

Empathy's Dark Labor: Feeling, Fact, and the Black Subject
in Late Nineteenth Century Black Narrative

By

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For Ty, Charlie, and Raheem

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: EMPATHY AND THE VESTIBULE

When, in her 1892 pamphlet *Southern Horror*, anti-lynching advocate Ida B. Wells proposed specific measures that those working to end lynchings in their communities could enact, she dismissed appeals to morals as a viable strategy. Wells offered: “Appeals to the white man’s pocket have been ever more effectual than appeals ever made to his conscience” (69).¹ Wells’s assertion bared not just her outright exasperation with a readership that she had judged uncaring concerning the fate of black lives, but it also made plain her theoretical approach to readers as a whole. Wells’s assessment was that writers’ attempts to appeal to their readers’ sense of obligation to others was an ineffective way to recruit these readers to their causes. Instead, Wells theorized, writers had to appeal to readers as investors who needed to protect their investments.

When I first read Wells’s assertion, her exasperation resonated with me deeply. By Wells’s writing, not yet thirty years from Emancipation in 1863, the most widely circulated expression of black writing was the slave narrative.² I had read a number of slave narratives, many that tried to wield what one critic—citing Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Sojourner Truth, and others—calls “the metaphors of moral suasion,” as slaves and former slaves often offered their narratives to readers in the hopes that they would conceive U. S. slavery as a moral failing and, consequently, act to abolish the

¹ Wells, *Southern Horror* in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, Jacqueline Royster, ed.

² See Goddu, “The Slave Narrative as Material Text” in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, John Ernest, ed. for an extensive discussion of the circulation of slave narratives.

institution.³ These narratives document overwhelming violence and brutality, and the sheer number of them—suggestive of the volume of persons that sustained the events described—left me demoralized.

I had come to believe that the authors who expressed their plights in the hope that readers might alleviate their pain exhibited what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism,” a term she offers to describe, “a kind of relation in which one depends on objects that block the very thriving that motivates our attachment in the first place” (2012).⁴ Berlant describes herself as after “the ordinary pulses of a fraying crisis” (2012). Her interest is less in intense affects and more about those affects whose subtle presence structures our daily lives, whether these sustain us or diminish us. For this reason, she is interested in what happens when the attachments that make life livable begin to disintegrate. In Berlant's formulation, cruel optimism occurs when objects do not sustain one's fantasy of what would bring one happiness—what, in a catch all term, Berlant calls “the good life.” Detaching oneself from the object that is preventing them from “the good life” would altogether extinguish the possibility of “the good life” and so one holds onto the object.

What became clear to me after reading Wells' assertion concerning her readers' investments was that I was not taking into account a larger understanding of how readers already came to texts engulfed in relations that had constituted them. Contrary to the Berlant formulation, one could not choose one's own fantasy; it was already constituting

³ See Baker, *Workings of the Spirit*, p. 13.

⁴ See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. Berlant distills her thinking on cruel optimism and her intentions for the term in an interview published in *Rorotoko*. See also Berlant, “Lauren Berlant: On her book *Cruel Optimism*.”

them. Such a relation between readers and texts did not just (dis)appear with the text, but it was solidified through the text. Thus, if the conditions of subjectivity needed to be negotiated, so did this already existing relationship. In other words, Wells's assertion put pressure on constructions of affect that presume that subjects get to choose their attachments. In her written work Wells was disassembling what Denise Ferreira Da Silva calls the transparent subject, the natural subject existing outside of history that hides how subjectivity is constructed.⁵

With her critical attempts to reach readers effectively and to have them relate to her cause, Wells was deconstructing empathy for her reader. When she contended that some methods for reaching readers were “ever more effectual” than others, she concomitantly marked other methods as less effectual. As such, the critic can interpret Wells, if only implicitly at times, proposing an accounting of empathy—a clean cost-benefit analysis. What was empathy? How did it work? How did one use it in writing and at what cost? To what advantage was its use for those who made themselves its object? Wells's project brings into view a larger trend in late nineteenth century black American letters: she, like other black writers, I will show, was beginning to grapple with the notion that commodification was the primary force structuring human relationships, and she was exploring how she could make the implications of such a determination useful in her written approaches to other humans.

As Hazel Carby, Belinda Edmondson, and Michelle Ann Stephens demonstrate, these writers' work appeared in a post-emancipation period in which, although black

⁵ See Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

persons were no longer understood as living property in relation to others, as the abolished system of chattel slavery had figured them, narratives of civility relied exceedingly on ever expansive definitions of property and ownership in order to distinguish classes of persons.⁶ These scholars document that black thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century were writing at a moment in which who owned what and how much of it they owned was used to determine personhood. In particular, to be in possession of a specific gender, race, or both could mean the difference between making and unmaking one's cultural authority.⁷ As Stephens argues, deep anxieties concerning racialized, gendered, and sexualized belonging, made it such that a "narrative of white civilization becomes a narrative of American nationhood." (78). It is in this modern context that the black masculine savage, the black feminine jezebel, the black mammy, and other racial types "must be assimilated to modernity" (78). Wells's work shows that she took such reader expectations into account in order to deftly construct her literary and cultural authority.

However striking Wells's approach to readers as consumers, it was not singular. Rather, a number of black thinkers at the turn of the century were approaching readers using similar capital-based understandings of empathy. Paying close attention to the writing careers of journalist Ida B. Wells, novelist Charles W. Chesnutt, magazine writer and editor Pauline Hopkins, and scientist W.E.B. Du Bois from 1892 to 1905 reveals the larger trend for black writers to revisit how they were attempting to engage readers. I

⁶ See Carby, *Race Men*; Edmondson, *Making Men*; and Stephens, *Black Empire*.

⁷ See also Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

show how at the turn of the century these writers were thinking explicitly about how they could use their written work to tutor their readers about black subjects. I demonstrate that in the process they often doubled back to previous black thinkers they regarded as mentors—revising some of their approaches and abandoning ones they felt had failed or were outmoded.

Empathy's Dark Labor attends to how Wells, Chesnutt, Hopkins and Du Bois negotiated the double-bind of wanting their white readers to know and understand black persons—empathize with them, even—all the while realizing that whites' desire to know might be put at the service of domination and exploitation. Their work tendering black feeling for readers was not simply a site for aesthetic description but for redressing the conditions of subjectivity. The written page provided these authors opportunity to stage encounters with readers using work whose subjects were at once intimate and vulnerable and, yet, remote and protected. To gain access to this mindset, I use empathy as a mode of analysis that outlines what we do—what we offer, receive, gain, and surrender—when we engage in emotional modes of connection with others. In this manner, my work treats empathy as a schematic tool for affective and emotional inquiry that unveils tactics that U.S. black writers undertook to compel their white readers into their service all the while protecting themselves and black personhood from exploitation. Thinking of empathy as a blueprint for how persons relate to one another in these late nineteenth black thinkers' work not only raises provocative questions concerning how they supposed people accepted, diverted, or refused connections with others and why, but it also documents

they were continuously thinking strategically about how to induce emotions in others in order to gain political.

Empathy's Historical Ties to Consumption

In writing this manuscript about thinkers who deconstructed empathy as an economic procedure (v.) as opposed to a quality of benevolence itself (n.), I was asked over and over again about my subjects' religious views. Were the writers I focused on Christian? Did they worship? How did religion play a factor in their views? One gentleman asked me outright if Du Bois even read the Bible. These questions about subjects' religious beliefs were telling. For what they suggested was my interlocutors' resistance to approach empathy in anything other than moral terms. In these interlocutors' minds, empathy was a component of moral character and any comprehensive discussion of it would no doubt take that into account.

The writers I examine understood empathy as a type of consumption, as a desire to know into another's body. In this manner, the investigator might presume that their definition of empathy is in accordance with its earliest English translations from the German verb *sich einfühlen*, which appeared in 1873 and defined empathy, quite literally, as "feeling into."⁸ Initially, *sich einfühlen* was a term reserved to describe how persons related to objects. Aestheticians in the late nineteenth century used *sich einfühlen* to describe one's capacity to "feel into" art objects—paintings, inanimate artifacts, books—

⁸ Gregory Currie outlines this history for empathy in his essay, "Empathy for Objects" in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (2011).

in order to “know.” Thus, even while empathy has come to be seen as between persons, initially it merely ventured a person’s investment in an object. Empathy’s etymology, then, brings forth an important dynamic concerning human flesh and embodiment. Empathy between persons, even as its origins recede from view, remains haunted with a process that commodifies the human. Empathy exploits the materiality of the human flesh of another as an object that represents that other’s inner life.

By putting the materiality of human flesh in harm’s way, by abstracting it into an object that one can exploit at will in order to reap understanding, empathy (as a mode of consumptive imagination) imposes on its object the condition that Hortense J. Spillers has identified as cultural vestibularity. Over a cluster of influential essays, Spillers theorizes cultural vestibularity, a notion that uncovers how transatlantic slavery installed a symbolic order that culturally “unmade” enslaved persons. Spillers explains that African persons subjected to the “Middle Passage” were “literally suspended in the oceanic” (“Mama’s” 215). Ripped from native lands and cultures, names that carried any significance for their captors and forcibly compelled to movement that only exacerbated the felt immobility that their captivity imposed, slaves were “thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that exposed their destinies to an unknown course” (215). As such, for Spillers, enslavement marks a “*theft of the body*,” what she defines as “a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire” (206, emphasis in original). Spillers’s move here is critical: she theorizes that enslavement instigated a critical separation between what she calls the captive body and what she identifies as its motive will and active desire. Even if the

material contours of the African person focused a “private and particular space, at which point biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, and psychological fortunes converged,” captivity disrupted these contours and reduced them to commodities to be consumed and expended at a captor’s will (206). In short, subjects taken as undifferentiated quantities are subject to the same “rules of accounting” which stipulate that a commodity is a commodity is a commodity (206, 215). This undifferentiation sought to destroy any social distinctions and kinship relations. Nevertheless, in Spillers summation the willful and desiring subject does not die out to the captive body but is also its consequence, bearing the markings of enslavement’s disjunctures. Although externally imposed meanings dictate the methods through which captors (de)value the captive body, these cannot finally obliterate the materiality they commodified, the original scene of the crime. In this manner, enslavement “makes doubles, unstable in their respective identities”: on the one hand, enslavement produces the captive body and on the other it also produces a willful and desirous subject, marked with vivid lacerations, cuts, and bruises of the culturally imposed undifferentiation (206). The latter Spillers renames the “flesh,” arguing that “before there is the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero-degree of social conceptualization that does not escape the concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography” (206).

Using these terms, Spillers argues that captivity places the flesh firmly in a provisional space she calls cultural vestibularity. She theorizes that the flesh resides unprotected in an anteroom to culture:

It is this “flesh and blood” entity, in the vestibule (or pre-view) of a colonized

North America, that is essentially ejected from the “The Female Body of Western Culture,” but it makes good theory, or commemorative “herstory” to want to “forget,” or to have failed to realize, that the African female subject, under these conditions, is not only the target of rape—in one sense, an interiorized violation of body and mind—but also the topic of specifically externalized acts of torture (207).

Precisely because the flesh is outside of culture it does not receive the protections available to bodies that reside inside of culture. To those that operate beyond the threshold, the flesh’s lacerations are repressed or ignored, as failure to recognize the scene of unprotected female flesh allows its exploitation to persist.

Like the vestibularity that Spillers shows was adopted for captive flesh, a claim she establishes with particular attention to black women, empathy exploits its objects of identification. Empathy’s objects are commodified for use in gaining knowledge, however invasive of the flesh such knowing may be for those on whom it capitalizes. In another essay that appeared three years earlier, Spillers, again investigating the symbolic order created from the enslavement of black women, described the vestibule as a “marketplace of the flesh,” an “act on commodification so thoroughgoing” that its effects seemed ineluctable (155). She offered:

Slavery did not transform the black female into an embodiment of carnality at all, as the myth of the black woman would tend to convince us, nor, alone, the primary receptacle of a highly profitable generative act. She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her

issue became the focus of a cunning difference—visually, psychologically, ontologically—as the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between humanity and “other.” At this level of radical discontinuity in the “great chain of being,” black is vestibular to culture. In other words, the black person mirrored for the society around her what the human being was not. (“Interstices” 155).

The very commodifying measures that Spillers identifies in vestibularity are embedded in the procedure of “feeling into” others that is implicit to empathy. Spillers theorizes that enslavement commodified the black woman not just as a lever used to solidify the distinction between human and non-human, but as the conduit from the one ontology to the other, respectively. The apparatus that Spillers uncovers shows the enslaved black woman is both how those outside of her bodily contours experience difference in the form of an “other” and how they sense their own selfhood, the inner life that exists distinct from that “other.” In this symbolic order, the black woman, like the object of empathy, is the not fully-object, not fully-human mode through which her users evade the unprotected corporeality to which they have subjected her and keep subjecting her. Put a different way, captive black women were made into what Spillers would later call “a living laboratory,” vulnerable to the procedures of others (“Mama’s” 208). Writing decades after emancipation Wells, Chesnutt, Hopkins, and Du Bois all would use their writing to stage a vestibularity that opened new possibilities for the captive.

Empathy and the Vestibules’s Potential

The late nineteenth century black writers I investigate put the vestibule to insurgent use. It is important to document that Spillers's vestibule is, in part, a response to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 thesis that a black woman placed at the head of a kinship structure "seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole" (204). Spillers's description of the cultural vestibule not only offers a powerful critique of Moynihan's argument, it offers the potential for redress. Spillers's detailing of enslavement's symbolic order in a money economy exposes Moynihan's thesis as "a fatal misunderstanding" that "assigns a matriarchalist value where it does not belong," as it "actually misnames the power of the female in a enslaved community"; she could neither claim her child nor, in her case, was motherhood "perceived in the prevailing climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance" (228). Nevertheless, this same vestibularity leaves an opening that Spillers tenders:

This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject. Actually *claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness. (229)

This idea of making a place for the female social subject, one previously stolen with the theft of the body, decodes the hieroglyphics of the flesh, allowing for the "motive will" and "active desire" to reclaim the power to name. In other words, claiming the monstrosity of the flesh disrupts a way of living that stipulates black persons dying. It

subverts a symbolic system that understands them as illegitimate or bearers of social non-value.

By applying Spillers's framework to both female and male writers, I do not mean to negate its gendered specificity. Rather, I mobilize black feminism in order to highlight that precisely because narrative uses black persons as interstitial objects that readers can "feel into," the bold experimentation they potentially offer goes undetected, seen only as the conventional practice of aesthetic description. In other words, I use Spillers's apparatus to make visible reparative work that may otherwise go undetected precisely because it first names the thing it seeks to redress. In this manner, this manuscript also takes its energies from much of the work that black feminist scholars like Claudia Tate, Deborah McDowell, Barbara Christian, Mary Helen Washington, among others, committed to showing that genres like the sentimental novel, previously and summarily (and still today, at times) dismissed as fluff, did political work.⁹

While my work here on Chesnutt and Du Bois shows them diving headlong into their projects with a gender privilege outright refused Wells and Hopkins, they are forced into the realization that Spillers voiced she hoped black men would obtain from their readings of "Mama's Baby, Papas Maybe." Spillers offers: "black men can't afford to appropriate the gender prerogatives of white men, because you have a different kind of history; you can't just be patriarchal. You have to really think of something else as you come to that option. If there is any such thing as a kind of symbiotic blend or melding

⁹ See Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*; McDowell, *The Changing Same*; Christian, *Black Women Novelists*; Washington, *Invented Lives*.

between our human categories, in this case of the diasporic African, then this is the occasion for it (304).¹⁰ Spillers's work on black women allows us to think critically about relations between human subjects, relations that empathy schematizes.

Capital as Empathy's Grammar

By naming this study *Empathy's Dark Labor* I mean not only to argue that empathy operates in the shadows unquestioned as a tool of capital but also that empathy, at least in writing, becomes a procedure wherein a reader's sense of the darkly pigmented is made a commodity that, if unchecked, reinforces the internal model which that same reader already has constructed about his or her self and about the world around that self. In other words, empathy risks reinforcing the biases that a reader already has in place. The authors I examine attempt to institute checks to divert this process.

It is not surprising that a look at empathy in late nineteenth century American writing exhibits how capital structured human relations. The economics of slavery had cemented consumerist values into everyday life, and slaves had not only learned to negotiate these but also, in few instances, to exploit them. With his research on domestic slavery in nineteenth century New Orleans, historian Walter Johnson has shown how the slave market reduced human beings to commodities with prices. Johnson describes a chattel system wherein slaves learned the advantages of provisionally viewing their bodies—as they had been taught—through the eyes of their slave owners, like “living

¹⁰See, Spillers et. al. "Whatcha Gonna Do?": Revisiting "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book": A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan.

property” (*Soul* 20). Viewing themselves in two ways, “one belonging to their masters, one belonging to themselves,” Johnson shows that slaves could, and did, affect the conditions of their sale (21). In what Johnson describes as “the intricate bargaining that preceded the final deal,” Johnson shows how few slaves who learned of their impending sale ran, feigned illness, or “threatened self destruction”—all acts that would have accordingly destroyed or diminished the monetary value they embodied (9, 34). Other slaves made it impossible for slave owners to impute their sale as a simple business transaction when it meant that slave owners would have to break their promises to them. These slaves leveraged these promises as contracts that if breached would compromise that slave owner’s putative honor. Even though Johnson notes, “that very few slaves were able to escape a threatened sale,” he concludes that the slaves’ resistance itself forced their slave owners into “creating knowledge of the structural accountability that was often hidden behind well-turned public accounting and ritual avowals of circumstantial necessity” (30). Which is to say, whatever reason slave owners gave for their involvement in slavery, when slaves resisted, slave owners had to recognize and account for their involvement in the brutal commerce of persons. As Johnson documents, slave sales did not occur for reasons that were beyond people’s control but were the “predictable result of a system that treated people as property,” even as these “objects” were continually registering their humanity (29).

To recognize these slaves’ agency in these moments is not to forget the brutal process of becoming a slave that was sustained at the length of a whip and the “perpetual dread” of losing family or loved ones that such a system induced and nurtured. Rather, it

is to show that consumerism shaped the identities that both the slave owners and slaves adopted and that slaves could and did recode consumerist grammars both for use in practices of resistance and to create a public accounting of the measures being used on them.

The Difficulties of Reading Slave Narrative

Writing and living in Nashville, TN for most of my graduate career had its effects. The Thanksgiving after I had started reading the lists of books that I chose in order to develop expertise in specified literary fields, I went to visit my parents in Georgia. I had read dozens of slave narratives. As I drove on interstates that cut through red earth, farmland, and endless pine fields, I thought of the enslaved persons who had gone there in escape hoping to make their way to freedom. What fortitude it must have taken. What hope beyond all hope. In my car I would be at my parents' house in hours. Imagine the years it took some slaves to make it to safety, if they made it at all. Looking out my window, I felt I sensed something from this vantage that I had not quite grasped while reading: the sheer expanse under which people had existed in brutal constraint.

Reading slave narratives has hard effects, and I think it becomes compelling to want to shield yourself and others from the hard truths they contain. I think of historian Nell Painter's invocation to a student who had delved into Louisiana archives to conduct research on the domestic slave trade. Painter advised that the voices from the archive call and beg, as she put it, "to leave the blood in."¹¹ Painter expressed the need, if not

¹¹ See, "In Depth with Nell Painter," C-SPAN, January 6, 2008.

obligation, to guard against writing a history that inoculated violence for easy consumption. She encouraged her student to tell people's full stories—as riddled with violence as they may have been, as difficult and messy as it was. Painter's story reminds me of a laugh I let out while I recounted to a friend one of the vexing slave narratives I had read. I wondered why I had laughed. It was not a laugh of joy. It was disruptive. Akin, I would later presume, to the type Mikhail Bakhtin describes in his treatise against authoritarianism, when he argues that there is laughter that indicates the presence of consciousness.¹² I would later wonder if my laughter was instead a break, a graceful timeout from a consciousness that had become too difficult to handle. Laughter allowed me to process the difficult world about which I was learning, and it de-normalized the very narrative coming out of my mouth even as it also gave me respite from it.

How was it, I wondered, that readers in the antebellum period received such narratives? How did they feel them? How did writers approach the experiment of reaching their readers? How did they negotiate the openness and vulnerability that writing risks? The intimacy? Under such constraint how had writers presented stories so that they could be received white protecting themselves?

Empathy and Temporality

While the work of the nineteenth century writers I feature in this manuscript shows that they viewed empathy as a vestibule, a potential training ground both in and outside of culture through which they could redress the past, these writers were not

¹² See Bahktin, "Rabelais in the History of Laughter."

engaging in any type of recuperative history. They let the dead be dead. They recognized the moments in which hegemony had been completed. Yet, for all of them, the dead—in many cases, the formerly exploited, assailed, and embattled—haunt the pages of their works like ghosts offering the possibility of resolution. To see these ghosts as presence—specifically, as the presence of the dead—rather than as the debt and negation that some critics perceives them to be, allows for the possibility of a reenactment with a difference. As Colin Dayan offers, “Ghosts are never proof of vacancy but evidence of plentitude. They return chock full of memories and longing. For them, nothing is ever past, and sometimes they appear to test the limits of death and its meaning in a world of terror” (*The Law* 9). *Empathy’s Dark Labor* reads black thinkers proposing the written page as the terrain on which those in the present can renegotiate the ideas that bound up those of the past.

In this line of thought, I interpret Douglass attempting to use such a cultural vestibule to instruct readers in a passage of his first published narrative of 1845. In the passage, Douglass recounts how his human needs were neglected while he was a slave on Colonel Lloyd’s plantation:

I suffered much from hunger, but much more from cold. In hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked — no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees. I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into this bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and feet out. My

feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes. (30)

Douglass's condition as perceived chattel makes it such that his human needs—warmth, sustenance—receive no consideration. Irrespective of season, he is given no commodities—shoes, stockings, or otherwise; rather, he is understood as a commodity himself. When he throws himself in a sack, he performs his own fungibility in a spending and saving economy, as he is as good as the newly milled corn gone-to-market that previously weighed the bag. Now he is the bag's cargo. The bag hides his face from view, effacing any particularity, any individuation he might be ceded as a person. His frost-cracked feet, offering the synecdoche of vulnerability and casualty in an environment of unrelenting labor and terror, exhibit the persistent consequences of past rupture.

The distinct times and spaces referenced in the passage—one of a slave Douglass and another of a formerly enslaved Douglass—exhibit the generative possibilities of the vestibule to provide coordinates to a materialized Douglass recognized and understood not as a commodity but as a human who endured commodification. Robert Stepto suggests as much in his discussion of Douglass's "syncretic language" (20). Stepto lauds, "Douglass's ability to conjoin past and present, and to do so with images that not only stand for a period in his personal history, but also, in their fusion, speak of his journey from slavery to freedom. The pen, symbolizing the quest for literacy fulfilled, actually measures the wounds of the past and this measuring becomes a metaphor in and of itself for the artful composition of travail transcended." (20).¹³ Douglass's feet are only given

¹³ Robert Stepto, *From Behind the Veil*.

signification with a pen belonging to a Douglass of the present moment, one ostensibly outside of the provisionality of the vestibule. The Douglass of the present is immersed in the process of writing and has staked a distance that protects him even as he offers up for purposes of instruction the coordinates for a past version of himself that is unable to escape the ruptures of the flesh he suffers.¹⁴ In this manner, Douglass uses the vestibule to attempt a claiming of the monstrosity of the flesh that Spillers outlines as possibility.

Dangers of the Vestibule

The severe disjunctures of the flesh that Douglass documents escape the eye of some critics. Albeit for very different reasons than presented above, James Olney has also examined the Douglass passage above and noted the distance between an enslaved Douglass and a formerly-enslaved Douglass. In the course of his one-size-fits-all analysis of the slave narrative, Olney emphasizes Douglass's work is "the best example, the exceptional case, the supreme achievement" (53) For Olney, the distance Douglass constructs between a past self and a former self is not simply a protective distance that evinces Douglass's attempt to perform an insurgent claiming of the monstrous flesh. Rather, in Olney's account, the passage exhibits Douglass's outright disavowal of the materialized self. Praising what he calls Douglass's "marvelously revealing passage," Olney argues that it (55):

¹⁴ Although, as Houston Baker notes, Douglass's theft of the bag itself offers an act of resistance. Writes Baker: "The spirited response suggested by the pen's work is anticipated, however, by the counter-capital rebellion involved in stealing the bag" (41). See Baker, *Workings of the Spirit* (1993).

dramatizes how far removed he is from the boy once called Fred (and other, worse names, of course) with cracks in his feet and with no more use for a pen than for any of the other signs and appendages of the education that he had been denied and that he would finally acquire only with the greatest difficulty but also with the greatest, most telling success, as we feel in the quality of the narrative now flowing from the literal and symbolic pen he holds in his hand. (55)

Olney relegates Douglass's physical body in favor of a social (and immaterial) construction of erudition. In his assessment Douglass is no longer "the boy" "with cracks in his feet" but "the most telling success," an assertion that makes it impossible for Douglass to exist as both. The transaction has erased or made illegible the injuries of slavery that Douglass's feet present. According to Olney's account, Douglass's value is that he makes his reader "feel" that value. This means that Olney's abstracted vision of Douglass's body hides the very materialization Douglass sought to emphasize when, literally, he proposed resting a pen in the gash of his flesh. For Olney, the pen hides the scarring as opposed to emphasizing it. If, as Spillers suggests, what was stolen from the captive body was time and place, Olney reproduces the theft when he denies Douglass material form. In so doing, Olney exhibits the provisionality of the vestibule and how at any moment its inhabitants are subject to destruction.

Such dangerous responses to uses of the vestibule are anticipated in Saidiya Hartman's assessment of the dangers for the enslaved or the formerly enslaved when they exhibit sentience—joyous or otherwise. These demonstrations, she argues, are used to further facilitate their subjection and commodification, creating what she calls "closures

of sentiment” (*Scenes* 52). Hartman detects in Douglass’s work “an anxiety that accompanied his discussion of slave recreations,” specifically because Douglass had learned, she contends, to identify “recreation with abasement” (54). Hartman argues that Douglass negotiated the bind by “stressing the importance of interpretation and contextual analysis when uncovering the critical elements or ‘implicit social consciousness’ of slave culture” (54). In other words, Douglass accentuated that the overall context of chattel enslavement meant that sensation was commodified even in scenes of play. Such wariness for slave recreation (“closures of sentiment”) is abetted again in other parts of Hartman’s analysis where she demonstrates that so thorough was the commodification of the enslaved that they came to refer to their recreation as “stealing time” (*Scenes* 66). Hartman notes that slaves’ use of the phrase “played upon the paradox of property’s agency and the idea of property as theft, thus alluding to the captive’s condition as a legal form of unlawful or amoral seizure” (66). Even while she explicitly recognizes “stealing time” as an act of slave defiance, an appropriation of “slave owners’ designs for mastery and control,” Hartman suggests that in the larger context of enslavement these acts are provisional and, in the end, emphasize captivity (69). As Hartman formulates them they are “itinerant acts,” “contests,” where domination looms as the persistent and, ultimately, prevailing terror (66).

Hartman’s assessment of “closures of sentiment,” then, poses a striking counterargument to my contention that writers effectively staged the vestibule as a protected space to claim monstrosity: Hartman’s work puts forward the contrary point of view that the vestibule can only ever be a tool of surveilling terror and, further, she does

not stipulate that emancipation meant one's extraction from it. These arguments operate not only in Hartman's assessment of "closures of sentiment" explored above but also in her theorizations of emancipation. One of the major thrusts of Hartman's work is that "emancipation instituted indebtedness" (131). She argues that emancipation did not undo the damage that captive bodies suffered in enslavement. Hartman posits:

the transition from slavery to freedom introduced the free agent to the circuits of exchange through this construction of already accrued debt, and abstinent present, and a mortgaged future. In short, to be free was to be a debtor—that is, obliged and duty bound to others. Thus the inaugural events that opened these texts announced the advent of freedom and at the same time attested to the impossibility of escaping slavery. (131)

In Hartman's view, far from removing injury, emancipation installed it again. The damage to the enslaved body from captivity is not undone with emancipation, but is now both memorialized as past and also continuously present, as it manifests itself in the symbolic order of a capital and moral (obliged and duty bound) economy through which the emancipated must operate as freed persons. Hartman calls this condition "debt peonage" (130). This debt-peonage is essentially a post-enslavement extension of the cultural vestibule that Hartman previews as "involuntary servitude that conscripted the newly emancipated and putative free laborer, an abiding legacy of black inferiority and subjugation, and the regulator power of a racist state (10). In such a system, black persons remain commodified.

Nevertheless, embedded in Hartman's understanding of debt peonage is a moral economy that Wells and the other late nineteenth century writers featured in this project summarily reject. The indebtedness to a moral economy that Hartman sees ordering captive bodies marks a crucial difference from the subjects of the vestibule that Spillers theorizes and that I build on here. Whereas for Spillers the "theft of the body" discussed earlier created both the captive body (of imposed social value) and the flesh (of materialization that resists commodification into those imposed social values and, thus, must be ignored), Hartman disallows the distinction. Rather, she argues that the captive body wholly disappeared into the "chasm between object, criminal, pained body, and mortified flesh" (94). In a note further explaining her meaning and distinguishing her definition of the captive body from one that includes the flesh of Spillers's "zero-degree" conceptualization of the vestibule, Hartman asserts:

Although I do not distinguish the body and the flesh as liberated and captive subject positions, I contend that the negation of the subject that results from such restricted recognition reinscribes the condition of social death. (231 n. 57)

Hartman's work exhibits her attunement to the devastating injury and trauma that black bodies suffered as they were stripped of meaning and abstracted into a symbolic order that valued them as it wished.¹⁵ Still, while her work unearths just how effectual and

¹⁵ Spillers, too, comes close to ceding the distinction. "The captive body, then, brings into focus a gathering of social realities as well as metaphor for value so thoroughly interwoven in their literal and figurative emphases that distinction between them are virtually useless" ("Mama's" 208). While the demarcation may be "virtually useless" for those subject to enslavement's injury, it nonetheless offers opportunity to read mediation in its context and to create a praxis for subversion and living.

comprehensive that terror was and, in large part, continues to be, without the flesh in place as evidence of slavery's regime's inability to completely abstract away people's materiality into a symbolic order, there is no there there, no rubric to understand how material values were constituted. Hartman's framework wholly conscripts subjects into the moral economy that not just represses but extinguishes the captive's motive will, active desire—what Spillers translates as flesh—as the symbolic order that keeps the captive body commodified structures what is moral, what is deemed “good” in a socially accepted system of obligation.

Departing from Hartman, I differentiate the captive body from the flesh in order to contend that cultural memory can be retrieved from the vestibule in a way subversive to those the vestibule renders available to commodification. The vestibule offers a vision of potentiality for the captive body other than abjection. This is exemplified, for instance, in Hartman's definition of empathy. Hartman's view of empathy has been used to think about the unspoken dynamics of encounters with (black) slave bodies.¹⁶ Hartman theorizes the “double-edged” valence of empathy, given that, for her, it is a tool of benevolent identification that is also bound up with erasure. Attending to the violence of the slave trade, Hartman uses a slave narrative in which a white man, John Rankin, imagines himself in the body of a black slave in order to feel the pain of the other. Hartman demonstrates how empathy can mask violence: “Rankin becomes a proxy and the other's pain is acknowledged to the degree that it can be imagined, yet by virtue of

¹⁶ See, for instance, Faith Smith's *Sex and the Citizen* where she uses it to discuss the fungibility of the black female body.

this substitution the subject of identification threatens to disappear” (19). For Hartman, empathy is violent because it evinces the fungibility of the slave body.

I propose a differing way of reading how empathy is functioning in these texts: where Hartman reads erasure, I read solidification. For me, empathy is built of exactly one subject’s recognition that he or she is distinct from another subject; instead of threatening to “disappear” the subject of identification’s position is solidified and reinscribed in the comparison. For instance, in the phrase often used to express empathetic identification, “I know how you feel,” there are two distinct subjects: the one who presumes to know and the one who feels. The identification produces distance, a boundary between the one feeling empathy and the subject of identification. Empathy provides a layer of protection for the subject invoking it. Though this may appear a small difference from Hartman, it is critical because it stresses the way in which empathetic identification is not at all based on sameness. Rather, it relies on difference. It creates not one but two coherent subjects. To use Hartman’s example, Rankin, in the process of empathetic identification is given negative coherence by what he is not. Still, what I am pointing to is that the slave is also given coherence by all that Rankin believes he is. The slave body is not at all erased or disappeared. Rather in the moment of empathetic identification the slave body becomes a commodity which is at once superfluous and indispensable. To use Spillers’s formulation, it is interstitial.

My use of vestibularity to describe the processes of written work is not meant to undermine the very real situations that actual persons faced under enslavement. Rather, it is precisely to interrogate what happens when one attempts to make the unimaginable

imaginable. In as much as one reads and rereads, such aesthetics irreducibly enact and reenact violence. To fail to recognize the vestibularity in these works or, worse, to ignore it would be to keep intact the hieroglyphics of the flesh that allow for flesh's continual popping. Prohibitive judgments of right and wrong set aside, the vestibularity these writers staged allowed them a provisional domain of profound intimacy in which they could acquire the power to name from a protected distance. Such work not only represented an inversion but a subversion of the very system they sought to expose.

Sensation Not Catharsis

This project suggests affects studies' limitations for work on black life. When I began this project, two of my colleagues, Petal Samuel and Lucy Mensah, asked me to define affect. I offered them a provisional answer and included a definition for a term about which they had not asked, emotion. Affect, I told them, is pre-cognitive bodily sensation, whereas emotion is the result of a hermeneutics of that bodily sensation.¹⁷ If we take fire, for instance, the sensation of warmth we experience on our hands is affect;

¹⁷ In a volume on philosophies of memory Felicity Callard's and Constantina Papoulias's contribution "Affect and Embodiment" offers:

Hence, affects refers to an amorphous, diffuse, and bodily "experience" of stimulation impinging upon and altering the body's physiology, whereas emotions are the various structured, qualified, and recognizable, experiential states of anger, joy, sadness, and so on, into which such amorphous experience is translated. Thus, affect is precognitive, while emotions are understood as distinct categorizations of experience related to a self. (We feel fear because of a physiological event: fear, the identifiable emotion is a judgement on a primarily bodily mode of engagement with the world.) (247)

Their definition of affect shows how it presupposes a natural order before physiology. See Callard and Papoulias "Affect and Embodiment" in *Memory: Histories, Theories Debates*.

the minute we exclaim “ouch” we would have expressed an emotion. The very separation of affect from emotion—in other words, the separation of a sensation on the body from the interpretation of that sensation—I believed, allowed an opening where one could escape the body in pain, interpret sensation for oneself. My colleagues were angry: they asked me to reconcile that definition with the Middle Passage, a term they were using as short hand to express the violent trauma African persons and their descendants felt and, continued to feel, in its implication for daily life. Was I denying intergenerational trauma? Was I dispensing with the implications for trauma on black bodies? Was my purchase in a framework that dispensed with the body altogether?

Working through Wells, Chesnutt, Hopkins, and Du Bois, I get the sense now that unwittingly I was attempting to divorce persons from the affects that haunt them. Yet, these writers rejected my attempts to study them with a lens of precognitive bodily sensation. The difficulty was right there in the definition. Pre-cognitive suggests a natural state of sensation, one outside of contextual and, thus, historical specificity. Wells et al. insist that embodiment is contextual; sensation, in their writing, occurs as a result of touch—forcible, enforced, or otherwise—with one’s surroundings. As such, sensation is a ready-made rubric for interrelation. Sensation is used as a tool in their work. They express or, for that matter, refuse to express sensation in strategic ways that show how power is constituted or in order to constitute it altogether. For this reason, I believe now, that my work here is more along the lines of a study of the performances of affect. It accounts for those who stage sensation, dissemble it, and show its workings in a larger symbolic order. In so doing, it also fills in that transparent subject, challenging the notion

of bodily sensation as pre-cognitive, as a “natural” state of affairs. This work disassembles what Denise Ferreira Da Silva calls the “transparent I” who ostensibly operates self-determined and self-contained.¹⁸

The Chapter and Dates Covered

In the following chapters I show how Wells, Chesnutt, Hopkins, and Du Bois each produced written work that they believed failed to reach their audiences as they had intended. I show not only how each writer revised his or her methodology to better reach his or her respective audience, but also how their revisions put on display empathy as a form of commodification that must be managed carefully.

In the first chapter I argue that through Ida B. Wells’s 1894 correspondence with mentor and friend Frederick Douglass, she learned to make her self into a good that could easily and comfortably be consumed by those who had power over her. Specifically, in this correspondence Wells recognized and used empathy not as a tool of benevolent identification between persons, as figured famously by Adam Smith and other thinkers whose ideas were popular at the time, but as a tool of capitalism whose primary mode was limited to consumption.¹⁹ I show how Wells’s correspondence with Douglass exhibits her adopting and practicing the view that her flesh bears the markings of commodification, and I examine how she adopts this view insurgently not only for her

¹⁸See Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

¹⁹ See Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

own purposes but also for the lynchings victims she will catalogue in her following major publication, *The Red Record*.

Like Wells, Charles Chesnutt, the focus of the second chapter, was forced away from the techniques of moral suasion when he realized these were ineffective. When Chesnutt's *Marrow of Tradition*, a novel he believed to be his best work, appeared in 1901 to mixed critical reception, Chesnutt moved away from directly trying to confront the race problems in the South, and he went back to running his stenography business. Four years later in 1905, he would publish his last major novel, what he regarded as his last ditch effort to reach readers effectively. Where Wells's work allowed readers to explore her theories in prose, Chesnutt allows us to explore how the language of capitalism works in another medium: fiction. This chapter compares the techniques that Chesnutt's earlier work used to explore racial difference to the methods that his 1905 work *The Colonel's Dream* employed. It argues that that the reviews from *The Marrow of Tradition* forced Chesnutt to determine that his readers saw black persons as "the means of production," and it shows how Chesnutt altered his writing to shield black persons from further abuse. *The Colonel's Dream* enacts a refusal to provide readers access to black bodies. Instead, in the novel black bodies largely dissemble, refusing readers access to their inner lives. Chesnutt challenges the notion that narrative empathy is contingent upon a reader's ability to consume textual subjects' inner life.

The third chapter examines two of writer Pauline Hopkins's fictional works—the novel *Contending Forces* (1900) and the serialized novel *Of One Blood* (1902-03)—and argues that Hopkins's reported biography, one marked by brash dealings with others, has

overtaken her literary work that was often subtle, calculated, and nuanced. Hopkins diagnosed a literary culture's move from recitation to immediacy. Whereas recitation valued publicly recited knowledge and shared responsibility, immediacy prized private, independent consumption. Hopkins used immediacy to get her readers engaged in civic life they would have presumably otherwise ignored. Thus, in Hopkins's view empathy was transactional—one gave a good in the attempts to obtain something in return.

The last writer whose work this project explores in depth is W. E. B. Du Bois, who famously opened his 1897 *Atlantic* essay, "Strivings of the Negro People," with his assertion that many hedge around asking him "How does it feel to be a problem." Scholars have used the Du Bois passage to think about the "Negro problem" as an extended metaphor or to provide exegesis on the double consciousness that emerges from negotiations of "me and the other world." This chapter is an experiment that takes Du Bois literally. It argues that in his early career between 1896 and 1905, Du Bois should be read not, as is common practice, as a monument in American letters who was interested in figurative language, but as a scientist concerned primarily in objectively reporting the natural world. Du Bois's experiment was figuring out how best to present as scientific finding the senses that he observed were consigned to how it felt to be "a problem." With Du Bois's role as a scientist in the foreground, *The Souls of Black Folk* emerges as Du Bois's experiment about empathy: it is his systematic, scientific investigation of how black persons (when not available themselves) should be presented in writing for the purpose of scientific study and understanding. It is his experiment in how to develop empathy. For this reason, during these same years in which he revised and collected what

would become *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois laid greater significance on understanding black persons not in metaphorical fashion but as sentient beings vulnerable to their environments. He develops his views concerning sentience in the process of conducting the other projects that he was involved with at the same time—namely, his work collecting data and observing black people for his survey of Philadelphia’s black residents in the 1899 *The Philadelphia Negro* and his work with the American Negro Academy and its president Alexander Crummell, a figure whose views concerning religion spirituality he respected but, despite numerous studies that argue otherwise, used as foil and counterpoint rather than parallels.

For the most part, the primary texts examined in *Empathy’s Dark Labor* span from 1892 to 1905. To this writer, this range covers the years in which Wells, Chesnutt, Hopkins, and Du Bois were most actively producing work deeply invested in how to ethically materialize black persons in writing. These years are bookended by Ida B. Wells's burst on the scene for her editorial on lynch law in 1892 and Du Bois’s documented surrender to the passions that led him to abandon his life as a scientist in favor of the Niagara Movement in 1905.

The dates also cover an important moment in the technologizing of print and what this meant for personal interactions. One of the main conceits of this project—explored throughout but largely in the final chapter on Du Bois—is that as methods of communication modernized with industrialization, print overtook the person as the primary vehicle for creating and challenging ways of knowing. Knowledge about persons was determined and managed on the written page as opposed to in person. Research

continues to show that throughout the nineteenth century publication became cheaper and more accessible and distribution methods more intricate and effective.²⁰ As such, larger quantities of print could make it increasingly farther.²¹ Whereas one might have formerly traveled to an area and given a speech or a rally to project one's self into the public sphere, now one could instead dispatch a publication. Print's extended reach largely meant that it could transgress ever more locales than the persons who had written its content.²² In a direct sense, then, print served to simulate intimate encounters between persons when those persons were not themselves available.

This is not to say that print replaced speech nor is it to debunk what Carla Peterson calls "bodied voice," a term she uses to theorize "the primacy of the spoken word, its importance as a mode of action rather than simply an articulation of thought, its magical power to create events, to make the past present, and vision reality" (48). While Peterson means to expand the critical repertoire of nineteenth black women's production to a more copious definition of "text" that would include the public addresses and performances available in the archives, in the process Peterson also suggests how ineluctable speech forms were to effective communication. In her investigation of nineteenth century black women's public speaking, she documents the rich oral traditions

²⁰ This is one of Benedict Anderson's arguments in *Imagined Communities*.

²¹ See, "The National Book Trade System" in *A History of the Book in America* (2007). Eds. Casper, Groves, et al. Pp 117 – 157.

²² Print's advent on human relationships is a thematic productively explored in varying fashion by Ifeoma Nwankwo and Brent Hayes Edwards and by Trish Loughran and Benedict Anderson. See Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism*; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; and Loughran, *The Republic in Print*.

that made the body central to encounters between persons. It follows, then, that black thinkers, no longer able to wield their bodies, their very materiality in order to communicate directly with others, would attempt to invest in writing the same rich sensuality they had come to know and to exercise through oral culture—to bring the body and the same sense of touch into writing. The writers featured in the project were after what, extending Peterson, we might call bodied writing.

Conclusion

The discussions concerning empathy that these nineteenth century black writers began with their work are still present at my writing more than a century later. I write these pages in Philadelphia's old Seventh Ward, less than a block away from a historical marker that pegs the tenement in which W. E. B. Du Bois lived while he was collecting data for *The Philadelphia Negro*, his 1899 survey of a large portion of the City's black people. The same inlets and side streets wherein the city then stowed its black service workers are now costly real estate valued for proximity to large hospitals and to tourist attractions that drive the Center City market.

Even now the City is divided. As I write this, Philadelphia is one of fifteen areas in the United States to hold zip codes the federal government has designated "Promise Zones." While the naming immediately summons Martin Luther King's assertion that the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence produced promissory notes to which all citizens were fell heir, the zones were constituted to follow President Obama's assertion that "a child's course in life should not be determined by the zip code she's born

in, but by the strength of her work ethic and the scope of her dreams.”²³ The promise is that in these zip codes the federal government will fast tracks funding to residents and organizations who demonstrate to it that they intend to serve the community.

In an abandoned bank building that local residents had repurposed as a community center, I recently attended a showing of a film that teens from Philadelphia’s Promise Zones produced to “tell their stories.” In the film the teens shared both their personal experiences and those of longtime residents and community organizers—which they had acquired in cross-generational interviews—in order to present the impact they all sensed disinvestment has wrought on the their lives and neighborhood. The repurposing of the bank building itself already seemed a metaphor apparent for the work of the writers I explore, but what was most striking was what impressions were second nature for the teens and what surprised them. Many of the teens mentioned that in the future they wished to be business owners in their neighborhood. I was taken aback with the surety with which they had learned that in their community this was a route to legitimacy and dignity. But I was more taken to hear each teen share that what surprised them the most as they made the film was “how much people had to say”—an impression that implied the silence the interviews had broken and which suggests how easily relations between persons can be extended and nurtured when one voluntarily offers up the self for use by another. *Empathy’s Dark Labor* is about the preparations some thinkers undertook for that same practice, sometimes in the very same neighborhoods, more than one hundred years ago. Schematizing empathy allows the investigator to cast in high

²³ See Obama, “Remarks on Promised Zones.”

relief the terms under which black subjectivity has been constituted, and how we might use these terms to make our worlds anew.

CHAPTER II:

OF IDA B. WELLS, FACTS, AND RESIGNING REGISTERS OF EMPATHY

Wells's revised understanding of empathy is on full display in her 1895 pamphlet *The Red Record*. This chapter analyzes Wells's second major pamphlet *The Red Record* and the circumstances that led to its writing. Examining Wells's correspondence with abolitionist Frederick Douglass in the three years before she would write *The Red Record*, I argue that Wells's own personal experiences of alienation and abjection during her second trip to England in 1894 stunned her and both gave reason for and, ultimately, solidified a writing style that reflects Wells's unique strategy for uplift work, a strategy that was dependent on facts and suspicious of narrative.²⁴ By using facts—catalogues, numbers, registers—as opposed to narrative, Wells could do two things: she could rebuff desires to know into black bodies while all the same presenting the incontrovertible truth and cruelty of ritualized lynching.

In this manner, Wells's method inflects academic discussions of black ontology that have occurred since the late 1970s. I demonstrate how Wells proposes what Nahum Chandler and Fred Moten call a “para-ontology” or “ontology of dehiscence” respectively.²⁵ She demonstrates that whether in writing or in the flesh, blacks were

²⁴ A number of scholars have detailed Wells's second trip to England and her correspondence with Douglass during the trip, and they have greatly helped me put Wells's and Douglass's correspondence in historical context. See Linda McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled* (1998); Mia Bay, *To Tell The Truth Freely* (2009); and Paula Giddings, *Ida* (2009). In this chapter, I examine the primary materials—largely Wells's and Douglass's archived correspondence—of this history as accessed from the Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress. I draw on the scholars published work to help contextualize the correspondence.

²⁵ See Chandler, “Of Exorbitance” and Moten, “The Case of Blackness.”

always responding to environments as opposed to emerging from vacuums. Her praxis was a way of recognizing not the ways in which blackness could exist, for it was already circulating about her, but how it could exist differently. Or, more specifically, how she could exist differently.

Wells, Empathy, and Morality

When Ida B. Wells writes the newspaper editorial that she will later convert into the pamphlet *Southern Horror*, she has become fatigued with the persisting techniques of moral suasion that black writers—and, often, their amanuensis—had adopted for abolitionist purpose during slavery.²⁶ At the time of her writing in 1892, Wells had received word that three black men she knew—indeed, three of her friends—had been lynched, she reports, for daring to run a grocery store that would compete with, and divert business from, a white grocer. Jolted, she wrote an editorial that sought to end the brutal, ritualized practice of lynching.²⁷ Rather than ask her reader to feel pity, compassion, or, really, the arsenal of pathos for her dead friends and for the other numerous black killings she documents, Wells took on a striking approach: she contended that her white readers had little interest in morality and in affirming the suffering of other humans. Rather, she

²⁶ Phillip Gould defines moral suasion as a central component of slave narratives, embedding these in larger humanist projects. See Gould, “The Rise of the Slave Narrative.”

²⁷ In her book-length study on the lynching, Jacqueline Goldsby documents that in the 1890s the number of lynchings in the United States “soared to unprecedented heights,” adding that during 1882 -1930 lynch mobs murdered 3,220 men, women, and children (15). 1892 represented the highest number of lynchings on record at the time. See, Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*.

asserted, these readers only heeded appeals to them as consumers. As she protested, “The appeal to the white man’s pocket has ever been more effectual than all the appeals ever made to his conscience. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is to be gained by a further sacrifice of manhood and self-respect” (SH 69). As opposed to appealing to her readers’ benevolence, Wells sidestepped arguments that lynching was wrong—deeming such approaches ineffectual—and chose instead to argue that lynching’s end was in the economic interests of all. Wells saw no use in pleas that sought to have one human enter into benevolent identification with another. In her opinion, such a longstanding practice had failed over and over again, and it had only resulted in bodies “sacrificed” to a brutality that could not finally be upended. Wells was contending outright that engaging persons based on what capital they could acquire (or lose) was more effectual than appeals to them founded on moral plains of right and wrong.

With respect to how others were defining empathy, Wells’s first salvo was to reject that it was a matter of conscience. Wells’s cool dismissal of writers’ appeals to their reader’s benevolence (displayed in her quotation above) put her at variance with a number of other black writers and storytellers, particularly those in the earlier part of the same century. That black biographers and storytellers had developed by slavery’s end a tradition of using their work to appeal to the conscience of their (white) audiences is old news. Scholars like David Blight, Dana Nelson, and William Andrews have documented

this thoroughly and black thinkers themselves tell us as much.²⁸ Frederick Douglass, one of the most popular black writers of the nineteenth century and a man who would in his late-life mentor Wells, had, decades earlier, famously shamed a room filled with white abolitionists with his speech “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?”—an address which he later pamphletized for distribution. On July 5th, 1841, Douglass chided his audience, which had ostensibly just celebrated the nation’s independence, for ignoring the continued bondage of black persons: “Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them” (31).

Douglass’s admonition, what historian David Blight lauds as “abolition’s rhetorical masterpiece,” worked because, as Blight puts it, it “converted moral suasionist strategies” for use in slavery’s overthrow (“Frederick”).²⁹ In other words, Douglass tapped into readers’ ability to feel ethically responsible for the plights of an entire class of persons. Douglass’s audience needed to be stunned in to a visceral sense of others’ suffering. As another black thinker, former slave Linda Brent would confide to her reader in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) nearly two decades after Douglass’s address, “Reader, it is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you truthfully what I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still

²⁸ See Blight, *Frederick Douglass’s Civil War* (1991) for such trends as seen through Douglass; Nelson, *The Word in Black and White* (1994) for extended discussions on empathetic identification; and Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story* (1987) for a broader analysis of the structure of early U.S. black autobiography which, nonetheless, details empathetic identification.

²⁹See Blight, “Frederick Douglass's Great 4th of July Oration” at <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/12871>.

in bondage, suffering as I once suffered” (47).³⁰ Brent was transparent about her efforts to compel her reader to feel sorrow, pity, or concern. Though she wished to “kindle a flame of compassion,” it is unclear whether she believed that such feelings of concern for black people already lingered with her readers and merely needed to be fanned further, which might suggest a pervasive baseline of pity for slaves, or whether she believed these feelings needed to be placed in her readers’ hearts altogether. Whatever the case, Brent’s passage documents her ultimate confidence that a benevolent reader—one newly attuned to the suffering of the other—would act on the disadvantaged’s behalf.

Still, Wells wished to abandon such petitions. While calls like Brent’s exhibited the valuable nature of the slave narrative as a political tool with the potential to move readers to feel emotions that might stir them into action on behalf of the slaves, Wells suggests that this literature had also come to risk dangerous implications. The practice could equate blackness with an ontology of pity and it was a strategy whose widespread practice had met failure, if we interpret failure as the dogged persistence of the same violence it was trying to upend.

That Wells rejected empathy’s configuration as a moral category and put in its place matrices of transactions based in self interest, then, provided a striking turn. What made Wells’s approach to engaging readers so acute is not that she was adopting new tools in order to reach them—attempts to induce feelings in others through writing had been common practice and, according to experts, the primary impetus of sentimental

³⁰ While Jean Fagan Yellin has long shown evidence that Linda Brent is the pseudonym that Harriet Jacobs used for protection when she detailed her own story for publication, I use Jacobs’s pseudonym to discuss the narrative figure. See, Yellin, “Harriet Jacobs.”

literature that was well established by Wells's time.³¹ Rather, Wells was offering an alternative understanding regarding how those feelings could be induced, rejecting the moral drives that had been in place at least since Samuel Johnson's *Rambler*.³² In the process she was redefining what empathy was and what she believed it was not. Wells's angle on empathy as a transaction is instructive precisely because it exposes how axiomatic empathy's moral register had become and how far from view and critique its inner workings proceeded.

Even writers who were suspicious of empathy did not finally wrest it from its conception as a morally-based project. As Dana Nelson shows, Linda Brent, wary of the power imbalances inherent in empathy, held it in suspicion and asked her readers to do the same.³³ In particular, Brent reminded antebellum white women of the differences between themselves and the slave women about which they read. As Nelson argues, Brent's narrative uses sisterhood as the vehicle to achieve empathetic identification even while it asks the "reader to become aware of her *own* social position and biases before

³¹ See Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century*.

³² With his *Rambler* 4, Samuel Johnson advocates for using literature in order to more effectively teach morals. He argues that "familiar histories"—by which he means written accounts of people's experiences—fantastical or otherwise, "may perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions." This didacticism is well established by Wells's time. See Johnson, "Rambler 4."

³³ Nelson herself demonstrates the slippage between empathy and sympathy when at her study's outset she names her monograph's animating force as "interest in the 'sentimental' strategies of each text to present empathetic versions of the racial Other as well as the explicit focus of each novel on the politics of narrating history (xi). For consistency in describing terms that during Wells's time were used interchangeably, I use empathy.

she feels compelled to try to understand the very different difficulties of another” (144, emphasis in original).³⁴ Nelson reads Brent guarding against empathy’s potential to “structure *sameness* in a way that can prevent an understanding of the very real material *differences* that structure human experience in a society based on unequal distribution of power” (142, emphasis in original). Brent worried about the ways empathy could elide the very object of identification for which it was presumably being put in service. She wished to have the particularities of slave women recognized. Brent’s need to put a safeguard in place may already speak to the danger she perceived for empathy to act outside of the principled structure that she presumed bounded its workings, a point to which I return below. Nevertheless, all of Brent’s suspicions are finally cast aside in order to achieve empathy’s prescribed moral ends. Even if, as Nelson argues, Brent’s methods for drawing empathy from her reader were complicated and seldom offered without qualifications for those same readers, Brent nonetheless keeps intact—indeed, relies on—empathy’s configuration as a moral category. Nelson herself concludes that Brent’s work would “evoke moral indignation” in her readers, that “the narrative is able to suggest that the injustices suffered by slave women is at least partially the responsibility of her free sister, who fails to live up to the responsibilities of sisterhood,” and that her readers would have come away with a “a moral obligation to protect their ‘sisters’” (143). At their core, these readings understand empathy as the possession of an elusive feeling. In

³⁴ While Nelson describes the relation between Brent and her presumed antebellum readers, Hazel Carby explored the complex valences of sisterhood between Brent and the other textual figures of *Incidents* in “Hear My Voice, Ye Careless Daughters.” See Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood* (1988): 45-61.

the logic that structures these readings, the investigator knows one is unattached to empathy because one does not sense moral obligation.

Although Wells was attempting to appeal to the sentiments of readers she hoped would be moved to work to curb the increasingly widespread practice of lynching, she was configuring empathy far differently than predecessors who yoked it to morality. She rebuffed its configuration as a moral category and argued that it be understood as a secular project merely invested in securing and expending capital. Rather than conceiving empathy as a result—a benevolent feeling one has for an other or an understanding one has of an other, Wells conceived empathy as a series of transactions indifferent to morals between one and one’s object of contemplation. Empathy, in her view, was not—as Douglass’s and Brent’s work suggests—an already coherent feeling that needed awakening. Rather, empathy was a procedure: namely, the process of imaginatively projecting one’s self into an other’s situation in order to benefit from the sensations of that situation. In such a system, sensations one perceives in others are commodities at one’s disposal. Far from obligation, such a system invites consumption of these commodities for one’s own private pleasure and understanding.

Wells, Douglass, and the Deferred Letter

In the midst of her international anti-lynching campaign, Ida B. Wells wrote Frederick Douglass from London, England on 3 June 1894 to inform the leader that she had circulated as many of his latest pamphlet as possible. Most likely referring to disseminating a version of Douglass’s 1894 anti-lynching speech “The Lesson of the

Hour,” later revised into *Why the Negro is Lynched* (1895), Wells made what might easily be glossed as a throwaway comment to Douglass.³⁵ She affirmed: “I had disposed of all the pamphlets you gave me. It is, as you say, the argument and should be published along with my facts.”³⁶ That Wells made distinction between her writing style and Douglass’s is noteworthy: while she presented Douglass’s work as argumentation— words predisposed to subjective reading, she cast her own work as incontrovertible fact, objective reality. Wells’s statement should not be disregarded as an incidental comment; rather, read amid her other writings—in particular the sum of her surviving correspondence with Douglass between 1892 and 1894—it emerges as a careful and powerful declaration of her unique contribution to race work. I present the context of Wells’s 3 June 1894 letter to demonstrate just how significant Wells believed the distinction between her and Douglass’s writing styles to be, given that this dissimilarity substantiated into differing methodologies for uplift work. These events inflected Wells’s relationship with Douglass and exposed the significance she consigned to the writing distinction between them she highlighted: argumentation vs. fact. In particular, the circumstances of her second trip to England, where her relationship with Douglass became most strained meant that she learned by experience what would be required of her writing for race work.

As Wells biographers Linda McMurray, Mia Bay, and Paula Giddings show, while in England for a second time in 1894, Ida B. Wells encountered troubles with her

³⁵ When Wells returned from her second trip to England, she would publish *The Red Record* and acknowledge in its opening that she had drawn from the Douglass pamphlet for inspiration. She would quote from it directly.

³⁶ Ida B. Wells. Letter to Frederick Douglass. 3 June 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

sponsorship that made it evident to her and one of her English hosts that despite having been invited abroad she would need letters of reference in order to prove to the British public that she was not a rogue, mendacious individual. ³⁷ The implication was clear: Wells was a woman traveling alone and the rules of propriety dictated that she have papers. Celestine Edwards of the Society for the Recognition of the Brotherhood of Man—an English civil rights organization—and established author Isabelle Mayo had invited Wells to England. Yet, Wells’s history with Mayo would cause Wells difficulty.

Only a year before, during Wells’s previous and first visit to England, Mayo and Edwards’s predecessor Catherine Impey—a Quaker and longtime supporter of equal rights who Linda McMurry and Paula Giddings document had befriended the likes of William Still and Booker T. Washington—had sponsored Wells and controversy had erupted during the visit. ³⁸ While Wells was under Mayo and Impey’s sponsorship, Impey had written a personal letter to a man she thought shared her romantic feelings. The man forwarded the letter to Mayo with a note that Impey was a wanton woman, a nymphomaniac who jeopardized the organization’s work. Outraged, Mayo absolved her relationship with Impey and exposed her in the press. Mayo urged Wells to do the same, but Wells refused. Wells wished to have no part in punishing Impey for what she believed had been a human, innocuous expression of romantic feeling on Impey’s part. When, the

³⁷ See McMurry, *To Trouble the Waters*; Bay, *To Tell The Truth Freely*; and Giddings, *Ida*.

³⁸ See McMurry, *To Trouble the Waters*, pp. 177 and 189. McMurry even cites Impey’s vegetarianism to imply her commitment to “justice and reform” (189). See also Giddings, *Ida*, p. 258.

following year, during Wells's second trip to England, Mayo learned that Wells still refused to fault Impey, she suddenly withdrew her sponsorship.

Before departing for England Wells had received assurance from Mayo that Edwards, Impey's replacement, would honor her invitation and that she "would work unblighted!!" (emphasis in original).³⁹ Mayo's emphasis suggests the need Mayo felt to emphasize that Wells could work without fear of reproachment. Yet, it also served to remind Wells of how Impey had been defamed. Nevertheless, Edwards fell ill just before Wells arrived in Europe, leaving an impaired organization and Wells to fend for herself.

In this abandoned state, Wells needed someone to vouch that she served what she called "the work," a praxis she defined as speaking truth about the abuses black people sustained in the United States. With "the work," Wells believed, she could manipulate public sentiment for the benefit of her race, motivating people to bring about better conditions for black persons. Strong letters of reference would allow her to secure the English speaking dates she would have previously secured with her English sponsors' reputations.

It is not surprising that Wells believed she had such a letter writer in Frederick Douglass. By 1894, not only was Douglass recognized as an international brand of trust, having once been himself an exile in England, but also Wells had established a personal relationship with the well-known leader, even to the point where he had loaned her twenty-five dollars for her trip abroad.

³⁹ Isabelle Mayo. Letter to Ida B. Wells (Fragment). 12 September 1893. The Frederick Douglass Papers. Library of Congress.

Wells, expecting Douglass to provide a letter just as he had, for instance, for her pamphlet *Southern Horrors* (1892), writes to entreat his help. The first letter Wells writes to Douglass in order to request the letters of reference evinces her confident and assuming tone. Having only arrived in England a few days earlier, by 13 March 1894 Wells had already spoken to a crowd in Liverpool, and she seemed undeterred by the problems of her sponsorship. Immediately after outlining the difficulties with her sponsorship to Douglass, her 13 March letter confides, “I am compelled to depend on myself somewhat, as there are many places where the Brotherhood is not organized.”⁴⁰ Still, Wells remains determined: “I have come abroad to give three months of my time to the work and I am going to do it.”⁴¹

Wells wished for Douglass to know that despite challenges with her sponsorship her mission remained intact. She informed Douglass that she was staying at the home of C. F. Aked, “the most popular pastor in Liverpool with the largest congregation,” at whose church she had spoke to a crowd of over 1,500.⁴² She asked two favors of Douglass: to write Aked a thank you note and to write her a letter of reference. She insisted:

He [Aked] thinks I should have a letter of introduction from you.

Please write one as soon as you get this and forward to me immediately.

You know about my work and can the better commend me to these forces than I

⁴⁰ Ida B. Wells. Letter to Frederick Douglass. 13 March 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. Library of Congress.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

can speak for myself. Indeed I should be most glad if you will write Mr. Aked himself and thank him in the race's name for the help he has already given the cause. I know you will write the letter at once for me and more than oblige me. It is the second personal favor I ever asked of you and would not ask it but that I hope the race will benefit thereby.⁴³

Wells suggests that she could not speak on her own accord. Indeed, her gender and her race put her in a delicate position: she was an unmarried young woman, whose anti-lynching campaign addressed sexual relations in frank, open fashion--unheard of at the time. After all, she sought to debunk the black male rapist myth used to justify lynching by suggesting that a number of white women entered relationships with black men of their own accord; it was not clear how English crowds would receive her frank message. In her letter to Douglass, Wells carefully situates herself as a race worker: to do a favor for her was to do one for "the race's name." Wells was confident that Douglass, a man who had devoted his life to race work, would "more than oblige" her.

Yet, Douglass did not respond favorably: he moved aggressively to protect his brand. His letter to Wells teemed with mistrust. Despite the gloss Wells had provided him concerning her impaired sponsorship situation, before he will write for her, Douglass requires both that Wells provide him with more details regarding her invitation abroad and that she affirm her motives. While he agrees to thank Aked for "opening the doors of his church to you and our cause," Douglass expresses irritation that an English paper claimed that he had endorsed Wells to England: "I see that you are already advertised as

⁴³ Ibid.

accredited to England by me. I had not supposed that, being invited to England, you needed my endorsement. They who called you there knew, I suppose, what they were doing and meant to stand by you and your mission.”⁴⁴ Douglass takes offense to his name being used for events without his permission. He asserts that Wells’s agreement was not with him but with other parties who should have used their own reputations to advertise for events of which he had no part. Douglass’s use of pronouns documents his distancing rhetoric. His use of “you and your mission” repudiates Wells. He does not refer to “our cause,” or “our work” or “the work” as he had in previous correspondence or as he had written in the passage immediately above, recognizing Aked’s help to Wells. Rather, at this critical juncture, Douglass’s rhetoric suggests that the ends of his work and those of Wells’s work are at odds. His altered use of pronouns telegraphed his misgivings with Wells’s motives. Using “you and your mission,” Douglass announced his doubts about what Wells had presented to him as altruistic work on behalf of the race.

As his letter to Wells continues, Douglass’s irritation morphs into more palpable suspicion. He delivers a sharp request:

Will you oblige me by telling me frankly who invited you to spend three months in England and what assurances they gave you of support while on this mission? If they have promised and have failed to perform what they promised they should be exposed. On the other hand, if you have not been invited and have gone to

⁴⁴ Frederick Douglass. Letter to Ida B. Wells. 27 March 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

England on your own motion and for your own purposes you should have told me so.⁴⁵

The circumstances of Wells's predicament do not make sense to Douglass. Douglass calls for Wells to speak to him "frankly," implying that he believed that up to his writing she had not been forthcoming. He takes on an interrogative stance. He questions Wells's motives and, again, thereby, her credibility. Douglass queries whether Wells is actually in England for race work or for her "own purposes." He wishes to confirm Wells's motivations.

Douglass closes his letter to Wells with a metaphor that affirms his power. He pledges: "I am ready to hold your hands up, and want do to do so, but I wish to do so intelligently and truthfully."⁴⁶ The very physicality of Douglass's metaphor—to hold another's hands up—suggests the muscularity and strength of the one individual able to fully support another. It is an act that not only signifies support but also approval, an endorsement. Douglass was aware of the influence he could wield. He knew his public support of Wells could recommend her not only to the black English public but also the white English public who, knowing of Douglass and having ostensibly abetted his escape from slavery, had come to trust him. His letter demonstrates reluctance with expending the capital of his reputation on Wells.

Douglass's metaphor also recalls the body, a body that in Wells's case was delimited by subjective—racial and gendered—and economic constraints. Douglass's

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

body, once shackled by similar constraints, had become inscribed upon and approved by a white public. He suggests his willingness to wield his body and the pre-approved meanings attached to it—maleness, good black—before a public in order to authorize Wells. In short, he could serve as patron saint to Wells. Douglass affirms his readiness to use the influence he had acquired on her behalf. Yet, he indicates that he must be satisfied that Wells's motivations are for race work and not animated by her self-interest. Apparently not swayed enough by Wells's letter, Douglass sits back and waits for Wells to respond, his very quiescence a sign of his privilege and power. His relative inaction would mark Wells profoundly, initially devastating her.

The 27 March 1894 Douglass response to Wells is peculiar, especially given a history that suggests he had protected and aided her in the past. Wells's writings demonstrate that she had sought Douglass's advice and mentorship on more than one occasion and that they had, in fact, developed a personal relationship. In their first documented correspondence, shortly after meeting Douglass for the first time in person, Wells wrote Douglass on 17 October 1892. She asked him to write a letter she could use as the introduction to what would become the anti-lynching pamphlet *Southern Horrors*. Even then, her writing was confident and direct: "I take the liberty of addressing you to ask if you will be so kind as to put in writing the encomiums you were pleased to lavish on my article on Lynch Law published in June 25 issue of *The Age*. I am revising the matter for a pamphlet and would feel highly honored if you would send me a letter with

your opinion of it, which I would use as an introduction.”⁴⁷ Seeing opportunity in the praise Douglass had “lavished on” her work, Wells did not hesitate to harness the leader’s extensive influence. Douglass’s response was swift. A week after Wells’s correspondence, Douglass had penned the letter that introduces the pamphlet. The swiftness with which he endorsed her work stands in contrast to the reticence he would later display to endorse her person.

Their relationship would develop from that moment, and Wells would visit Douglass at his home on multiple occasions, so often so that by the time of her request for references she had even established a writing relationship with Douglass’s wife, Helen Pitts Douglass. The archive of Wells’s letters to the Douglasses demonstrate that Wells was close enough to them that she could visit them on a whim, informing them that she was coming from out of town to their home as opposed to requesting if she could, and doing so with less than a day’s notice.⁴⁸

A 20 December 1893 letter from Wells to Douglass reveals the degree to which she perceived Douglass as a mentor figure and guardian. In the letter, Wells denotes the difficulty of enduring attacks to her credibility in both the black and white presses. On

⁴⁷ Ida B. Wells. Letter to Frederick Douglass. 17 October 1892. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Wells’s postcard to the Douglasses on 26 July 1894: “I am coming to Washington tomorrow.” Ida B. Wells. Postcard to Frederick Douglass. 26 July 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress. See also, Wells’s April 1894 letter to Helen Pitts Douglass for a missive that embodies her apparent familiarity with the family. In the letter Wells jokes with Mrs. Douglass that she is not sure she has a home. Ida B. Wells. Letter to Helen Pitts Douglass. 26 April 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress. In addition, see Wells’s warm recollections of Pitts Douglass in her own posthumous autobiography: Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, pp. 72-74.

more than one occasion, Wells commiserates with Douglass about the challenges of being a race worker. In the face of these hardships and the attacks to her character that were deployed to undermine her work, Wells expresses her thankfulness for the direction and reassurance Douglass had provided her: “you comforted me with your counsel and gave me your protection.”⁴⁹ In this particular instance, Wells was writing Douglass after suffering a particularly nasty review by a black editor: “put a muzzle on that animal from Memphis. We are onto her tricks. If we get after her, we will make her wish her mother had changed her mind ten months before she was born.”⁵⁰ Wells wanted Douglass to come to her aid once more. After quoting the entire vitriolic editorial, in dramatic fashion Wells asked Douglass to defend her as he had in the past: “In my distress, wounded to the quick and utterly unable to help myself, I turn to you.”⁵¹ Wells was especially hurt that a member of her own race had attacked her in the press, and she entreats Douglass to forcefully respond to the black reviewer: “He is not a true representative of the race and I earnestly ask you to come to my relief and teach him a lesson he will not forget.” The gendered dimension of Wells’s request stands out: her letter positions her as a damsel in distress in need of saving by the gallantry of a heroic slave. She appeals to Douglass’s power and his gender privilege. She trusts him to act on her behalf. She saw him not only as an ally but also as a protector. This time, however, Douglass did not come to her rescue.

⁴⁹Ida B. Wells. Letter to Frederick Douglass. 20 December 1893. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

While it is not clear why Douglass relucted writing in support of Wells, there are events that suggest conflict between Douglass's approach to race work and Wells's approach. The most documented disagreement concerned Douglass's involvement with the "Colored Jubilee Day" at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Historian Linda McMurry describes the event as forming a "controversial issue that strained the collaboration of Wells and Douglass" (203) and historian Mia Bay surmises of the pair that: "The atmosphere between the two was no doubt strained that summer" (35).⁵² Both describe that the Exposition was to celebrate America's achievements since Columbus landed on its shores. Participants would receive high visibility and opportunities. However, with the exception of service positions, black people were mostly denied active participation in the Exposition. Douglass and Wells even worked together to publish a pamphlet detailing the exclusion: "The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition" (1893). Douglass was involved in orchestrating a "Colored Jubilee Day" for the fair. Seeing it as an empty concession in the week's long affair, Wells was opposed to a "Negro Day." She urged Douglass not to participate in protest of the unequal treatment blacks received. Yet, Douglass saw the fair as an opportunity to put the unequal relations blacks faced despite their many and extensive contributions on display, even if for a day only. Wells wrote in the press in opposition of the fair, and her words were used to undermine Douglass. In her autobiography, edited and released posthumously by her daughter in 1972, Wells writes that she would only later see the value of the "Jubilee Day" and that she apologized to Douglass shortly

⁵² See McMurry, *To Keep the Waters*, p. 204 and Bay, *To Tell*, p. 34.

thereafter for her position. Nevertheless, such an experience might have soured Douglass, and compelled him to react to protect his legacy.⁵³

Wells biographer Linda McMurry makes a more comprehensive assessment for Douglass's reluctance to write for Wells. Presenting a number of reviews that sought to silence Wells by attacking her credibility and character or by creating controversy, McMurry diagnoses Douglass's reaction to Wells's letter as one of a fatigued and embattled persona: "Apparently, the cumulative effect of attacks on Wells had eroded the black leader's confidence" (208). It may have been that Douglass's past experiences with Wells had disillusioned him.

Historian Paula Giddings offers a clear portrait of Douglass during the years of his relationship with Wells that recommends both his insecurity with his status and his fatigue with being used as a public figure as possible reasons for his reticence to write on Wells's behalf. According to Giddings's sympathetic assessment, "events had conspired against Douglass having the peace of mind of a retired elderstatesman or of his earning the diplomatic equivalent of an honorable discharge with commendation," adding that even "when others reached out to Douglass it was done in a manner that suggested he no longer had the singular stature to influence public opinion" (*Ida* 243). Giddings describes a Douglass not just negotiating a large share of personal turmoil—from the death of his first wife Anna Murray and their son Frederick Jr., to his worries concerning the health and emotional difficulties his grandchildren faced, to his quarrels with those who took

⁵³ See Duster, *Crusade for Justice*, p. 116 - 119. Wells summed up Douglass's position concerning the Exposition as "he thought it better to have half a loaf of bread than to have no bread at all" (118).

issue with his marriage to Helen Pitts, a white woman—but also grappling with fear of professional irrelevance that a controversial diplomatic appointment in Haiti had spurred, leaving him feeling his age and young race leaders trying to replace him.⁵⁴ “In 1894,” Giddings sums up, “Douglass was especially sensitive about his status” (294). He was both wary and weary of extending credit to people. Indeed, Douglass may have very well been fatigued with people taking advantage of his stature in general, a stature which he may have fretted was on the decline.

Whatever the case, Douglass’s response was a blow to Wells. She began her eight-page explosive response dated 6 April 1894, letting Douglass know in just what state his letter had put her:

Your letter which I received this morning has hurt me cruelly. With all the discouragements I have received and the time and money I have sacrificed to the work, I have never felt so like giving up as since I received your very cool and cautious letter this morning, with its tone of distrust and its inference that I have not dealt truthfully with you.⁵⁵

Wells was wounded deeply by Douglass’s distanced rhetoric. Her words indicate she felt betrayed by a man she regarded as one of her closest allies and mentors. Believing she had undertaken “the work” at great personal sacrifice, she takes exception to being placed under suspicion. For Wells, Douglass’s doubt provided the ultimate demoralization, and she wanted to make sure she communicated her resentment. Her extended sentences and

⁵⁴ See Giddings, *Ida*, p. 238 - 245.

⁵⁵ Ida B. Wells. Letter to Frederick Douglass. 6 April 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

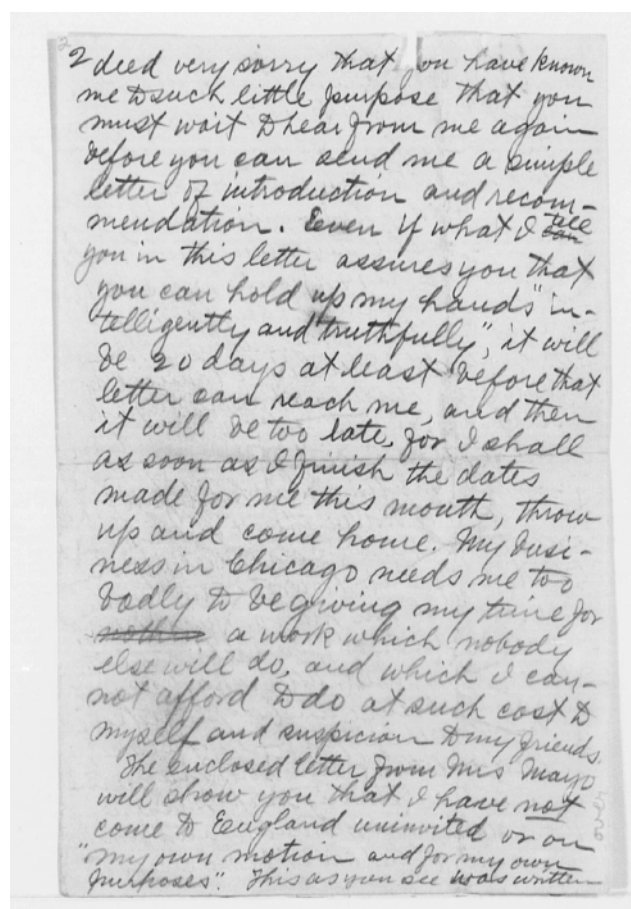
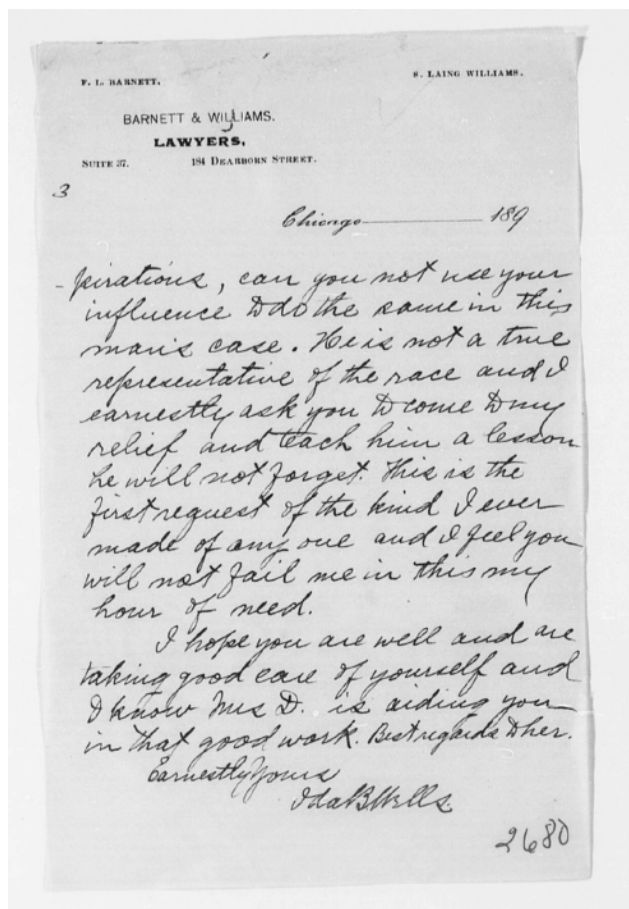


Figure 1: Ida B. Wells Letter, Sample One (left) and Figure 2: Ida B. Wells, Sample Two (right)

On the right (Figure 1) is an image of the third page of a three-page letter Wells wrote to Douglass in December 1893. On the left (Figure 2) is an image of the third page of the eight-page letter, Wells wrote to Douglass after he refused to write her a letter of reference.

proliferating clauses suggest a writer bursting at the seams, attempting to swiftly get down all of her reactions as well as the palpable extent of the hurt and outrage that was attached to them.

Even without reading the letter's words, an onlooker might guess the emotional state of Wells simply by taking in the appearance of the writing. The handwritten original is riddled with words that have been underlined once, even twice; multiple strikethroughs in favor of stronger words appear over and again; and additions cram in the already cramped spaces between the lines. These elements cumulate to suggest a letter written

passionately and in haste. Unlike her previous letters, which appeared with well-spaced lines and words, here Wells exhausts much more of the page's blank space. Individual words and lines now crowd one another in their hurry to cement their place on the page and to devastate their reader.

Wells gave reason for her fury. She informed Douglass she assumed he would have readily provided the letter, for "without knowing anything about these people and their invitation, you did know me and had never had cause to doubt my truthfulness" (2, Wells's emphasis)⁵⁶. In the original Wells underlined "did" two times. Her emphasis on "did" at once denotes both her firm belief that she and Douglass shared a close relationship and her stunned realization that the very same relationship and its state of intimacy had disappeared suddenly and decisively. Feeling she had lost Douglass's favor, Wells consigned Douglass's state of "knowing" to the past; it was a former condition, a lost element to which she was no longer privileged. Wells was left reeling. She was upset that a man with whom she thought she had formed a trusting relationship could question their bond. Whereas strangers might need such reassurance, she begrudged that an intimate requested it.

Wells made clear her belief that Douglass's reluctance was unwarranted and that it would ramify into a number of detrimental effects. She lamented:

I am indeed very sorry that you have known me to such little purpose that you must wait to hear from me again before you can send me a simple letter of introduction and recommendation. Even if what I tell you in this letter assures you

⁵⁶ Ibid.

that you can hold up my hands ‘intelligently and truthfully,’ it will be twenty days at least before that letter can reach me, and then it will be too late, for I shall as soon as I finish the dates made for me this month, throw up and come home. My business needs me too badly to be giving up my time for a work which nobody else will do, and which I cannot afford to do at such cost to myself and suspicion to my friends. (3)⁵⁷

Wells took offense that Douglass treated her like a distrusted unfamiliar. The statement which closed Douglass’s letter—his desire to write the letter of introduction on the condition that he could do so “intelligently and truthfully”—has such an impression on Wells that she quoted it back to him, a mirroring that suggests her incredulity with his display of distrust. She quoted the words back to him as if to confront him with the ridiculousness she saw in them. Wells implied to Douglass that by not meeting with alacrity the “simple” task of writing a letter of recommendation that he had delayed and, thereby, hindered “the work.” And, for Wells, that Douglass had refused to write for the race without any apparent cause exacerbated his offense.

Wells did not understand how her personal forfeitures for “race work” could be seen as self-serving. She listed the difficulties of race work and the individual sacrifices she felt she had made to commit to “the work,” reminding Douglass that she had other obligations that she abandoned and to which she could devote her time instead, particularly if this work she had prioritized would only set her back economically and further alienate her. Her threat that she should just as soon “throw up and come home”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

documented both her impending resignation and exasperation. To write that Wells felt disaffected would be understatement. She sustained from Douglass the very type of attack to her credibility and character that in the wake of others' she had once called on him to soothe and give counsel.

Wells's comments to Douglass introduce and make significant the element of class, a factor that makes her even more dependent on Douglass. A number of the personal costs to which she referred were financial. Wells noted that she agreed to come to England for her expenses and two pounds per week, noting "it was as little as I could come for + then at sacrifice to my business."⁵⁸ Not only does she refer to her ailing business, but she even makes mention of the borrowed twenty-five dollars that she has failed to return to Douglass: "I very much regret that the turn of affairs will not permit me to send you the \$25 which I owe you in this letter, but I hope to have it by the 20th when the note is due, even if I have to borrow it here."⁵⁹ Wells's move here was dramatic. Wells wished to show Douglass that her aim was not to exploit his good will. Her stated intention of returning the money she borrowed from him, even if it meant that she had to go in debt elsewhere, indicated her fervent wish, even if only symbolic, to impose on him no further. Wells's statements put forward the possibility that race work may be a terrain limited to those with access to economic privilege or, at least, the ability and freedom to invest and consume at will.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Despite its fiery passages, Wells's 6 April 1894 letter nonetheless provided Douglass with detailed information to respond to each of the points Douglass had inquired about in his request, and it closed with conciliatory words for the civil rights leader. Wells reached out for Douglass's grace:

While my heart bleeds that you should class me with that large class who have imposed upon your confidence, I still love you as the greatest man our race has yet produced and because of what you have endured for the race's sake. I hope still to be regarded not "My Dear Miss Wells," but by the name I love to hear you use—Ida.⁶⁰

Wells's closing was at once a plea for reconciliation and a declaration or, better still, a reminder of their former confidence. Despite the hurt she charged he caused her, she still valued and respected Douglass's work and the experiences he sustained and underwent for race uplift. She longs for the intimate mentoring relationship she once enjoyed—indeed, a relationship she feared imperiled—to be restored.

In Douglass's quiescence, Wells became her own agent. She did not just sit and wait for Douglass; rather, a 30 April 1894 letter of English minister Ambrose Blatchford to Wells demonstrates that while Douglass hesitated, she was exhausting other avenues to secure English speaking dates. Blatchford wrote to console Wells his failed efforts to help her find sponsorship, and he recommended to her others who she might consult for aid. He sympathized: "Indeed it is but natural that you should be sorry to find I had no better news to give you. Now then,--we must try by other means of making your earnest appeal

⁶⁰ Ibid.

known.”⁶¹ Blatchford understood Wells’s dilemma. While he provided her with further options to explore, he did not sound particularly confident with any. He only expressed enthusiasm for one solution: Douglass. Blatchford closed his letter with an apt post-script: “How I wish we could get a good earnest letter from Fred. Douglas[sic]” (emphasis in original).⁶² Despite Wells’s efforts to find other avenues on her own, Blathford’s letter must have confirmed for Wells the power that Douglass’s endorsement could wield. Wells was no doubt receiving pressure from English hosts to produce letters from Douglass. Her allies did not feel they could be of much help without his blessing.

Douglass had left Wells stranded. Her sponsorship was faint. Her resources were waning; she would not even be able to pay Douglass back on schedule the money he had loaned her, as a family emergency would crop up for her to which she would attend with the funds set aside for the leader. Wells was alone. She was alienated. Her credibility was under suspicion even by those she fancied intimates. She was in a foreign land compelled, as she put it, to depend on herself. In other words, in England, Wells was the black stranger in the village, and she needed the help of those about her. She needed people to take her in, and she had to find a strategy to attract them.

It is in this context of deep alienation that Wells strategically fashioned her writing (and her self) into a good that could be consumed wholesale by a target audience while, nevertheless, getting her message across uncompromised. Wells’s tensions with

⁶¹ Ambrose Blanchard. Letter to Ida B. Wells. 30 April 1894. Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

⁶² Ibid.

Douglass foregrounded the double-bind in which she would be caught repeatedly: she had to win the favor of stakeholders while speaking facts that might very well implicate them, upend or ridicule their methods, and, as a result, potentially anger them. Her letters to Douglass—a man whom she respected and adored but whom she also needed to jolt into her service—were the ideal training ground for such a practice.

Wells begins to use letters to Douglass as a medium through which to remind him of her offerings to race work. She would write Douglass twice more in the hopes of receiving letters of reference from him. In the end, Douglass would write in support of Wells, but his letters would not arrive to England until 1 June 1894. By then, almost two months had elapsed between Wells's first request and Douglass's eventual assent. In this two month hiatus the way in which Wells styles letters to Douglass changes: Wells's approach to obtaining Douglass's favor becomes more strategic; her letters are more careful, more superficially self-deprecating, and more laudatory of Douglass. And still, the letters also manage to advertise the novel techniques that Wells brings to race work and the skills that she had already exhibited in that regard.

Wells's amended approach appears in her next letter to Douglass on 6 May 1894, one month after her infuriated eight-page response to his inaction. While the entire 6 May letter did not survive, the fragment documents her revised tone and suggests that Douglass had written her back since her initial response to reprimand her tone and to encourage her, all the while refusing to write letters in her support.

Still, Wells pressed forward, requesting the letters again in more directive fashion. This time she was more specific to Douglass about what she needed in the letters and

why she needed it. She referenced the letter of thanks Douglass had written to Aked at her request:

When I wrote to you I had not seen your letter to Mr. Aked; since seeing it I know from what he and others said that while they did not expect gush (may they pay you the same compliment I do in knowing you to be incapable of such a thing) still they would have been better satisfied if you had spoken more positively regarding me and my work.⁶³

Wells made the letters a request from others, not necessarily one from her. With “they would have been satisfied,” she instructed Douglass concerning the threshold of praise letters of reference would need to meet in order to win “their” approval—in this case the support of potential sponsors. She suggested that Douglass would not have to write with excessive sentiment or false praise, but that he would merely need to be earnest, given, of course, that a man of his character would be “incapable” of being effusive. Thereby, by extension, Wells implied to Douglass that her work was a quality product that spoke well on its own and needed no hyperbole in presentation. Wells criticized Douglass for a weak note of thanks on her behalf, she tutored him on how to write a better one, and she assured him of her confidence in him to do better with the letters of reference.

Wells was able to act with such impunity because she consigned the notes of criticism to her sponsors’ needs. In effect, while her sponsors saddled Douglass with criticism with their demands, she, on the other hand, at least on the surface, only made

⁶³ Ida B. Wells. Letter to Frederick Douglass. 6 May 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

certain to share in their sentiments when they complimented Douglass or responded favorably to him—for instance, praising his earnest nature and character. In this manner, Wells was able to deploy a rhetorical attack all the while she protected herself from Douglass’s disfavor by scapegoating the exacting wishes of prospective sponsors.

Wells methodically set forth the benefits Douglass could perform for the work if he were to hesitate no longer and write letters of reference for her. First, she focused on the work Douglass could have done. I reproduce the superscripted text to denote the additions that Wells made to a sentence, presumably after writing it. Wells wrote: “As the best known member of the race a positive letter or voucher^Λ from you would ^Λhave go^Λne far to pave the way in many places I have been and now am.”⁶⁴ Without the additions—the superscripted text—Wells’s sentence merely documented the work Douglass’s letters could perform in the future: “As the best known member of the race a positive letter or voucher^Λ would go far to pave the way in many places I have been and now am.” However, with the changes, the sentence denounced Douglass for the opportunities to help race work he had already missed by not writing at once in Wells’s support: “As the best known member of the race a positive letter or voucher^Λ from you would ^Λhave go^Λne far to pave the way in many places I have been and now am.” While Wells’s written additions appear innocuous corrections, the palimpsest dramatized Wells’s indictment of Douglass’s idling and emphasized the urgent need for his support.

Wells continued to lay out the potential for productive race work in Europe. She told Douglass again that since she remained unknown in England, “the people who have

⁶⁴ Ibid.

a vague idea that the Negro race is a brutish one, deserving death” do not know to trust her “that lynching is so terrible a thing, deserving their censure.”⁶⁵ Wells managed to chart her own contribution as she asserted to Douglass that his writing possesses the power to alter destructive prejudice and “would help the race cause wonderfully and help me counteract the bad impression every White American who comes across, to say nothing of the newspapers and magazines—leaves in the minds of Europeans.”⁶⁶ Wells’s turn here was swift: she moved seamlessly from describing Douglass’s value to documenting her own importance for their purposes. Asserting her willingness to counteract “these impressions by the thousands,” Wells suggested that even with good work—presumably like Douglass’s anti-lynching pamphlet “The Lesson of the Hour”—one needs the means to circulate the message: “I am willing to do so, but I cannot alone. If there was money and persons sufficient to distribute your magnificent pamphlet thruout [sic] the length and breadth of the kingdom, much would be done.”⁶⁷ Wells implied that given resources she could achieve greater results for the race during her time abroad. Again, Wells’s presentation of the work she could have been performing built the case for her pressing need for sponsorship.

Wells’s letter continued to outline what she could do with sponsorship so much so that it appears a litany meant to stress over and over again for Douglass the potential value of his letters and the significance of Wells as an agent. She detailed for him the potential

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

sponsors who ask for letters of reference, she included the addresses of prospective sponsors, and, in two instances, she included in her own correspondence to Douglass the correspondence written to her by potential sponsors that expressed they wish to read from Douglass. By providing Douglass with these catalogues, Wells moved to documenting everything, lest her credibility be put to doubt once more.

Wells used Douglass's own words to motivate him to write. She reminded Douglass of his confidence in her and she excused herself for the tone of her previous letter.

It lightens my heart wonderfully to have you say at the close of your letter that you have stood by me in every time of trial and will for all time to come. That is spoken like any dear good and grand Old Man Eloquent, and I want to beg your forgiveness for my hasty words. Yes, I am sure I deserve a whipping about my way of speaking of that \$25, and I give you leave go whip me when we meet.⁶⁸

Wells thrilled that Douglass had acknowledged the closeness of their relationship in recent correspondence. Her mention of Douglass's assurance to stand by her at all times seems calculated—it only appeared after she had detailed how his letters of reference could help her and the race. Wells's implication was clear and simple: in order to fulfill his pledge to stand by her, Douglass ought to write in her support. Her assertion that Douglass's words are spoken like those of any great public speaker, any "Grand Man Eloquent," at once compliments Douglass's oratory skills and hid—albeit but barely—her biting and bold insinuation: the time for talking and empty rhetoric had passed; she

⁶⁸ Ibid.

needed Douglass to act. Yet, Wells's sentence has not even ended before she was apologizing, though cheekily, for her tone in the earlier letter, ceding the peculiar power to discipline her to Douglass, a submissive stance masking her ostensible control.

Hopkins's whipping seems more complicated than meets the eye. While Paula Giddings reads the exchange as playful, a sign that Wells had "rekindled, as she hoped, [Douglass's] paternal, protective side" in the context of this reading it is difficult not to see Douglass with the same power over Wells that slaveowners would have had over their slaves.⁶⁹ Hopkins literally figures herself a commodity at Douglass's disposal and in need of his protection. She was alone and she needed travel papers.

Wells would write Douglass again four days later on 10 May 1894, employing many of the same strategies from her 6 May letter. She nonetheless had reason to write with greater urgency, specifically to ask for letters that would allow her to talk to the British Parliament, an unexpected though fortunate opportunity that had sprung up, which she needed to seize within a short window of time.

Douglass would finally write in Wells's support, but Wells's writing suggests her once easy rapport with him had been lastingly altered. By 3 June 1894 Wells was writing Douglass to thank him for the letters of reference her sponsors had received only two days earlier, but she did not revert to the carefree way in which she had previously written Douglass. Rather, even in expressing her gratitude to Douglass she continued to underscore her value as a self-sacrificing agent for the race, only more aggressively:

⁶⁹ See Giddings, *Ida*, p. 296.

You know I thank you from the depths of a grateful heart that your response has been so prompt and the letters to those gentlemen written at once. I am glad for the sake of the cause far more than for my own. For in my own behalf I never should have troubled you. Indeed, had it been on a mission of my own I should never had been in England today.⁷⁰

It appears that with her letter Wells was still responding to the doubt Douglass had expressed regarding her motives in his initial refusal to write. Again, Wells stressed that she was not in England for her own purpose but with the aim of giving speeches that would raise awareness of the oppression blacks face in the United States. Although it took Douglass's letters approximately two months to arrive to Wells's potential sponsors after her initial request, she nonetheless thanked him for his "prompt" writing. It is unclear whether Wells's gratitude refers to Douglass's timely response to the latest request for letters that she had made on 10 May, or whether the ambiguity could once again be highlighting all but Douglass's responsiveness—his hesitation.

Later in the letter, Wells referenced Douglass's delay once again and suggested that "the work" continued in spite of his hesitation. Outlining why she had asked Douglass to write letters of reference to begin with and the positive effect they had once written and delivered to sponsors, Wells proclaimed:

I turned to you as one of the race that is suffering—for a word which would aid me in helping that race. That word came and strengthened the hands of those who

⁷⁰ Ida B. Wells. Letter to Frederick Douglass. 3 June 1894. The Frederick Douglass Papers. The Library of Congress.

—not waiting for it—had already responded to the cry of humanity against oppression. I thank you for it, and the race which already loves and honors you for your words and works in its behalf—cannot but more highly venerate you for your word in your old age.⁷¹

Wells's continued hurt at Douglass's initial unfavorable response is clear. She felt she turned to him in a moment of great need and that he failed to act, leaving her "to flounder along as best I could." Wells again emphasized that her request was not personal but on behalf of black people or to "respond to the cry of humanity against oppression." Her punctuation offset hard her assertion that race work persisted in England without Douglass's action—"not waiting for it", although she did acknowledge that Douglass's letters did help once they arrived. Wells, then, assumed the position of the one who speaks for the race—a position once ceded to Douglass without question—and thanks him in stately fashion for his efforts in his "old age." In the context of her continued intimations that he had failed to act swiftly enough for the race and of her sustained emphasis on her contributions and agency, Wells's reference to Douglass's age insinuated that the leader was past his prime. She laid emphasis on her own ongoing contributions in spite of Douglass's hesitation, and she implicitly dismissed Douglass as a legend with past words and past work.

Wells began to distinguish herself from Douglass, emphasizing more strongly the value that she specifically brought to race work. She asserted:

⁷¹ Ibid.

You know my sentiments—I have always adored you as our greatest man and hoped that I had been fortunate to win for myself a slight measure of your regard from a personal point of view. However, I feel myself favored to have won your ecumenisms for my work.⁷²

Wells suggested that Douglass only supported her because he believed in her work, not her. Yet, she still had great admiration for Douglass and his opinion. Thus, Wells's letter to Douglass did double-duty. While she was careful to thank Douglass and to praise him—"I have always adored you as our greatest man"—she also worked to remind him of her unique contribution to the work.

It is in this context that I return to the writing distinction that Wells made and that I presented at the outset of this section. Referencing the Douglass pamphlets that she had been able to distribute Wells writes of Douglass's words, "It is, as you say, the argument and should be read along with my facts."⁷³ The distinction Wells made between their writing styles suggests that Wells saw it necessary and appropriate to remind Douglass that she brought a differing approach to race work, one that he himself had praised and in which he had once seen potential. Perhaps, most importantly, Wells suggested that she brought a perspective that in all his years Douglass had been unable to bring. Wells's aside, "as you say," indicates that she had discussed with Douglass this distinction between "argument" and "facts" prior to her letter or, perhaps, even that Douglass had initially made the distinction himself.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

The importance of facts must have become imprinted in Wells's mind during her second trip England. In her moment of abject alienation, in her moment as "one of the race who was suffering," her character under suspicion and her credibility impaired, the only viable response was that she could marshal "the facts." Over and again, Wells catalogued facts to Douglass in attempts to get him to act. Wells presented the catalogue so persistently that it became a litany that Douglass had little choice but to respond to.

Wells's words to Douglass also mark her belief that facts should be coupled with an argument or a narrative. Wells's next major publication, *The Red Record* (1895), demonstrates how she negotiated the relationship between argumentation (what I believe to be synonymous to narrativizing) and facts—the process of cataloguing, tabulating, and cumulating. In other words, the form that *The Red Record* takes compared to Wells's earlier work *Southern Horrors* (1892) suggests that her trip to England and her dealings with Douglass solidified the approach that she would take to fend off attacks to her credibility and to avoid needing to place herself in a position of deference. Wells had found a powerful writing tool that would substantiate into a novel method for race uplift.

Wells's Modified Approach: *The Red Record*

Ida B. Wells's *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* appeared only months after she had returned from England the second time and after Frederick Douglass died in February 1895. While the pamphlet continued Wells's written campaign against lynching, her approach had changed. Wells moved away from the prose-heavy persuasive writings she had previously used to a

writing style that approached narration with restraint. Specifically, in *The Red Record* Wells limited prose about lynchings and, instead, literally tabulated killings. Like she had with Douglass, she focused on using her writing to give her readers facts that they could consume or get other to consume.

In the publication's final pages, Wells called *The Red Record* a "practical work," and she asserted that its objective had been to "tell the facts, and friends of the cause can lend a helping hand by aiding in the distribution of these books" (157). So assured was Wells of the practicality of this aim that she proposed it to others. Anticipating readers who, like the "interested friends" she met at public lectures, would inquire after her, "What can I do to help the cause?" Wells offered them a similar métier: "The answer as always is, 'Tell the world the facts'" (157). How Wells used the written page of *The Red Record* to engage in the work of conveying facts, then, is particularly significant.

Using statistics gathered from over two years of lynching reports in the *Chicago Tribune*, Wells devoted two chapters of *The Red Record* to just listing 1893's and 1894's lynching victims by name. She listed those lynched under the alleged "offense" for which they were lynched. Under such "offenses" as "SUSPECTED ROBBERY," "ASSAULT," "ATTEMPTED RACE," Wells provided her reader with the date persons were lynched, their full names, and the location where they were lynched. In pages and pages listing the killed, the "offenses" under which names are organized obtain the effect of chapter headings, and the names under these headings are given the effect of entries or records. Wells's choice to include imprecision is powerful. Sometimes those listed are unidentified; the crime has reduced them to bodies stripped of proper names—"unknown

negro,” “four unknown negroes,” “two unknown negroes” she writes (83). The listed location referenced a point outside of the text from which their bodies had been retrieved. Wells also records the reported locations of lynchings so carefully that the imprecise geographies named give a sense of the sheer expanse of the terrain on which people were lynched. People were lynched “near Selma, Ala,” in “West Texas” among other imprecise locations. That descriptions like “near” or “outside” are reduced to the nouns they modify shows just how much fidelity Wells gave to reports, whose imprecision in turn, shows the casualness with which people were killed. With the exception of statistical information that breaks down lynchings by state and the total number of recorded lynchings per offense, there are entire chapters there is no traditional prose. In other words, large sections of the work refuse narration altogether, featuring, almost in their entirety, tabulated killing. Wells has let the dead bodies that piled the page speak for themselves. As Wells’s letters with Douglass had shown, she did not need to comment, she could let the form do so for her.

In what we might regard as her first authenticating gesture, not only did Wells’s reprint the same endorsement letter from Douglass that had preceded *Southern Horror*, but she also cited the late Frederick Douglass’s pamphlet, “Why is the Negro Lynched.”

In so doing, she authorized her own work, as she learned was needed in England. Wells’s structure exhibits her disinclination to narrate. Her account reads like a formal and official record of lynchings—a news bulletin, recording events independent from commentary and without (explicit) moralizing. Wells implied that to “tell the facts” provided an immediate accounting for lynching that could be put to use at once to help

stop it. She laid emphasis on providing her readers evidence of objective realities, independent of any imaginative procedure they might impose on these.

There are numerous possibilities in how one could interpret the effect of Wells's decision to list the names of the dead. To list the names takes up space on the page. It also takes up time, given that a reader must recognize each name. It literally slows the momentum that prose has naturally, given that one begins and ends with each entry before moving to the next. Each name not only provides the lynched with recognition but also provides an indictment for a system that allows these killings to persist.

Tabulation's departure from traditional narration offered up a reversal and a refusal. The very juxtaposition of the methods for delivering information, suggests not only a refusal to offer stories for all the dead, but it also suggests the impossibility of doing so. Wells's tabulation of lynchings can be read as both aggressive display of killings and as protective refusal to provide narratives for these. It is a display of one year's worth of killings

Wells's list is a litany, a prayer for the dead written by Wells and recited over and again by every reader who comes to her text. A supplication for it all to end. The cumulative effect is devastating. What Wells's entries have done is force a private enterprise into the public record in order to show that this was not just about the individual cases, but that it was a systemic killing off of a people. Wells was distinguishing private use of knowledge to public use.

Wells distinguished her work from moralizing. Far from an account between persons, Wells was offering evidence to an authority. Her dealing with Douglass had

taught her that moralizing did not ingratiate herself to those in power. The narrative is divided like a bulletin: it states its case, provides statistics, elevates examples of these statistics. She felt it's practicality was that Wells's practicality was manifest especially in how she thought she could enlist readers or be of use to "friends of the cause." She ventured:

When I present our cause to a minister, editor, lecturer, or representative of any moral agency, the first demand is for facts and figures. Plainly, I can not then hand out a book with a twenty-five-cent tariff on the information contained. This would be only a new method in the book agents' art. In all such cases it is a pleasure to submit this book for investigation, with the certain assurance of gaining a friend to the cause. (157)

Wells's refusal to participate in a market that further commodified black bodies can be seen in these passages. She did not see this work as "sellable"—subject to what she called the book agents' art. Rather, she offered it for use for use by those who could potentially wrest in from the desire to consume over to the desire to be with.

CHAPTER III

“MORE BONES AS WELL AS MORE FLESH,”

OR CHARLES CHESNUTT’S FACTS AND DANGEROUS FICTIONS

That fiction requests a reader to consume and be affected by imaginative identifications of the other—an identification process that critics have talked about extensively enough to brand it “narrative empathy”—seems such a given that we hardly linger to question its base assumptions. And yet, the relationship between a reader and a text’s content seems always at the foreground or, at the very least, as reader-response theorists might have it, on the horizon.⁷⁴ For instance, in her attempts to cement a “theory of narrative empathy,” Suzanne Keen has offered a definition of the term that exhibits these relations:

Narrative empathy is the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another’s situation and condition. Narrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it, in mental simulation during reading, in the aesthetics of reception when readers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it. (2013)⁷⁵

Keen stipulates that the process of narrative empathy involves a reader gobbling up a buffet of impressionistic elements—taking in a sight, a sound, a smell—via words on a

⁷⁴ See Wolfgang Iser’s, *Prospecting* and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* for a discussions of how imaginative identifications figure prominently in reading practice.

⁷⁵ Suzanne Keen "Narrative Empathy". In Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.): *the living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press.

page. The definition of the phenomenon presumes that “feelings” and “perspective-taking” in fiction are offered up without reservation for the reader to take in, as the genial term “sharing” suggests. To attain narrative empathy, then, we assume that the reader must take in the other.

This assumption that a reader receives windfall from a text provides the quiet foundation of much of our critical work. Recently scholars from a variety of disciplines have returned to investigations of the effects of narrative on a reader—a topic as old as Aristotle’s *Poetics*—with heightened attention to emotion. An explosion of affect theorists are trying to secure the place of emotion in a literary-critical discourse that Fredric Jameson predicted (perhaps all too soon) would be marked by a “waning of affect” (1990).⁷⁶ While the advocates for thinking about the effect of emotions in narrative have differing views of what a reader’s emotional engagement with a piece of literature can accomplish in the lived world, all believe emotional engagement to be a critical, though oft-neglected, component to reading practice and literary analysis.

These critics may disagree on whether a piece of fiction can provide a reader with emotions that compel that reader into any substantive action, yet their critical work suggests that they do agree—if only implicitly in some cases—that fiction provides a space where a reader can engage in the productive emotional and imaginative act of identifying with constructed characters. Consider Martha Nussbaum’s persistent assertion that reading narrative fiction rewards a reader’s emotional engagement by training his or

⁷⁶ For examples of explosion see Gregg and Seigworth, *Affect Theory Reader* or Clough’s and Halley’s *Affective Turn*. Jameson’s prediction appeared in *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

her moral and political consciousness; Nussbaum adamantly argues that such a training transforms the reader into a better citizen (of the world!) capable of making positive decisions in daily life regarding complete strangers (1996; 2010)⁷⁷. Or Keen’s initially countervailing assertion that “scant evidence exists for narrative empathy’s contribution to real-world altruism” which she immediately qualifies by conceding “[t]his devalues neither narrative empathy nor the widespread trust in the socially beneficial yield of novel-reading, which I regard as an admirable hope shared by many novelists” (2011, 37)⁷⁸. Or Heather Love’s invocation for critics to return to fictional texts whose potentially depressing contentions can teach us about the workings of power structures, however irredeemable the texts’ characters or painful their truths (2007).⁷⁹ Or Rita Felski’s assertion that critics themselves are a reading public whose suspicious reading practices may already render clear their own affective orientations to texts—orientations which they may have unknowingly already accumulated by means of their emotional association to these same texts (2011)⁸⁰. However different the approach these critics undertake, however varied what they believe to be the putative result of fiction on the reader, each critic’s analysis relies on valuing the fictional text as a space that allows readers to generate emotional identifications by taking in the impressionistic elements the

⁷⁷ See Nussbaum, *For Love of Country? and Not For Profit*.

⁷⁸ See Keen, “Introduction: Narrative and the Emotions.”

⁷⁹ See Love, *Feeling Backward*

⁸⁰ See Felski, “Suspicious Minds.”

text offers. In other words, fiction is regarded as an emotionally furtive field ready for, if not explicitly inviting, the reader's consumption.

In this chapter, I wish to dispute the assumption that fiction must rely on a reader's imaginative identification of the other by reading this assumption into the historical and cultural context of work by black writers of the early Progressive Era. I argue that the brutal history of U.S. slavery—one rife with violent commodification and continued, albeit masked, subjugation of black bodies—made certain black writers wary of subjecting black personhood to narrative exploitation as well. These writers transformed their narrative style and their practice in order to rebuff any further abuse to black persons. Their *métier* became to move the text away from being an easy-access site that prepared and packaged black bodies and souls for commodification to one that made commodification difficult and that permitted them to instruct their readers differently about black persons, especially at the safe distance that reading permits.

To make visible this revision of narrative empathy, I pay close attention to the writing career of Charles Chesnutt, a black writer who occupied a unique position in American letters at the end of the nineteenth century, given that he was one of arguably two black writers with access to a large white mainstream audience.⁸¹ With his last published novel *The Colonel's Dream* (1905) in mind, I trace how Chesnutt's writing transformed under the imperative to write for a white public and under own his stubborn insistence to write about "the color line" while doing so. These imperatives had the

⁸¹ Later, in 1931, Chesnutt would identify Paul Laurence Dunbar as the other black author with white mainstream Progressive Era appeal. See Chesnutt, "Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem" (1931).

potential to be at odds, if not to diverge and derail one another. If he was to be successful, Chesnutt had to wrangle them together while tending to the dangers of narrative empathy.

Although much attention has been given to the effects or the lack of effects of narrative on a reader, little attention has been paid to how black writers crafted their work to address and transform how their writing was being taken in by white readers. My approach, in contrast, focuses on what the writing itself sought to achieve as opposed to what we believe to be its results, by tracking specific writing practices and techniques; the emotions of the writers that governed them; and, in particular, how these writers regarded black bodies and personhood at the turn of the twentieth century. By analyzing Chesnutt's usually unexamined letters—such as his notes to publishers, advocates, and mentors; his journal entries; and his manuscripts in progress—I have found that he was attempting to tutor his readers in how to regard black bodies and persons with nuance and the assumption of complexity.⁸²

I engage the fields of narrative theory, affect studies, black studies, and gender and embodiment to understand how Chesnutt negotiated strong emotions about disenfranchisement by crafting his narratives strategically with a white (usually male) reader in mind. The heightened awareness he demonstrates about his readers' identities shows the need for race and gender to be brought to bear on the category of "reader," often presumed to be uniform by scholars of reader-response.

⁸² The Chesnutt Digital Archive edited by Stephanie Browner has been a valuable resource for this work.

We have been warned about the adverse effects of narrative empathy before. Saidiya Hartman has explored the abuse and violence black bodies sustain in the wake of empathy, and her view of empathy has been used extensively to think about the unspoken dynamics of encounters with (black) slave bodies (1997).⁸³ Hartman theorizes the “double-edged” valence of empathy, given that it is not simply a tool of benevolent identification but is, for her, also bound up with erasure. Attending to the violence of the slave trade, Hartman uses a slave narrative in which a white man, John Rankin, imagines himself in the body of a black slave in order to feel the pain of the other. Hartman demonstrates how empathy can mask violence: “Rankin becomes a proxy and the other’s pain is acknowledged to the degree that it can be imagined, yet by virtue of this substitution the subject of identification threatens to disappear” (1997, 19). For Hartman, empathy is violent because it evinces the fungibility of the slave body.

My work, though, builds on this idea by contending that black writers like Chesnut were well aware of untoward uses of empathy and that, indeed, they were experimenting with writing practices that could harness how people were using empathy. Chesnut’s fiction attempts to exploit what the practice of empathy or the white’s belief about the fungibility of the slave body.

Chesnut’s writing suggests that he believed fiction could be retooled from a form that was, under the guise of empathy, covertly persisting in a commodification of black persons that had begun with slavery in to a form that could initiate or reprogram readers to a course of more equal relations between white persons and black persons. Chesnut’s

⁸³ See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

work evinces his conviction that he could use a text to lure readers that regarded the black body as an expendable commodity by exploiting their desire for obtaining a black good. If black persons were regarded as merchandise by white consumers, then he would offer them up as such in his fiction. In other words, he would exploit modes of knowing that held contemporary post-reconstruction black persons no differently than the slave bodies the slave trade had taken for fungible. Only, once a reader was in his text, his work's content and the manner of its writing would attempt to instruct readers differently about black personhood by working to inhibit the perpetuation of ways of knowing that figured black persons as goods. If successful, this revising work would lay the foundation for subverting the prejudices of those whose views had persisted from the spending and saving economies of the American slave trade.

Through a text, then, Chesnutt presumed that he could defend himself and other black persons by redirecting ways of knowing that had the effect of acting on black persons with violent and oppressive force. Textual characterization of persons became real inasmuch as it generated or altered perceptions about living persons that affected how they were able to live their lives. Chesnutt understood the fictional text as an experimental terrain on which he could stage a confrontation with consumers (readers) who regarded black persons as commodities from which they could derive pleasure and entertainment if not kill off by ostensibly treating them as expendable waste. The text was in these instances a site, then, not necessarily for erasure, but for redirecting notions that had solidified into seemingly intractable ways of knowing that were having an effect on daily life.

A black writer who wrote in “states of emergency” both ontological (state of being) and legal (nation state), Chesnutt lived in a historical moment in which black persons were, as he would write, being steadily and increasingly disenfranchised.⁸⁴ Through vagrancy laws that had the effect of remaking black persons into slaves, the constant threat and use of lynching, the attempts to limit suffrage, and by other means, the personal sovereignty of black persons was continuously under attack. Chesnutt’s experimentations with fiction are not at all separate from Progressive Era fights for black inclusion in political and social life—the plight for democracy. Rather, they are one and the same. By calling for the end of narrative exploitation of black persons, Chesnutt was calling for black enfranchisement in fiction, a locale whose rules, like the nation’s, disallowed under acceptable terms a black body’s presence.

If he was to get readers to think critically about black disenfranchisement Chesnutt needed to persuade people to think about race and difference with his writing, but he did not wish to do so by perpetuating the represented abuse of black bodies. This problem—provoking empathy without depicting scenes of violence—moved him to think specifically about how he could use emotion and emotional dissemblance as a strategy to produce, revise, and experiment with literary form while protecting blackness from further commodification. In particular, my reading of these materials demonstrates that Chesnutt’s interest in emotions and dissemblance of emotion remained at the foreground of his thinking about writing, in large part as a strategy of survival.

⁸⁴ On states of emergency see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*. Chesnutt describes in detail the extent of black people’s disenfranchisement in late nineteenth century “United States.” See Chesnutt, “*The Disenfranchisement of the Negro.*”

While Chesnutt's *The Colonel's Dream* contains black characters, they are seen but hardly heard. Departing from how he had constructed black characters in early work, in this last major fiction piece Chesnutt denies these characters much interiority, but he gives these black characters just enough inner life to suggest that they are engaging in a process of emotional dissemblance initiated for their own survival. Historian Darlene Clark Hine has outlined the process of dissemblance that I borrow here to describe how Chesnutt's black characters act. In her thinking about how black women met the threat of rape in the nineteenth century, Hine describes the process: "By dissemblance I mean the behavior and attitudes of black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors" (1994, 37).⁸⁵ It is not lost on me that Hine uses dissemblance to document the survival and resilience strategies of actual persons who suffered brutal violation. Still, using the term to show how Chesnutt staged encounters with bodies represented and imperiled in a text highlights the workings of epistemic violence from which Chesnutt sought to defend and instruct.

Thinking about the intertwining of narrative and (dissembled) emotions in this manner permits us to see how black writers were trying to "induce"—to allude to Keen's definition of narrative empathy at the outset—another type of "sharing" through fiction—one that happened without persisting in the tendencies toward commodification that had emerged with slavery. Through this lens, fiction projects like Chesnutt's *The Colonel's Dream* emerge not as failures, as Chesnutt's novel had indeed been taken, but

⁸⁵ See Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-construction of American History*.

as bold experiments that sought to push against the limitations of fictional form on minoritarian bodies.

The Colonel's Dream: A Literary Experiment

With a few recent exceptions, Charles Chesnutt's last published novel, *The Colonel's Dream* (1905), is little regarded in critical circles.⁸⁶ To say it plainly, it is generally considered the worst of the three novels he published in his lifetime.⁸⁷ So little is the novel reputed that when the Library of America published Chesnutt's collected works it omitted a reprinting of the novel entirely, only nodding to it in a brief chronology of Chesnutt's life found in the appendix of the collection (2002).⁸⁸

Yet, *The Colonel's Dream* marks a flashpoint in Chesnutt's writing career. Chesnutt wrote about the work as if it were his last ditch effort to set his thoughts on the race problem to paper for a white audience. In 1904, the year before the novel was published, Chesnutt wrote his writing mentor, author and editor Walter Hines Page, about the short story that he wished to turn into what we now know as *The Colonel's Dream*. In his 29 June 1904 letter to Page, Chesnutt admitted he was almost ready to quit writing

⁸⁶ For exceptions see Gary Scharnhorst's "The Growth of A Dozen Tendrils" (1999) Matthew Wilson's *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* (2004), and Ryan Simmons's *Chesnutt and Realism* (2006).

⁸⁷ Three of Chesnutt's novels were recovered and published posthumously. *Mandy Oxendine: A Novel*. Ed. Charles Hackenberry. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997; *Paul Marchand, F. M. C.* Ed. Dean McWilliams. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998; and *The Quarry*. Ed. Dean McWilliams. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

⁸⁸ See the Library of America's *Charles W. Chesnutt: Stories, Novels, and Essays*, Werner Sollors, Ed.

stories about the issue of race: “I have almost decided to foreswear the race problem stories, but I should like to write a good one which would be widely read before I quit” (214).⁸⁹ Chesnutt’s desire that his novel be “widely read” encapsulated his desire for his fiction to reach white audiences, as they were a sizable part of the readership of the time. Nevertheless, he did not wish to acquire this expansive readership with stories that invited them to “take in” black bodies, perpetuating the practices of slavery that commodified blackness. In the same letter Chesnutt wrote that “as a matter of taste” he shrunk back from “disgusting detail” that allowed his reader to sentimentalize or regard with nostalgia the old ways of the South. In his efforts to meet the dilemma of successfully minimizing sensationalizing and in the wake of personal and financial circumstances to which I will attend in a moment, Chesnutt was compelled to make *The Colonel’s Dream* his most experimental work to date.

With *The Colonel’s Dream*, Chesnutt created a novel that foreswore giving his reader access to black bodies. The novel is animated by the doings and feelings of white characters. In the novel, Chesnutt constructs the story of Colonel Henry French, a successful white New York businessman who as a young man had fought for the confederacy in the Civil War. After acquiring wealth as a Northern businessman, French returns to the southern town in which he grew up, and he is overtaken by fond memories and an overall nostalgia for the Southern life of his aristocratic childhood, compelling him to stay and to try to make a life there with his own son. Still, French feels that the

⁸⁹ Leitz and McElrath have edited a volume of Chesnutt’s early letters spanning from 1889 to 1905. See, Leitz and McElrath, “*To be an Author.*”

town itself remains riddled with what he regards as the unpleasant legacies of slavery that manifest in everyday injustices toward workers. French worries about these unpleasanties because he believes these a nuisance that keep the town from thriving economically, and, thereby, in every other manner as well. Setting out to repair the brutish unequal relations, he is resisted and becomes resented by townspeople who are set in their ways and by businessmen who profit from exploiting the disenfranchised, as they particularly do by exploiting the convict lease system. In spite of his considerable resources and effort, French is unable to change the town and frustrated and crestfallen he returns North.

Chesnutt's heightened and extended attention to the thoughts and motivations of the white characters of *The Colonel's Dream* provides a revealing contrast with his renderings of the black characters, many of whom, for the most part, remain conspicuously silent. Chesnutt allows black characters in the text little interiority. And yet, though these black characters speak little, their calculations are evident. Chesnutt gives readers characters who in the presence of white persons brood; divert; fail to respond; and, sometimes, prepare to speak but quickly think better of it, in the end choosing to remain silent. Thus, in a turn from his previous written work, Chesnutt does something with the black characters in the novel that was peculiar for a major writer: he protects black bodies in the novel by having his black characters dissemble. In this manner, Chesnutt denied readers engaging in the imaginative and emotional world of his novel the level of access to black bodies to which they had become accustomed in much

of previous literature. Readers who become emotionally involved in Chesnut's narrative had to do so without consuming black bodies.

To be clear, *The Colonel's Dream* does not cede to the black reader access to black bodies either. The dangerous tradeoff with Chesnut's revisionist work is that he also leaves in his wake potentially hollow characterization of blackness. When *The Voice of the Negro*, a literary journal aimed specifically at a black readership, reviewed *The Colonel's Dream* in its February 1906 edition it only had one grievance about Chesnut's work: "We could wish that somewhere within the confines of the pages of this book there might have given a description of the present day strong and self reliant Negro of the South, but perhaps sufficient for its mission are the characters therein given" (143).⁹⁰ The reviewer wished that there were a stronger characterization of blackness that attested to the resilient and successful black citizen in the wake of the historical moment that sought to abject black people. The review encapsulates the danger of Chesnut's project: he was limiting blackness to the point that he risked hollow representations of it, but Chesnut pressed on.

Chesnut's literary experiment was not received well. After *The Colonel's Dream* Chesnut would not (and perhaps could not, given the grace he had exhausted from readers and publishers) publish any other major works. Matthew Wilson asserts that Chesnut's career had been toppled by his direct attention to white hegemony in the South. In a discussion about whiteness in the novel, Wilson writes "Chesnut was putting

⁹⁰ Review of *The Colonel's Dream* in "Book Reviews," *The Voice of the Negro*, 3.11 (February 1906): 143.

the last nail in the coffin of his career, because even racial liberals like William Dean Howells and George Washington Cable were unable to extricate themselves from the historical horizon of American racism” (2009, 162).⁹¹ Though Joseph McElrath’s and Joseph Leitz’s earlier work makes a strong case that the loneliness of Chesnutt’s crusade was even more profound than Wilson asserts. McElrath and Leitz demonstrate that Cable saved his own career by abandoning direct interrogations of the race question, while he nonetheless continued to offer Chesnutt advice to persist in the very interrogations of the same (1997, 20-23).⁹²

In the end, Chesnutt was alone. Despite the impending consequences of exhausting his readers with his unrelenting direct interrogation of the “race problem”, Chesnutt pressed on in his work. The publication of *The Colonel’s Dream* would, in effect, end his fiction-writing career. It was the last major work of fiction he would publish before his death in 1932.

Both the experiences that brought Chesnutt to write *The Colonel’s Dream* and the novel itself evince Chesnutt’s belief that his fiction could teach white readers about how to regard blacks as persons. The novel does something extraordinary: it takes seriously the notion that Progressive Era readers’ expectations for fiction about black people were already entangled, if not indissociable from, these same readers’ prerogatives as consumers. Chesnutt believed that the fiction form was carrying forward the notion that blackness was a good for consumption by white readers. *The Colonel’s Dream* is his

⁹¹ Wilson, *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles Chesnutt*.

⁹² McElrath and Leitz, “*To Be An Author*.”

attempt to exploit prevailing ideas about fiction in order to produce a work that resisted regarding blackness as a commodity. As his last ditch effort to change ideas about blackness, Chesnutt's writing and rewriting of *The Colonel's Dream* exhibits how he constantly revised his practice to respond to how readers were engaging his work. For these reasons, for an in depth analysis it is useful to examine the novel's reception, the lead up to it, and, finally, the novel itself.

Reception of *The Colonel's Dream*

A number of Chesnutt's contemporaries did not receive *The Colonel's Dream* with enthusiasm. If an early review from a paper in Cleveland, Ohio—Chesnutt's longtime place of residence—is any indication, then critics judged that he had gone astray from what they believed to be his better writing practices. The 9 September 1905 edition of the *Cleveland News* opened with praise for Chesnutt but then delivered a searing critique of *The Colonel's Dream*:

Charles W. Chesnutt, the local novelist, can write a good story. He knows all about the essentials of a novel that will please and interest his readers. He has a firm grasp on English and has a literary swing to whatever he writes. His half dozen novels have had a steady sale at the book counters and reviewers have been particularly complimentary. He has been an artistic success, because he has kept to a high model and has written as well as he knew how to write.

But this artistic level has not been maintained in "The Colonel's Dream."

Personally, I found it a monotonous exposition of a man's views of the race

problem. Mr. Chesnut's other volumes have had a tendency to the same question; they have attacked it from every side, and while they possessed nothing strikingly new in a way of solution, there has usually been some unique phase exposed to view, some twist or turn that made the reader think, after he had laid the book aside. Not so with this latest effort. (4)

The review turns quickly. The reviewer has trouble grasping how an ostensibly successful writer with proven ability to please the masses could be so "monotonous." While the reviewer recognizes that Chesnut had probed the "race problem" in multifaceted ways in his past work, for the reader something had gone awry in *The Colonel's Dream*. The novel had left something to be desired, given that the reviewer felt that the novel had contributed little to further reflection. In short, the reviewer believed there was little a reader could take away from the novel. Chesnut was being criticized for being too political, too direct, too consistently. I will return to the reviewer's experience of monotony in greater detail in a moment. First, it is worth taking a look at what animates his frustration.

The surprising monotony the reviewer experiences as he reads Chesnut's work alerts us to a change in Chesnut's writing. The reviewer had plenty of Chesnut's literary oeuvre to find his confidence in Chesnut's artistry. In the late 1880's Chesnut had earned a reputation as a promising black writer of affable tales. He had first charmed readers with the appearance of his short story the "Goophered Grapevine" in the August 1887 issue of the prominent *Atlantic Monthly*. In the story, a Northern white male land-buyer cites the fantastic story an ex-slave uses to dissuade him from purchasing a past

slave plantation in the American South. Chesnutt's short story gave readers a morsel of a black folk tale that involved fantastic elements like conjuring and superstition. The story would allow Chesnutt to develop a relationship with *The Atlantic Monthly*, and he would publish a number of stories with the magazine. He would even leverage his relationship with the magazine in order to publish with its publishing company Houghton and Mifflin, and in 1899 he would publish a volume of short stories with the company that would thrill a number of white critics, *The Conjure Woman* tales.⁹³

The "Goophered Grapevine" attests to the process by which Chesnutt beguiled white readers with stories about the South by including racial novelty. Chesnutt's relationship with *The Atlantic* indicated his ability to reach wide audiences, given the expansive readership of the publication. William Andrews has argued that Chesnutt must have realized that he could not have enticed crowds with the same old antebellum racial stories that regarded black subjects merely "comically or sentimentally" (19).⁹⁴ Rather, Chesnutt "dropped the unoriginal racial material he had been working on and struck out on a new tack"(19). Employing an ex-slave raconteur's memory and imagination for most of the narration, Chesnutt created "a local color tale within a tale, replete with dramatic contrast between its main characters, a white Yankee businessman and a mixed-blood ex-slave, and a fascinating glimpse into folk culture and lore of the antebellum black man" (19). As Andrews notes, using a black character to deliver the fictional account of the "Goophered Grapevine" Chesnutt had given his reader unprecedented access to the

⁹³ On this point, see Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*.

⁹⁴ See Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*/

“beliefs and practices of plantation slaves” (19). Readers loved the incantation of the “Goophered Grapevine,” and *The Atlantic* requested more of Chesnutt’s stories.

The very opening of the “The Goophered Grapevine,” revised for inclusion as the first story of *The Conjure Woman* (1899), alludes to how readers needed to be transported to a different time and place in order to arrive at the fantastic elements Chesnutt’s fictional story was about to deliver. The narrator describes his journey to the old plantation, the setting for the tale:

Our route lay partly up hill and partly down, for we were in the sand-hill county; we drove past cultivated farms, and then by abandoned fields grown up in scrub-oak and short-leaved pine, and once or twice through the solemn aisles of the virgin forest, where the tall pines, well-nigh meeting over the narrow road, shut out the sun, and wrapped us in cloistral solitude. Once, at a cross-roads, I was in doubt as to the turn to take, and we sat there waiting ten minutes - we had already caught some of the native infection of restfulness - for some human being to come along, who could direct us on our way. At length a little negro girl appeared, walking straight as an arrow, with a piggin full of water on her head. After a little patient investigation, necessary to overcome the child's shyness, we learned what we wished to know, and at the end of about five miles from the town reached our destination. (7)⁹⁵

The landscape to which the narrator travels increasingly evidences less active human influence. As the unbounded growth that ultimately overtakes the road on which the

⁹⁵ Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman*.

narrator travels suggests, the narrator journeys from farms that exhibit signs of cultivation to those whose development appears to have ceased, been neglected, or been altogether abandoned. The sun, widely popular in Chesnutt's historical moment as a metaphor of enlightenment, has been shut out by the landscape. The landscape evokes a feeling of tradition and the sacred more than an empiric response. The "cloistral solitude" the narrator experiences in the environment suggests his reverence for the ascetic simplicity of that what remains, that what is bound up in the landscape preserved by neglect. The narrator experiences sentimentalism similar to nostalgia. He has traveled to a relic of a bygone time or yore. The plantation, the narrator's description suggests, was, yes, a thing of the past (no longer cultivated and abandoned) but one, which, pace enlightenment, induced nostalgia and veneration. Arrived (as if by time machine) in the ostensible past, the narrator, his wife, and the reader are greeted by a black figure that by way of the associations just discussed is rendered into a plantation slave, young but knowledgeable enough to be fearful of potentially dangerous interactions with white persons.

In the "Goophered Grapevine" Chesnutt made literary choices that satisfied what he perceived as a white readership's desire for "old negro tales" without altogether sacrificing his potentially more strident political aims of implicating white people in the unequal relations between them and black people (Chesnutt *Journals* 125).⁹⁶ The manner in which Chesnutt constructed the narration for "The Goophered Grapevine" exhibits Chesnutt's readiness to give readers the plantation stories he felt they wanted all the while

⁹⁶ Chesnutt intimated as much in his journals. See, *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, Richard Brodhead, ed.

he furtively met his more subversive aims. In a story where black ex-slave character Uncle Julius is quoted without interruption for almost three-quarters of the narrative, it is easy to forget that the actual narrator for the story is not Uncle Julius but a white northern businessman giving his account of him and his wife's first encounter with Uncle Julius. Inasmuch as readers receive raconteur Uncle Julius's extensive tale, they only receive it as cited by (or through) a white male narrator. Author Gayl Jones has noted that observations made within "The Goophered Grapevine" are delivered "from within the frame of Northern perceptions" (100).⁹⁷ As a consequence, Jones concludes, Chesnut's narrative construction "tells us more about the psychology of the white man and the psychology of his time than it does the character he describes" (100). In other words, while the narration seems to be divulging much about black life, it all the while reveals white persons' attitudes and interests about that same life. Jones, therefore, points to the ways in which Chesnut's story allows for an examination of not only Chesnut's narrative choices but also the narrative choices he has his characters make. The white narrator permits readers to explore how Chesnut imagined white readers were receiving black stories.

In the "Goophered Grapevine" the narrator recalls the story of how ex-slave Uncle Julius attempted to dissuade him from purchasing a Southern vineyard. It is important to bear in mind that the narrator is retelling the story and that the events he describes have already occurred. By the time the story's narration begins, then, the narrator has already made the decision of whether or not to purchase the vineyard.

⁹⁷ Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voices*.

Accordingly, his purpose in retelling the tale cannot be to weigh the information given to him by Uncle Julius. Uncle Julius possesses no influence on him in this regard. Rather, the narrator appears only to recount the story for his and his audience's entertainment. The narrator regards Uncle Julius's tale as diverting amusement.

Both the intimate tone and the air of intrigue the narrator of "Goophered Grapevine" employs in order to relate his encounter with Uncle Julius to the ostensibly white reader transfigures Uncle Julius into the object of gossip in white conversation. The white narrator rehearses for the reader—the hearer of the story—the events surrounding his encounter with Uncle Julius with the detail and specificity of one engaging with a familiar and, to his mind, an equal. He even reveals to the reader intimate details concerning his wife's poor health. His congenial tone potentially puts the reader at ease. The narrator assures the reader that the tale to follow is harmless, a fantastic story of plantation life. Describing Uncle Julius's mode of storytelling the narrator details: "At first the current of his memory—or imagination—seemed somewhat sluggish; but as his embarrassment wore off, his language flowed more freely, and the story acquired perspective and coherence. As he became more and more absorbed in the narrative, his eyes assumed a dreamy expression, and he seemed to lose sight of his auditors, and to live over again in monologue his life on the old plantation" (12-13). Julius provides no threat to the narrator. The narrator attributes the initial "sluggishness" he reads in Uncle Julius's performance of the story to shyness with his auditors. The assessment of shyness already suggests an imbalance of power between the narrator and Julius.

The narrator's passing, nonchalant aside concerning whether Julius relied on his memory or his imagination for the telling of his conjure tale confirms the narrator's disinterest in the substance of Julius's information. It is true that when the narrator might broaches both memory and imagination, he could be acknowledging that much time lapsed since antebellum slavery—that the very temporal distance may have made it difficult for Julius to recall events of the past exactly as they occurred. In more ungenerous fashion, the disinterest in ascertaining either, could be read as an assertion of his overall distrust with Julius's storytelling. The passing manner in which the narrator glosses the distinct terms suggests the lack of importance with facts for him and, presumably, for his audience. Rather, what matters in the narrator's description—indeed the focus of his detailed account of Julius's narration—is not so much the substance of Julius, the veracity of his words, but his style and his words. The narrator confirms this excepting attention to Julius's style with his decision to reproduce Uncle Julius's words in a Southern black dialect all the while contrastingly presenting his own words in uninflected English. The narrator's focus on Julius's narrative style casts in high relief his fascination with the manner of Julius. Julius only matters to the narrator in as much as he can entertain an audience. The importance of Julius's content, his substance, is subsumed to performance.

Subtlety on Chesnut's part, the narrator's evaluation of Julius's "sluggishness" and "embarrassment" may simply mark the narrator's own misrecognition of Julius's cautious approach to an encounter with someone able to determine his financial fate. If Julius was to continue to profit from the land, it was imperative to dissuade the narrator

from purchasing the vineyard. Julius's embarrassment, his very wariness with his white auditors, suggests the imbalanced power relation of which he feels a part.

In the "Goophered Grapevine," the narrator possesses the power of determination. His own descriptions of the initial moments of his first encounter with Julius exhibit his skewed power dynamic with the ex-slave. He describes he and his wife's exploration of the old plantation and their happenstance encounter with Julius:

We alighted, and walked about the place for a while; but on Annie's complaining of weariness I led the way back to the yard, where a pine log, lying under a spreading elm, formed a shady though somewhat hard seat. One end of the log was already occupied by a venerable-looking colored man. He held on his knees a hat full of grapes, over which he was smacking his lips with great gusto, and a pile of grape-skins near him indicated that the performance was no new thing. He respectfully rose as we approached, and was moving away, when I begged him to keep his seat.

"Don't let us disturb you," I said. "There's plenty of room for us all."

He resumed his seat with somewhat of embarrassment. (7-8)

The narrator literally and figuratively descends on the plantation. His arrival has the power of altering the actions of those on the plantation. He notes a seated black figure that he identifies respectfully as a "venerable-looking colored man," who upon seeing him attempts to leave. Yet, the white reader interpellates the man, and the man resumes his seat--only with a difference now: he is embarrassed. Julius attempt to leave is an act that denotes he believes he has no claim to the land on which he sits and from which he

feeds. While the narrator informs Julius that he has no claim to the land yet either, Julius's persisting embarrassment indicates how he has entered a relation in which he does not feel comfortable. In the scenario, the narrator is given the power to interpellate Julius, and the narrator is given the power to determine Julius's future.

Nevertheless, the narrator seems oblivious to the imbalanced relation between him and Julius and to Julius's potentially traumatic relation to antebellum slavery. In the narrator's description of Uncle Julius's style he notes Julius recalling the occurrences of antebellum plantation life as "dreamy." Such a positive connotation for a history of violent oppression that Julius vividly describes suggests the narrator's insensitivity to Julius's past. Chesnut's critique of white interest in black life lies in Julius's ability to tell of slavery without moving his audience, most immediately his white auditors, beyond sensationalizing. When, Annie, the narrator's wife asks Julius at the end of his tale if his story if his story her very question suggests a reluctance to enter into any relation with Julius's story when she would be made to care or implicated in the need for change.

Only at the story's end would readers learn that the ex-slave raconteur had ulterior motives and hoped, in the end, to profit from his storytelling. Read with awareness of his motivations, Julius's caginess retroactively takes on more subversive meaning. Consequently, critics have labeled Chesnut's black character here, Uncle Julius, a trickster. Chesnut had penned a character whose avuncular nature and innocuous namesake belied a subversive figure, especially cunning because of the very subtlety with which he operated. The subversion was hidden in the entertaining, fantastic black life readers had come to expect.

It is not surprising, then, that given Chesnutt's departure from the more subtle and, arguably, more easily dismissed political work of "The Goophered Grapevine," the Cleveland Reviewer presented above felt Chesnutt had gone astray with *The Colonels Dream*. The explicitly political plot of *The Colonel's Dream* upsets the *Cleveland News* reviewer quoted above for what he perceives to be a lack of aesthetics, leaving the reviewer experiencing monotony. Considered through the lens of what Sianne Ngai has termed the "ugly feelings" of everyday life, the boredom the reviewer suffers is telling of the effect of Chesnutt's strategy on the reader.⁹⁸ Ngai compares shock and boredom, both of which she deems paralyzing affects, in order to suggest that boredom is a specific response to a constant, prolonged aesthetic experience. She argues: "Sudden in onset, brief in duration, and disappearing quickly, astonishment involves high levels and steep gradients of neural firing; whereas boredom, slow or gradual in onset and long in duration, involves low and continuous levels of neural firing" (261). Chesnutt's longer work, given more flesh, is understood as less successful by the bored reviewer because of the contrasting aesthetic experience it produces from Chesnutt's earlier shorter works. The prolonged narrative of *The Colonel's Dream* does not retain the shock and sudden onset of the fantastic tales Chesnutt told in his early career. Rather, Chesnutt had tweaked the narrative to deliberately dull such responses, seeing them as vulgar. Ngai continues, "even as the temporalities of shock and boredom are inarguably antithetical, both are responses confront us with the limitations of our capacity for responding in general. [...]" The shocking and the boring prompt us to look for new strategies of affective

⁹⁸ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*.

engagement and to extend the circumstances under which engagement becomes possible” (261- 262). By blocking readers from accessing black souls as represented in writing, Chesnutt had altered the circumstances by which engagement was possible. A reader trying to make use of Chesnutt’s novel had to find in the extended work a new mode of affective engagement, one that did not rely on a fantasy of black access.

Chesnutt had written knowledgeably about the problems of the South, and he had flustered some of his readers. Chesnutt’s creation of a nostalgic white business-man in *The Colonel’s Dream* who longs for equal relations in his Southern town in order for it to thrive economically and be the envy of others seemed artless to at least one reader. After reviewing the plot, the same *Cleveland News* reviewer, apparently at the height of his frustration, charges: “Flapdoodle, I say, is all this sort of thing. Many of these episodes are ‘facts’ gleaned from Southern newspapers--but they are not literature” (4).⁹⁹ Chesnutt had presented the race problem in the South all too realistically. His reviewer’s charge amounts to an assertion that Chesnutt had precluded him from imaginatively engaging with the material. The reviewer felt forced to conclude: “‘The Colonel’s Dream’ is not a novel. It is an editorial based on the race question and a biased one at that” (4). The reviewer’s inability to see Chesnutt’s most recent effort as worthy of the label of fiction evinces how Chesnutt had toppled expectations for the form, and also how he was beginning to alienate a readership that expected a good in the fiction but had been denied it.

⁹⁹ Rev. of *The Colonel’s Dream* in "Literature and Art," *The Cleveland News* 18 Sep 1905: 4.

The review also suggests that audiences were reacting to the lack of full black characters in the novel. The review confirms Andrews's suggestion that Chesnutt had abandoned the very type of race story that had made him popular amid popular audiences. Andrews writes: "Confining himself for the most part to the white side of the color line distanced Chesnutt from the matter which had made the *Conjure Woman*, *The Wife of His Youth* and *the House Behind Cedars* his most original contributions to racial realism in American Literature" (257).¹⁰⁰ The review demonstrates that Chesnutt's readers were meeting his transforming *métier* with resistance. That this review came from Chesnutt's hometown newspaper must have increased the bite of its words and the rejection Chesnutt felt.

Still, when placed in the context of Chesnutt's letters, such a review is not at all surprising. In fact, while penning the book, Chesnutt had worried about some of the same issues the reviews of *The Colonel's Dream* raise. When *The Colonel's Dream* was a mere short story, Chesnutt mused in his 29 June 1904 letter to Walter Hines Page that the narrative was "hardly meant for more than an elongated short story" but that he felt he could "enlarge the structure, giving it more plot and more characters, as well as more words—more bones as well as more flesh" (213).¹⁰¹ Chesnutt knew what he wanted to present to his reader (the bones), the question was how to package the message (the flesh). Notably, Chesnutt's metaphor to Page used corporeal language that had the effect of transfiguring his story not simply into a thing but into a textual body of sorts.

¹⁰⁰ Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*.

¹⁰¹ Chesnutt in Leitz and McElrath, "*To Be An Author*."

Chesnutt worried about how he would present the story in the expanded form, with “more flesh”:

The general theme is encyclopedic, and I ought to be able to get a full sized novel out of it. I am only apprehensive of the didactic side, to which the theme gives constant temptation; for I realize that preaching is not art, and as a matter of personal taste I shrink from the sordid and brutal, often unconsciously brutal side of Southern life—as I should from the shady side of any other life. If I can handle some of these things in a broad and suggestive way, without disgusting detail—if I could follow even afar off the Russian novelists of the past generation, who made so clear the condition of a debased peasantry in their own land, I might write a great book. (*To be an Author*, 213)

Chesnutt’s letter centralizes the bind in which he feels caught and unveils his contemplative approach to fiction writing in *The Colonel’s Dream*. Chesnutt wishes to write a story that attends to the race problems of the South without sensationalizing the material. He knows that his topic is capacious—“encyclopedic”— and that he needs to narrow in on it in order to make it more accessible for his reader. Yet, he fears that narrowing in too closely would require him to reproduce “sordid” and “brutish” details which he would rather omit “as a matter of personal taste.” Nevertheless, he frets that to “shrink” from these details would leave his work at the level of preaching, a type of homily that he likens to didacticism or moralizing argumentation but not to literature. Chesnutt resolves to strike a balance that includes the troublesome details that produce his anxiety, but that nonetheless tempers them by rendering them only in broad and

suggestive terms. Following this course, Chesnutt believed he could have a novel that met popular success.

Chesnutt's anxiety here sounds like a fear/methodology that Saidiya Hartman's would express more than a century later regarding reprinting a brutal scene of subjection. Hartman describes a bind in her *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) in which she refuses to reproduce the violent scene that Frederick Douglass describes concerning the gruesome beating of his Aunt Hester. Neither does Hartman wish to repress the scene nor does she seek fugitivity from it. Hartman sums up: "At issue here is the precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between witness and spectator. Only more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and the terrible." As a solution, Hartman directs her gaze otherwise. Hartman chooses, she tells her reader, "to look elsewhere and consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned" (4). Yet, Fred Moten, in admiration of the Hartman's critical move, labels Hartman's decision not to reproduce the account "illusory," given that it is reproduced both in her reference and her refusal and, thereafter, in every scene she goes on to read. For Moten, Hartman's opening leaves the space "for the ongoing reproduction of that performance in all its guises and for a critical awareness of how each of those guises is always already present in and disruptive of the supposed originality of that primal scene" (4).¹⁰² We might say then, that like Hartman's refusal, the power of Chesnutt's refusal to reproduce the sordid and the brutish casts in high relief how

¹⁰² See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* and Moten, *In the Break*.

relations, even at quotidian levels that escape discernment, are structured by powers which, to use a Frank Wilderson turn of phrase, shows how “violence precedes and exceeds” the black persons they wish to protect.¹⁰³ The move to view empathy as precarious—vulnerable to the brutishness of scenes that would obliterate it—obscures that empathy may already itself be illusory, as what Chesnutt fears is that it may be part of, or interstitial to, the apparatus it seeks to refuse.¹⁰⁴

Yet, this fear that brutality may be sensationalized that Hartman may not be so much of a judgement on the precarity of empathy as it is indication that empathy is tracked on moral terms that structure the precarity.

Chesnutt’s Earlier Hiatus from Publishing Fiction

The revision of *The Colonel’s Dream* into a novel was not the first time Chesnutt had been apprehensive about the political work his fiction would do and how it would do it. Only a few years earlier, when Chesnutt wrote his publishers at the prestigious Houghton, Mifflin, and Company on 30 December 1901, he revealed his anxiety over how his latest novel *The Marrow of Tradition* was faring in reception and sales. *The Marrow of Tradition* had appeared just months before in July of 1901 and, despite Chesnutt’s confidence in the novel’s craft and story, its slow movement off the shelves was disappointing publishers that had expected much more both for a book they had advertised so vigorously and from an author who earlier in his career had displayed so

¹⁰³ See Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*.

¹⁰⁴ See Spillers, “Interstices” in *Black, White, and in Color*.

much promise. The appearance of critical reviews that ranged from ambivalence to labeling the novel “a bitter, bitter book” was doing little to sway readers to pick up *The Marrow of Tradition*.¹⁰⁵ Chesnutt was shaken. He needed the work to sell.

The *Marrow of Tradition* was a thinly veiled fictional account of the Wilmington Riots of 1898. Jennifer Larson describes the real life event: “a Democratic leader in Wilmington, North Carolina mustered a white mob to retaliate for a controversial editorial written by Alexander Manly, editor of the city's black newspaper, the Daily Record. The mob burned the newspaper's office and incited a bloody race riot in the city. By the end of the week, at least fourteen black citizens were dead, and much of the city's black leadership had been banished. This massacre further fueled an ongoing statewide disfranchisement campaign designed to crush black political power” (“Early African American”).¹⁰⁶ Chesnutt fictionalized the account by following two of “Wellington’s” families—an eminent white family and a black one, whose lives entangle throughout the novel in significant ways. The finished work was not faring as well as Chesnutt would have liked.

The stakes were high for Chesnutt. He had left his successful stenography business two years earlier in 1899 in order to test his ability to make a living as a man of letters, and he was supporting himself and his family with small royalties for written work and with savings that were steadily and dangerously depleting. He needed to sell his work in order to generate income.

¹⁰⁵ Leitz and McElrath reprint such reviews and give their context in *To Be An Author*. See especially p. 172 n. 6.

¹⁰⁶ From the online “Documenting the American South” archive, William Andrews, ed.

The imperative to generate income that Chesnutt's writing lay under may shed light on Chesnutt's publicly stated motivations for writing *The Marrow of Tradition*. In a local piece meant to generate interest in the novel, Chesnutt shared, as the title of the piece states, "his own view of his new story, 'The Marrow of Tradition'":

I have been asked to make for this page a brief summary of the motive and chief points of my forthcoming novel, "The Marrow of Tradition." The primary object of the story, as it should be of every work of fiction, is to entertain; and yet it belongs in the category of purpose novel, inasmuch as it seeks to throw light upon the vexed moral and sociological problems which grow out of the presence, in our southern states, of two diverse races, in nearly equal numbers. (5)¹⁰⁷

Read in the context of his financial circumstances, Chesnutt's assertion that his primary object with *The Marrow of Tradition* was "to entertain" could be read as Chesnutt doing his duty as an astute advertiser who knew that readers wished to find escapism in fiction. Chesnutt was attempting to lure these readers to his novel, for he knew his novel had political ambitions which he states outright here, though almost in passing. His very rhetoric—"and yet"—anticipates arguments that "to entertain" could be regarded to be inherently at odds with "the category of the purpose novel" that casts light on "vexed moral and sociological problems." The purpose novel risked didacticism that hindered the escapism readers sought. Still, Chesnutt was eager to sell the two categories to his potential readers, not as in contention, but as complementing elements that could collude

¹⁰⁷ Chesnutt, Charles W. "Charles W. Chesnutt's Own View of His New Story The Marrow of Tradition." *Cleveland World* (Oct. 20, 1901): Magazine Section, P. 5.

to create a good story. In this manner, fiction could be reconfigured into a site a reader went not to escape from the world, but a site where one sought instruction for how to life in it.

Chesnutt's public motivations for *The Marrow of Tradition* point to another reason that the stakes of his popular success were high: Chesnutt wished to exploit a position he occupied that few black writers did—he was a black author writing about race who was being published by a company that had extensive white readership. His association with Houghton and Mifflin gave him access to a white mainstream audience. As Leitz and McElrath point out, whereas most black authors were being published in venues with limited circulation or in serials, Chesnutt was with a firm with wide circulation that boasted a number of authors—Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Thoreau—with white mainstream appeal (9).¹⁰⁸ In effect his work could attempt to throw light on issues of race and equity for “diverse races,” or in this case, a varied readership.

Nevertheless, while Chesnutt relished the opportunity to reach a wider audience with his work, he was beginning to have doubts over a white audience's desire to receive a story of the color line that implicated them in the need for change. Worried, Chesnutt wrote his publishers and asked if given their “long experience” they could predict if an author could meet “popular success”—what Chesnutt defined as “a sale of 20,000 or 30,000” copies—writing about the color line. It is useful to note, that by the time of his letter Chesnutt had only sold 3,000 copies of *The Marrow of Tradition*. This low number must have been a letdown for a book that Houghton and Mifflin's had compared in

¹⁰⁸ Leitz and McElrath, “*To Be an Author.*”

advertisements to the hugely successful and popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which sold 10,000 copies in the first week and 300,000 by the end of the first year, hardly meeting demand with printing presses running constantly (Parfair 2007).¹⁰⁹

Chesnutt's very query to his publishers seems more like a rhetorical plea for understanding than an effort to obtain advice, for what follows in Chesnutt's letter is a lament that marks his burgeoning realization concerning the limited representations of blackness that his public was willing and ready to consume. He wrote:

I am beginning to suspect that the public as a rule does not care for books in which the principal characters are colored people, or with a striking sympathy with that race as contrasted from the white race. I find a number of my friends advise me to break away from this theme for a while and write something which is entirely disassociated from it. They suggest that the line between zeal and fanaticism is a very narrow one and I gather that they suspect me of being perilously near it in my latest book. (171)¹¹⁰

Chesnutt's corrective impulse, his doubling back to "or with striking sympathy" is telling. In *The Marrow of Tradition* Chesnutt had presented wide ranges of blackness—ranging from an elite doctor accommodationist to an ex-convict who turns revolutionary, from a slavery apologist "mammy" to a young black woman nurse who refuses to confound freedom with equality. Chesnutt's "or" is an amendment that suggests the other possibility harder to swallow: it was not that Chesnutt's reader did not want to see

¹⁰⁹ See Claire Parfait, *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852 – 2002*.

¹¹⁰ Chesnutt, "To Be An Author."

depictions of black folk; rather, Chesnutt was broaching the possibility that his reader did not “care to” look at these depictions with sympathy. Chesnutt had identified something he believed to be strange with how the public was consuming his work.

The advice Chesnutt relates his friends offered him make clear their fear that Chesnutt was approaching his topic in too straightforward a manner. He risked being seen not simply as a person with strong emotions that wanted to be heard, but as a fan, a biased, uncritical advocate of ideals. Lest he use up the grace he had gained through his more affable and conspicuously political stories like the “Goophered Grapevine,” his friends were encouraging him to take a hiatus from writing fiction about race or to write on something else altogether. Soon thereafter, Chesnutt would return to his stenography business, only publishing a couple essays, until the publication of his next major fictional work, *The Colonel’s Dream* in 1905. Chesnutt’s hiatus would be a time to reconsider how he could convert perilous fanaticism to a more palatable zeal.

Chesnutt’s Early Views of Fiction and Black Persons

Readers of Chesnutt’s early journals may find the aggressive approach he later adopted to write about vexed social issues in *The Colonel’s Dream* surprising. In sum, the journals reveal that Chesnutt was an assiduous student of propriety equally in his personal life and in his fiction writing. In both real life and in his novels, Chesnutt was careful about how he presented the body and its workings to the public. From hygiene, to shades of skin, to sex he was scrupulous about appearance. In journals that are alarmingly honest—in one entry Chesnutt swears that he will stop masturbating, “So help me

God”— he confides his aim for tutoring his body: “I want to feel like a man and a Christian, to walk the earth with a firm step, and to feel that I am honest” (70).¹¹¹ Chesnutt’s wish for respect and independent authority in a world in which he felt at the fringes informed his experimentation with literature. Chesnutt would express the same wishes for his writing that he hoped his daily personal interactions would bring about: that is, that his writing like his person would effect a change in race relations that allowed him and others to enjoy the confidence and freedom of personal sovereignty. His journals evidence that early in his writing life, he was thinking about the relationship between a live body and a body in a text.

Chesnutt’s journals reveal that he experimented with making his body into a type of fiction. Through his meticulous attention to hygiene, his suppression of sexual urges, and the vacillating meanings he projected about his skin color, Chesnutt’s actions, on my read, amount to a belief that the physical body was, effectively, a palimpsest onto which he could locate and divert themes. Chesnutt was cementing a practice in which he used the body in order to stylize and control narrative about him.

Chesnutt drew an analogy between the body represented in a text and the live physical body. His journals can be read as evidence that for him writing was another site of embodiment where one could tutor a body—a site that did not necessitate corporeal encounters but that occurred, rather, in the textual transactions between the words imprinted on a page and a reader’s induced imagination. A quick look at the journals, then, allows us to examine Chesnutt’s burgeoning theorizations about the possibilities of

¹¹¹ *Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, Richard Brodhead, ed.

fiction and embodiment, theorizations that anticipate the experimentation Chesnutt would undertake in *The Colonel's Dream*.

Chesnutt's interest in embodiment is clear from the very first pages of his journals. In them, a young Chesnutt reveals an interest in hygiene that suggests how much care he took in presenting himself. As early as sixteen, when his journal recordings began, Chesnutt was copying into his entries paragraphs from the 1857 self-help manual *A Handbook for Home Improvement*. Writing "It is a very good book and I shall proceed to copy a few paragraphs," the sixteen year-old Chesnutt copiously did just so. Taking from a section of the manual titled "How to Behave," Chesnutt recorded scrupulous paragraphs that imparted to readers directions regarding "The Daily Bath," "The Feet," "Change of Linen," "The Nails," and "Spitting." The last line Chesnutt copied in this hygiene entry for the date warned, "Watch yourself carefully [...] These may seem little things, but they have their weight, and will go far in determining the character and impression we make upon those around us" (41). The book from which Chesnutt copied taught that no routine was too frivolous and that every action on the body, every sign placed on it cumulated to making specific persons. Using books like these, Chesnutt was able to teach himself a bodily propriety that he would find useful not only in his own life, but which years later he would lend to the characters of his fictional work as well. These references would denote a person's capacity to tutor the body through an encounter with text.

Hygiene was for Chesnutt not simply a type of travestiment, but a ritual performance that recommended him as a master of his own body. If the ritual of hygiene

could “go far in determining character” and shape the impressions one gave to others about oneself, then Chesnutt wanted to wield every influence he could on the narrative he was delivering with his body. In order to achieve mastery over the narrative, he needed to tend to the body carefully. The attention and time Chesnutt gave over to reading about hygiene and to consequently producing painstaking facsimile of it in his journals denotes the importance that he assigned to the specifics of the ritual performance.

In his journals Chesnutt is quick to comment on those who he believes do not heed such a ritual practice. He often comments on persons that do not adhere to such bodily propriety. He does so especially with women who he judges to be unclean.

Chesnutt recorded in his journals lessons he learned about embodiment not just from the books he read but from his everyday experiences and encounters with people who did not know how to racialize him. Born of two free black parents, Chesnutt’s skin was light enough for him to pass as white. While he kept a job as a young teacher at a black school in North Carolina, according to his journals, townspeople and those in nearby towns took him for white on a number of occasions—a misidentification that Chesnutt did not always correct. Rather, on more than a few instances throughout his journal entries, Chesnutt discloses that he passed as white:

Twice to-day or oftener I have been taken for “white.” At the pond this morning one fellow said, “he’d be damned” if there was any nigger blood in me. At Coleman’s I passed. On the road, an old chap seeing the trunk, took me for a student coming from school. I believe I’ll pass anyhow, for I am as white as any

of them. One old fellow said to-day, “Look here Tom, here’s a fellow as white as you air [sic].” (78)¹¹²

Chesnutt’s journal entry gives the impression that he could move seamlessly between having himself identified as black and having himself identified as white, as if for him it was as easy as a mental note that he enacted. At this point in his life, Chesnutt had to speak up if he wanted to be identified as black. The reaction of the incredulous gentleman to Chesnutt’s blackness suggests that the gentleman misidentified Chesnutt’s race and that Chesnutt corrected him. Yet, just as quickly Chesnutt documents that he did not always correct misidentification. His recording of the confrontation is just as quickly followed by Chesnutt’s unfussy admission that he had in the same day “passed” for white.

An important racial privilege dynamic emerges from the entry. Chesnutt’s journal entry here figures whiteness as a type of privileged invisibility or order that tellingly required or compelled no commentary. In contrast, blackness mandated a disruption. Chesnutt had to identify himself as black to those he encountered that had not through Chesnutt’s set of associations—having black parents, working at a black school, carrying a trunk away from a black school—determined he was black. Chesnutt’s very act of recording the instances of “passing” may be an indicator that both being misidentified and allowing the misidentifications to persist was impactful enough an event for him to make a note of. At the same time, the entry documents instances that were teaching Chesnutt that race was a social construct whose determinations could happen at the level

¹¹² *Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, Richard Brodhead, ed.

of the individual encounter. When it came to his own body, Chesnutt was teaching those he encountered in how to regard it.

Chesnutt's journal entry alludes to race as at once slippery and persistent. That Chesnutt offsets "white" in quotations calls attention to what he must have felt was the arbitrariness of racial categorization to begin with. The quotations serve as a reminder that "white" could act as a citation of racial meanings. Chesnutt's understanding that "white" was what he had been "taken for," relies on a logic in which, effectively, Chesnutt's own personhood and sovereignty had been substituted with "white," a set of predetermined social meanings that were bound up in what the word "white" had come to represent, what it enclosed. Being "taken for" something else, must have exhibited for Chesnutt how the live body could collapse to the one represented by text, in this case the textual designate being "white."

Both the narratives Chesnutt chose for his body and those that were imposed upon him produced limitations in his daily life. The limitations imposed on being categorized black were no doubt having their effect on Chesnutt in his everyday life encounters with others. The journals document an increasingly alienated individual who was fighting off bitterness and motivating himself by making resolves about what he could do with the financial and public station a literary career could afford him.

Chesnutt's journals indicate that he figured himself as occupying a liminal space. Richard Brodhead has argued that Chesnutt's education alienated him from a number of black communities, and in his journals Chesnutt practically confirms he felt such differentiation acutely. As Brodhead puts it by beginning with an admission Chesnutt

wrote in his journal: “‘Too stuck up for the colored folks,’ Chesnutt was estranged from the black community by the superiority of his education—and no doubt by the attitude of superiority he derives *from* his education. At the same time, he is not admitted to the company of equally educated and cultivated whites [...] who exclude him on racial grounds” (25).¹¹³ Chesnutt’s inability to feel completely any part of one racial community coupled with what he perceived to be his ability to be nonetheless somewhat embodied in either group influenced how he resolved to approach the literary career about which he fantasized. At this point in his life, Chesnutt was almost a decade before he would achieve literary fame with short stories like the “Goophered Grapevine.”

In his journal, Chesnutt often positions himself as an observer of others. As the phrases from entries above such as “I’m as white as any of them” and “Too stuck up for the colored folks” convey, Chesnutt did not express belonging or attachment to either white or black communities. Indeed, his journals often position him as an outsider to both groups. Instead Chesnutt identifies himself as an onlooker to both races, and in his journals he made no qualms about exploiting his written observations of either group for profit.

For Chesnutt, readers wanted a good, a product and he felt uniquely positioned to provide it. Thinking about the success met by white writers like Albion Tourgee and Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose fictional work he felt often related stories about black people, Chesnutt mused that Northern readers were hungry for depictions of black folk:

¹¹³ *Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, Richard Brodhead, Ed.

There is something romantic to the northern mind, about the southern negro, as commonplace and vulgar as he seems to us who come in contact with him every day. And there is a romantic side to the history of this people. Men are always ready to extend their sympathy to those at a distance, than to the suffering in their midst. And the north, their eyes not blinded by the dirt and the hazy moral and social atmosphere which surrounds the negro in the south, their interest not blunted by familiarity with the state of affairs in the south, or prejudiced by a love of “our institutions”—sees the south as it is; or is ever eager for something which will show it in a correct light. (125)¹¹⁴

Chesnutt figures the “southern negro” as a spectacle that a northern readership had established precedent and practice for consuming through a text. For him, the text had the effect of commodifying blackness for a readership ready to consume it. It allowed that same readership a safe enough, convenient distance where they did not have to be accountable for the effects of such commodification, which was part of the logic that animated oppression on real bodies. Rather, commodification here occurs ostensibly innocuously both far away and only in constructions. Along these lines, “the northern mind” could take in blackness, not as a lived truth, but as a construction that merely occurred in an imaginative realm that exhibited the charming qualities of romance and altogether dispensed with the “vulgar” or “commonplace.” In this manner, readers could shield themselves from the implications of the limited representations of blackness they

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

were consuming. They only needed to be entertained, or to comfortably take in the romance.

If a white writer could profit from telling stories about black folk, Chesnutt questioned, why could not a black one. In the pages of his journal he wondered, “why could not a colored man, who has lived among colored people all his life; who is familiar with their habits, their ruling passions, their prejudices; their whole moral and social condition; their public and private ambitions” “write a far better book about the South” (125). Chesnutt’s racial identity seats him in a peculiar place. He feels his identity grants him more right and legitimacy than a white writer writing about black life, but he also feels estranged from the very black community of which he is to write. Chesnutt’s use of the third person plural possessive pronoun “their” telegraphs his felt separation. Chesnutt was positioning himself as someone with access enough to perform a service that could have sociological implications and that would allow him to make a profit while doing so.

The passage again documents Chesnutt’s complicated relation to his racial identity. In his conjecture, Chesnutt implies that he himself is a “colored man” who could profit by providing northern readers with the delimited representation of blackness he believed they desired. Still, Chesnutt immediately presented another type of black person with his use of “their” that announced the division he felt from this group. Chesnutt was contrasting his blackness at the level of the person with blackness at the level of the group. While he did not feel like he belonged to the romantic “southern negro” depicted in the fiction he had observed, he felt that his blackness nonetheless equipped him to

write more knowledgeably than white writers who were themselves profiting off of black representations without any claim of authenticity to the category. Furthermore, Chesnutt begins, as he would with “The Wife of His Youth,” to challenge the notion of monolithic blackness. His assertion was that the ranges of blackness in the literature present at his writing were too delimited to represent him adequately.

Chesnutt soon followed his conjecture that he could handsomely profit from packaging staid black characters in fiction by contrastingly expressing his resolve for a literary career in more altruistic terms. He determined he would write a far better book than writers like Stowe and Tourgee and that he would do so while limiting what he considered to be “stale” representations of black persons:

I intend to record my impressions of men and things, and such incidents or conversations which take place in my knowledge with a view to future use in literary work. I shall not record stale negro minstrel jokes, or worn out newspaper squibs on the “man and brother.” I shall leave the realm of fiction where most of this stuff is manufactured, and come down to hard facts. There are many things about the Colored people which are peculiar, to some extent, to them, and which are interesting to any thoughtful observe, and would be doubly interesting to people who know little about them. (126)¹¹⁵

While Chesnutt would still offer up the black body for consumption, he resolved not to reproduce hollow, stereotypical imaginings for his reader. Rather, his work was to be more empirical, based off of observation. Inasmuch as he would try to produce what he

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

felt to be realistic depictions of blackness, he thought himself to be leaving the realm of fiction, a realm where construction, conjecture, and romance dominated the form, where, as he put it, “stuff is manufactured.” Again, positioning himself as an anthropologist onlooker, he resolved to discuss in his writing the “peculiar” and the “interesting” that he observed about black persons. In this manner, Chesnutt believed himself to be contributing to ending both limited conceptions of blackness and conceptions of fiction which relied solely on fabulation from old representations of blackness rather than current everyday black life. Thus, Chesnutt believed that he would provide a service to his readers and to literary form.

Chesnutt’s desire for an empirical approach to fiction aligns with sections of his journals where he theorizes that such an approach could equalize the effects of fiction on multiple readers regardless of each reader’s capacity for imagination. Working from and responding to Hugh Blair’s *Lectures of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), Chesnutt wrote:

The importance of an ideas is measured by men ~~in proportion~~ to the capacity of their own minds.¹¹⁶ An insignificant thought fills the mind of an ignorant or narrow minded person, and of course appears immeasurably vast to him, when it would scarcely occupy an appreciable space in the mind of a man of broad and comprehensive views. – Following this we might suppose that great ideas would

¹¹⁶ Editor of Chesnutt’s journals Richard Brodhead indicates in a footnote that Chesnutt “renumbered the words in this sentence to indicate the preferred revision: ‘Men measure the importance of ideas by the capacity of their own minds.’”

be dwarfed by their reception into small minds, for is not so, for the small minds never entertain them. (96)

While Chesnutt worked from Blair, Chesnutt's words here should not be dismissed as simple précis. Rather, Chesnutt used Blair's handbook in order to catapult himself into theorizations concerning the import of producing a literary philosophy that made fictional texts accessible to everyone. Chesnutt believed that he could mitigate the widely varying results that fiction could have on a reader by providing readers of his fictional work preparations that leveled the reading field, as it were. For Chesnutt, only those who were primed to receive ideas could receive them in their full import and richness. Chesnutt described the "capacity" for persons to regard the value in ideas as directly proportional to the greatness of those same persons' "own minds." Importantly, Chesnutt's choice of language suggests that the greatness of one's mind here serves not as a measure of natural intellect but as a form of education, a training that allows one to fully appreciate the scope of ideas. Chesnutt implied that such training was necessary for reception of rich ideas that would go otherwise unnoticed by the untrained or the "ignorant or narrow minded" receiver. It was not simply the quality of an idea or the complexity of it that gave it substance, it was how that idea was packaged to be readily and fully consumed by the receiver. Even at the young age of seventeen, Chesnutt felt equipped to package ideas in a manner that white readers would consume.

Chesnutt was theorizing reader-response. His strikethrough in the passage above of "the important of an idea" in favor of "the importance of ideas" indicates his impulse to hone his language concerning how readers consume to get to a theory he could use

widely. Chesnutt's journal writing suggests that for him the notion that one's capacity for understanding was directly related to one's priming and training for that understanding was not for him merely a localized instance but a theory he felt he could relate broadly to "ideas" in general. He would use this notion of preparing a reader in order to begin to craft his fictional work.

Chesnutt concludes that if his readers were to receive ideas in writing he had to train these readers' capacities to receive these ideas. In his journal, Chesnutt followed his discussion regarding training his readers' capacities by analogizing the craft of such training to the preparations the Greeks undertook to build a wooden horse to enter the walls of Troy:

Great thoughts are like the wooden horse of the Greeks which could not be got in at the gates of Troy; but unlike the walls of that city, the barriers of ignorance cannot be broken down to admit them. (96)

Chesnutt's allusion to the Trojan Horse to describe the process by which he felt he needed to deliver ideas to people indicates the writing practices he was considering.

As the tale goes, the Greeks presented a wooden horse as a gift to the Trojans during war-time hoping that the Trojans would bring the horse into the famously impenetrable city of Troy. Unbeknownst to the Trojans the wooden horse had been built hollow in order to hide soldiers that would attack the city if the Trojans accepted the gift. Transposed, then, Chesnutt's allusion to the tale implies his willingness to engage in similar subterfuge in order to reach readers whose physical barriers could "hardly be broken down." The passage also points to his readiness to adopt a clandestinely aggressive stance toward his

reader, as he would show nearly ten years later with “The Goophered Grapevine,” whose narrator is subjected to the trickery of Uncle Julius.

Thus, without letting up on his financial and political aims, Chesnutt was establishing a belief that he would undertake his fiction-writing career by packaging ideas in a manner where they could be understood and appreciated by a wide readership without alienating that same readership. Chesnutt’s journals evince that he had begun to think through his methodology for luring his readers with enough entertainment (flesh) to provide them with more purposeful writing (bones). Almost twenty years later, Chesnutt would be much more wary of the fiction form and much less willing to allow his reader to consume black bodies. His rendering of black characters in the *The Colonel’s Dream* exhibits the extent of his transformation. He had found what he believed to be a proper balance of “the facts” and fiction as a “figure of speech.”

Critically, the allusion to the Trojan Horse again exhibits Chesnutt’s complex interest in locating themes on a body. Just as the horse was travestiment for the Greeks’ desire to infiltrate the city so was fiction Chesnutt’s drag for his political ambitions. Through his deliberate staging of his physical body, whether fending off attacks or preparing for one, Chesnutt was already establishing a practice of manipulating “flesh”. He was figuring out he could do the same with the textual body.

Chesnutt’s regard for packaging can be seen in his defense and explication of figures of speech. Working from Blair again, he harangued writers who regarded figures of speech as trite farce suggestive of lazy writing. He wrote:

Figures of speech are not artificial or unnatural, as the many treatises on the subject, and the attention which rhetoricians have always bestowed upon them, might lead us to suppose. This is so far from being the case, that on many occasions they are the most common method of uttering our sentiments. Savage nations use them plentifully, and in the ordinary conversation even the most ignorant are very frequently employed. (98)

For Chesnutt, figures of speech were not merely ornamentation or tools that any writer could use successfully. Rather, they required observations of life itself and then deliberate and accurate use if they were to accurately represent everyday speech. For a writer that regarded himself an observer to the races, they were the ideal tool to transmit authenticity for an audience of readers. Figures of speech constituted the naturally egalitarian component of language because everyone had access to them and all, even the “savage” used them to communicate. They were accessible to anyone, regardless of the morality of the sentiments they were attempting to present.

In figures of speech Chesnutt perceived the fullness of everyday expressions, forms he felt he could exploit to approach representations of true human sentiment. Arguing that rhetoricians were forgetting that language was being used to express people’s feelings Chesnutt argued:

A great deal of unnecessary attention has been bestowed upon this subject, which has drawn its study much labor which should have been given to other parts of composition. For however numerous and definite the rules may be, however great

may be your knowledge of them, remember that the figure is only the dress; the sentiment is the body, and substance. (98-99)

For Chesnutt, figures of speech were merely travestiment for the substance of human feelings. To follow Chesnutt's earlier thinking on bodies, figures of speech take on a similar function to what Chesnutt would later, in his letter to Walter Hines Page, describe as flesh, that which hides or protects the bones or which you can alter to make the bones more palatable. It follows in this analogy then, that the bones remain the substance of literature, what Chesnutt, in his burgeoning sensibilities as a writer, identified as human sentiment. In this manner, Chesnutt's enterprise into the novel can be seen as him experimenting with another locale wherein he could give his ideas bones and flesh—a body—in written form. Chesnutt undertook the process of crafting a textual body little differently than he did giving himself a body by his attempts to alter his corpus and consequently the narratives about him.

The Colonel's Dream's Black Characters

The opening to *The Colonel's Dream* reminds readers of Chesnutt's beguiling earlier work only to abruptly depart from its surreptitious styling in favor of more overt thematics. It may be no coincidence that in *The Colonel's Dream*, the final novel Chesnutt would publish in his lifetime, he makes the impetus for its Southern setting the same as it was in "the Goophered Grapevine," the North Carolina-set story that had catapulted him to fame. In the opening moments of both tales, family doctors advise the protagonists to head south in order to provide a severely ailing, immediate family member with a more

anodynic climate. Both protagonists find the charm of the south alluring, and head to the region readily. The family doctors' and protagonists' conception of the South align with perceptions of the region that render it a space of utopic lure, a locale to which one travels to evade further infirmity and to be healed.

Both stories begin with protagonists attempting flight from fatality who, nevertheless, flee directly into a lifelessness represented by stagnant areas where progress appears to have ground to a halt. Chesnut identifies the Southern setting to both narratives as a decaying North Carolina, a place existing merely as a relic of a storied past, a shell of its former self. Yet, of the two protagonists only Colonel French of the *The Colonel's Dream* finds himself, in spite of immense resources at his disposal, powerless to change or resist Southern ways he believes at once brutish and intractable. Contrastingly, the protagonist of Chesnut's earlier "Goophered Grapevine" had found a way to revitalize his environment and to alter his circumstances into something both palatable and profitable. In the end, the white male narrator triumphantly declaims investment in the South a lucrative and newsworthy endeavor. About his recently purchased North Carolina land, he proclaims "it has been for a long time in a thriving condition, and is often referred to by the local press as a striking illustration of the opportunities open to Northern capital in the development of Southern industries" (34). In the South, the white narrator of the Goophered Grapevine had found a convivial environment to revive a grapevine plantation and to secure wealth for himself and his town. Colonel French, on the other hand, has no such fortune. Chesnut unveils the South of Colonel French as death-ridden.

In *The Colonel's Dream* Chesnutt depicts a Southern setting doomed to remain irredeemable, a consummate city of the dead. He underscores the urgency of his social justice message by casting in high relief the imminence of death surrounding his white characters. The novel's plot unfolds into a dirge for the Colonel's extensive resources and his family members. By the end of the narrative, the Colonel will have spent vast amounts of money; he will have irreparably fallen in the estimation of a Southern white aristocracy that once revered him; his faithful servant will be dead; and his beloved toddler aged son will have been killed. Whereas, only four years earlier in 1901 Chesnutt's *Marrow of Tradition* had ended with a characters' invocation for hurry to salvage severely wounded race relations after a massacre—"There 's time enough, but none to spare" (329)—with *The Colonel's Dream*, Chesnutt suggests that time had run out and that the damage of inattention to black exploitation and disenfranchisement had slipped to ineluctable levels.

With these similar yet diverging plot lines, Chesnutt creates a repetition with a difference or, to summon Joseph Roach a type of surrogation—an imprecise substitution whose differences are heightened in comparison.¹¹⁷ In this manner, Chesnutt reminds readers of his earlier work and yet is unafraid to move from it, alerting his readers that his work now had a more explicit political ambition with regard to race than he had undertaken, for the most part, until his writing of *The Colonel's Dream*. No doubt

¹¹⁷ Deleuze explores the relationship between these terms in *Repetition and Difference* (1968). The conception which I borrow here concerns the notion that an overturn of a previous work is nevertheless a return. Consequently, Chesnutt's return already announces his overturn. See also Roach, *Cities of the Dead*.

animated by his fatigue over the increasing disenfranchisement of black persons and his increasingly pressing desire for change, such overtly political work from Chesnutt marks a stark departure from the meticulously covert tactics he had outlined as strategies for success in his early journals. With initially harmonious plot lines that fade crescendo into dissonance, he means to provide the reader with a reconceptualization of the thinking that guided his earlier pieces. Consequently, *The Colonel's Dream* moves with pronounced urgency.

If white characters and their sympathizers are hurtling towards death, in Chesnutt's view, black persons are already there socially. Operating on the fringes, decaying, Chesnutt presents the first black character the reader encounters as a virtually lifeless slavery apologist. The reader initially meets this black character in a cemetery as "very intent upon his occupation" he tends to the grave of his former slave masters (23). Colonel French and his son Phil, descendants of the dead to which the black figure looks after, spot him as they approach the graves of their ancestors:

Father and son had traversed half the width of the cemetery, when they came to a spacious lot, surrounded by large trees and containing several monuments. It seemed less neglected than the lots about it, and as they drew nigh they saw among the tombs a very black and seemingly aged Negro engaged in pruning a tangled rose tree. (23)

Only when French and his son draw near to their family's burial lot do they distinguish the black figure from the tombs that surround him. The narration makes the aging black man's body indistinct from the tombs—the above ground chambers used to lodge the

dead, suggesting that his body itself enshrines death. The passage gives special attention to the man's blackness and his advanced age, and it fixes him in the cemetery. If blackness is a concept understood to operate in matters of degree (the darker your skin color, the more deep your black essence), Chesnutt makes the first black figure readers encounter "very black," denoting a type of uber-blackness that suggests the "very black" man is the very essence of what black is understood to be. On sight, the "very black" man's body is aged, failing, a relic. In this manner, the passage consigns the "very black" man to share the lifelessness of the figureheads of the plantation to which he tends. Together they exist enshrined in tombs—actual and bodily—but, for Chesnutt's purposes, both very dead.

Upon seeing the black man, French and his son take in the impressionistic elements of the "very black" figure, and they regard him with a pity that had in the antebellum period become the hallmark of white persons entering empathetic moments with black persons. The narration explains: "they had paused at the side of the lot and stood looking at him" (23). The onlookers consume the black figure with their eyes without alerting him of their presence. In this moment, the characters and the reader occupy the same sightline. The reader takes in the black man as the characters do. The narration guides the consumption, until the observed breaks it. The black man, initially unaware of the consumption, startles and alters his behavior when he finally does notice the presence of his intrigued spectators: "When the old man became aware of their presence, he straightened himself up with the slow movement of one stiff with age or rheumatism and threw them a tentatively friendly look out of a pair of faded eyes" (23).

Though the old man is caught off guard. His tentative *simpatico* seems tempered only by what appears to be his vacillation concerning whether his onlookers are dangerous or not. He ultimately casts aside hesitation and welcomes the intrusion.

The narration finds strange pleasure in the “very black” old man’s tattered clothing. The narrator informs the reader that the old man’s wear fares just as badly as his body, but the narration finds a melancholy delight—a nostalgia of sorts-- as opposed to abjectness in this appearance. After noting his “battered hat” the narration continues: “the rest of his clothing was in keeping, a picturesque assortment of rags and patches such as only an old Negro can get together, or keep together” (23). Describing the wear as “picturesque,” the description summons congenial connotations of charm and quaintness. The portrayal elides a critique of the “very black” man’s abject circumstances, making his need to patch rags together a testament to the old world charm of the Southern setting and not the compulsory mode for the disenfranchised. In this passage, the black man’s ability to survive with little affirms the resourcefulness that only the “very black” could have or “keep together,” as opposed to indicting the system that makes such resilience requisite for survival. Even this passage is not the first time that Chesnut devotes attention to a slavery apologist character. The apologist is a Chesnut type that appears over and again in his fiction.

In this first meeting with “the very black man,” French exercises his white male body’s power to validate and to operate without a trace. Lauren Berlant has argued that “the white, male body is the relay to legitimation, but even more than that, the power to suppress the body, to cover its tracks and traces, is the real sign of authority, according to

constitutional fashion.”¹¹⁸ Berlant suggests that white male corporeality operates with a privilege to leave no trace of itself, making itself know when it is needed in the exercise power of power. In contrast, such suppression is not afforded to the “very black” man’s body. It is spotted immediately, consumed by the gaze, and interpellated by observers into an encounter that may or may not, as the man’s “tentative friendly look” suggests, be threatening.

It is critical to note that although the “very black” man discloses plenty about himself in monologue, Chesnutt withholds his name from the reader—a decision I chose to mimic in the above analysis and will continue to for just a moment longer—until the black man has established himself as sympathetic to his former slave owners. Chesnutt’s choice has the effect of highlighting that he characterizes the encounter between the “very black” and his white onlookers not as one between equal individuals but as one between racialized subjects who in their locale possess differing levels of power. The textual suspension of the black man’s name depersonalizes him. He shows how the encounter treats the very black man as the object of intrigue and commodification.

White onlookers can operate unseen and unidentified. As the black man discloses his plantation genealogy and clarifies his relation to the French family for the reader, French’s son Phil chimes in twice to identify him and his father’s relation to the same slave owners about which the black man speaks. Twice Phil tries to interrupt the black man’s monologue twice—“‘Why, papa!’ cried little Phil, ‘he means—’” and “‘Papa, he means--’”—and twice little Phil’s father silences him with increasing severity—“‘Hush,

¹¹⁸ Berlant, “National Brands/National Bodies” in *The Female Complaint*.

Phil,” and the second time, “Shut up, Phil!” (23, 24). By censoring his son’s desire to place his body in relation with the dead figures and consequently the black man speaking, the father invokes his power to suppress his body. Rather, as the narration documents, the colonel listens to the black man describe his affection for his former slave owners “much moved, but giving no sign” (23).

The black man Chesnutt presents only achieves personalization when interpellated by his white onlooker and then approved. The black man establishes for the Colonel what he feels is his social standing since the abolition of slavery:

Well, suh, I b'longed ter de fambly, an' I ain' got no chick ner chile er my own, livin', an' dese hyuh dead folks 'pears mo' closer ter me den anybody e'se. De cullud folks don' was'e much time wid a ole man w'at ain' got nothin', an' dese hyuh new w'ite folks wa't is come up sence de wah, ain' got no use fer niggers, now dat dey don' b'long ter nobody no mo'; so w'en I ain' got nothin' e'se ter do, I comes roun' hyuh, whar I knows ev'ybody and ev'ybody knows me, an' trims de rose bushes an' pulls up de weeds and keeps de grass down jes' lak I s'pose Mars Henry'd 'a' had it done ef he'd 'a' lived hyuh in de ole home, stidder 'way off yandah in de Norf, whar he so busy makin' money dat he done fergot all 'bout his own folks. (24)

The black man diagnoses his position in relation to former slave owners and to white and black people of his present moment. He stops short of claiming to be part of the French family. Rather, he describes their relation to him as one of possession—he “b’longed ter de fambly.” He appears not to know how to relate to others outside of relations structured

like those of the chattel slave system. With white people who do no longer possess black people and with black people who his subservient mode of relating to people antiquated, he has no use. He feels himself inconsequential to both white and black folk. He feels that the dead whose graves he tends appear closer to him than those living. His answer compels the Colonel, whose gaze still takes the black man in” to want him to speak his name: “What is your name?” asked the colonel, who had been looking closely at the old man.”

Chesnutt chooses the name “Peter” for the black man, and the name’s ambivalent meanings, applied to the character in *The Colonel’s Dream*, reinforces Peter’s loyalty to a system of chattel slavery and his impending obsolescence. The name Peter itself summons the Biblical disciple of Jesus known as a loquacious stalwart of the Christian faith. An apparent apologist for slavery, the character in *The Colonel’s Dream* could be seen as a staunch adherent to what he knows best. As he asserts when Colonel French asks his name, “Peter, suh - Peter French. Most er de niggers change' dey names after de wah, but I kept de ole fambly name I wuz raise' by. It wuz good 'nuff fer me, suh; dey ain' none better.” (24). Peters assertion that there is no better name evidences that he has chosen to live by the best of what he knows. Still, in its secular meaning, Peter, also recalls the verb form “to peter,” which entails a gradual fade or decrease into nonexistence—oblivion. Chesnutt’s choice of the black man’s name distills the drama he sees in the man’s apology for slavery: while it may be the only way he knows, Peter exists by an outmoded subjectivity people worked hard to tear down.

Peter is the only character in *The Colonel's Dream* that speaks at length, and, still, a direct critique of what chattel slavery had done to human subjectivity exists in how he relates to other human beings and in how he views himself. He has difficulty operating outside of power relations where he cannot be used and he regards himself as most like the dead. In the one loquacious black character of his last novel, Chesnutt placed a critique that implicated white people and demonstrated how the privilege they exerted over others during slavery systematically damaged human subjectivity.

All other black characters of *The Colonel's Dream* speak very little. The novel marks how over the course of Chesnutt's career, Chesnutt's black characters go from being loquacious to, in the end, conspicuously silent. They no longer, as Uncle Julius had done in "The Gophered Grapevine," use fantasy, titillation, and entertainment to divert individuals into their service. Rather, as I assert earlier, they dissemble when in the presence of stakeholders. Over and again, Colonel French comes into the presence of black characters who speak very little and, then, only in what appears to be methodical and strategic fashion or not at all.

What is most radical about this dissemblance is that it occurs in the context of fiction, an area typically assumed to welcome a reader's empathetic identification and to rely on it. Scholars have misidentified Chesnutt's attempts to block such identification as polemics and failures, and the few who praise the novel's experimentation hardly linger. Nonetheless, I contend that the manner in which Chesnutt crafts the black characters themselves—as opaque representations—deters their commodification.

Indeed, it is the very dissemblance of Chesnutt's black characters in this final extended effort that exhibits his bold experimentation with the novel form. Chesnutt's last novel evinces how his understanding of physical and textual bodies, his fatigue with nationwide black exclusion, and his distrust of people's untoward uses of empathy cumulated into what I read as his artistic expression of refusal, wherein black characters dissemble, performing refusal outright. He denies readers access to these black characters' interiority and, in the process, renders the characters abstract launching a defense against what he believed to be the systematic commodification of blackness occurring in the transaction between texts and readers. While difficulties spring from such limited representation of black people, paying attention to what is missing from these black representations—namely, interiority—highlights Chesnutt's efforts to alter how readers relate to characters in a text.

First, Chesnutt shows a history of black voices being disregarded by evidencing a continuation of the practices of slavery in the convict lease system, a collection of policies that preyed on the disenfranchised in order to exploit cheap labor. Though Chesnutt had explored the convict lease system in the *Marrow of Tradition*, he returns to it with extensive attention in *The Colonel's Dream*. His work explores how silence operates in the lives of black persons both as an oppressive tool and one of restraint and resistance.

Chesnutt's novel provides an extended look at the disenfranchising practices of the convict lease system by shifting attention away from black interiority that was often the stuff of black fiction to the white patriarchs who had the power to determine the fate

of black lives. When Southern legal authorities arrest Peter for vagrancy, unable to prove employment and unable to pay the exorbitant fine, Peter enters a system where the state sells his labor to the highest bidder in order to settle his fine. Though Peter asserts that he has done nothing wrong, his jailers reject, if not dismiss, his protestations entirely and peremptorily. The narration documents a jailer's reaction: "'You niggers are always kickin', ' said the constable, who was not without a certain grim sense of humour, and not above talking to a Negro when there were no white folks around to talk to, or to listen" (58). Chesnutt suggests that the white constable prioritizes the voices of white people over those of black people. He makes Peter a prop that can serve the constable's needs only in the absence of his white peers. Peter was to be spoken to, he was not to speak.

Using Peter as a prop, the constable launches into harangue about black persons. He does not understand why Peter would wish to speak:

I never see people so hard to satisfy. You ain' got no home, an' here I've give' you a place to sleep, an' you're kickin'. You doan know from one day to another where you'll git yo' meals, an' I offer you bread and meat and whiskey - an' you're kickin'! You say you can't git nothin' to do, an' yit with the prospect of a reg'lar job befo' you tomorrer - you're kickin'! I never see the beat of it in all my bo'n days.

The constable's words reflect the logic of slave masters who used what has become known as "sambo" characterizations of black people in order to justify slavery. In this view, black persons were not able to help themselves, and, as the justification goes, white

persons enslaved black persons to care for them¹¹⁹. Chesnutt's uses the constable in order to demonstrate that despite the abolition of slavery decades earlier such a white savior mentality, which attempted to excuse away exploitation and to dehumanize black persons, persisted well into the post-Reconstruction period. The constable figures white persons as those with the power to determine the lives of black persons not themselves. Thus, the constable believes Peter an inferior unworthy of speech. For him Peter is an object. He is labor itself.

It is important to note that the constable also concurrently demonstrates that he has established a particularized narrative for what he believes constitutes black interiority. His inability to reconcile black "kickin'"—restraint and resistance— depends on his presumption of both how black people feel and of what he believes they need and are getting. First, he dehumanizes Peter with a racial epithet whose purpose it is to strip his individuality and place him in an inferior position. Next, his dismissal of Peter's protestations show he prioritizes his own preconceived notions of how blackness is embodied over the live, whole person before him. For the constable, inasmuch as Peter matters, he matters to reinscribe his presumed notions of how blackness is embodied. In other words, Peter is the result of the constable's imaginative labors. Peter is the labor.

Chesnutt presents readers with Bud Johnson, a black character jailed with Peter, who seems to understand that the white patriarchs regard him as labor and refuses to

¹¹⁹ For an extended example of an argument that suggests that slavery was beneficial to slaves and that elucidates the "sambo" characterization, see Stanley Elkins, "Slavery and Personality." For a critique of Elkins's incredibly persisting views, see Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery."

participate in the proceedings with his silence. Johnson, too, is on the verge of being sold by one white patriarch to another into the convict lease system. Charged with vagrancy, a judge asks Johnson to enter a plea—the summons to provide a plea an act that itself evidences a ritual colluding of law and whiteness in interpellating black persons stripped of their ability to determine their own futures. The narration reports that “[t]he prisoner maintained a sullen silence” and that upon the lack of response the judge enters a plea for Johnson. Once more, the judge provides a space for Johnson to speak—“Have you anything to say?”—and Johnson does not provide a response per se. The narration documents his reaction: “‘What's de use er my sayin' anything,’ muttered the Negro. ‘It won't make no diff'ence. I didn' do nothin', in de fus' place, ter be fine' fer, an' run away 'cause dey did n' have no right ter keep me dere’” (64). Johnson’s reaction should not be confused for a response to the judge. Rather, the passage identifies that Johnson mumbles his words. Readers can assume, then, that Johnson’s words are quiet and indistinct, more to himself than to those around him. His decision to stay to himself marks his refusal to participate into a system that objectifies him. Johnson restrains his speech to refuse objectification. He rebuffs an invitation to performance for his auditors, and he takes strength from his repudiation of their efforts otherwise.

While Peter’s and Bud Johnson’s voice remains insignificant to his jailers, the jailers respond to Colonel French, whom they immediately regard as a white patriarch peer and a fellow capitalist. The judge in charge of the sentencing and sales identifies the Colonel and then initiates him into the bidding proceedings:

I thought, suh, that you looked like a No'the'n man. That bein' so, doubtless you'd like somethin' on the Uncle Tom order. Old Peter's fine is twenty 'dollars, and the costs fo' dollars and a half. The prisoner's time is sold to whoever pays his fine and allows him the shortest time to work it out. When his time's up, he goes free.

(67)

Colonel French is able to enter the convict lease sale proceeding simply on the basis of his whiteness and his entrepreneurship. The judge informs the Colonel that whatever time bid he offers up for “the prisoner” must be better than that of his white patriarch peers in order to secure Peter. The Colonel “acquires” Peter for life under the rules of the system.

The convict lease system requires the Colonel’s collusion in merging white supremacist thinking and the law. The convict lease system operates on a system where persons are already commodified in the language used to describe the labor. The narration describes the bidding process for potential convict lessees much in the same manner that historians have documented the auctioning off of black persons on antebellum selling block for slaves¹²⁰:

Gentlemen, I now call yo'r attention to Lot Number Fo', left over from befo' the wah; not much for looks, but respectful and obedient, and accustomed, for some time past, to eat very little. Can be made useful in many ways - can feed the chickens, take care of the children, or would make a good skeercrow. What I am

¹²⁰ I draw on Walter Johnson’s documentation of the everyday dynamics amid white slave-buyers to make this comparison. See Johnson, *Soul by Soul*.

bid, gentlemen, for al' Peter French? The amount due the co't is twenty-fo' dollahs and a half. (66)

For the buyers, Peter is a “lot.” The auctioneer never refers to Peter by human pronouns. Rather, in the context of the auctioneers description the “it” threatens the typically “he” used for human subjects. The white patriarchs who wish to exploit labor regard Peter invariably as trained labor—respectful and obedient—and object—scarecrow. In short, they regard him as whatever form they need for him to take.

The Colonel purchases Peter and knows not what to do with him. He cannot escape the meanings of the system, and as much as he initially tries to operate outside of them, he comes to regard Peter as labor in the end. The narration states that the Colonel:

had no very clear idea of what disposition he would ultimately make of the old man, but he meant to provide in some way for his declining years. He also bought Peter a neat suit of clothes at a clothing store, and directed him to present himself at the hotel on the following morning. The interval would give the colonel time to find something for Peter to do, so that he would be able to pay him a wage. (71)

In the very making of Peter into labor the Colonel’s capitalism renders him complicit in the system that manufactures humans as waste—persons made into objects to be used and disposed of at will. As the auctioneer informs the Colonel after his purchase of Peter, “you are responsible for his keep as well as entitled to his labour, for the period of your bid” (68). The Colonel’s capitalism is synonymous with the law that allows him to treat Peter as he wishes.

With Peter, the Colonel realizes how his view of black persons has been represented hollow by white interpretation. The narration captures his sentiments as he observes white peers bidding for blacks: “The colonel was boiling over with indignation. His interest in the fate of the other prisoners had been merely abstract; in old Peter's case it assumed a personal aspect. He forced himself into the room and to the front” The Colonel realizes that he his characterization of black people had been up this point hollow. The same Colonel who saw Peter as a “picturesque” “Negro” now sees him differently. Yet, this change has not been animated by any congress with Peter. It has been animated by his association with other white people. In other words, seeing Peter through the eyes of other white patriarchs like him, Colonel French begins to see black people as more than abstractions.

Although Bud Johnson has witnessed the Colonel’s fight to purchase Peters freedom, Johnson remains staunch in his refusal to engage. The narration describes his encounter with Colonel French:

Bud Johnson evidently recognized the friendly gentleman who had interfered in Peter's case. He threw toward the colonel a look which resembled an appeal; but it was involuntary, and lasted but a moment, and, when the prisoner became conscious of it, and realised its uselessness, it faded into the former expression.

(69)

The narration shows Johnson’s conscious effort to restraint from allowing others to empathize. Even though he has witnessed the Colonel’s efforts on another black man’s

behalf, he consciously avoids entering in a relation that would allow someone other than himself to be the stakeholder.

With Johnson, Chesnutt demonstrates a persistent dissemblance. While Johnson's initial impulses may be for human connection, his circumstances dictate that he only enter into relation with other humans in strategic fashion.

CHAPTER IV

“THE RECITATIONS WERE OVER FOR THE DAY”: PAULINE HOPKINS, THE IMMEDIATE, AND VORACIOUS PROGRESSIVE ERA READERS

The story of how black author Pauline Hopkins was dismissed from *The Colored American Magazine* has overwhelmingly influenced scholarship that has characterized her and her literary contributions as defiant. These characterizations have obscured a subtler trajectory in Hopkins’s work that evinces vanguard studies in and experimentation with reader response: Hopkins slyly attempted to draw empathy from readers by exploiting their desire for immediate consumption.

By 1905 Hopkins would be pushed out of her position as editor for *The Colored American*, her political views having angered Booker T. Washington, whom Hopkins biographer Lois Brown minces no words in calling the “architect of her demise” (Brown 2).¹²¹ Worn-out with Hopkins’s persistent critiques of black disenfranchisement, Washington had surreptitiously infiltrated *The Colored American* with John Freund, a white philanthropist with publishing experience who secretly worked at his behest. Freund became an advisor and financier for the owners and editors of *The Colored American* after he expressed sustained interest in the wellbeing and longevity of the black literary outlet he knew struggled financially. As Freund worked with the staff, he gradually revealed his contention that the magazine’s progressive stance risked alienating readers. Freund attempted repeatedly to change the political character of contributions to

¹²¹ A number of Hopkins scholars document Booker T. Washington’s attack on Hopkins. See Lois Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins* and Alisha Knight, “Furnace Blasts for the Tuskegee Wizard.”

the monthly, and Hopkins became increasingly wary of him. In a 16 April 1905 letter to black news editor and political activist William Trotter, Hopkins detailed instructions Freund had given her for bettering the magazine:

He told me that there must not be a word on lynching, no mention of our wrongs as a race, nothing that would be offensive to the South. He wrote:-- "If you are going to take up the wrongs of your race, then you must depend for support absolutely upon your own race. For the colored man today to attempt to stand up to fight would be like a canary bird to face a bulldog, and an angry one at that. The whole line of work must be conciliatory, constructive, and that is where Booker Washington is showing himself to be such a giant" (4).¹²²

Per Hopkins, Freund's policy for the magazine was to gut it of any overt political critique and reference. At all costs, the magazine was to avoid incrimination or offense. At a moment when *The Colored American* relied heavily on financial contributions to survive, Freund's standing as one its creditors must have compounded the pressure for the staff at the magazine to meet his directives, lest, as he appeared to threaten, he cease funding it. Nevertheless, despite Freund's repeated admonishments, Hopkins and staff continued to produce work that failed to adhere to his guidelines and please him, and it was soon revealed to Hopkins that he had been working at Washington's behest. Having failed to intercede the political character of *The Colored American* with Freund, Washington

¹²² Pauline Hopkins. Letter to William Trotter. 16 April 1905. Pauline E. Hopkins Papers in the Special Collection of the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library at Fisk University.

bought off the magazine, moved it from its offices in Boston to New York, and effectively put Hopkins out of a job.

When the November 1904 issue of *The Colored American* magazine appeared, Hopkins's name along with her title of "Literary Editor" had been removed from its masthead, and the publication offered only a curt goodbye to "a faithful and conscientious worker" (700).¹²³ In so doing, it delivered a brute estimation that demoted Hopkins to a laborer alienated from her product. After all, Hopkins had not only been involved in the monthly magazine's conception four years earlier and since written three novels that were serialized in it, two biographical series, and numerous editorials and short stories, but she had also sought, selected, and edited contributions to it. The brevity of the announcement and its burial amid routine publisher announcements vastly understated the substantial stewarding and managerial duties that Hopkins had undertaken during her tenure with the publication.

Scholars have proffered reasons for Hopkins's forced departure, and in the process each has emphasized Hopkins's radical, even uncompromising, nature and literary content as large factors. Noting the sexism of the industry in which Hopkins worked, Hazel Carby allows that "precisely because she was a woman Hopkins's editorial influence received little public recognition," and she cites at least one contributor to the magazine, William Braithwaite, who later implied that Hopkins "should have remained in silent and grateful submission for having the opportunity to publish in the magazine" (1988, xxxi); referencing Gwendolyn Brooks's description of Hopkins

¹²³ *The Colored American Magazine*, November 1904 (Reprinted by HathiTrust).

writing, Lois Brown suggests that it was Hopkins's "bursts of righteous heat" towards Washington's resistance to black nationalism that caused his ire, and that he bought the magazine from under Hopkins to spite her (2008, 2); and Alisha Knight argues that Hopkins "utilized her editorial role to tailor a message to a black middle-class audience" that propagated a "success formula" that adhered to the necessity of literary and historical education in a manner so boldly antithetical to Washington's up-from-bootstraps approach that he acted to silence her (2007, 60).¹²⁴ Each scholar uncovers a critical history of attempted censoring and erasure that Hopkins faced as a figure they position as fundamentally outspoken.

Still, it may be to the detriment of attention to Hopkins's literary work that the story of her abruptly ended tenure at *The Colored American Magazine* has become well-rehearsed in current Hopkins scholarship. The preponderance of critical attention to Hopkins's squaring off against Washington has positioned her as the bull in the china shop, and it has diverted from a trajectory of literary work that more than being brash, truculent, and reflexive was rather increasingly sly, nuanced, and thoughtful about how not to alienate its reader and the potential to create new black and white reading communities.

Well before sustaining Washington's assault, Hopkins was experimenting with literary efforts that attempted to create a space that convened those who were interested in black bodies but were fatigued with having paraded before them the wrongs black

¹²⁴ See Carby "Introduction" in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*; Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*; and Knight, "Furnace Blasts for the Tuskegee Wizard."

people had been forced to face. These were tiresome recitations. What is more, Hopkins's fiction suggests that she had determined that the late-nineteenth century American public had grown weary not just with recitations concerning black people but with recitation in general. Too often, recitation presumed admonishment and accountability, and American audiences were begging off of them. In short, Hopkins had spotted a decline in recitation's effectiveness, and she was learning how to fashion her fiction to exploit its regression. Viewed in this context, Washington and Freund were not just singular forces in Hopkins's personal story (as critical work tends to station them), but they were proof-positive of a larger literary moment to which Hopkins had already begun attending with her fiction. Reviewing Hopkins's contributions to *The Colored American Magazine* in this wider historical context, Hopkins's fiction can be understood as more than a series of reflexive responses, but as quietly subversive experimentation that approached a literary and political milieu with a calculated affective strategy.

In this chapter, I position Pauline Hopkins's serialized novel *Of One Blood* (1902-1903) as the culmination of her experimentation with rendering recitations into novel and immediate expressions for both black and white Progressive Era readers who were voracious for black novelty. *Of One Blood* exhibits that Hopkins's fictional work sought to entrap readers who were at once bored with recitations that implicated them in the degradation of black peoples and eager for immediate access to represented black interiority. In order to lure readers into *Of One Blood*, Hopkins forswore the recitations of which readers had grown bored all the while she used these, if surreptitiously.

To get there, I argue that Hopkins's *Of One Blood* (1902-1903) emerged not only from Hopkins's astute read of a post-Reconstruction literary moment that was witnessing recitation's decline, but also from her conclusion to correlate the decline with a concurrent aggrandizement of free markets and private enterprise that she witnessed left persons uninterested in the strictures of civic life. In short, For Hopkins, recitation's decline evinced a historical moment in which "recitation" (facts repeated aloud with the hope that an audience would ultimately be accountable for these) was losing ground to what I call "immediacy" (consumption that stipulated privacy, power, and, importantly, freedom from accountability). Hopkins had determined that people's interest in independent consumption was overtaking their interest in the philosophical democratic ideals that stipulated one denizen be responsible for another. Her assessment of the public's waning interest in recitation stages an investigation of her audience's appetite for immediate and private pleasure, and, more broadly, of how this milieu would shape her writing. What would she make of this preference for consumption over what Achille Mbembe calls "a community of life"?¹²⁵ She exploited it.

Recitation vs. Immediacy: An Initial Definition of Terms

Having construed a post-Reconstruction historical moment when the American public's interest in recitation was fading, Hopkins wrote novels that capitalized on her

¹²⁵ Achille Mbembe has given the shorthand "a community of life" in order to distinguish an order that exhibits what he feels are the democratic prerogatives of mutual humanity from what he sees as capitalism's capacity to render humans as disposable commodities. See Mbembe, "Democracy as Community."

reader's fascination with something altogether contrasting: the immediate and the fantastic. Such a claim may already foreground Hopkins's conspicuous contribution to her late-nineteenth century literary moment. To yoke the novel as artifact and final product with the term "immediate" seems on the whole counterintuitive, given that a writer constructs a novel for an extended period of time long before it arrives in the hands of its reader. Yet, Hopkins's fictional work demonstrates that she staked her avowed political purpose to "raise the stigma of degradation from [her] race" upon closing just this very gap (*Contending* 13).¹²⁶

Hopkins's work pays heed to an affective approach I refer to here as "the immediate" or "immediacy." That is, her fiction lends peculiar attention to the moment of encounter between a reader and her written text, with a mind to produce for that reader a feeling that he or she has ready, privileged, and private access to the representations in her text. The immediate was Hopkins's attempt to collapse the perception of distance between a reader and the constructions she placed in her text in order to exploit that reader's desire to obtain and consume—in confidence and without difficulty and further obligation—a fresh product.

Using literary techniques to close off any immediacy gap, Hopkins's fictional work evinces her formal efforts to simulate the proximity of a physical encounter and consequently have her work's anti-racist message feel more express to Progressive Era readers that were increasingly uninterested in responsibility to others. After all, in the hand of its reader, the text was a thing particularly well suited to provide the individual

¹²⁶ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*.

with the experience of a presumed collective.¹²⁷ Hopkins interest in the immediate, then, presented an interest in materiality itself and how it might be channeled through the interplay of texts and the imaginations of the persons that hold them.

The deft tactics of Hopkins's "immediate" pop to the foreground when counterpointed with the de rigueur use of recitation that proliferated in her day. Where the "immediate" was exciting, private, and independent, recitation was by definition that which had been repeated over and again—almost exasperatingly, even— for public use. Recitation implied responsibility. As the 1893 manual *How to Conduct the Recitation* attests, recitation had by Hopkins's time become entrenched as a pedagogical tool where one repeated in writing or in speech all matters of fact to an audience—events, numbers, statistics, and calculations—with the hope that the audience would commit the information to memory for good use.¹²⁸ The manual declared that facts were "the materials out of which our intellectual house is to be built" (6). Yet, no doubt pointing to the shortcomings of recitation it also sought to mitigate, it quickly added, "but we are concerned not only about getting these materials into the structure of the mind, but about the plan and order there among them, and whether the walls are loose and shaky or firm and solidly built" (6). Recitation could repeat facts over and again but there was neither assurance that a public was paying attention nor that it had instilled these facts in individuals. The manual conceded that at its worst (and often), recitation acted as impersonal "Dull Machine Work" and "dry mechanical routine," that because of its

¹²⁷ Indeed this is Benedict Anderson's argument in *Imagined Communities*.

¹²⁸ McMurry, *How to Conduct the Recitation*.

repetitive nature risked being wholly disregarded (17, 18). Thus, while recitation abounded as a pedagogical technique in Hopkins's time, if Hopkins was going to acquire her reader's interest, she had to distance herself from the drone technique and fiction was the site to do it.

Hopkins's work exhibits she made deliberate choices to position "immediacy" as an alternative teaching tool to recitation. She increasingly crafted her novels to act not as distant and public artifact (as recitation had become) but as intimate and immediate product of the moment. Late fictional efforts for *The Colored American Magazine* like *Of One Blood* suggest that she increasingly thought of her texts in economic terms: the text was the commodity and her reader the consumer. In her fictional work she did away with direct requests for empathy that sought to make readers accountable for human plights cited within a text. Rather, Hopkins's fiction offered readers right of entry to black interiority without the guilt or responsibility. Her texts prioritized the relationship between reader and text as an immediate, private transaction that first and foremost had to divert.

We must emphasize that representations of black persons are the "goods" Hopkins offered up in these transactions. Fabulation in Hopkins's fiction simulated real time, spontaneous access to black lives and, at least initially, sheltered the reader from implication in a laundry list of facts and histories of the dreadful experiences that black peoples had been made to suffer. Nevertheless, not unlike the Charles Chesnut's fiction explored in the previous chapter, facts ultimately emerged as a repudiating backbone for Hopkins's fabulation. Her fiction worked to ensure that a reader met the often-recited

facts of black disenfranchisement only after the reader had been lured into the novel with her use of “the immediate.”

Even so, Hopkins move to offer the black body distinguishes her approach from Charles Chesnutt’s in clear fashion. As the previous chapter showed, where at the height of his power Chesnutt began to attempt to shield the black body and to deny readers any consumption of it, Hopkins used her power to sacrifice it in favor of generative understanding. In order to demonstrate a progression in Hopkins’s literary strategies, I understand Hopkins’s experiences as a jubilee singer, her interest in internationalism, her first novel *Contending Forces*, and her many contributions to *The Colored American Magazine* as a series of experimental affective approaches in which she explored how to offer her readers black bodies.

Hopkins would capture her reader by hook or by crook, and exploring the tactics of her work demonstrates that even current Hopkins scholarship, to which I will attend later in this chapter, falls prey to Hopkins’s lure to immediate and seemingly unconditional consumption of blackness. This scholarship inadvertently highlights the danger of Hopkins’s enterprise: literature that invites readers to consume representations of blackness in order to productively alter those same representations does so at the risk of commodifying the very bodies it aims to protect. The representations Hopkins puts in circulation potentially both alter and reinscribe readers’ perceptions of blackness.

This chapter proceeds in two parts. The first part sets out the literary context Hopkins inherited and the method she developed to exploit it. It shows that Hopkins inherited a literary milieu marked by recitation’s decline with the nineteenth century

American public and the consumptive tendencies that emerged with the same. Hopkins's early work acts like public notes both of this milieu and of how other thinkers were pushed to receive it and adapt to it as it developed. Particularly with her published appreciations of the work of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, Hopkins documented her critical attention to the strategies that allowed the two figures to connect effectively with their audiences. Hopkins's study of Lincoln and Douglass displays her conceptualizing and identifying her own craft. The second part of this chapter positions *Of One Blood*, Hopkins's last major work with *The Colored American*, as the culmination of Hopkins's studies. It explores the craft of her work and its danger.

Recitation's Decline and Consumption's Growth

In December 1905, soon after Hopkins had been forced out as literary editor, robbed of the position that had given her an extended platform, Hopkins gave a speech to a crowd gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Standing in Boston's Faneuil Hall—a monument John Hope Franklin would identify as the “widely heralded” “Athens of the republic”—Hopkins admonished her listeners.¹²⁹ She declared that although abolitionists like Garrison and Douglass had seen their cause “triumph in the emancipation of the slave, and died believing that the manhood rights of every citizen of the United States were secured then and forever,” that “the rise of a younger generation, the influence of an unconquered south, and the acquiescence of an ease-loving north that winks at abuses where commercial relations

¹²⁹ See Franklin, *A Southern Odyssey*.

and manufactures flourish and put money in the purse, have neutralized the effects of stern policy of these giants in an earlier age” (Franklin 25, 176; Brown 538).¹³⁰ For Hopkins, a market of consumption was complicit in replacing citizenship based on vigorous discussion, generating empathy, and a community of life. That she delivered her caution in a locale that many hailed as a monument representative of the life force of government only would have compounded the force of her message.

Hopkins’s 1905 assessment reads like an echo of the sentiments she had up until that point worked to express in her fiction. Historians elucidate the literary context Pauline Hopkins inherited in the late nineteenth century. In particular, literary historians Trish Loughran and Michael Warner as well as historians Gary Wills, David Blight, and David Roediger have produced work which when put in conversation suggests a shift wherein Americans increasingly valued the independent power of immediacy to the public accountability of recitation. Even if these scholars have not called it such, they have documented the general American public’s waning interest in recitation, and they have identified the decline as a mid-to-late nineteenth century phenomenon.¹³¹ Collectively, their work shows how political economy caused an affective shift that in turn induced a literary shift away from recitation.

¹³⁰ Hopkins’s speech is reprinted in Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*.

¹³¹ See Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print*; Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic*; Gary Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*; David Blight, *Race and Reunion*; and David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

Michael Warner and Trish Loughran provide competing interpretations of whether print provided a space for consensus or fragmentation in national culture.¹³² Warner asserts that print created a space that permitted the emergence of a U.S. republic. According to Warner, print allowed for the rise of the nation because it provided a public space wherein citizens could engage in public debate about values that would form the republic. Offering an alternative to Warner's assertion that print was essential for the consolidation of a national U.S. print culture, Loughran contends that "the more connected regions appeared to be (in print), the more regionalized (rather than nationalized) their identities became" (345, parenthetical in original). For Loughran, an increasingly connected book market revealed that what she calls "the virtual nation"—a rib to an entity whose materialist presence she denies—was actually a non-nation that had only snuck into being because of the very lack of nationalized print culture that it had presumed in order to create itself. Loughran asserts:

Contrary to unionist truisms that link the spread of print culture to a more nationalist consciousness, the print campaigns of the 1830s cultivated a sense of material simultaneity across nationalist space that, paradoxically, produced an enhanced sense of regional difference. A growing sense of simultaneity, in other words, produced not nationalism but an ever more entrenched sectionalism. (345)

In short, print was putting pressure on a "virtual nation" that had been created and ratified through it in a manner that highlighted the primacy that local and regional identities had always experienced within print.

¹³² See also, Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

Gary Wills pinpoints the flashpoint of recitation's decline very precisely to 19 November 1863, as he compares the delivery of the famed 272-word brevity that has become known as Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" to the comparatively forgotten two-hour recitation Edward Everett painstakingly delivered just before Lincoln would take the same stage (Wills 1992, 2011). The nineteenth century American public's interest around the gestation of Lincoln's remarks lays the groundwork for understanding both the literary and political context Hopkins would inherit and her strategic use of immediacy.

For Wills, the preservation of Lincoln's speech and the forgetting of Everett's work suggest the public's valuation of Lincoln's immediacy over Everett's recitation. Wills mines written accounts that detail how Everett prepared for his speech—as the great orators of his time were accustomed and, perhaps, expected to do—for months by gathering facts and statistics. So much had Everett rehearsed that at Gettysburg he delivered his findings from memory over the course of two hours. In contrast, records hold that Lincoln wrote his remarks the night before his speech, if not, as some witnesses have it, during the ceremony at Gettysburg and only moments before he had to speak, jotting down his thoughts on the back of an envelope while he listened to Everett recite. The valuation and subsequent posterity or overlooking of their differing approaches reveals the priorities of the audience that was present.

The 1863 Gettysburg audience's interest—representative for Wills of the larger public's interest—not only reveals their fascination with Lincoln's spontaneous format but also their desire for more proprietary involvement in it. Wills ruminates:

It was not enough for those who treasured their day at Gettysburg to have heard Lincoln speak—a privilege they shared with ten to twenty thousand other people, and an experience that lasted no more than three minutes. They wanted to be intimate with the gestation of that extraordinary speech, watching the pen or pencil move under the inspiration of the moment.

That is the other emphasis in these accounts—that it was a product of the moment, struck off as Lincoln moved under destiny’s guidance. Inspiration was shed on him in the presence of others. The contrast with Everett’s long labors of preparation is always implied. Research, learning, the student’s lamp—none of these were needed by Lincoln, whose unsummoned muse was prompting him, a democratic muse unacquainted with the library. Lightning struck, and each of our informants (or their sources) was there when it struck. (“The Words”)¹³³

For Wills, that the audience witnessed the moment when Lincoln set pen to paper produced for them an intimate and immediate experience. He suggests that the audience regards Lincoln’s remarks as a “product of the moment” precisely because the audience members were present as Lincoln’s speech was being crafted. They equated their “being” at the moment of gestation to their contribution in the making of Lincoln’s remarks. The audience’s involvement with Lincoln’s speech as “a product of the moment” in turn provided them with proprietary feeling over it. Although in a public setting amid at least

¹³³ See Wills, “The Words That Remade America: The significance of the Gettysburg Address.” The piece appeared in *The Atlantic*’s Civil War 150 year commemorative issue.

10,000 others, audience members privatized the experience—they made the words their own.

It is important here to distinguish that it was not simply the content of Lincoln's speech that interested the audience members, but also their experience receiving it—its packaging. Unlike Everett's recitation, Lincoln's process did not alienate the listener from the product or bound them to oratory conventions that presumed listeners would work out a priori allusions and themselves labor with past thinkers or philosophers. Rather, Lincoln's speech came without such baggage. Indeed, Lincoln's listener was spontaneous, independent, and, importantly, an autonomous subject from whom no previous or subsequent labor was required. Lincoln's listener was, in other words, an independent consumer. Immediacy, not dull machine work, had facilitated not only the audience's proprietary involvement and consumption of Lincoln's product but it had also stipulated a privacy that acted as a type of protection as it bestowed the illusion of invulnerability and power.

This invulnerability is the other important factor of immediacy: the audience members' immediate and independent consumption evoked their power in a moment of destitution, and such power must have been especially seductive given the glum historical setting of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." Both Lincoln and Everett were at Gettysburg in 1863 to provide dedicatory remarks for a new cemetery that had been built in the wake of the 50,000 casualties to the Battle of Gettysburg. Wills graphically writes of how the "whole of Gettysburg" had become "a makeshift burial ground, fetid and steaming" given

that felled bodies from the battle still rotted above ground at the time of Lincoln's and Everett's addresses("Words").¹³⁴

Such a setting bears significance for understanding Hopkins's milieu as well, given that there are striking similarities. Just as Lincoln and Everett had delivered their words in an environment of violent death and decay, Hopkins's work would appear at the end of the nineteenth century in the morbid context of increased racialized lynching and a convict labor system—explored in previous chapters—that regarded black persons as refuse. In their dreary moment, Everett's and Lincoln's approaches had not only been ripe for comparison because one speaker directly followed the other, but also because of the degree to which they empowered audience members. It is clear that for his dedicatory remarks Everett reached for tradition, summoning Greek thinkers and famed eulogizers, and yet, as Wills argues, Everett's speech, while well-respected, would wallow in obscurity. In contrast, despite the sober setting, Lincoln's comments would "become a symbol of national purpose, pride, and ideals," as he "transformed the ugly reality into something rich and strange—and he did it with 272 words" (Wills "The Words").¹³⁵ The background and reception of Everett's and Lincoln's speeches imply that Lincoln's approach met more success because in a time of grief he made his audience feel empowered, authorized, and not just beholden to others. Lincoln's distancing from recitation jolted and inspired an audience that was wallowing amid the devastation of war and the collective grief of its consequences. The audience needed a break from the shared

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

responsibilities of citizenship. Lincoln's speech urged individuality and gave them such a respite.

Hopkins's Affective Understanding of Recitations's Decline

Wills's assertions here are especially pertinent given Hopkins's approach to similar materials. A century before Wills's writing Hopkins diagnosed the public's fascination with Lincoln's immediacy as a symptom of individuals wanting to feel authorized and empowered. The irony of Hopkins's theorizing is that she suggests that the newness of Lincoln's style incites even those who oppose him politically to be independent consumers. Years after the "Gettysburg Address," myths of Lincoln's style intact, Hopkins used one of her serialized novels to venture that people's fascination with Lincoln was not simply about his personage but necessarily also about how his oratory extracted audiences' deep-seated anxiety that democratic values could impinge on personal authority and freedom.

Reflecting on Lincoln's allure from her early twentieth century vantage point, Hopkins wrote a novel set in the wake of Lincoln's election. Writing under the pseudonym Sarah Allen for the magazine novel *Hagar's Daughter* (1901-1902), Hopkins penned a fictional Jefferson Davis that appears at the novel's opening and is struck by Lincoln's new approach. Hopkins's Davis responds to Lincoln's recent election to the presidency. He agitates a crowd of "leading southern politicians" who wish to maintain their privilege to consume as they see fit. The crowd hisses at Davis's mention of Lincoln's name: "For Abraham Lincoln (hisses) nothing is inviolate, nothing sacred; he

menaces, in his election, our ancient ideas and privileges. The danger grows greater. Let us arise in our strength and meet it more than half way. Are you ready, men?" (17).¹³⁶

Hopkins constructs a Lincoln that for Davis and his followers represents the threat of that which is new and unscrupulously unpredictable. Her Davis fears that all the actions and behaviors he and others established over time through recitation run the risk of alteration. Hopkins's writing emphasizes the drama of the moment and people's primal reactions.

Although writing in the novel genre, here Hopkins borrows from the style and format of dramatic literature. She represents the crowd's hisses and, later, their shouts parenthetically, as if they are stage directions meant to document both the audience's visceral reaction and their active collusion with the rhetoric Davis delivers. For this audience, Lincoln's presidency threatens to unsettle their traditions and privileges, and Hopkins wants her readers to know Davis and his audience are not happy about such a turn of events. Pointedly, Hopkins makes not Lincoln but his election the dramatic center of Davis's protestation when she breaks the momentum of Davis's sentence to have him identify with greater specificity the cause of his indignation—"Lincoln, in his election." Davis rails against a system that would make him responsible to views that threaten his own private enterprise.

Per Hopkins's novel, Lincoln ignites even characters in political opposition to him and the views he represents. Lincoln's mediated change and unpredictability, his recitations, threaten their prerogative to consume autonomously. Outlining what he

¹³⁶ Hopkins, *Hagar's Daughter*, p. 17.

maligns as the Northern way of life, Hopkins's Davis elaborates his fear of the existence he thinks will encroach on his way of life as Lincoln comes to power:

Our Northern friends make a great talk about free society. We sicken of the name. What is it but a conglomeration of greasy mechanics, filthy operatives, small-fisted farmers, and moonstruck Abolitionists? All the Northern States, and particularly the New England States, are devoid of society fitted for well-bred gentlemen. The prevailing class one meets with is that of mechanics struggling to be genteel, and farmers who do their own drudgery, and yet who are hardly fit for association with a gentleman's slave. (17)¹³⁷

Hopkins counterpoints the unsettling that Lincoln and democratic imperatives pose to the crowd's desire to consume when and how they wish. For Hopkins's Davis, the North frightens precisely because it is filled with laborers bereft of autonomy. Davis disregards any position other than that of consumer as drudgery and the absence of authority and social standing. As his solution, he feels compelled to secede from this form of governance and to form an alliance that defers to his consumption.

For Hopkins, Lincoln's election becomes a metaphor for the threat of shared responsibility that Davis and his followers seek to avoid. They wish to protect their authority to use what they view as (human) "product" as they see fit. This ability to consume independently was one of the "ancient ideas" that the democratic imperatives of Lincoln's election endangered. In this manner, Hopkins represented Lincoln and his election as a catalyst that highlighted what she regarded as a primary conflict of her

¹³⁷ Hopkins, *Hagar's Daughters*.

historical moment: in addition to becoming representative of a new style—a different way of doing things, for Hopkins's Lincoln was also a vehicle for reflecting on the growing tension she identified between democracy and consumption. Hopkins's 1901-1902 characterization of Jefferson Davis encapsulates a view wherein the consumer is held in higher regard than the citizen.

By constructing a Davis whose views were entrenched previous to the mid-nineteenth century setting in which she places him, Hopkins suggests that such a tension between the roles of citizen and consumer had been established and growing long before her late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century writings. For Hopkins, the American public's desire to be independent consumers was not new and had been emerging strongly for decades. Hopkins's work shows that she related literary shifts with this desire and that, specifically, she situated recitations decline with the public's growing desire to consume.

A Model for Hopkins: Douglass's Reception

Hopkins specifically saw this trend reflected in people's reception of Frederick Douglass's work, whose work she would make a case study. Hopkins work unpacking her literary context was anticipating what scholars have decades later diagnosed. The impulses that emerged from Lincoln's thrilled Gettysburg audience as well as the attitudes that Hopkins would identify with her fictional representations of Lincoln and Davis resonate with the imperatives that scholars define for Romanticism and, in peripheral fashion, the transcendentalist thought that would follow. For a number of

scholars, these movements prized unprecedented access to personal subjectivism above staid empiricism.¹³⁸ Writings from these specific movements reveal that desire for immediacy had been gradually overshadowing recitation. Hopkins work suggests, that she viewed these forces converging in the American public's reception of Douglass. Her work anticipates how Douglass is still received in contemporary work.

A reading public's interest in personal subjectivism is at the core of how black autobiography was being read. In 1985, when William Andrews identifies the discursive priorities of Romanticism and uses these to sift out the node of William Garrison's exhilaration for Frederick Douglass's narratives, not only is Garrison's desire for consumption on full display, but also Garrison exhibits his concomitant boredom with recitation. In his analysis of the first century of black autobiography Andrews sums up that Romanticism and transcendentalism were "determined 'to report life' based on resources that were 'not so much the pens of practiced writers, as the discourse of the living'" and that they prioritized the "tangible experience and direct perceptions of the individual" (101, 102). They were, to put it differently, movements that privileged not just personal feelings but also and more pointedly, personal feelings that others could experience as they saw fit.

¹³⁸ William Andrews's early work *To Tell A Free story* exhibits this trend. Lawrence Buell's book length study provides a historical context for this moment: "The Transcendentalist was no more deeply interested in spirit and nature, however, than he was in the human consciousness which experiences their power and the relationship between them" (263). See Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance*.

In 1854, less than five years before the fictional setting for Hopkins's Lincoln and Davis, abolitionist Garrison intimated the public's desire for immediate and proprietary involvement in other's narratives when he assessed the value of Frederick Douglass's accounts. Andrews understands Douglass's narrative style—specifically what he calls Douglass's "expressives"—as "some of the first fruits of the emancipation of the black biographer under the influence of the cultural forces [of Romanticism]" (102). Writes Andrews:

Douglass's style, the signature of his individuality more than the recitation of the facts of his past, was the most telling aspect of the ex-slave's narrative. The "most thrilling" incident in the story was not, in Garrison's view, the famous battle between the sixteen year old Douglass and the slave-breaker, Edward Covey. It was instead "the description Douglass gives of his feelings, as he stood soliloquizing respecting his fate, and the chances of one day being a freeman." (102)¹³⁹

Andrews highlights Garrison's excitement that Douglass's narrative gives him the ability to access the ex-slave's personal feelings. He reads Garrison's enthusiasm as an express response to Douglass's choice to inhabit a new narrative style. Garrison felt that up until Douglass's writing black writers had too often shied away from expressing their feelings directly. Andrews debits Garrison's thrill for Douglass to the fact that Douglass, in a display of the newfound authority and freedom made possible by his emancipation, "asserts a proposition about something but also conditions his reader's response to that

¹³⁹ Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story*.

assertion by couching it in an expression of his psychological state as he makes the assertion” (102).¹⁴⁰ Andrews concludes that Douglass’s “expressives” were “a way to recontextualize baldly factual assertives about the past so that the reader could be shown not just the incident or what the incident signified but how to *feel* about the incident” (103, emphasis in original).¹⁴¹ The particularized attention that Garrison gives to Douglass’s feeling is evident, and Andrews justly emphasizes Garrison’s excitement with Douglass’s new stylistic choices.

Yet, what is also present in Garrison’s words that Andrews does not specify is that Douglass’s expression of his feelings, tantamount to a represented black inner life, is given priority over the materialist conditions that produce these same feelings. Garrison draws clear distinction between Douglass’s recitation of the facts that occurred in an event and Douglass’s immediacy—the “thrilling” disclosure of his feeling. According to Garrison, it was not the fight Douglass has with Covey that could compel audiences, but Douglass’s revelation of his innermost feelings. For him, the personal disclosure is the real node of interest. Douglass renders his feeling in soliloquy, giving the impression of intimate and immediate private access, and Garrison is left clearly seduced. Garrison seeks proprietary feeling in the life of the newly emancipated Douglass. He seeks the private, independent consumption that comes through immediacy. Garrison’s focus to feel as Douglass feels and to subsequently take ownership of that feeling, obscures the events that generated Douglass’s feeling and his expression in the first place. Expressing

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

personal feeling in this new manner, then, Douglass risked dulling the facts of his experience.

Even Garrison contemporaries who were not as seduced with Douglass's style suggested that proprietary feeling and immediacy necessarily came with the sacrificing of a recitation of events. As Andrews points out, Ephraim Peabody's 1849 grave response to Douglass's narrative is instructive regarding the manner in which some readers wished to consume Douglass's work.¹⁴² Peabody exhibited enthusiasm for the slave narrative as literature. Assuring those who feared "lest the elements of poetry and romance should fade out of the tame and monotonous social life of modern times," he wrote:

There is no danger of it while there are any slaves left to seek for freedom, and to tell the story of their efforts to obtain it. There is that in the lives of men who have sufficient force of mind and heart to enable them to struggle up from hopeless dull and tame. (19)

Peabody regarded slave narratives as grand texts with great entertainment value. Far from "dull and tame," he compared them to epics, arguing that the story of "fugitive slaves" made for "a whole Iliad of woes" and "a modern Odyssey" (19). He exclaimed, "What a combination of qualities and deeds and sufferings most fitted to attract human sympathy in each particular case!" (19). Peabody suggested that the plights of former slaves could draw in readers, and he recognized that "biographies of fugitive slaves are calculated to exert a very wide influence on public opinion" (20). Although he contended that slave

¹⁴² See Andrews's detailed account of Peabody's influence on the slave narratives' reception. See Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story*, Chapter 4.

narratives were filled with the universal drama of human life, he also recognizes that they are particularized texts that were crafted with an audience in mind. Peabody suggests that these narratives had the potential to move readers into the service of abolition.

Yet, while sympathetic to slave biographies and to Douglass, Peabody took issue with Douglass's use of feeling—what he called “the mode of address in which he sometimes indulges himself” (24). Peabody believed that the style of speech Douglass had adopted mistook “violence and extravagance of expression and denunciation for eloquence,” and he argued that with such a style Douglass was “likely to diminish, not only his usefulness, but his real influence” (24). He encouraged Douglass to take heed instead from the style of a merchant. Peabody at once scolded and reasoned:

When men are profoundly in earnest, they are not apt to be extravagant. The more earnest, the more rigidly true. A merchant, in discussing the politics of the day, about which he knows or cares little, freely indulges in loose, extravagant, and violent declarations. But follow him to his counting-room; let him be making inquiries or giving directions about some enterprise which he really has deeply at heart, and the extravagance is gone. Nothing will answer here but truth, and the exact truth. His earnestness makes him calm. It is seen in the moderated accuracy, as well as in the decision and strength, of his statements. Extravagance and passion and rhetorical flourishes might do when nothing which he greatly valued was at stake; but here is something too serious for trifling. (25)

Drawing Douglass's work in comparison with the imperatives of a merchant, Peabody admonished that Douglass's aim should have been a “moderated accuracy.” For Peabody,

Douglass was writing into a literary marketplace, and therefore he had to mind his style, lest he alienate consumers that might otherwise be sympathetic to his “enterprise” and want a share of it. In other words, Peabody would have Douglass speak “truth,” but only inasmuch as it was a truth befitting his success in a marketplace that Douglass was seeking to enter.

It is important to distinguish that in Peabody’s statement it was not the act of Douglass expressing his feeling that Peabody read as extravagant. Rather, more precisely, Peabody revealed that it was Douglass’s denunciation-producing interpretations of those feelings that drew his critique. When Peabody admonished that Douglass see the merchant as his model par excellence, he warned that while the merchant may talk politics, that the merchant also knows when this same talk should cease in favor of one’s enterprise. For Peabody, Douglass, could, with his newfound emancipation, recklessly involve himself in the democratic impulses of the nation—impulses that Peabody derided as indulgent and frivolous--or he could, instead, appeal to consumers. Peabody admonished Douglass to find his way in the marketplace, for him the real seat of power for use by those whose enterprise was “too serious for trifling.” As Peabody contended, yes, Douglass could talk politics, but he had to know when the dictates of the consumer were greater and provided him with more purchase than those of democracy. Peabody did not take issue with Douglass’s expression of his feelings, but with what he felt was the artless manner in which Douglass expressed these feelings. Peabody’s primary concern was that Douglass risked making his consumer uncomfortable or, worse, altogether alienating that consumer. In other words, what Peabody specifically rebuffed in

Douglass's work was Douglass's use of recitation—Douglass's attempt to bring forth fact over and again for public use.

Despite their differing valuations of Douglass's work, then, both Garrison and Peabody had at their core assessments of Douglass—respectively laudatory and admonishing—one lesson: what was salable in the eyes of the reader (the consumer) was immediate, intimate access to a black inner life kept free of any repudiating recitation. Whether extolled by Garrison as a thrilling “disclosure” of feeling or desired by Peabody as “only the truth” what counted for these men was that they be able to comfortably and autonomously consume his story, that they be able to own it as they saw fit. Both Garrison's and Peabody's opinions of Douglass's narrative style, as well as the constructed representations of Lincoln and Davis explored above, accentuate how the literary movements that Hopkins was inheriting correlated immediacy directly to the country's growing impulse to consume. A desire to possess was overtaking a desire to be in interrelation with.

Douglass, Hopkins, and the Commodified Body

More than forty years after Garrison and Peabody debated over Douglass's style, Hopkins rendered her own assessment of Douglass's work, and her review evinces not only adoration for him, but also that she may have been studying Douglass to contemplate how to exploit a literary moment whose prizing of personal accounts veiled wanton consumption. Writing for the December 1900 issue of *The Colored American Magazine's* “Great Men of the Negro Race” series—a series that she had instituted only

one issue earlier with her biographical sketch of Toussaint L'Ouverture—Hopkins crafted an appreciation of Douglass in which she attended closely to Douglass's powers of persuasion.¹⁴³ She devoted a large portion of the review not to Douglass's biography, but to noting how others—herself as a child included—responded to Douglass's person favorably. Hopkins marveled at how Douglass was able to reach both black and white audiences at once. Her review outlines that in her own work she sought to mimic Douglass while redressing how, to invoke Hortense Spillers's language concerning captive bodies, audiences used him to make black “vestibular to culture.”¹⁴⁴

Indeed, one of the most striking moments in Hopkins's review of Douglass occurs when Hopkins places a white audience's reaction to listening to a Douglass lecture alongside her own valuation of a Douglass talk that she herself had experienced in her childhood. The adjacent layout of the accounts arranges a comparison wherein the white audience saw Douglass's “body” and Hopkins saw, if we follow Spillers, his “flesh.” Better still, again following Spillers, we might further identify what Hopkins saw as Douglass's “active will, motive desire.”¹⁴⁵ Hortense Spillers has imposed the distinction of “flesh” and “body” as “the central one between captivated and liberated subject

¹⁴³ Pauline Hopkins, “Hon. Frederick Douglass” in *The Colored American*. For descriptions of this series and the men it featured see Wallinger, “Booker T. Washington and Famous Men” in *Literary Biography of Pauline E. Hopkins* and Alisha Knight, *Pauline Hopkins and the American Dream*.

¹⁴⁴ Hortense Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papas Maybe.”

¹⁴⁵ Spillers makes this substitution in “Mama's Baby, Papas Maybe.” The captive body creates a body and the flesh, which Spillers suggests is the inability to finally extinguish the human made captive. See Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papas Maybe” in *Black, White, and in Color*.

positions” adding, “before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography.” In this sense, the flesh may operate as thrownness itself, a state of existence with others before social procedure is ascribed. At its core, the force of Hopkins’s redress and the impetus for her fictional attempt at “immediacy” lies in pronouncing flesh to reveal the apparatus of possession and consumption that the body hides.

Hopkins emphasized Douglass’s ability to reach across racial lines specifically to white audiences when she reprinted a lengthy anecdote from Parker Pillsbury’s 1884 “Anti-Slavery Apostles.”¹⁴⁶ Showing the account’s high degree of significance to her, she lent two of the twelve pages of her Douglass appreciation to uninterrupted quotation of Pillsbury’s recounting of how he and an assemblage of five-hundred other abolitionists had reacted to experiencing a Douglass lecture firsthand.¹⁴⁷ In the excerpt, Pillsbury witnessed Garrison take a podium before the congregation of abolitionists just after Douglass had spoken. Noting Douglass’s ability to occupy an audience, Pillsbury marveled that Douglass had left the crowd “wrought up almost to enchantment [...] as he turned over the terrible Apocalypse of his experiences in slavery” (124).¹⁴⁸ The account further accentuated the degree of transport Douglass’s words enacted on the congregation

¹⁴⁶ For comparison, see Parker Pillsbury, *Acts of the Anti-Slavery Apostles*.

¹⁴⁷ Hopkins redacted some of Pillsbury’s account without notice. There are a few descriptors and sentences that do not appear in her reprinting that appeared in the original 1893 “Anti-Slavery Apostles.”

¹⁴⁸ Pauline Hopkins, “Hon. Frederick Douglass.”

when it described that after Douglass had spoken “none seemed to know nor care for the hour” (124). Such a temporal disjuncture suggests the degree to which Douglass and his experience had swept up the crowd.

The reprint also reveals a fine distinction: it was not just Douglass’s story that mattered in the transfixing experience his audience was able to have but also his bodily presence. Pillsbury reports that a “singularly calm and serene” Garrison immediately followed Douglass’s lecture by asking the crowd to appraise Douglass: “Have we been listening to a thing, a piece of property, or a man?” (124). Garrison’s query turns attention not simply to Douglass’s lecture, but also to Douglass’s bodily presence. Garrison was asking those assembled for a determination of Douglass’s ontological standing. While Garrison’s question may have been posed as a rhetorical device meant to incite the audience to affirm Douglass’s humanness, the very posing of it to begin with reveals the anxiety of a historical moment in which Douglass could have been figured as otherwise. Garrison’s question was about the body. He was asking the crowd present to recognize the black figure standing before them and to affirm “its” ontology. For them, Douglass’s black body was already marked insofar as it was a marker of black sociality. It had survived “the terrible Apocalypse” and now it and its full account were before them. In this manner, the presence of Douglass’s body was just as important a part of his performance as his words, if indistinguishable from it.

Pillsbury himself emphasizes the significance of Douglass’s bodily presence by making it into a thing altogether his own. While Pillsbury reported that “fully five hundred voices of men and women” shouted back, “A man! A man!” no sooner was he

providing a complex and, perhaps, unwittingly conflicting assessment of Douglass with which Hopkins closed her reprinting of his account. Pillsbury wrote of Douglass (and Hopkins reprinted):

Before us stood one trophy, self-delivered, self-redeemed from our chattel slavery system, then seething with all the terrors of the second death. And why should we have not rejoiced then and there? For that proved none other than baptismal, the consecrating service of Frederick Douglass into the life work and ministry which he has since wonderfully fulfilled. (124).¹⁴⁹

Despite the crowd's affirmation of Douglass's humanness, Pillsbury's appraisal transmogrified Douglass into a commodity he could possess—a trophy. Pillsbury, like Garrison before him, prized the personal subjectivism that Douglass had expressed. For Pillsbury, Douglass gave tangible and visible form to the rewards of the abolitionist movement. He saw Douglass fulfilling a sacred duty to offer up his body and his story and to allow people to consume them. Douglass's body and the story that accompanied it made available—from a distance and in safety—the terrors of the un-“delivered” and the un-“redeemed.” The body and the story not only provided absorbing entertainment for the audience, but they also became a tool that the crowd could use to distinguish itself from that in which they found themselves in the presence of.

Hopkins's reprinting of the account emphasized not only that Douglass had been able to move white listeners but also the method by which he, according to those very listeners, was able to do so. Douglass had offered up his body for consumption. The

¹⁴⁹ Hopkins, “Hon. Frederick Douglass.”

blackness of his body and its account had performed a “consecrating” service. Hopkins’s choice to include the lengthy reprint of the anecdote exhibits the degree to which she felt it was important to present documented reaction to Douglass’s person.

For Hopkins, Douglass’s offering of his body was an important element of his work that missed the attention of his critics and fans alike. Subtly casting doubt on arguments which would deem that Douglass’s written work was far more effective than his speaking tours, she put forward: “It is argued that Frederick Douglass’s ability as an editor and publisher did more than all his platform eloquence to compass the freedom of his people; that, of course, is the question” (125).¹⁵⁰ Hopkins did not dismiss outright those who prized Douglass’s publications over the lectures he delivered in person. Rather, she suspended the claim for a thought exercise, suggesting that it held at least some merit that deserved consideration.

Hopkins then launched into a comparison of the effectiveness of Douglass’s publications with his public lectures that took account of the limited mediums available to black authors, and she argued that Douglass’s publications could not be adequately assessed without also attending to his speaking tours. First, Hopkins conceded that Douglass filled a peculiar station in black letters that allowed him to operate with less limitation than his black peers. She mused that while there were a number of journals that “had done something towards raising the black man’s standard,” that “literary work of colored men was received with great allowance by whites and they were considered out

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

of their sphere when they meddled with journalism” (125).¹⁵¹ Hopkins’s appraisal of the genres in which black writers were expected to work recalls the attitudes of Ephraim Peabody explored above, wherein black writers seemed forced to decide between fabulating in order to be successful with white readers on the one hand and producing overtly political work that would make them irrelevant with those readers on the other. In short, per Hopkins’s view, then, white audiences wanted black writers to entertain them, not to provide them with reports that specified events and influence.

Hopkins’s opinion of the marketplace for black letters accounts for her assiduous attention to Douglass’s reception: Douglass had fared out of the ordinary with white readers, and Hopkins not only wanted to give reason to such an aberration but also to mimic it. She viewed Douglass as a figure whom after a long career and “well-earned fame” had been excepted into a field wherein his black peers were seen to “meddle” and to carry on an unwanted and, consequently, disregarded existence in the eyes of a number of white readers.

While Hopkins acknowledged the potential for her contemporaries to argue that Douglass had done more for abolition with his published work than he had accomplished with his public lectures and narratives, she ventured that Douglass’s success was related to the specter of his bodily presence always haunting his writings. Hopkins intimated that the lectures that Douglass had performed in bodily presence had sanctioned the journalistic publications that followed.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Indeed, Hopkins continued her reflection on Douglass's effectiveness by crediting the transporting effect he had wrought even on her to the presence of his physical figure and form. Recalling a childhood memory in which she witnessed Douglass lecture, Hopkins dramatized Douglass's appearance:

In appearance Mr. Douglass was tall and well-made with a grandly developed head stamped with the sign-manual of intellectual superiority—a head that delighted phrenologists. His voice was full, round, rich, clear, and his enunciation perfect. I remember well the sensations which filled my own breast the first time it was my privilege to listen to the “grand old man.” Child as I was, I felt that I could listen to the mellow richness of those sonorous accents forever. His bearing full of simplicity, was the dignified bearing of a wealthy cosmopolitan, sure of himself and of the world's homage, master of himself, unpretentious yet brilliant as a star. (125)¹⁵²

Hopkins made clear that seeing Douglass and hearing Douglass was for her a striking sensory experience. Although writing more than twenty years after she had witnessed Douglass's lecture, she recall in especially vivid form “sensations which filled [her] own breast.”

As Hopkins made the case for the importance of Douglass's body in his work, the placement of her account next to Pillsbury's casts the distinction between the two accounts in high relief: whereas Pillsbury's devoted his attention to Douglass's body and its existence within a social order, her approach took first to his flesh as a part of his

¹⁵² Ibid.

humanity and life force. From his head to his mouth, Hopkins took inventory of Douglass's fleshly parts. She made his physicality matter in both senses of the word—molecular and signifying. Hopkins makes his skull occupy space and gives it flesh and meaning; she makes his mouth produce sonorous tones that emit lively vibrations; and she interprets the curvature of his spine in order to wring seriousness and nobility out of it. Hopkins based her assessments not solely upon imagining blackness but upon interpreting Douglass's fleshly presence. Hopkins emphasized that Douglass emanated life. In so doing, she recognized the person of Frederick Douglass, and, ultimately, his humanity within the social order.

Alongside the reprinting of Pillsbury's account that she had just provided, Hopkins's reaction to Douglass accentuates that she reacted to Douglass differently than had her abolitionist counterparts. Whereas Pillsbury and his crowd were transfixed by the apocalypse of Douglass's body, Hopkins was interested in the life force of his flesh, its active will and its motive desire. It may be no coincidence that in his original text Pillsbury sub-headed the Douglass account that Hopkins reprinted, "Frederick Douglass Discovered"¹⁵³ In so doing, Pillsbury made implicit a belief that "something" or someone had been made newly visible. Pillsbury's account commemorates a moment in which the audience (re)installed Frederick Douglass as a black figure. In as much as Douglass offered up his body, Douglass offered it as a visual palimpsest of all the meanings that have been associated with black bodies. It is this very installation that made Garrison's first question to the audience concerning Douglass's "real" ontology

¹⁵³ Pillsbury, *Acts of the Anti-Slavery Apostles*. This phrase appears in chapter XII's title.

possible and intelligible to them. In order to cohere, Garrison's question had to be counterpointed with all the other meanings that the audience had installed previously for black bodies. While Douglass's person may have represented a black mobile sociality, in this vestibule he may have been a body possessed and capitalized upon by audiences who wished to continue consuming independently.

This understanding of Douglass's dimensionality squares well with Hortense Spillers warning about the body. For Spillers, the body works not only with historical specificity but is also always installed within a particularized social order.

I would contend that the body is neither *given* as an uncomplicated empirical rupture on the landscape of the human, nor do we ever actually "see" it. In a very real sense, the "body," insofar as it is an analytical construct, does not exist in person at all. When we invoke it, then, we are often confusing and conflating our own momentousness as address to the world, in its layered build-up of mortal complexities, with an idea on paper, only made vivid because we invest it with living dimensionality, mimicked, in turn, across the play of significations.

("Peter's Pan" 21, emphasis in original)¹⁵⁴

Douglass mattered inasmuch as the audience incorporated him into their ongoing significations of blackness. Hopkins's attention to the flesh was an attempt to return to the zero degree of a liberated subjectivity in which signification was not used as a technology of violence. In this space, Douglass and blackness could matter differently.

¹⁵⁴ Hortense Spillers, "Peter's Pan" in *Black, White, and in Color*.

I should be clear, it is not that Hopkins eschewed warring significations about black bodies, nor that these disappeared in her assessment of Douglass. Hopkins consigned to Douglass all matter of meaning that emerged from her understanding of his socially constructed black body. She may be understood to have emphasized the grand structure of Douglass's skull to refute phrenologists which used black persons' physicality to argue for their intellectual deficiency; she accentuated Douglass's erect carriage with presumption that it had been born of his cosmopolitan ventures for those who viewed black persons as provincial; and she ceded mellifluous accents and sonorous tones to Douglass's utterances for those that perceived black bodies as inarticulate. Her assessment was subjective. Nonetheless, what distinguishes Hopkins's approach from Pillsbury's method is that the flesh—a meaty materiality and undifferentiated sensuousness—animates her assessment. In other words, Hopkins approach responds to social claims that the body facilitates while it reinforces (reinstalls) a recognition of Douglass's particularized flesh and life force—his humanity. That Hopkins casts flesh and the body in conversation allows her a new type of power.

Such a teasing out of Douglass's vexed reception does not negate Hopkins's appreciation for his method. Hopkins outlined that what she found most powerful about Douglass's work is that he exploited his person in order to have his audience continue to sense in spite of his persistent recitations. Arguing that “[w]hite men and black men had spoken on slavery but never like Frederick Douglass,” Hopkins listed the range of sensations she believed Douglass had drawn from his audience: “He made his audiences weep, laugh, swear. He opened the hearts of thousands to mercy and pity for the slave by

his eloquence and pathos. Many kept away from his lectures lest they be converted against their will. He knew the gamut of the human heart and swept the strings with a master hand" ("Frederick Douglass" 124). Hopkins, like Garrison had, praised Douglass for the novelty of his style. Still, she also specifically noted how Douglass, because of his use of the very immediacy that threatened to incorporate him into concurrent narratives of black dispossession, could also be a threatening figure, able to exploit sense to manipulate audiences into new procedures that disavowed the technologies of violence that had emerged in chattel slavery.

Hopkins's dogged insistence on flesh that could pose a threat to the bodies that audiences protected and, indeed, out of which they made trophies, encapsulates the difficulty of her enterprise: she had to interest audiences who wished for a claim on the body while exhibiting that those claims on the body were derivative of the flesh she sought to make visible. Douglass's favorable reception among audiences across race had shown her that she could obtain the attention of a general public by offering the body. Her task was to remind these audiences that the body was flesh that they had read into a social order, that the body, as Spillers would have it, was a vestige of a preexisting semiosis. To return to my earlier terms, her task was to harness the immediate to coax readers into seeing the recitation. Recitation had to be transmitted through the sense. The immediate was Hopkins's way in.

It is no wonder that toward the end of the appreciation Hopkins made a case for using Douglass's tactics to respond to the violence of her time. Seeing a direct link in the instruments of violence in use, Hopkins admonished readers who believed that

emancipation, though hard fought, had been won. Naming lynch law and the convict lease system, she encouraged others not to give recitations that pointed out abuses: “some of us may even wish to never recall the horrors of our past. But is there not cause for anxiety? Are things, in the main, very much different as this hour? To-day we have again slave-power, for the old spirit is not dead; the serpent was scorched, not killed” (“Frederick Douglass” 128).

Encounters with *Contending Forces*'s Readers

Hopkins tutored herself with Douglass's example of how to use the body for uplift work, and she incorporated these techniques in her own work by first constructing a black textual body. In the preface to her first published novel *Contending Forces* (1900), Hopkins gave reason for her writing: “In giving this little romance expression in print, I am not actuated by a desire for notoriety or for profit, but to do all I can in an humble way to raise the stigma of degradation from my race” (13).¹⁵⁵ Hopkins saw herself as a race woman whose desire was not for remuneration but for the uplift of her race.

Yet, her identification to blackness was not just textual, it was visual. Leaving little doubt to what her race was, Hopkins had tendered a portrait of herself as frontispiece and signed it, “Yours for humanity, Pauline Hopkins.” This image of Hopkins was the first printed page readers would have encountered after the cover of her book. In the image a black woman stares back at the reader forging an encounter between at least two representations specifically under review here—that of author and reader and

¹⁵⁵ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*.

that of raced individual and raced individual. Hopkins and her reader were coming face-to-face, as it were.



yours for humanity,
Pauline E. Hopkins.

Figure 3: Pauline Hopkins *Contending Forces* Portrait Frontispiece
A portrait of Hopkins in which she stares back at the reader appeared before the title page of her first novel, *Contending Forces*.

What remains unclear however, is what subjectivity Hopkins was offering up for their encounter. Though usually the closing for a letter, the position of Hopkins's signature, "Yours for humanity," draws it into relation with the image it sits below, and Hopkins's signature becomes a caption that helps the reader locate in the image both a relationship of possession—"Yours"— and a relationship of offering—"for humanity." The caption guides how readers should consume the image and, by extension, this representation of Hopkins.

Yet Hopkins's signature, the very representation of personhood, presents slippage concerning whether Hopkins tenders black subjectivity or human subjectivity to structure a kinship-based encounter. The novel's dedication follows her image and signature and does little to clear the ambiguity: "To the friends of humanity everywhere I offer this humble tribute written by one of a proscribed race." It is unclear whether Hopkins meant the human race or the black race. Either way, Hopkins had prepared to meet with a subject who, to return to Nwankwo definition of cosmopolitanism, had used "the definition of oneself through the world beyond one's own origins."¹⁵⁶

The frontispiece must have been as striking for readers as its ambiguities dangerous. Scholar Hannah Wallinger opens her 2005 literary biography of Hopkins with a description of the portrait, labeling it "the portrait of a beautiful and dignified Pauline Hopkins." Wallinger argues that the portrait compared to the images of brutal enslavement which will follow it—in particular, one of a woman who lies on the ground bloody, face averted as the men who ostensibly whipped her stand over her—evince that Hopkins is "the African American author in her full right" (1).¹⁵⁷ Per Wallinger, Hopkins's frontispiece immediately makes clear her purpose:

Hopkins clarifies her viewpoint right from the beginning. Her position is one of identification. She is one of the writers whose pen is, to use Anna Julia Cooper's phrase, "dipped in the lifeblood of their own nation." The literal flowing of blood from the woman's wounds highlights the "distinctive American note" of this

¹⁵⁶ See, Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ See Wallinger, *Pauline E. Hopkins*.

thrilling story (2)¹⁵⁸

For Wallinger, Hopkins's portrait offers readers assurance that the story that follows will be thrilling because the one who tells it identifies with the the abjected that the story describes. Nevertheless, readers need not worry, given that Hopkins, despite her racial identification, is not the woman on the ground, but the elite Victorian far removed from the danger of the "thrilling story."

Hopkins's work presents an interesting challenge to the framework I have read alive in the work of Wells and Chesnut. I have argued that black writers like Wells and Chesnut saw that empathy was dangerous because it reenacted commodifying ideologies of U.S. slavery that made black people the means of production, and I have held that black writers denied their readers entrance into such imagined relations with black persons by evacuating their black representations of all except that which would be hard to commodify and fetishize, essentially, facts of some form—statistics, bodies vacated on inner life. Hopkins, however, moves against this trend. She submitted her representations of black persons for narrative exploitation. As opposed to resisting the move to make black persons the means of production, Hopkins embraced it and wrote directly into it. Indeed, she invited it. Such appropriation of "the master's tools" provided scenarios for other black readers to consume black characters just as white readers had done. Both white people and black people could do the consuming. Thus, Hopkins did not attempted to change fiction's assumptions, she had merely exploited them. She offered black bodies her reader could use.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Readers' use of black bodies in Hopkins's work—readers' very immediacy with them, albeit defamiliarized from a U.S. context—is evident even in contemporary scholarly treatments. Scholarship on Hopkins has increasingly noted Hopkins's tendency to have readers look abroad to black others to better understand and critique U.S. race relations and to resolve U.S. traumas. In a number of these scholars' figurations of Hopkins's work, a United States fragmented by racism and disenfranchisement encounters for healing purposes a "pan-African" expression of blackness made coherent only when undergirded by pain, hurt, and yet, somehow, hope. For instance, seeing an "insurgent cosmopolitanism" in Hopkins's work, Colleen O'Brien asserts that "Hopkins's dreams of unifying the 'dark races' often coalesce in histories of rebellion—reactions to moments of great suffering—as well as premonitions of future social upheaval, of a providential labor uprising" (2006, 249).¹⁵⁹ More recently, in an analysis of Hopkins's last novel *Of One Blood: or the Hidden Self*, Gordon Fraser moves to resist easy delineations of coherence when he argues that Hopkins's novel "offers instead an overwhelming sense of contingency, provisionality, and unknowability" (2013, 364).¹⁶⁰ And yet, what remains steady in Fraser's analysis is the use of black people for the possibility of transnational healing: "Hopkins's novel contacts the hidden selves of diasporic blacks—their African selves—and replaces a history of colonization, kidnapping, murder, and rape with a history of past greatness, a long period of sexually

¹⁵⁹ See O'Brien, "Blacks in All Quarters of the Globe."

¹⁶⁰ See Fraser, "Transnational Healing in Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self*."

and territorially protected hiding, and the promise of a renaissance” (365). In these scholars’ understanding, then, black peoples’ “hidden selves” can be disposed readily to wield magical healing powers and to unleash revolutionary potential. The interpretations make black people a monolith of fantastic subjects able to surmount, albeit with contingencies, the deepest of hegemonies. In these cases, “black” becomes ultra-“black”, a referent only understood and made intelligible in reference to a supercharged, supernatural, out-of-this-world self. That is, blackness can only be recognized when it has been labeled abject and its conception contained and monumentalized by the appearance of sameness onto itself.

Within the novel, readers would see how encounters like the one Hopkins had just offered with her frontispiece were approached with trepidation. Fear for encounters that would unmask a “hidden self” and put one in a relation of sameness with an other is a theme that appears throughout Hopkins’s *Contending Forces*. Hopkins demonstrates how individuals are only interested in the encounter when it leaves them in a position of power and invulnerable. Hopkins uses progenitor character Mr. Montfort to exhibit how sameness is made a contagion about which characters are in constant vigil, but that they conveniently appropriate to justify their relations with others. In business, Montfort, a slave trader, was not “cruel” nor “avaricious” but in the course of commercial life had “lost sight of the individual right or wrong of the matter” or better still, via what the narrator delivers as a corrective Montfort “perverted right to be what was conducive to his own interests,” justifying his ownership of slaves by arguing it a “common practice of those all about him” (22). Montfort rationalizes his purchase in slavery by suggesting an

inability to fend from the dictates of social context. Nonetheless, the narration resists abetting his view, naming Montfort's complicity a perversion of "right." Montfort believes that he is not marked by the same depravity of other slave masters, given that the care he gave his slaves exceeded that of other masters (23). He wishes to maintain power while disavowing his possession of any.

Hopkins renders Montfort a character negotiating the contradictions of homeplace. In a move that complicates Montfort's encounters with others, the narrative questions Montfort's bodily "purity," revealing that as a result of Bermuda's deep slave past for him (and his wife) "there might even have been a strain of African blood polluting the fair stream of Montfort's vitality" (23),¹⁶¹ Montfort's understanding of a racialized self becomes critical for him as he is informed that the British will adopt new laws creating a system in which slaves would be freed within a short period of time. The threat of undifferentiation emerges, and Montfort is forced to reflect on his relation to others. His own ambiguous provenance makes it difficult for him to negotiate or evaluate power in relation to others in potential encounters. Fear is generated as he loses a hierarchical economy under which his power is generated. He must decide whether to risk sameness: "Uneasiness now took the place of his former security; thought would obtrude itself upon him, and in the quiet hours of the night this man fought out the battle which conscience waged within him" (23).¹⁶² Reading Hopkins's theorizing here, we

¹⁶¹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

might see Montfort terrified of an encounter free of social categories. What underlies this reading, is that perceived same cannot be met with pleasure.

While it makes sense that scholars have focused on Hopkins's interest in global intra-black relations, given that Hopkins herself expressed how prominently such thought figured in her writing for *The Colored American* magazine, a hyperawareness, if not fear, of immediacy and its attending possibilities animate Hopkins's conceptions of notion of the encounter. In a 16 April 1905 letter to friend and political activist William Trotter, Hopkins recounted how the financial creditors of *The Colored American*, whom she believed were secret allies to Booker T. Washington and under his silent direction, had inoculated the magazine's political character as a whole. More specifically, she charged, these stakeholders had stifled the impetus towards black cosmopolitanism present in her contributions to *The Colored American*. Relating the effects of a creditor's furtive editorial influence, Hopkins wrote: "Little by little he opened his views to me and I found he was curtailing my work from the broad field of international union and uplift for the blacks in all quarters of the globe, to the narrow confines of the question affecting solely the Afro-American" (emphasis in original).¹⁶³ Hopkins's lament to Trotter bemoans that the forces financially backing the magazine were censoring her work. Her lament likewise remains a clear assertion of the work she had set out to do with her prolific contributions to the magazine. Hopkins's emphasis on both "international" and "uplift" documents her resistance to considerations of black uplift solely from a U.S. standpoint.

¹⁶³ Pauline Hopkins. Letter to William Trotter. 16 April 1905. Pauline E. Hopkins Papers. Special Collections, Fisk University Library.

Rather, she suggests a drive in her work purposefully approached deliberations of black relations and uplift from a perspective of black cosmopolitanism.

Hopkins eschews black sameness for an international difference that she understands as both more comprehensive and generative. For Hopkins, positioning herself in relation to other black persons does not necessarily place her in relationships of absorbing sameness. By Hopkins's early twentieth-century historical moment, forms of black cosmopolitanism had been taking shape in the Hemisphere for some time. As Ifeoma Nwankwo theorizes, the success of Haitian uprisings that began in 1791 and that amounted finally in to the creation of the first black republic in 1804 set in motion new modes of conceptualizing interrelatedness between people of African descent.

Cosmopolitanism—which Nwankwo characterizes as “the definition of oneself through the world beyond one’s own origins”—became a tool that African descended peoples evaluated for use in their plight to be recognized as both as human and as equal to other races (9).¹⁶⁴ For Nwankwo, “Whites’ fear of the revolution and its presumably contagious nature forced people of African descent throughout the Americas, particularly those in the public eye, to name a relationship to the Haitian Revolution, in particular, and to a transnational idea of Black community, in general” (7). For a person to define oneself in relation to the world outside oneself required contending with and wielding referents of “humanity, nation, and race.” For Nwankwo, in a moment when most individuals defined themselves “through humanity, nation, and race,” black people were largely limited to their blackness. Nwankwo holds that precisely these negations of human and

¹⁶⁴ Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism*.

cosmopolitan subjectivity compelled black public figures writing in the wake of the Revolution to make public identification or, importantly, disidentification with blackness, cosmopolitanism, humanness, or any. Such (dis)identifications were no doubt, many times, strategic and informed by deliberate response to white fear of black revolutionary potential. It is precisely this prerogative for subjects seen as black to disidentify that Hopkins contends with in her writing and that receives little attention in current scholarship on her work. Importantly Nwankwo distinguishes this forging of relations as a “cosmopolitanism from below,” it is distinct precisely because it uses immediacy not to undermine civic life but the power structure that seek to suppress it (“the cosmopolitanism from above”)(14, 34, 215 n 23).¹⁶⁵

Thinking of Hopkins as a scholar of the black cosmopolitanism inflected encounter casts in high relief the attending methods of her writing, particularly of her fiction. Hopkins implicated both black and white readers by surreptitiously using internationalism. By placing her novels in international contexts in their crucial beginning moments, Hopkins was able to relate stories that did not immediately implicate her readers. As the novels progressed her readers came to see how international histories were entwined with their U.S. present—their homeplace, a term I shall return to in a moment. In this manner, Hopkins was able to instruct her readers through an international uncanny. Thus, Hopkins’s work enacts a theory of the uncanny before documented

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

theorizations by Frederick Nietzsche, Ernst Jentsch, and Sigmund Freud.¹⁶⁶ Her work also reverses the move by previous black thinkers—David Walker, Samuel Delany, Frederick Douglass¹⁶⁷—to look inward and then outward for pedagogical purposes. In her work, Hopkins troubles facile delineations of national/international, internal/external, or “bounds of habitation,” demonstrating that these systems are not merely a free market economy from private enterprise but an interconnected system that implicate us all. Hopkins shows us bodies are, in the words of Vera Kutzinski, “equivocal.”¹⁶⁸

Hopkins’s cosmopolitanism is a tool that redefines the currency and cash of skin color. She shows that the very definitions of skin color used to monetize persons like property and to whittle them to abstractions reveals the larger hegemonic power of the constructed race working in the background. In this manner, her work here is not a departure from the interrogations of empathy that have structured the preceding chapters of this manuscript. Indeed, Hopkins explores the continuously waged stakes of coming into relation with an other.

Nwankwo’s conception of black cosmopolitanism provides a heuristic through which to understand both the work Hopkins was attempting with her writing and to think through the reliance the critics above exhibit on “magical negro” conceptions of blackness. For me, Nwankwo’s definition of cosmopolitanism from above not only has

¹⁶⁶Each of these scholars has theorized the uncanny. See Nietzsche, “Genealogy of Morals” (1897) ; Jentsch, “On the psychology of the uncanny” (1906) ; and Freud, *Das Unheimliche* (1919).

¹⁶⁷See David Walker, “Appeal”; Martin Delany, *Blake*; and Frederick Douglass, *Toussaint*.

¹⁶⁸ Kutzinski, “Borders and Bodies.”

striking similarities to empathy, it is empathy by another name, with particular emphasis on ones's "homeplace" as the seat of exploitation. Understanding Hopkins through empathy and its relation to cosmopolitanism highlights the distance—both literal and representational—between subjects in the moment of encounter.

Conclusion: Hiding Recitation in *Of One Blood*

Beginning with its third installment Pauline Hopkins's serialized novel *Of One Blood* (Nov 1902 – Dec 1903) appeared in *The Colored American Magazine* with two elements with which it would continue to appear until the end of the series: Hopkins's copyright and a synopsis of the novel's previous installments in the magazine. These formal elements must seem commonplace enough as to warrant no further discussion—even the most popular reprints of the novel currently in circulation omit the copyrights and synopses in their editions.¹⁶⁹ The logic seems clear-cut: the copyright announced Hopkins's legal right to the novel and the synopses reminded readers of what had occurred since the installment of the month previous. Yet, these inclusions abet the political work Hopkins's was after in her fiction. Both the copyright and the synopses stand in tension with the novel's the work of imagination that the novel's installments was promoting. Both copyright and synopsis were recitations that surreptitiously reminded readers of the both the knowledge they were accumulating and those whom they were encountering.

¹⁶⁹ Editions from the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writer Series (Oxford University Press) and The Givens Collection (Washington Square Press) omit the copyrights and synopses entirely.

Pauline Hopkins's serialized novel *Of One Blood* (1902-1903) opens with the narrator's declaration that work, at least temporarily, has ceased. The narrator's opening gambit—"The recitations were over for the day"—functioned as an assurance to the reader beginning the novel that what followed was to provide respite from everyday routine (29). *Of One Blood* was fiction and its reader was encouraged to fantasize, or put another way, to not engage in staid labor. *Of One Blood* casts suspicion specifically on the work of recitation. Its reader was being guided away from the boredom or routine to the excitement of the spontaneous.

It is not surprising that the novel attempts to entangle recitation and uninteresting work. The term "recitation" itself denotes performative acts of listing aloud and regurgitating fact from memory for public benefit. Recitation is exhaustive labor precisely because of the very constant repetition it presumes. But it also presumes an audience.

In its opening paragraphs, *Of One Blood* describes the exhausted disposition of Reuel—its recitation-fatigued protagonist—as he contemplates the futility of rehearsing views from books: "morbid thoughts had haunted him all day: To what use all this persistent hard work for a place in the world—clothes, food, a roof? Is suicide wrong? he asked himself with tormenting persistency (30). Reuel deeply mistrusts the value of recitation. He sees futility in the work, and his dreary assessment of it upsets him to the point of nihilism. Yet, all the while, Reuel's downbeat thoughts have created a recitation of their own and have become the "haunting" that causes his very disposition and threatens, finally, to obliterate him. And this is the novel: Reuel casts in doubt the value

of recitation while at every turn the novel undermines his claim by evidencing recitation's "tormenting persistency."

Yet, considered in the context of Hopkins's other contributions to *The Colored American Magazine*, the monthly in which *Of One Blood* was serialized over the course of twelve issues, such a respite from work seemed like a departure. Many of Hopkins's contributions up to that point had been about race work and she had acquired the reputation of a historian. Hopkins's work up to this point had been with making repetition feel new, creating the lure of immediacy. This is the challenge of *Of One Blood*: to make new, that which it was repeating.

Devoted readers of *The Colored American* may have recognize that recitation was precisely what Hopkins had been doing with many of her outstanding contributions to *The Colored American* magazine. For instance, the magazine's previous issue completed Hopkins's series spotlighting Women, a series she had completed after spotlighting great men of the race as well. She had established herself as a historian. And in the very issue in which *Of One Blood* begins, Hopkins had contributed an editorial that appeared before the novel began. Recitation was precisely what Hopkins had been doing.

In this context the opening to *Of One Blood* appears as a tongue-in-cheek caesura of Hopkins's previous work. Yet to say that Hopkins abandoned recitation in her novel is premature. The novel is filled with it. Hopkins biographer Lois Brown argues that with her first novel, *Contending Forces*, Hopkins presented herself as "a scribe of the past, witness to the present, and mollified historian" (224).

By the end of Pauline Hopkins's serialized novel *Of One Blood* (1902-1903) character Dianthe Lusk will be dead and readers will realize that she is the same disembodied presence that has haunted the novel's characters from its very beginning. In this manner, Hopkins has not only collapsed time but she has collapsed space. The embodied presence of Lusk exists at once with her disembodied presence. In her work, Hopkins troubles facile delineations of national/international, internal/external, or "bounds of habitation," demonstrating that these systems are interconnected and implicate us all.

Lusk's murder, renders her a ghost in the text, a persistent irrepressible presence doomed to haunt the character that Hopkins introduces to her readers. Interestingly, Lusk even haunts herself. While Hopkins takes her reader from the dark and gloomy space of Boston to a mythical land hidden in the monuments of Ethiopia, Lusk remains ever present, occupying greater and greater terrain.

Hopkins work suggests that she discerned that she could use form and style to formally construct an intimacy that would captivate her Progressive Era audience. Harnessing serialization, amorphous temporalities, and international settings, she created an immediacy that ensnared readers with (the impression of) unprecedented access to the lives of her constructed subjects. Her efforts amounted to a type of novelty, a new and unfamiliar encounter of sorts between a reader and an other.

CHAPTER V

“I ANSWER SELDOM A WORD”: OF DU BOIS, CRUMMELL, AND THE SCIENCE OF WHAT IT FEELS TO BE BLACK

Literary scholars’ persistent emphasis on both the presence and meaning of metaphor and figurative language in W. E. B. Du Bois’s epic 1903 collection *The Souls of Black Folk* has established Du Bois as a major literary figure. In the brief preface to the Norton Critical Edition of *The Souls of Black Folk* Henry Louis Gates offers that it was this text “with its resonant recurring themes, tropes, and leitmotifs, that would find the metaphors for crucial aspects of the still unconscious feelings of nameless African Americans” (1999, ix)¹⁷⁰. Gates concludes that through Du Bois’s “curiously powerful text, the particularity of the Negro became a metaphor, a universal aspect of the human condition” (x).¹⁷¹ Gates, of course, echoes the earlier work of Robert Stepto who in his often-cited analysis of the text contends that Du Bois’s major achievement was “the transformation of data into metaphor” (1977, 53). Similarly, while turning to the more poetic himself, Gates holds that Du Bois may have seen “himself as a man of action, but as a man of action who luxuriated within a verdant and fecund tropical rainforest of words,” adding that *The Souls of Black Folk* was his “magical book” whose “powerfully resonating metaphors” came to define modernity itself (2007, xi, xii).¹⁷² With concision,

¹⁷⁰ See Gates, “The Black Letter on the Sign: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Canon.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Stepto, *From Behind the Veil*.

Gates imposes: “First and last W. E. B. Du Bois was a writer” (xii).¹⁷³ The meat of these and like-minded approaches to Du Bois’s work have put figurative language at the foreground of analysis. As the record of recent scholarship shows, such methods have no doubt provided valuable lenses through which to suss out complicated Du Bois concepts like “the veil” or “double consciousness—ideas to which I will return later in this chapter.”¹⁷⁴

Yet, perhaps unwittingly, they have also obscured that Du Bois saw his major role, especially in his career’s early years between 1896 and 1903, those in which he edited and compiled *The Souls of Black Folk*, not as a writer but as a scientist who was distrustful of the very metaphor and figurative language for which he is now lauded. As Du Bois ironically put it in a 1938 retrospective of his early career, “I was in my imagination a scientist” (“Pageant” 17).¹⁷⁵ To take Du Bois at his word and to think of him first as a scientist opens up an alternate approach to *The Souls of Black Folk* wherein before it became a monument to American letters, it was first the work of an outsider to literature—a scientist who wished only to report on what he regarded as facts of the natural world and who in the process poked at representation’s given assumptions.

¹⁷³ Gates, “The Black Letter on the Sign.”

¹⁷⁴ Take, for instance, Rebecka Fisher’s 2011 monograph which argues that it follows Du Bois when it grounds itself in the “analysis of the philosophical possibilities of metaphor and its relation to concepts of black being in the African American literary tradition” (1). See, Fisher *Habitations of the Veil*.

¹⁷⁵Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. A Pageant in seven decades, 1868-1938. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

With Du Bois's role as a scientist in the foreground, *The Souls of Black Folk* emerges as Du Bois's timely experiment about empathy: a systematic, scientific investigation of how black persons (when not available themselves) should be presented in writing for the purpose of scientific study and understanding. If black persons were to receive understanding in the natural world, his work suggests, they could not be presented merely as ideas nor could they be offered as goods. Rather, Du Bois's early work evinces his belief that to break through to readers, black persons needed to be presented in writing as sentient, fleshly humans. He sought to wrest black persons from the abstractions he worried they had become in written reports. Du Bois's work warned that the body risked becoming the disposable feature of representation—the ghost of the machine.

Du Bois's early career exhibits him attempting to regulate metaphor and other forms of imagination with the sentient world. Du Bois's experiment was to use sentience—that which is experienced through sensation upon the body—in order to remind readers that representation, however useful, was always at a remove from the physicality, the very life force of its subjects. In Du Bois methodology's sensation is the discernible, objective component of a natural world and as such both anchors scientific work and, as the potentially corrective referent before the written word, regulates imaginative work that seeks to represent it.

I contend that during the years in which he wrote, compiled, and revised the chapters of what would become *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois not only thought critically about how to effectively report scientific findings regarding black persons in

order to produce knowledge, but also of how to do so in writing without abstracting those persons away. I show that between 1896 and the appearance of *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 both Du Bois's work canvassing Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's black neighborhoods for his study *The Philadelphia Negro* and his association with Alexander Crummell in the form of the American Negro Academy not only pushed Du Bois to think about material presence but to centralize sentience as the tool with which to break through the potential abstraction of persons in written reports he feared.

As I will show, Du Bois's work going door-to-door collecting data about Philadelphia's black residents emphasized for him that sentience was not metaphorical or figurative. Rather, sentience—the capacity to feel and, by extension, to be vulnerable to one's environment—was material. Sentience could be observed, recorded, and subjected to scientific scrutiny. It was a tool that offered valuable data that Du Bois could harness in his efforts to study and report on black lives. The academic training and projects that Du Bois had completed before 1903 bare that he was seeking intently to do just so: to insert sentience into the arsenal of measures used for scrutinizing and representing black life—to make it an empiric tool. As Du Bois wrote in 1938 about this early work, “Social scientists at the time were thinking in terms of theory and of vast and tenuous laws; while I had for study a concrete set of living beings set off by themselves and capable of almost laboratory experiment” (“Pageant” 15).¹⁷⁶

Du Bois's increasing interest in sentience begins with *The Philadelphia Negro* but it must be read in concert with Du Bois's work of the same years with the American

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Negro Academy, given that it is here that Du Bois tested the philosophical underpinnings for his experiment with sentience. I show that Du Bois developed a methodology for his growing interest in reporting on “living beings set off by themselves and capable” when he used the work of the two men he considered his intellectual forbearers—Alexander Crummell and Frederick Douglass—in order to triangulate his own thought.

Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* is the culmination of his negotiating the sentient body into the schematic partitions of Douglass and Crummell’s thought. Crummell and Douglass were very much at odds concerning how they thought black persons should present themselves in the modern world, and contrary to critics who argue that Du Bois was fully aligned with Crummell in his thought, his early work actually shows him pushing the ideas of both men.¹⁷⁷ Namely, whereas Crummell’s Cartesian leanings led him to believe in a concept of the soul’s preexistence that freed the mind from any necessity to be yoked to the body, Douglass’s empirics insisted that sensation (and so the body) be a condition of existence and not a consequence of it. Both greatly influenced his approach to reporting on black persons in his modernizing world. While Du Bois appreciated that Crummell’s theorizations would spare black persons vulnerability to the chaotic and potentially humiliating sentient world, he worried that Crummell had given black persons a privilege they did not have in real life. Du Bois held that in the material world the sentient body was also a palimpsest, ground zero for whatever processes of the mind individuals brought to persons—processes I identify here plainly as “imagination.”

¹⁷⁷ A clear example of scholars who see this alignment is Henry Louis Gates’s and Cornel West’s coauthored work, *The Future of the Race*.

For Du Bois, Crummell's strategy for black persons to harness imagination could not alone succor them in the racialized encounters they faced daily in the material world. Rather, black persons were also beholden to their sentient bodies; these, too, needed bargaining into any understanding of black persons in the natural world. By reconciling the at-odds thought of Crummell and Douglass, Du Bois found his own methodology.

Thinking of *The Philadelphia Negro* and Du Bois's thoughts on Douglass and Crummell in relation to the subsequent appearance of *The Souls of Black Folk*, these written works emerge as pinpoint nodes of an early career wherein Du Bois increasingly wielded sentience as part of a scientific approach to imagination that regulates it. More and more during this time Du Bois laid emphasis on sentience as a discernible, indispensable component of black life. When *The Souls of Black Folk* appeared in 1903, it offered Du Bois's full-blown, apogean expression of a representation- regulating methodology in which sentience was a scientific tool used to contend with what he understood as potentially dangerous reliance on imagination to understand black persons.

To be sure, Du Bois's approach was also gendered male in ways that provide striking counterpoint to the strategies that in the previous chapter I argued Pauline Hopkins adopted during the same time.¹⁷⁸ With his insistence on transposing the sentient body to paper, Du Bois was advocating for the body in writing at a moment when his female counterparts were avoiding its use. As Carla Peterson has shown through careful

¹⁷⁸ Several scholars have explored Du Bois's vexed approach to gender. See, Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Black Feminists and Du Bois." See also, Hazel Carby, *Race Men*; Beverly Guy Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*; and Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*.

analysis of Sojourner Truth's and Watkins Harper's narratives, in Du Bois's late-nineteenth century United States, black women had turned to writing to negotiate their body's public exposure and vulnerability.¹⁷⁹ Grounding her analysis in a history of the commodified black female body, Peterson argues that "from their dislocated and liminal positions these black women ultimately turned to literary representation of self-marginalization—to the writing of self, spirituality, and travel, the reprinting of public lectures, and the creation of fictional worlds—in an attempt to veil the body while continuing their racial uplift activities in the public sphere" (Doers 22). Thus, to consider Du Bois's scientific approach is also to consider how his gender privilege made available a strategy for narrative empowerment that was denied women writers of his historical moment; it is also to consider how written work serviced differing forms of black empowerment and how its formations reveal were tactical responses to writers's understanding of their own place in the world.

To think of Du Bois in as a male scientist is to think of the priorities that governed his early career between 1896 and 1903. Already by 1905, two years after *The Souls of Black Folk* appeared and as the outright protest of his Niagara Movement was burgeoning, Du Bois was describing the pull he felt for a more strongly subjective approach to studying black persons and documenting their lives.¹⁸⁰ Speaking of a subjectivism that would presumably allow him to more strongly advocate for equal rights

¹⁷⁹ See Peterson, *Doers of the Word*.

¹⁸⁰ Robin Kelley and Earl Lewis have suggested that the Niagara Movement took on what they called "militant aims" to fend of the accommodationist program forwarded by Booker T. Washington. See Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*.

for black persons, Du Bois admitted that with regard to such advocacy he felt “swept up in a current to this new and different expression,” and yet, he assured, he all the while “continued to cling to his scientific work” (“Pageant” 24).¹⁸¹ Du Bois’s “clinging” perhaps already encapsulates the difficulty with which he withstood dispersing his scientific methods.

By 1907, however, there is evidence to suggest that Du Bois had begun to abandon the scientifically rigorous representation he had defined with *The Souls of Black Folk*. In a November 1907 letter to John Brown biographer (and somewhat rival) John Villard, Du Bois explained the more subjective prerogatives he held for the John Brown biography that he was writing.¹⁸² Du Bois declared that his *John Brown* was “going to be an interpretation and I am not trying to go very largely to the sources”¹⁸³ Du Bois’s newly lax attitude toward fidelity signaled an about-face from the set of controls he had put in place in the referent-driven representations he had strived for in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

In 1909, nearly two years after this correspondence, when Du Bois’s *John Brown* appeared to criticism that it was sentimental and factually inaccurate—criticism which Villard in large part led, Du Bois again defended his work and he denoted its departure

¹⁸¹See Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. A Pageant in seven decades, 1868-1938W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

¹⁸² Du Bois’s relationship with Villard is described in detail in Manning Marable’s *Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*.

¹⁸³ See, W.E.B. Du Bois. Letter to John Villard. November 1907. Oswald Garrison Villard Collection of the John Brown Manuscripts, Columbia University, Box 19.

from clearly defined scientific method.¹⁸⁴ He wrote that he had sought to interpret Brown from the “little known but vastly important inner development of the Negro American” (*John Brown* xxx). He lamented the paucity of new hard sources on which he could draw, and contended that even absent what he called “these special materials” that “the broad truths were clear” (xxx). Du Bois was suggesting that interpretation, however meager the sources, was just as important, if not more important than hard fact.¹⁸⁵ As Du Bois himself put it years later in 1938 as he reflected on the time before students of Atlanta University: “Now the fat was in the fire and my career as a scientist was beginning to be swallowed up by my role as a propagandist” (“Pageant” 23). Not only had Du Bois conceded that his scientific work was ending, but the passive language he used also implied that he could no longer ignore that he had surrendered to propaganda. As if to further the point, two years later in 1911 Du Bois would publish a novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, casting in high relief his stronger and stronger turn to the metaphors he once approached with reticence.

Du Bois’s adherence to science specifically in his early career, presents a strong reason to attend to what he was attempting to achieve with a scientific approach to representation before he got “swept up in a current.” Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* is his foremost scientific declaration that the world of sensation continually flew in the face of a

¹⁸⁴ See David Levering Lewis’s account of Villard’s criticism regarding his *John Brown* in *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963*, p 21.

¹⁸⁵ Du Bois scholar Nahum Chandler has an extended interpretation of Du Bois’s meaning of “inner development.” Seeing it as a “primarily epistemological” reference as opposed to a “substantive one,” Chandler argues that inner development has everything to do with the way the object of reflection comes into view or being. See Chandler, *X-The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*.

world of imagination. It shows that Du Bois's thinking on sentience offered a conjecture where the empiricist (him and Douglass) and the Cartesian (Crummell) did not inhabit rival positions but existed together to regulate, through the sentient world, imagination that would presume a real world potentially indistinguishable from fiction. The primary stake of Du Bois's early work was to lay out a schematic that conceived of black persons not simply as imagined or as represented, as strict adherence to Cartesian impulses risked, but as the stuff of material presence itself—fleshly humans in relation. Du Bois's work suggests that the empirics of sensation, of matter (n.) could reign in the fancies of one human's imagination upon another.

The study proceeds in four parts. I begin with the historical context in which Du Bois's early work appeared, using scholars from anthropology, history, and literature. Next, I show that Du Bois, in an about-face from his previous thinking, recognized the context I describe during his work on *The Philadelphia Negro*, and I show how he worried about its consequences. Du Bois's next step was to think through how his scientific work fit both with his historical context and with previous genealogies of black intellectual life. As such, in the third section, I show that Du Bois negotiated Douglass's and Crummell's thought under the auspices of his association with The American Negro Academy to develop his own approach to black life. Finally, I end with an examination of select passages of *The Souls of Black Folk* that exhibit Du Bois announcing and enacting his scientific methodology. I read these against and alongside current longstanding readings of *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Literacy, Orality, and the Body in Du Bois's Historical Moment

In late nineteenth century United States, Du Bois was writing at a complicated nexus in U. S. black letters. Following the Civil War and through the Reconstruction period black literacy had increased dramatically in the U.S., as former slaves worked to acquire reading and writing skills that slave owners had historically used state law and violent force to prohibit.¹⁸⁶ The uptick in literacy was a departure from previous years when, save literacy that had been acquired secretly, black persons in slave communities relied largely on the spoken word to communicate and to share knowledge both privately and publicly.¹⁸⁷ With emancipation, however, black persons had ever more turned to the written word. They built schoolhouses to teach literacy; developed literary societies to discuss printed works; and used the church as a vehicle for further instruction and study. There is indication that at the same time the overall circulation of black print also increased.

In essence, by Du Bois's historical moment, black persons in the U. S. were increasingly undergoing a shift from what Walter J. Ong calls "orality" to "literacy." What complicates this period is that black persons were turning to literacy at a moment when literacy itself was engulfed in what Catherine Gallagher calls "fictionality," a state where conceptions of what is written on the page subsume the lived world. What I mean is that at the very moment when black persons in the United States were increasingly

¹⁸⁶ For a history of black literacy in the U.S. that shows how literacy vested black persons with "practical power" also see *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, Heather Andrea Williams.

¹⁸⁷ See Hortense Spillers, "Moving Down the Line" in *Black, White, and in Color* and Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voices*.

using the written word to project themselves into the public sphere, the medium they were using was prone to displace understanding of them as living, breathing humans. Du Bois, despite black women writers' concomitant worries of print materials' black commodification, was trying to mitigate this risk. He was attempting to have the physical coexist with the inanimate—the oral with the literate.

Ong and Gallagher outline a literary milieu that shows that as black persons moved increasingly from orality to literacy and were called to manage knowledge about themselves on the page instead of in person, they also had to respond to how ways of knowing that were created and delimited by the written page. As both Ong and Gallagher show, while the modern subject had learned to use literacy to organize knowledge about themselves and their ontological statuses, it did not necessitate that one imagine one's existence in the face of an other. Rather, there were ways of knowing that abetted, indeed existed because, the real life person had been subordinated to the point that a reader did not have to recognize a world beyond one's self. Whereas the emphasized presence of an other in written narrative would have required readers to collide with that other and to grapple with that presence, literacy all but disappeared the live referent. First, Ong; then, Gallagher.

Existing in Literacy

While Ong scarcely mentions African descended cultures in his book, *Orality and Literacy* (1982), his delineation of a culture's movement from orality to literacy provides a useful frame to think about the context of black knowledge-making in which Du Bois

was writing.¹⁸⁸ The field on which black persons were called to manage and negotiate knowledge about themselves was shifting from the person-to-person interactions upon which orators, speakers, and persons in general had relied, what Ong calls “orality” to interactions between the inanimate written page and readers, what Ong calls “literacy.”

In Ong’s framework literacy or orality serves as mere shorthand for the method a culture uses to organize knowledge; the method has important consequences. A culture may use the spoken word or it may use the written word to organize ideas about itself. For Ong, each framework has distinct ramifications for social life. A culture’s use of a framework of orality or literacy shapes that culture’s social values. To choose orality or literacy is also to stipulate what form of interactions a culture regards or prizes and, consequently, which it produces, sustains, and reproduces. Ong holds that the absence of literacy forced cultures of orality to more intently value what he calls “the human life world”:

In the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings. (42)

¹⁸⁸ Ong’s book was recently rereleased in 2013 to commemorate its thirtieth anniversary. To my reading Ong’s direct mentions of black or African descended cultures are brief. Such mentions occur at pgs. 40 – 48 and 92 where Ong shows how central orality was to some West African cultures. See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

Ong emphasizes that in cultures where writing does not structure knowledge about persons that these persons must rely not on distanced metaphor for knowledge-making but on the immediate referents themselves— human beings. Thus, in its protocols for knowledge-building, a culture of orality collapses the distance between persons, for what appears as the observable, objective world must be arbitrated not through knowledge at a remove from persons—as is the case for knowledge appearing on the page, for instance—but through direct, dynamic interaction between one person and an other. Up until the Civil War, the characteristics of orality structured daily life for black persons. Orality and the intimate relation it stipulated was the main technology a large portion of black communities in the U.S. wielded in order to communicate and survive.

This is not to say that at the time of Du Bois's writing print's role as a powerful and potentially revolutionary emissary for black persons had not been solidified. Indeed, quite the contrary. A number of scholars have affirmed that dating from the American Revolution through the Civil War black authors in the United States used the printed word as a tool to project themselves into the public sphere and to empower black persons. Many used writing not only to incite readers to act for slavery's abolishment but also to reshape prevailing understandings of black identities.¹⁸⁹ Frances Smith Foster has occasioned the work of a number of black women authors to show that they were using writing to call attention to their own particularities and embodiment.¹⁹⁰ And Ifeoma

¹⁸⁹ Richard Newman et. al. argue as much in *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature*. Also, Jeannine DeLombard argues, "reading and publishing would remain crucial to African American political as well as cultural survival" in "African American Cultures of Print."

¹⁹⁰ Foster, *Written By Herself*.

Nwankwo has argued that written news of the Haitian Revolution inspired black persons across the globe to reflect on their own subjective standing. For Nwankwo, it was primarily through the printed word that black thinkers positioned themselves in relation to the Haitian Revolution and in doing so not only defined themselves in relation to other black persons but forged connections (and at times distinctions) that transcended national and political boundaries.¹⁹¹ Such scholarly reports no doubt give reason for the increasing use of literacy, as they show how black thinkers turned to literacy to great effect as a vehicle for political empowerment.

At Du Bois's writing literacy also offered writers ostensibly greater reach. By his time black persons were more and more sustaining political disenfranchisement and limited mobility imposed both juridically and through surveillance (as in "sundown" town laws or lantern laws) and through violent acts like lynching.¹⁹² Lynching, as Jaqueline Goldsby reports, saw its greatest recorded growth in the last decade of the nineteenth century, just as Du Bois was establishing himself as a young scholar.¹⁹³ These factors coupled with an industrializing United States and the increasingly connected book market, meant that ideas about persons in writing could travel more widely sometimes and with greater ease and safety than the persons they were to represent. In this context, writing was of heightened and urgent importance.

¹⁹¹ See Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism*

¹⁹² Referencing a (mis)translation of Fanon, Simone Browne argues that surveillance has been and continues to be a "fact of blackness." She describes lantern laws that required black persons about in public past sundown to walk with lanterns at night if they were not in the presence of a white person. See Browne, *Dark Matter* (2015).

¹⁹³ See Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*.

Nevertheless, while print served as a potential emissary for black persons, it also maintained a complex relationship to the body. As literacy overtook orality, the role of the living, breathing person in writing risked increasing ambiguity. David Walker literalized the point as early as 1829, when he famously sewed his pamphlet—an impassioned, personal cry inciting black persons to rise up in revolt against their enslavement—into clothing that he sold to sympathetic customers to carry off on their bodies undetected. Alluding to the body's transformation into a commodity, Du Bois himself would write in *The Souls of Black Folk* that “Walker’s wild appeal against the trend of the times showed how the world was changing after the coming of the cotton-gin” (38).¹⁹⁴ Walker’s use of persons’ bodies to disseminate his thought literalizes the progression Walter J. Ong describes for words becoming thing-like in literary cultures. Writes Ong: “Writing makes ‘words’ appear similar to things because we think of words as the visible marks signaling words to decoders: we can see and touch such inscribed ‘words’ in texts and books” (11).¹⁹⁵ The body propagating print message emphasizes the ways that in literacy, print could appear synonymous with the “thingness” of the thinking and speaking person, risking the displacement of that person.

In his summation of the first century of black autobiography in the United States, William Andrews affirms a similar trajectory within black autobiography wherein the written page overtakes the speaking person to become the primary vehicle through which black persons can manage knowledge about themselves. Writes Andrews:

¹⁹⁴ Du Bois, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington,” *The Souls of Black Folk*

¹⁹⁵ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*

The journey of black autobiography toward free telling first had to pass through the intervening consciousness of amanuenses and editors, then had to challenge generic conventions and discursive properties of writing itself, before finally undertaking the greatest task of all, the appropriation of language for purposes of signification outside that which was privileged by the dominant culture. By 1865 the leading writers in the tradition had sounded the resources of language to evoke both an external and internal dimension of reality authorized uniquely by black perception. (290)¹⁹⁶

Albeit with different terms, Andrews describes a transition that black autobiographers experienced from orality to literacy. He notes that increasingly, black autobiographers moved from detailing their stories in person for amanuensis, editors, and other persons to delegating these stories to the written page. Frederick Douglass's narrative, "written by himself," which earlier in his manuscript Andrews tends to at length, marks such a progression. The writers that Frances Smith Foster details in her analysis of nineteenth century black women's literary production, *Written By Herself*, do so as well while also negotiating the intricacies of gender, respectability, and print. In these instances the speaking person was no longer the primary method for disseminating knowledge. Rather, the written page became the primary avatar for the storyteller. The person was at a remove. As Foster argues of early black women writers, in a process much like putting court records in evidence, through the written record black women were "testifying to the fact of their existence and insisting that others acknowledge their existence and their

¹⁹⁶ Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story*.

testimonies” (2).¹⁹⁷ What happened to the live person during these transactions takes various forms in scholarship.

While Andrews’s concludes that black writers developed and honed skills that empowered them to alter their social reality through the page, his conclusion belies the issue with which black thinkers in Du Bois’s late-nineteenth century would have to contend: the written page’s potential displacement of the live person. Andrews assures that within literacy black persons’ social reality “was not simply grim and fixed, an antagonistic force above and beyond black influence” but that their social reality could be negotiated on the page (290).¹⁹⁸ Andrews argues:

Social forces and arrangements even in slavery could be, under certain conditions, manipulated and exploited through speech action. The social scene had its provisional dimensions that were not fully realized until linguistic transactions established and defined them. Likewise, the inner dimension of reality, the world of all that was signified in the word self, was also dependent on language for its reification. (290)¹⁹⁹

Andrews compares the processes by which knowledge was negotiated in orality via person-to-person interaction and “speech acts” to those by which it was negotiated in literacy via the inanimate written word. Although Andrews means to show that by the mid-nineteenth century black autobiographers wielded literacy as a tool for their

¹⁹⁷ Foster, *Written By Herself*.

¹⁹⁸ Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story*.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

empowerment in the same manner as they previously had orality, Andrews's conception of black literacy simultaneously frames a problem: if in the literacy dominant milieu knowledge and power were actuated on the page, then knowledge about black persons remained in a liminal space, what Andrews calls "provisional dimensions," until it was ratified and authenticated in literature for understanding. The reader actuated the written word, and established the referent. That means that the human was predicated on the written word not the other way around. In this scenario, black persons existed as ideas on a page, an assemblage of disembodied and disempowered voices waiting for the pen and then the reader. In such a conception, black persons remain unintelligible until they are represented on the written page.

These black writers would have also had to negotiate the expectations nineteenth century readers in a milieu of increasing industrialization and capitalism brought to long-form narratives. By Du Bois's moment, readers approached literacy like a commodity—one where metaphors and representations were actualities commodified for a reading public. Decrying such uses of real persons in a retrospective of his early career, Du Bois expressed how he had resolved to turn the gaze from "the fruitless word-twisting" with which he felt literacy abounded ("Science and Empire" 51).²⁰⁰ Rather, "facing the facts of my own social situation and racial world," he wrote, "I determined to put science into sociology through a study of the conditions and problems of my own group" (51). Countering what he felt to be popular representations of black persons, Du Bois asserted his aim to present black persons as ontological facticities—as sentient beings: "primarily

²⁰⁰ The essay "Science and Empire" is in Du Bois's *The Dusk of Dawn* collection.

with the utilitarian object of reform and uplift,” he wrote, “I wanted to do the work with scientific accuracy” (51). To counter the view of blacks as narrative commodities, Du Bois wanted, he summed up, to give a study of “the facts, any and all facts, concerning the American Negro and his plight” for purposes of relation (51). Du Bois saw himself countering writing that commodified black persons on the page.

Existing in Literacy’s Fictionality

Indeed, the work of some literary historians suggests that late nineteenth century black thinkers may have been writing into a medium whose capitalist influences were at odds with any attempt to stage encounters between readers and others represented on the written page. By the nineteenth century, it was not just that the written word, as an inanimate object, displaced the persons it sought to represent (as Ong suggests happens in cultures of literacy), it was that the reader of texts willingly occasioned these to produce and manage knowledge *precisely because* the live person was already absent from them. This, at least, is the culture of literacy one gathers from Catherine Gallagher’s study of texts in the eighteenth century and onward.²⁰¹ Gallagher’s analysis offers the story of how readers used text in ways that were not about relating with others as much as they were about building and affirming the status and capital of readers themselves. When Gallagher uses the language of capital to show how texts enabled readers to use confidential speculative play as an epistemological resource, she emphasizes how literacy prioritized private enterprise (personal gain) above relation between persons. Her

²⁰¹ See Gallagher, “The Rise of Fictionality.”

conceptualization of eighteenth century reading practices offers helpful context that shows how Du Bois's insistence on placing the sentient body in writing was his attempt to challenge how readers understood a medium that merely, it seemed, trafficked in commodities. Du Bois was attempting to fill an absence.

Using the British novel as her primary point of entry, Gallagher describes how the modern subject of the early eighteenth century and on became engulfed in what she calls fictionality—that is, a specific disposition in which one embraces the made-up quality of written work for expedience in daily life. In Gallagher's work fictionality emerges not as written narrative that has some fictive quality to it—as it is often understood in common use, but as a mental state that is indiscriminate of truth or fiction that a reader adopts in order to sift and organize knowledge.²⁰²

Fictionality's status as mental state becomes particularly clear when Gallagher formulates it as a type of risk-free Cartesian game into which a reader opts. She explains that in fictionality “one is dissuaded from believing the literal truth of a representation so that one can instead admire its likelihood and extend enough credit to buy into the game. Such flexible mental states were the sine qua non of modern subjectivity” (346). Fictionality, in other words, necessitated from its users a type of facility between fact and fiction. It required that they willingly extend credit to suppositional truths and other types of un-fact. It stipulated, in short, that for the time being its users accept the potentially

²⁰² There is plenty of scholarship that uses the term fictionality to describe something that has a “fictive” or “untrue” quality. Suzanne Keen discusses this history at length in her *Narrative Form*. See, Keen, *Narrative Form*. I use fictionality to refer to a mental state one adopts wherein one invests in untruths to reap an epistemological reward.

untrue as true. In exchange for such belief—belief we might alternatively refer to as credit—fictionality’s users would obtain specific returns in the form of new knowledge or reaffirmed knowledge. Thus, fictionality operated as a type of investment users made that in turn made available a disposition of speculative play to them. Readers that used fictionality “bought into” a state of mind in which they quietly agreed to turn a blind eye to any imprecise or untruthful rendition of facts of the natural world in favor of the epistemological gains they would yield from adopting the mindset. It stands to reason that black writers like Du Bois, called to manage knowledge in such a culture of literacy, would have increasingly been crafting work for readers who viewed written narratives as sites for investments that yielded risk-free imaginative play rather than as terrains on which to encounter other sentient beings. Black writers of the nineteenth century would not only have had to understand written narrative from this established perspective but they would have also had to contend with the consequences of such a mindset in the lived world.

Indeed, the historical conditions in which fictionality surfaced exhibit not only how users’ comfort with the mindset grew so much as to allow it to operate with increasingly less visibility but also how the mindset had effects in the everyday lives of its users. Gallagher explains that fictionality arose as fiction writers of the eighteenth century lent confidence to their readers’ ability to discriminate truth from fiction. These fiction writers assumed that their readers knew that the narratives they created were fictive. Deserting any pretense that their narratives were not real, they aggressively embraced verisimilitude. These writers’ newfound ease with “real life” representation

nonetheless soon put them in a bind in the lived world: they needed to distinguish any verisimilitude in their work from writing that could be charged with libel. To elude libel, fiction writers resolved to craft narrative that was “real” enough for readers to relate with and fictive enough for it to appear unbounded to the “real world,” divesting it of juridical implication. Their method, Gallagher explains, became to suffuse long-form written narratives with general truths about persons even as (for fear of libel) they disappeared particularized reference to specific persons. Gallagher differentiates: “What distinguished the new writers from libelers was the insistence that the human referent of the text was a generalization about and not an extratextual, embodied instance of a “species.” Fictionality’s “founding claim” thus became “a nonreferentiality that could be seen as greater referentiality” (342). Fictionality’s *métier* of non-referentiality meant that there would be no person in the world to whom fictionality could point back, leaving the figures represented in writing unattached from fleshly lived-world referents. In a sense, the condition of fictionality was a state of otherworldliness that abstracted the material person away.

It is important to note that while in Gallagher’s formulation fictionality’s rise is concomitant with the rise of the novel (and most critics keep this tie intact), she does not bound fictionality up with the novel.²⁰³ Rather, she cedes that fictionality was indispensable to the daily life of the modern subject who occasioned the expedience of

²⁰³ Understandably, most critics who use Gallagher’s formulation of fictionality have kept its implications localized to the novel. See, Ian Baucom’s use of the term in *Specters of the Atlantic*, for example. My reading however extends Gallagher’s conception of the term out more globally, extending its influence outside the novel.

fictions in everyday life. A subject could use fictionality in everything from discerning the viability of potential marriage partners through mental conjecture to mentally accepting the fiction of paper money as a visible representation of a government's extension of credit for everyday financial transactions. What fictionality measured, then, was the extent to which a reader's use of imagination structured the realities of their daily life. Fictionality was important not because it was in the novel, but because it expressed a mode in which the modern subject used imagination to organize knowledge that could impact how he or she envisioned possibilities in "real-life."

Perhaps this is why it is at once understandable and strange that Gallagher resists the notion that fictionality had implications on live persons outside of the novel. While it is true that fictionality conditioned itself on suppositional truths, could not the speculative flights that one undertook with fictionality affect how one conceived of and interacted with the subjects of such flights in the real world hovering outside of the novel's bounds? How could they constrain fictionality from creating ways of knowing in the real world? To accept the terms of fictionality's emergence and its diffusion seems also to accept that the novel may not so easily constrain fictionality; it is to accept that fictionality, however distinct from the real world, had affects in it. Even if users turned to fictionality precisely because it was not in the real world, they did so for use in organizing the world in which they existed. Because fictionality's defined itself with the "real world" in so comprehensive a fashion that it needed insurance against libel, it is not inconceivable that fictionality became less and less visible. It is not inconceivable that as fictionality became

a thing in the world, it abstracted itself away, too—it became a species onto itself and was allowed to operate as natural procedure as opposed to construction.

Yet, although Gallagher recognizes that fictionality was a mindset that eighteenth century users and onward adopted in daily life, she precludes it from ultimately having effects on a more global scale than the novel. According to Gallagher, it is precisely fictionality's refusal to attach to any specific or otherwise "real" referent that made it attractive to readers. The substitution of specifics for general truths in written representation created a type of written narratives whose characters were at once specific enough for readers to identify with and incomplete enough, unoccupied enough for readers (in their fullness as lived persons) to form contradistinction from. According to this view, because fictionality did not directly acknowledge the lived experience of specific human referents, readers could easily enter an identification process in which they "were often called to be privileged and superior witnesses of protagonists' follies" (351). Contends Gallagher:

What seemed to make novelistic "others" outstanding candidates for such realizations was the fact that, especially in contradistinction to the figures who pointedly referred to actual individuals, they were enticingly unoccupied. Because they were haunted by no shadow of another person who might take priority over the reader as a "real" referent, anyone might appropriate them. No reader would have to grapple with the knowledge of some real-world double or contract an accidental feeling about any actual person by making the temporary identification. Moreover, unlike the personae of tragedy or legend, novelistic characters tended

to be commoners, who would fall beneath the notice of history proper, and so they tended to carry little extratextual baggage. (351)

In Gallagher's analysis, readers could use novelistic others—written representations of other humans to which they had offered credit—because their referents, the fleshly persons whom the written words were meant to represent, had already been displaced. Readers merely reaped the comfortable advantages of such displacement—freedom from grappling with another person's existence and with any challenge to their perceived sovereignty. It suggests that readers gave credit to texts not because they wished to encounter others, but because they wished for any investment they made to be done privately. The text was not a place wherein one came to collide, parallel, or engage in push and pull with an other. Rather, the written text was a site where one bought into fictionality's protocol precisely because it was a private transaction in which one could obtain and experience the pleasure of the unbounded self.

Gallagher's distinction is fine: for her, fictionality did not happen at the expense of the live person; rather, it was only available to users because the live person was already disappeared. Her summation holds that readers in search of knowledge or ways to organize the world were turning to written narrative precisely because they need not worry about the live person's displacement or any responsibility therewith. The only caveat of fictionality was that the reader not aid, not have any responsibility for the transaction. It was not a matter of "if" the human had been disappeared; it was a matter of if that disappearing had preceded the reader.

The byproduct of such analysis is that it emphasizes how readers were increasingly interpreting and understanding texts in a milieu of capital that rendered the human a fungible quantity. That Gallagher formulates fictionality with economic terms, like speculation and credit may be no coincidence. In doing so, she alludes to the historical moment of increasing industrialization in which its users were immersed—a moment in which commerce increasingly depended on potentially risky investment. Fictionality provided a safe alternative to such risk. It was a mindset through which its users could invest in something real enough that it could be recognized and imaginatively played out, but suppositional enough to be free from any actual or “lived world” consequence. (What is the charge of libel that abetted the emergence of fictionality if not a defense of how one’s property should be perceived and valued?) Gallagher’s assertions concerning fictionality recalls Ong’s warning that “Writing makes ‘words’ appear similar to things because we think of words as the visible marks signaling words to decoders: we can see and touch such inscribed ‘words’ in texts and books” (11).²⁰⁴ Fictionality provided its users risk-free alternatives, virtual realities of sorts, through which they could suppose the outcomes of potential investments.

Gallagher’s estimation of fictionality in the novel created a scenario wherein what readers sought in and through such spaces of conjecture was “not surrogate selves” but “the contradictory sensations of *not being a character*” (361 *emphasis in original*). Indeed, Gallagher resolves that “the fictional character’s incompleteness can, in other words, not only create a sense of the reader’s materiality as ontologically plentiful by

²⁰⁴ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

helping up reenvision our own embodied immanence through the condition of its possible absence, but also allows us to experience an uncanny desire to be that which we already are” (361). Gallagher concludes:

On the one hand, we experience an ideal version of self-continuity, graced by enunciative mastery, mobility, and powers of almost instantaneous detachment and attachment. We experience, that is, the elation of a unitary unboundedness.

On the other hand, we are also allowed to love an equally idealized immanence, an ability to be, we imagine, without textuality, meaningfulness, or any other excuse for existing.

In this summation, a readers’ participation in conjectures about textual others was not about affirming that otherness. Instead it was about reifying one’s sense of self against this alien otherness. Fictionality, as it stands, links the reading practices of the general public not to projects in relation but to projects in capital.

Yet, it is important to note that Gallagher’s conceptualization of fictionality does not fully deal with the Goldilocks scenario of “just enough” that it has created. Gallagher holds that readers can identify with characters as types or “species” because the live referent has been abstracted enough, is implausible enough, is empty enough not to require negotiation. The other side of that coin is that the characters are close enough to their referents to be material enough, probable enough to haunt the text enough, complete enough to receive some form of recognition. In this manner, fictionality could structure ways of knowing that had everything to do with how persons encountered one another in the lived world and what they expected to get from such encounters.

The inversion of Gallagher's argument creates an opening to stipulate a different set of conditions from readers, conditions wherein readers must impose on the imagination the regulating presence of the material world. Put another way, if the reader had learned to use literacy to make determinations concerning the real world because no encounters with others were stipulated, could he or she learn to acquire knowledge and make such determinations in the live person's regulating presence? This was Du Bois's experiment. Du Bois's attempted to re-conceptualize written narrative about black persons in order to establish reading practices that required readers to negotiate their relationship with the other sentient beings being presented he writing. He was attempting to open the space for imaginative practices that were enabled by representations of lived subject just as much as they might be curbed.

By the turn of the century, with black persons in the U.S. facing increasing disenfranchisement and more lynching than ever before, the live black person was under threat. Du Bois's attempt to reinvest a reader's imaginative practices with reminders that those representations involved real persons is an attempt to alter the conditions readers had learned to stipulate for the safe investments they made through written narrative. Du Bois's work was an experiment to see if readers' conjectural encounters with others could happen while those readers were beholden to those others. It is an experiment to stage the type of encounter Gallagher, more than a century later, precludes from possibility.

In this late nineteenth century context literary context that Ong and Gallagher help set up, Du Bois's adherence to a scientific approach was an attempt to (re)place the sentient body at the foreground of literacy and, consequently, a reader's way of knowing

and organizing the world. He offered an experiment that tested whether written narrative, a quality of the mind that operated like Cartesian play, could be combined with precisely what Gallagher says would inhibit readers from willingly organizing any knowledge: the empirical truth of sentient beings.

The Benevolent Despot and *The Philadelphia Negro*

Du Bois documents that his 1899 study of Philadelphia's black residents for the University of Pennsylvania, *The Philadelphia Negro*, spurred not just his misgivings about how black persons were represented but also about the milieu of personal gain that he felt produced and sustained such representation. Only three years earlier in 1896 the University had commissioned the study at the repeated urging of Susan Wharton, one of its funders, who felt that Philadelphia needed to understand the growing black population residing in the city's Seventh Ward.²⁰⁵

In "Science and Empire," an autobiographical essay that Du Bois wrote forty years after his findings from the Philadelphia study had appeared, Du Bois reflected on the circumstances under which he had accepted the task:

The fact was that the city of Philadelphia at the time had a theory; and that theory was that this great, rich, famous municipality was going to the dogs because of the crime and venality of its Negro citizens, who lived largely centered in the slum at the lower end of the seventh ward. Philadelphia wanted to prove this by figures

²⁰⁵ On the background to the study and the actors involved see, Lewis, *Du Bois*, p. 187-192.

and I was the man to do it. Of this theory back of the plan, I neither knew nor cared. I saw only a chance to study an historical group of black folk and to show exactly what their place was in the community. (30)

Du Bois held that the study's commissioners had ulterior political ends about which he was ignorant at the time he conducted his work: they needed data to consign the City's black population to "venality," to explain away their disenfranchisement of black persons and Du Bois, the young black scientist, was the ideal candidate for the job. Significantly, Du Bois cast himself not as an activist who had sought to conduct political work but as a scientist who had endeavored to collect data and to present findings in a historical context. His objective, he indicates, had been to conduct a dispassionate, scientific study of Philadelphia's black residents. He "neither knew nor cared" how his data might be used or interpreted. Still, although Du Bois may have approached his Philadelphia study not really paying attention to representation or any sort of propaganda, by its end he had established an opposition between fact (scientific study) and how it was represented and interpreted (the "theory back of the plan").

While Du Bois showed unabashed pride about the scientific work he had accomplished with *The Philadelphia Negro*, he viewed its major accomplishment as worrying the distinction that existed between materiality and representations of that same materiality. Regarding his study, Du Bois assessed that despite some "defective facts, and statistics, one lone worker and little money" that it "was as complete a scientific study

and answer as could have been given” (*Dusk* 30).²⁰⁶ He had “made a study of the Philadelphia Negro so thorough that it [had] withstood the ‘criticism of forty years’” (30). For Du Bois, that the study had withstood scrutiny was itself an assurance of the overall quality and soundness of the data he had presented. He suggested that the fortitude of his work was important to him merely because it had provided high ground from which to challenge and potentially alter what he perceived as improper documentation of black persons. Du Bois judged that his study’s ultimate success was that it had “revealed the Negro group as a symptom, not a cause; as a striving, palpitating group, and not an inert, sick body of crime; as a long historic development and not a transient occurrence” (30). Even in this reprise, Du Bois upheld his role as a scientist who merely “revealed” black people’s position. He need not spin tale or create knowledge, rather he was presenting what was already there, if covered up with obfuscating narrative. In the passage above, Du Bois’s anaphoric use of “not” signaled the number of countervailing views he felt his study brought against what he understood as the City’s prevailing understandings of black persons. In his view, his study of Philadelphia’s black persons had bared them not as states of pathology— sickness and inertia incarnate, but as the humans that they were— feeling, alive, dynamic, and vulnerable to their environments. Du Bois appeared to take special pride that with his scientific approach he was able to present Philadelphia’s black persons as sentient beings, cutting through what he viewed as staunch inaccurate documentation.

²⁰⁶ Mary Jo Deegan has argued that Du Bois did not work alone on *The Philadelphia Negro* and that he has elided his collaboration with women sociologists. See, “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Women of Hull-House, 1895-1899.”

Du Bois's time canvassing Philadelphia's Seventh Ward put him in direct contact with the city's disenfranchised black residents. On a daily basis he had person-to-person encounters with a population with whom he would later argue the City's elite did not bother. Du Bois wrote that he conducted the study "despite extraordinary difficulties within and without the group. Whites said, Why study the obvious? Blacks said Are we animals to be dissected and by an unknown Negro at that" (*Dusk* 59). He canvassed over 2,500 households for an estimated 835 hours, working with denizens of varying literacy.²⁰⁷

In the pages of *The Philadelphia Negro* Du Bois indicted what he saw as scientifically inaccurate documentation and suggested that interest in exclusivity and personal gain had enabled these. In a section of the study that details occupations in the city, Du Bois challenged theories about black workers that he believed some of Philadelphia's elite had upheld as fact. Reporting the employment data he had gathered canvassing Philadelphia black communities between 1896 and 1899, Du Bois complicated the reasoning some of the City's white persons gave for black persons' "practical exclusion" from "the trades and industries of a great city like Philadelphia" (126). Du Bois argued that the exclusion of black persons from the skilled workforce was not explained merely by the bigotry of a limited few, as was the prevailing view, but that the entire city had enabled the exclusion of black workers with their silence on the matter—all were implicated for creating the environment. He asserted that it was

²⁰⁷ Historian Herbert Aptheker gave this estimate of the extent of Du Bois's work in Philadelphia. Du Bois biographers have reprinted it. See Aptheker, *The Literary Legacy of Du Bois*.

not simply the case that “the foreigners and trades unions [had] crowded Negroes out on account of race prejudice and left employees and philanthropists helpless in the matter” (126). Rather, neither Philadelphia’s trade unions and white workers nor its employers and philanthropists were powerless or passive entities. Quite the contrary, Du Bois contended, they had “seized an economic advantage plainly offered them” when they actively withheld training for skilled positions to the overage of unemployed black persons in the City, delimiting these black residents to low wage, servant class positions (126). In so doing, Philadelphia’s white residents had systematically reserved for themselves the City’s skilled jobs and, consequently, opportunities for economic advancement and prosperity. According to Du Bois, the City was using black labor to secure wealth for its white residents.²⁰⁸

When Du Bois recapitulated this argument at the section’s end, he made two of its components clear—on the one hand, yes, it was true that black workers suffered race prejudice, but on the other they also underwent exclusion because inaccurate representation had been wielded against them in order to reserve wealth to a few. Du Bois summed up:

To repeat, then, the real motives back of this exclusion are plain: a large part is simple race prejudice, always strong in working classes and intensified by the peculiar history of the Negro in this country. Another part, however, and possibly a more potent part, is the natural spirit of monopoly and the desire to keep up

²⁰⁸ Modern day studies like David Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness* affirm what Du Bois had observed almost a century before.

wages. So long as a cry against " Irish " or " foreigners " was able to marshal race prejudice in the service of those who desired to keep those people out of some employments, that cry was sedulously used. So to-day the workmen plainly see that a large amount of competition can be shut off by taking advantage of public opinion and drawing the color line. Moreover, in this there is one thoroughly justifiable consideration that plays a great part namely, the Negroes are used to low wages—can live on them, and consequently would fight less fiercely than most whites against reduction. (129)

Although Du Bois acknowledged that race prejudice prevented Philadelphia's black residents from skilled work, he refused the view that it alone was at issue. For him, race was merely one component of an intricate system of disenfranchisement. Widening the perspective from which people had typically scrutinized black persons' exclusion, Du Bois included "the natural spirit of monopoly and the desire to keep up wages." With the spirit of monopoly, he had singled out what he felt to be a possibly "more potent part" of the intricate system of exclusion. Du Bois felt that those in power in Philadelphia acted out of motivation to maintain control and ownership, "to shut out competition." In such an environment of monopoly, race prejudice was a precision tool that white persons wielded against others in an organized and effective for personal gain. It was a tool to push others out and to maximize their own capital. Race prejudice and the spirit of monopoly worked together.

Still, Du Bois's summation, if inconspicuously, also isolated a third component of exclusion, a surreptitious partner to the spirit of monopoly and race prejudice:

representation. In the passage above, when Du Bois cites how cries against Irish persons and foreigners had been previously used to “keep those people out” of the city’s wealth, he was referencing not just a past of race prejudice being “sedulously used,” but also a history of public proclamation wielded to alter public opinion. In short, Du Bois had identified that propaganda, a form of imbalanced representation, was also a critical component in building the force used to exclude Philadelphia’s black residents.

Du Bois argued that brandishing skewed representation was a tactic so established and effective that Philadelphia’s workmen could “plainly see” how they could deploy it. He described the process succinctly, offering that employers knew what to do in order to shut black residents out of the skilled workforce as a two pronged approach: “take advantage of public opinion and draw the color line.” The first step was for employers to negatively alter the prevailing views concerning Philadelphia’s black residents; from there, they could put in place racial boundaries. Du Bois identified how employers’ use of representation colluded both with the spirit of monopoly and with race prejudice to create a system of exclusion that persisted without much scrutiny. Although each component played a critical part in black disenfranchisement, not all three forces received the same attention. Its conspicuous workings allowed representations to pose as objective as opposed to subjective. What was left was a skewed representation.

For Du Bois the young scientist, propaganda must have been anathema. He must have understood it simply as biased and faulty reporting of objects in the natural world. After all, propaganda was at base a telling of the world not for scientific accuracy but for one’s personal gain. As such, it was a tool not for the scientist, the one who wished to

know and understand the natural world as it was, but for the entrepreneur who wished to exploit representation for personal gain.

Both how one sees something or someone and who is able to see something or someone were such strong preoccupations of Du Bois's thinking that within his study he even gave way to a peculiar conjecture, an alternative potentiality, that showed the importance he ceded to perception. In the same "Occupations" section of *The Philadelphia Negro* Du Bois challenged the view that demurred that employers were powerless to hire black residents because hiring decisions were, according to them, either the result of entrenched systems or, worse, limited to the wiles of a bigoted, albeit anomalous few who overwhelmingly exerted influence and authority. As an alternative, he proposed that the spirit of monopoly was so powerful as to prevent persons from recognizing others even when to recognize them could improve their economic standing. In a departure from the scientific tone of the chapter, Du Bois entered a space of conjecture and wondered about the counteractive effect a "benevolent despot" might have on Philadelphia's milieu of entrepreneurship and industrialization. He ventured:

If now a benevolent despot had seen the development, he would immediately have sought to remedy the real weakness of the Negro's position, i.e., his lack of training; and he would have swept away any discrimination that compelled men to support as criminals those who might support themselves as workmen. He would have made special effort to train Negro boys for industrial life and given them a chance to compete on equal terms with the best white workmen; arguing that in the long run this would be best for all concerned, since by raising the skill and

standard of living of the Negroes he would make them effective workmen and competitors who would maintain a decent level of wages. He would have sternly suppressed organized or covert opposition to Negro workmen. There was, however, no benevolent despot.

Du Bois's opening salvo is critical. When he starts with "If now a benevolent despot had seen the development," he sets up a supposition that stipulates not just the type of subject that could do the seeing—"a benevolent despot"—but also what such a subject would have seen to set off the supposition in the first place—"the development." Du Bois's opening clause is almost no different than if he supposed, "If now someone kind, generous, and vested with agency had seen," for he stipulates the qualities of the subject that "sees." It stands to reason, then, that to "not be able to see" would mean that one was not that particular subject—that one was bereft of both benevolence and despotic power.

By establishing a supposition that required not only a specific subject but also a specific initial scene, Du Bois not only implies that there are other subjects who might look upon the same initial scene and from there produce differing outcomes, but also that the initial scene itself could also be elusive. Put in more syntactic language, by alluding to the possibility of scenarios in which someone other than a "benevolent despot" might look upon "the development" and produce differing outcomes, Du Bois implied that differing subjects could see objects differently. In addition, by conditioning the supposition on a specific object, he suggests that how a subject identifies an object is just as critical to the outcome as the specific subject.

For Du Bois, a clear subject and object, produced a specific predicate. The subject of Du Bois's vision, the benevolent despot, would have been able to clearly see the object, the City's system of exclusion toward black persons, and would have moved to resolve it. With the leadership of a benevolent despot the City could abandon seeing its black residents as tools for industry, and begin seeing industry as a tool to help all its residents. Du Bois was venturing that employing black workers instead of actively shutting them out of the marketplace would produce not only more financial success for their employers but also opportunity for social prosperity for all involved. Such outcomes were predicated upon the benevolent despot seeing black residents as sentient beings deserving of opportunity, as opposed to criminals and competition. It required not just a specific subject, but also that the subject see an object in a specific way. Here specifically, it required that the subject work to "sweep away" the prevailing racial prejudice and the spirit of monopoly in order to lay a foundation that allowed all workers access to opportunity.

Du Bois's peculiar conjectural turn appears to contrast the data driven work that he writes he sought to do.²⁰⁹ When his vision regarding a benevolent despot's potential impact on the City ends abruptly and forcefully, one realizes that with his supposition Du Bois could very well have been charged with writing fiction. After all, he was asking

²⁰⁹ Although remarkable for its length, this passage was not Du Bois's only supposition in *The Philadelphia Negro*. It appears Du Bois had a method of first clarifying how he was seeing an object and then using that clarification or re(definition) to imagine alternatives with these. Such examples in *The Philadelphia Negro* occur on pages 269- 274. In most of these examples, Du Bois's "If" is the lofty smoking gun for him inviting his audience to reimagine.

readers to envision a scenario in which they would be called not to see the natural world as he was reporting it was, but as he believed it could be seen. This becomes clear when he snapped the reader out of the supposition and back to the actuality of Philadelphia's workforce when he asserted that no such subject existed. He reported it plainly, "There was, however, no benevolent despot."

In another view, Du Bois's work detailing possible ways of seeing can be understood as an extension of his work. Du Bois was asserting that there was no subject who had seen the object as it was, and he was riffing off the object itself. Reductively, Du Bois's supposition breaks down to a logic statement where "if 'a', then 'b.'" His supposition was his attempt to show that how subjects perceived an object, "a," produced outcomes, "b." Du Bois ventured that *how* employers looked on black residents produced outcomes that they wound up ascribing to black ontology as opposed to a manner of seeing. Du Bois was attempting to show that what one understood as outcomes would change if one viewed black persons as sentient beings. Du Bois's foray here exhibits his developing interest not simply in what is seen, but also in training how to see what is before one. He was attempting to refashion both how subjects understood the object and how subjects understood themselves understanding the object.

It is critical to note that Du Bois's own prejudices made their way into *The Philadelphia Negro*, changing how he perceived subjects and objects and possibly undermining his attempts at scientific work. However axiomatic this assertion may seem, it is precisely because what is axiomatic (and what is not) is Du Bois's area of inquiry that the vantage from which he observes deserves critical treatment. Historian Tera

Hunter's study of working class black women's labor in late nineteenth century Philadelphia has shown that Du Bois's own class values and status inflected his work and the possibilities he envisioned for his subjects.²¹⁰ Hunter argues that Du Bois, "like other educated professionals" influenced by Progressive Era reforms, "set out to collect empirical data" that could inform and instigate social change and that, in the process, he also visited moral judgment on the people he studied that superseded his scientific work (92). While Hunter credits Du Bois for data-driven work that "offered a formula for reform that surpassed mainstream proposals of the era in advocating the transformation of institutions and practices that were impediments to democracy in the labor market, politics, and society," she also critiques Du Bois for failing to objectively contextualize his subjects. Hunter offers one persuasive close reading after another of Du Bois recognizing everyday tactics of resistance but reading these through a different system of values than his subjects employ, as a result transmogrifying their acts to potential infractions instead of resistance. From laborers feigning sickness in order to exercise control over their work hours, to laborers negotiating wages with table scraps from the households in which they worked, to laborers socializing in clubs outside of work in the late hours, Hunter shows that Du Bois's manner for observing the poor black residents he called the "submerged tenth," presented them as what she calls "contaminant" to be distinguished from the City's black families Du Bois judged "estimable families" (140). Hunter concludes:

²¹⁰ See Hunter, "The 'Brotherly Love' for Which This City is Proverbial Should Extend To All' the Everyday Lives of Working-Class Women in Philadelphia and Atlanta in the 1890s."

Du Bois, like other middle class reformers, however, also wishes to reshape the behavior and values of the masses to fit them to fulfill their lot, however unfairly it may have been assigned to them, in urban industrial America. In this regard, he failed to fully appreciate working class people's own values and tactics, which emphasized autonomy and collectivize life and savored social spaces for respite and recovery from wage work. Wage labor in itself was not virtuous, not by the estimates of the people who labored by their hands and sought to minimize its degradations. (145)

Hunter's analysis shows the power for a subject's own prejudice to alter how he or she perceives and explains the object he or she observes. Hunter illustrates that inasmuch as Du Bois is the subject who observes and thus sets the object, he also is an integral part of the scene he observes. Hunter's analysis raises critical oversights in Du Bois's analysis, but strangely it also affirms the need Du Bois was attempting to delineate for renewed attention concerning how subjects observed and how, unwitting or otherwise, they shaped their objects in these observations.

Du Bois's method contrasts the mindset of fictionality that Catherine Gallagher describes subjects used to organize knowledge. Whereas fictionality stipulated that readers came to texts precisely because they supposed its objects were displaced and impervious to a readers' engagement, Du Bois's work stipulated both the presence of a specific subject and a specific understanding of the object as a sentient being, susceptible both to the environment and to the wiles of the subject. By attending to the sentient needs of persons, Du Bois was showing that how knowledge was organized directly affected

live persons. Du Bois's next major work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), demonstrates that his realization of how persons lived on a daily basis in *The Philadelphia Negro* are the basis for experimenting with his method for presenting information. Du Bois's thinking on sentience plays a more significant role than literary scholars have accorded it.

The Anxiety of Crummell's Influence

If such thinking about Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* seems at odds with the work as it stands, it is because Du Bois methodology is interspersed with his declaration of his own philosophical approach to black life.

Not only did Du Bois's direct experiences with Philadelphia's black residents inform his practices, but during the same years, through his connections with the American Negro Academy, particularly its founder and leader Alexander Crummell, Du Bois publicly thought through outstanding philosophical approaches to black life, and he developed his own. Du Bois offered a differing approach, one that his scientific work animated.

Crummell's influence on Du Bois was not necessarily concordant. When it came to Crummell's thought, Du Bois was pushing against a stone. While he respected Crummell deeply, even regarding him as a prophetic figure, Du Bois's work in the years immediately after he met Crummell suggests that he disagreed with Crummell's uplift methodology for black persons. Du Bois's recognition of sentience meant that he could not abide by Crummell's understanding of a world where objects existed untethered from other objects. Whereas Crummell envisioned that black individuals could undertake uplift

irrespective (and disinterested) of others, in Du Bois's work the individual is never as discreet as Crummell presumed but always vulnerable to outside forces. If Du Bois's work in Philadelphia was teaching him anything, it was that black lives were vulnerable to external powers. Du Bois's Philadelphia work showed in his thinking.

To put Du Bois's and Crummell's thinking in opposition may not seem wise, given that, when scholars discuss these figures together, with few exceptions, it is to affirm what these scholars believe to be their harmonious thought. In their collaboration contemplating the modern day implications of Du Bois's essay, "The Talented Tenth," which Du Bois published in 1903 shortly after the appearance of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West identify Alexander Crummell as Du Bois's "hero," a figure "central in shaping his thinking about the ethical role of black intellectuals generally," and one who would greatly influenced his early thinking (1997, 121-123).²¹¹ Crummell biographer Moses Wilson argues that so infatuated was Du Bois with Crummell's ideas that "Conservation of the Races," an essay Du Bois delivered in an audience of black intellectuals that included Crummell, should be read as his forthright avowal of Crummell's ideas, however incendiary they might have been at the time (264).²¹² Although Moses casts suspicion on the depth of the men's personal relationship, he nonetheless holds that the essay established that "Du Bois was clearly the intellectual heir of Crummell, Eurocentric yet Pan-Africanist, chauvinistic yet cosmopolitan" (264). Du Bois biographer David Levering Lewis reports that aside from Du Bois's grandfather,

²¹¹ Gates and West, *The Future of the Race*.

²¹² Wilson Moses, *Alexander Crummell*.

“Crummell was the first living black man Du Bois found truly worthy of emulating—the first to whom he deferred with ready affection and intellectual affinity” (166).²¹³ For Shamoan Zamir the affinity of Du Bois’s and Crummell’s thought appeared so worn in academic literature that when he wrote his 1995 book length examination of Du Bois’s early thinking and the philosophers with which he feels it is in conversation, Zamir set aside only the book’s last chapter for Crummell. Zamir offered that “Crummell’s influence on Du Bois’s early thinking is well documented,” and he reserved his inquiry instead largely to Du Bois’s relationship with European philosophers, (1995, 169).²¹⁴ Carla Peterson is not so sold. While she too identifies in Du Bois the voice of Alexander Crummell (and that of James McCune Smith), she urges that attending to such voices beyond “caricatured description” “suggests that nineteenth-century genealogies are composed of many more skeins that the canon has thus far recognized, skeins that we need to identify, untangle, and analyze” (2011, “Untangling”)²¹⁵. For Peterson, mining the long strands of intellectual genealogies reward one’s mining with more intricate, entwined histories that complicate our understanding of how black intellectuals engaged in modes of uplift.

Understanding Du Bois as a scientist, who viewed sentience as a fact of the natural world that needed negotiating into any understanding of black persons, puts Du Bois’s thought at odds with Crummell’s philosophical approach. Du Bois’s relationship to

²¹³ Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1868 – 1919*.

²¹⁴ Zamir, *Dark Voices*.

²¹⁵ Peterson, “Untangling Genealogy's Tangled Skeins.”

Crummell's ideas was not "philiopietistic," as one critic has charged.²¹⁶ Rather, Du Bois was using Crummell's thought to stage his departure from it. He was offering a new approach to black life and uplift that used sentience as a countermeasure to theorizations that risked abstracting black persons. Examining the speeches they gave before one another both at Wilberforce and at the first meeting of the American Negro Academy shows this.

Du Bois documents the impression that Crummell made on him, and why he held Crummell in such high regard. As David Levering Lewis reports, Du Bois had met Crummell just before he took his appointment in Philadelphia,²¹⁷ while he was, as he described to a college friend, a "half happy" professor at Wilberforce University.²¹⁸ Penniless and in need of work after studies in Berlin, Du Bois had taken the first job offer that he had received at Wilberforce University in Ohio. A black religious school, Wilberforce ran primarily with the support of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the state of Ohio, and Du Bois would come to feel that the school's top administrators allowed too many academic concessions not only to stay in the good graces of its funders and board of trustees but also for their own personal ventures. While Du Bois's position at Wilberforce was not in the sciences as he had hoped, he found

²¹⁶ This is how Crummell's biographer Wilson Moses describes Du Bois's writing about Crummell and his ideas. See Moses, *Alexander Crummell*.

²¹⁷ For an account of Du Bois's plight to obtain work after his return from Berlin see Levering Lewis, *Du Bois*, p. 185-190.

²¹⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois. Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to John Dollar. ca. 1895. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, p. 1.

consolation that he would be working alongside well-known classics scholar, William Scarborough. When Du Bois found out that he would instead be replacing Scarborough as chair, Du Bois felt tricked, deceived. Wilberforce's new president, S. T. Mitchell, had succeeded the widely-respected late Bishop Daniel Payne, and as one of his first acts as president had fired his rival, the openly critical Scarborough, and then placated the faculty by hiring Du Bois, the promising young scholar, as replacement. In the same letter to a friend, Du Bois remembered the day he met Mitchell. His letter suggests that he felt like another pawn in the president's long game: "I shall never forget that man. He is stamped on my heart as the the [sic] most perfect realization of what the devil might look like in these last years of the 19th."²¹⁹

In Wilberforce's politically fraught environment, Du Bois stayed to himself. He wrote, read, taught, and hardly socialized, often retiring early to his room at the University. A diary entry of the next year reveals not just a sad birthday that Du Bois spent alone at Wilberforce—"Another birthday," he wrote, "28 years in this queer world," but also the frustration with which he looked at the University's academic concessions. When the school "suddenly" suspended classes for religious revival, Du Bois refused to take part and equivocated in a diary entry:

Now, I'm a Christian—that is, with some mental reservations I find myself quite in accord with the objects and methods of most church folk. I believe to [sic] in revivals—somewhat [.] That is I suppose that are are [sic] times when all earnest workers in any cause need re-consecration to their ideals & wish to gain co-

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

workers. So far so good—and yet, do you know that I’ve been almost a prisoner in my room for nearly a week, driven to distraction by the wild screams cries groans that rise from the chapel below me and reduced now to mental imbecility.²²⁰

Although Du Bois understood intellectually the purposes of revival as not only an affirmation of his students religious ideals but as a ceremony for any new persons who sought to join them, he felt that the revival distracted from the academic training for which the school was established. While his students where having their religious ideals reinforced, he felt his own intellectual labors thwarted if not futile in context. His mind, he held, was withering away in Wilberforce’s environment.

For Du Bois, Crummell’s visit was an exhilarating reprieve. When Crummell came to Wilberforce to deliver the commencement address in 1895, not only was he nationally regarded as one of the most incisive black intellects of his time, but he was also a religious figure of the Episcopal Church who famously did not mince words and whose prominence would allow him to stand up to anyone at the AME affiliated University. In short, in what Du Bois lamented as an anemic environment, Crummell provided abundantly the intellectual stimulus and excitement he craved. Years later, remembering the day he met Crummell at Wilberforce, Du Bois would express the awe with which he viewed Crummell and reveal the importance he ceded to his visit:

²²⁰ Birthday recollections, ca. 1896. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

“Instinctively I bowed before this man as one bows before the prophets of the world” (*Souls* 135).

If Du Bois had not been altogether familiar with Crummell’s thought, he certainly would have had a sense of it by the end of Crummell’s address. Crummell sermonized that the act of thought was not only human protocol—“the specific function of men”—but that it was also the most comprehensive uplift strategy available in a post Reconstruction world (400).²²¹ Leading with scripture—the apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians, Crummell urged his audience, as he had done consistently throughout his career, to train their mental powers: “FINALLY, brethren, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if here be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. – Phil 4:8” (399). Crummell argued to his audience that with this invocation Paul had set before them, “a body of grand ethical problems as objects of thought and solution.” They—like all persons past, present, or future—were obligated in life to discern, “What is right, and what is wrong? What is true, and what is false? What is pure and what is corrupt? What is just and what is unjust? What is honest and what is fraudulent” (399). Paul’s entreaty encapsulated what Crummell regarded as “that moral responsibility which presses on every soul the duty of facing moral problems and of

²²¹ Crummell’s sermon at Wilberforce University was reprinted in *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4, April 1898: 399 – 414 as “The Solution of Problems, The Duty and the Destiny of Man” after Crummell’s death. The citations of the sermon that follow are from this printing. There is evidence in Crummell’s papers to suggest that he gave this same sermon to at least three universities in 1895. See Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, p. 246 and p. 342 n. 12.

recognizing the task of weighing them” (400). In short, Crummell was arguing that to train thought was to endeavor in human existence. From one’s infancy into adulthood, he contended, an individual was constantly engaging in thought in order to solve moral and ethical problems, an effort he described as “the duty and destiny of man” (399).

For Crummell, the material body hardly mattered in the solution of problems. Rather, Crummell held that the material body mattered only insofar as it gave proof of thought. Thought, he argued, could be observed. Inviting his audience to view human development in children to adults, he contended, “We see with our own eyes the balance and poise of thought and judgment” (402). He offered the Wilberforce audience observations about children and adults as evidence of the developing mind, largely ignoring the changing structure of a body’s physicality as it grew into adulthood. Nonetheless, in a move that emphasizes the dynamic force he identified in thought, he used material language typically reserved for physical acts in order to describe thought. According to Crummell, one could witness the mind “prying into hidden secrets,” warding off “the assaults of temptation,” “wrestling nature with inward convictions” (401). He understood thought as the essence of the human: “What is mind? What is the nature of mind? What is its basis? Is it a product of our physical nature, or, of a finer and more subtle essence,” he asked the Wilberforce audience before leading them to the latter claim of thought’s finer essence (406).

By emphasizing his belief that thought had physical manifestations even in the earliest stages of human life, Crummell not only pointed to thought’s presence in these stages, but he also suggested its universalism. If one was not excepted from thought even

in infancy, a developmental period he scoffed was “the so-called period of unthought and irresponsibility,” then thought must be accessible to all humans at all stages of life (401).

He illustrated:

Here is a little babe, a few days breather of the common air, but notice the movements of its eyes, the close grasp of its tiny fingers, its earnest peering into the light, its wondrous listening to sound or tune. What does it all denote? Why it has already begun, instinctively and unconsciously, the endeavor to solve the mysteries of the world it has entered. (401)

Crummell’s use of a newborn infant, one just “a few days breather of the common air,” suggested he believed thought was neither exclusive to specific humans nor subject to the material conditions into which one was born. On balance, even an individual with no accumulations in the natural world used thought instinctively. Far from being simply the “special proprietorship” of the “scholar, scientist or philosopher,” thought was a function of humanity, “irrespective of the conditions of life” (400). In short, for Crummell’s human, thought was an “unvarying function of humanity” (400).

Crummell argued that the fundamental problems individuals faced were not based in materiality but based in thought. All people have faced problems, he told the Wilberforce’s graduation class. Yet, referencing the “Agrarian tumults of Rome,” the “convulsive movements of Grecian helots,” and other protest movements, he dismissed these as “frenzied and insensate men, antagonizing capital, resisting authority, ready, on the instant, to sling abroad, flame and incendiarism” (404). By responding in material ways, he argued, these persons were setting their squandering their energies on areas

indifferent to the problems they faced. Negatively assessing the value of any material protest, he squarely rejected anyone who argued “perchance, that they were generally the outcome of friction in matters of sustenance and housing; that they were simply the unrest concerning the gross material condition of the masses” (404). He chided:

Nothing can be more shallow than such a judgment. The material aspect is only the surface aspect. It is only blind eyesight which can resolve those convulsions into mere symptoms of animal unrest. For the difficulties of in their essence lie far deeper than any mere outward seeming. For see how, everywhere, moral principles and intermingled with every feature of the subject. There has rarely, if ever, been a strike, a labor riot, an industrial disturbance, an Agrarian outbreak, in all the history of man, but what has had underlying, some absorbing moral problem which agitated the souls of men. (404)

For Crummell, it was thought that caused unrest, not the material world. If one wanted to solve problems, one had to do it with thought. In Crummell’s mind thought was not only constitutive of subjects but it was the method through which subjects could alter the terms of their subjectivity. So much so was Crummell fundamentally unconcerned with materiality that he spoke of thought as if it were the equivalent to physical nourishment. He described the results of thought as its “fruit” and the “result which springs from study, the digestion.” He later rationalized the analogy, “the soul lives on after all temporal decline and all human decay” and still more “the soul has thirstings that are quenchless” (405, 414). For Crummell, thought was life’s fuel, irrespective of material drifts.

Not to have his Wilberforce audience deem his dismissal of materiality frivolous, or as he proffered they might rebut “mere idle, fruitless speculations,” Crummell leveled with them (409). He acknowledged the pull of materiality, even if in the end he aligned one’s appeal to it with indication of a being’s unfulfilled nature:

In fine, we are creatures made to look into the two worlds which bound our existence. We are creatures of sense, and so we come to see the visible world around us. But we are also, and in a higher sense, spiritual beings, and so we look perforce into the invisible world. Our lower nature forces us to look at the things which are seen. Our higher nature impels us to look upon the things which are unseen. This latter world is the boundless plane of mystery. Herein crowd upon us all the great problems of being, both for time and eternity. The world bristles with the great problems of existence and of destiny. (409)

Crummell described two worlds that pull on the subject. The first is a sentient world in which subjects are bound, if not altogether vulnerable, to the objects they perceive in the world around them. In Crummell’s view, the subject of this world allows sentience to drive him or her and has given way to his or her “lower nature.” He or she is a debased subject. Conversely, Crummell offered a second world wherein one leads a free existence. In this world, one is not bound to one’s senses and as such does not need to perceive or negotiate the world of objects—these are “unseen.” This world of invisibility grants one freedom from vulnerability, given that a world in which beings exist untethered to others presupposes a world free of countervailing forces that would threaten the sovereignty of

beings. In such a world, one unyoked to sentience, beings own power—internal resources—to help their selves. They possess the power to define their own existence.

That Crummell de-emphasized material conditions and instead championed an approach to life that focused on individual being itself—what Crummell elsewhere described as “soul”—must be understood through both Crummell’s background and the larger historical context. Certainly, Crummell’s religious faith shaped his thought. Du Bois biographer David Levering Lewis argues that in these years Crummell’s main program “was to build the moral fiber and institutions of the race in America” (164).²²² In Crummell’s view, he did not answer to persons; rather, he answered to a higher power. It bears significance that Crummell was addressing students graduating from a school affiliated with the Episcopal Church.

All the same, the graduating class of black students at Wilberforce would have also been taking Crummell’s advice into a post-reconstruction world. A life of thought, unbounded from the forces that threatened black persons in daily post-reconstruction life, was Crummell’s method for black uplift. By centering oneself in thought, Crummell suggested, one could spare oneself from the potential indignity of life led in a sentient world, a world in which objects were seen, felt, and in need of constant negotiation. Crummell is trying to be optimistic. One did not need to come into contact with others to uplift; one could uplift oneself.

It is difficult to know exactly what Du Bois, the young scientist, immediately thought of Crummell’s 1895 Wilberforce commencement address. There is no record that

²²² Lewis, *Du Bois*.

he cited its contents explicitly. What exactly, for instance, did the scientist think of Crummell's disavowal of the material world that he was training to understand? What did he think of Crummell's assertion that one could have freedom from external objects and the vulnerability and sentience that comes from these?

Despite Du Bois's lack of explicit annotation concerning Crummell's Wilberforce sermon, what is clear from Du Bois's subsequent early work is that while he respected Crummell as a thinker, he did not offer work that was simply, as scholars have argued, a concordant extension of Crummell's thought. Rather, Du Bois's early work exhibits his attempts to distinguish himself from Crummell, namely in the arena of sentient subjectivity. This work not only answers that the young scientist met Crummell's dismissal of materiality with resistance, but also that he sought to insert sentience into the arsenal of measures black persons living in a post reconstruction world could use as uplift strategy.

Du Bois's grappling with sentience as Crummell had presented it to Wilberforce's graduating class can be seen as early as Du Bois's essay, "Conservation of the Race." Du Bois delivered the essay in Crummell's presence, at the first meeting of the American Negro Academy on 5 March 1897, immediately after Crummell had opened the Academy's proceedings with his own address.²²³ By this point, Du Bois was deep into his work surveying Philadelphia's black residents, and his scientific method, based in the

²²³ This was the 127th anniversary of Crispus Attucks's killing, a man the American Negro Academy deemed the first martyr for the freedoms they sought to espouse with their intellectual endeavors. See Cromwell, "American Negro Academy" in *African Times and Orient Review*.

materiality Crummell disregarded, was at the foreground of his thought. Their speeches that day before the American Negro Academy exhibit their diverging thought.

Crummell's inaugural address, known now as "Civilization, the Primal Need of the Race," both laid in broad terms what he proposed as the organization's aims and extended his earlier advocacy of thought as an uplift mechanism for black persons.²²⁴ The American Negro Academy, comprised of a number of black male intellectuals Crummell had gathered to help the race, would have as their "special undertaking," as Crummell put it that day, "the civilization of the Negro race in the United States, by the scientific processes of literature, art, and philosophy, through the agency of the cultured men of this same Negro race" (285). Individuals could better themselves. Crummell argued that if thought was the solution to black people's problems in a post reconstruction world, they needed to produce art as thought objects: "To make *men* you need civilization; and what I mean by civilization is the action of exalted forces, both God and man. For manhood is the most majestic thing in God's creation; and hence the demand for the very highest art in the shaping and moulding of human souls" (285, emphasis in original). Showing still again his rejection of materialism, in particular the kind espoused by contemporary Booker T. Washington, Crummell chided those "constantly dogmatizing theories of sense and matter as the salvable hope of the race," reproving these as "Blind men!" (285). Instead, Crummell urged that not just black persons but persons of any defining characteristic, for that matter, needed first to apprehend their own ideological stance toward being, what he called "the grand conceptions of being" (285). With a disquieting

²²⁴ See Crummell, "Civilization, the Primal Need of the Race."

strain of elitism that contradicted the universalism he had earlier espoused at Wilberforce, he argued that because everyone “in a race cannot be a philosopher” that there was “the need of the trained and scholarly men of a race to employ their knowledge and culture and teaching and to guide both the opinions and habits of the crude masses” (287). It was up to individuals to help groups.

Importantly, Crummell stipulated what role sense should play in these scholarly endeavors—how scholars ought to negotiate the world of sensed objects: “And what is the spirit with which they are to come to this work? My answer is, that *disinterestedness* must animate their motives and their acts. Whatever rivalries and dissensions may divide man in the social or political world, let generosity govern *us*” (288, emphasis in original). In Crummell’s view not only was civilization the effect of individual ideological study but also of a keen disinterest in material conditions. He urged his audience not to wallow in the sentient divisions that marked their daily political and social experiences, but to continue in the work of thought in spite of these.

While Du Bois’s “Conservation of the Races” maintained a similarly elitist strain by suggesting that only a scholarly few were uniquely suited to lead black people in the U.S., it contrasted from Crummell’s address when it exalted sentience not as an element of the “crude masses” but as a scientific fact worthy of investigation. Sentience, Du Bois suggested, was the scientific tool with which to induce a rethinking of improper representations of black persons in literacy culture. To wit, Du Bois opened his address to the Academy foreground as an impetus for further intellectual work, but by describing sentience as the driving force:

The American Negro has always felt an intense personal interest in discussions as to the origins and destinies of races: primarily because back of most discussions of race with which he is familiar, have lurked certain assumptions as to his natural abilities, as to his political, intellectual and moral status, which he felt were wrong. (176)²²⁵

Du Bois's opening statement to the Academy centralized sentience as his object of inquiry above thought. The terms Du Bois did not select for his opening are just as important as the terms he selected. Instead of using some linguistic formation that designated thought as the impetus for his investigation, Du Bois twice chose 'felt,' a term used to designate the experience of sentience. Du Bois described for the scholars before him a world of "assumptions"—forms of thought basically—that the natural world, here composed of sensation and other lived experience, derails or altogether disqualifies. He used sentience to suggest that in literature about black persons lurk specific hypothesis (thought) that are unfounded in the interaction of objects in the natural world (sentience). In other words, he proposed that sentience was an observable fact, one that inherently countered potentially inaccurate literature about black persons. As such, the beginning of Du Bois's address elevated sentience from mere intuition to documentable scientific fact.

Du Bois's justified using sentience as an epistemological tool with the remainder of his address to the Academy. While he declared that the purpose of "Conservation of the Races" was to understand "the real meaning of Race" and how it affected interaction between humans, what remains innovative in the essay is that Du Bois proposed a

²²⁵ Du Bois, "Conservation of the Races."

scientific methodology that extended the definition of the materiality to include sentience. Du Bois had based his investigation of race on the precept that in order to achieve any comprehensive interpretation of human relations—including those pertaining to racial difference—had to take into account the natural world. “It is certain that all human striving must recognize the hard limits of natural law, and that any striving, no matter how intense and earnest, which is against the constitution of the world, is vain,” he declared, moving farther away from Crummell’s invocations to the same audience that one must remain indifferent to materiality (177). In Du Bois’s knowledge-making apparatus, epistemology needed to take the natural world into account and this included sentience.

For Du Bois, sentience was an under-explored aspect of the natural world. He pointed his Academy audience to the physical characteristics that scientists typically studied when they attempted to understand race and racial difference, and he argued that these characteristics were limited versions of the natural world that had yielded all the knowledge they were going to yield. As he noted, although a number of methodologies for understanding racial difference had been proposed by his late nineteenth century moment—“color, hair, cranial measurements and language,” “[u]nfortunately for scientists, however, these criteria of race are most exasperatingly intermingled” to produce any reliable insight (177). Scientific work based in these physical characteristics had proven both unable to differentiate between races and had given Du Bois reason to affirm that “so far as purely physical characteristics are concerned, the differences between men do not explain all the differences of their history” (177). Du Bois added that

“as Darwin himself said, that great as is the physical unlikeness of the various races of men their likenesses are greater, and upon this rests the whole scientific doctrine of Human Brotherhood” (177). Du Bois’s qualification of the physical characteristics scholars had examined—“purely” announced the new territory he sought to uncover; the “purely” physical had been unable to generate new racial understanding of any significance and, so far as Du Bois was concerned, had merely affirmed older theorization that was unable to make meaning of morphological difference. The overwhelming sense that similarities between races dominated the field of race study and understanding informed Du Bois’s search for a methodology that understood ostensibly discrete objects existing in relation to one another. Understanding how objects were both dependent and vulnerable to one another would allow scientists to understand them better; such was the work of sentience and race.

Arguing that the scientific study of “the grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone go but a short way toward explaining the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress,” Du Bois proposed that more knowledge could be obtained from examining sentience, given that it inherently emphasized relations between objects (177). In differentiation from the invisible world of thought that Crummell had presented as existence’s highest form, Du Bois observed that persons in the natural world existed in relation with visible others.

Du Bois contended that the social and economic scene in which he and the members of the academy produced knowledge potentially blinded them to sentience. He ribbed that the milieu of American exceptionalism and free market economy (what he

would in the same speech call that “mad money-getting plutocracy”) in which they existed did not encourage an individual to recognize objects that threatened to interfere with him or her (181). “We, who have been reared and trained under the individualistic philosophy of the Declaration of Independence and the laissez-faire philosophy of Adam Smith, are loath to see and loath to acknowledge this patent fact,” he quipped (178). Du Bois was likely speaking to Smith’s view that individuals exercised “natural liberty”; Smith theorized that without outside restraints individuals made the best decisions for themselves.²²⁶ Such a view would have certainly squared with the Declaration of Independence’s precept that all individuals are created equal and endowed with the right to liberty. Both figurations diminish, if not obliterate, any interference or the need to negotiate other individuals in the natural world.

Du Bois urged the Academy to look beyond the customary physical characteristics scientists had considered when trying to define race in order to see the nuances that he believed lay in plain sight. “There are differences—subtle, delicate and elusive, though they may be—which have silently but definitely separated men into groups” (177). This same separation entailed distinctions that could scientists could note.

Du Bois expanded:

²²⁶ On a related note, Smith also theorized that “sympathy,” a process he described as a type of imaginative projection of one into an other’s circumstances, could give such choices. In this regard, Smith’s conception of empathy distinguishes itself from David Hume’s whose sympathy is based on feeling precisely what another feels as opposed to imagining those circumstances through one’s self. Du Bois appears to want to revisit Hume’s conception. Philosopher Samuel Fleischacker discusses this distinction of sympathy as conceived through Smith and Hume. See Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations*, p. 9-11.

But while race differences have followed mainly physical race lines, yet no mere physical distinctions would really define or explain the deeper differences—the cohesiveness and continuity of these groups. The deeper differences are spiritual, psychological, differences—undoubtedly based on the physical, but infinitely transcending them. The forces that bind together the Teuton nations are, then, first, their race identity and common blood; secondly, and more important, a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life. The whole process which has brought about these race differentiations has been a growth, and the great characteristic of this growth has been the differentiation of spiritual and mental differences between great races of mankind and the integration of physical differences. (177)

Du Bois outlined that the Academy could discern racial difference when they considered how sentience influenced conceptions of race. The scholar needed only to push beyond the milieu of capital and radical individualism that left one indifferent to others on the one hand and left one understanding others as disposable quantities of the other. There were elements to learn from relation that biology alone failed to explain.

Du Bois's contention that differences were at once incorporeal—spiritual, psychological—and based in physicality distinguished sensation from perception. Du Bois was referencing a felt sense of the body. He was getting at sensation that individuals experience because they come into contact with other individuals, the same messy being that Crummell had dismissed as crude and base.

Scholars have debated the import of “Conservation of the Races” since the day it was delivered, but interestingly while Crummell commented on Du Bois’s ends, he remained silent about his sentient methodology. Crummell biographer Wilson Moses reports that in the minutes that Academy secretary John W. Cromwell apparently took at the 1897 meeting, Cromwell reported that Du Bois’s speech incited debate among the Academy’s members.²²⁷ Per Moses, when Academy member William Scarborough objected that he could not “conceive of two races, equal in every particular, living side by side, without intermingling,” that Crummell took exception, asking Scarborough to provide evidence from any civilization for his claim. (Moses 265). Moses reports that Crummell nattered variously:

Crummell rambled on at some length saying in sum that races, like families, were established by God and that races, like families, would always exist, because they were established by God. He concluded by saying, “We have just had a paper here tonight which is essentially a paper on the uses of races, and I think it is essentially a good one.” (Moses 265)

Crummell’s equivocating assessment of Du Bois’s speech left Du Bois’s scientific methodology unattended. Instead, he reserved his assessment of Du Bois’s address to the

²²⁷ I have been unable to find this document. Moses writes that he copied the document from Cromwell’s granddaughter Professor Adelaine Cromwell in 1986 and deposited it at Brown University’s Library. See Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, p343. n. 3. Cromwell’s granddaughter is of this date 96 years of age, and I could not reach her. Correspondence with Brown University Library resulted in verification that this document is not at that library. A WorldCat record suggests the document may have wound up at Howard University. I am following this lead. In the meantime, I use Moses’s report of the document.

outcomes Du Bois sought to achieve when he examined race. Crummell valued Du Bois's speech in as much as it attempted to make use of what he understood as God's creation.

Critics have discussed Du Bois's scientific argument or, more precisely, what they understand as its absence. Notably, Kwame Appiah and Lucius Outlaw have debated the salience of Du Bois's scientific view of race.²²⁸ Appiah contends that Du Bois may have taken up a socio-historical meaning of race and sought to leave biological science behind, but that he was finally unable to transcend biological science. Outlaw takes issue with Appiah's argument and charges that because Appiah examines Du Bois's race criteria individually as opposed to in clusters that he misses the element of a subject's choice that Du Bois race criteria leaves open. While these scholars disagree on whether to read Du Bois's race criteria conjunctively or disjunctively, both scholars dismiss the newer scientific thrust of Du Bois's argument: they disregard sentience as a scientific fact deserving of study. Disregard for the scientific thrust of Du Bois work, alters the works meaning and diminishes a comprehensive understanding of his goals. As Adolph Reed has argued concerning readings of Du Bois's "Conservation of the Races," Du Bois believed his work at the time was scientific because it integrated the science of social scientists as well.²²⁹

Part of the import of the "Conservation of the Races" address and Du Bois's association with Crummell through the American Negro Academy is that these experiences built the conceptual stage for the work that Du Bois conducted with *The*

²²⁸ See Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument" and Outlaw, "Conserve Races? In Defense of W. E. B. Du Bois."

²²⁹ See Reed, *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought*.

Souls of Black Folk. It was not simply that Du Bois was developing a scientific methodology, it was that the scientific methodology he was proposing announced a departure from the intellectual genealogy that he identified preceded him, a genealogy he named Alexander Crummell ending.

Although Du Bois's regard for sentience and its usefulness differed starkly from Crummell's, Du Bois still held Crummell in high esteem. It is clear that he valued Crummell as a leader for black people in the United States. When in *The Souls of Black Folk*, in the context of speaking against Booker T. Washington's brand of leadership, Du Bois named a genealogy of the thinkers he upheld as speaking productively to black life, he named Crummell (and Douglass) approvingly:

After the war and emancipation, the great form of Frederick Douglass, the greatest of American Negro leaders, still led the host. Self-assertion, especially in political lines, was the main programme, and behind Douglass came Elliot, Bruce, and Langston, and the Reconstruction politicians, and, less conspicuous but of greater social significance, Alexander Crummell and Bishop Daniel Payne. (39)

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Du Bois positioned Crummell prominently in his male genealogy of black intellectual life. His assertion that Crummell's thought was of great social significance despite the potential for it to escape historical notice, shows the high degree to which he valued Crummell's work. Still, Du Bois's assessment that it was to some degree inconspicuous also presented Crummell as a figure he needed to elevate out of potential obscurity.

²³⁰ Du Bois, "Of Booker T. Washington" in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West suggest as much when they laud that Du Bois's chapter on Crummell in *The Souls of Black Folk* accepted the opportunity to "immortalize" Crummell, as if Crummell's life's work had not cemented his place in black intellectual life on its own (121).²³¹

Du Bois approached black life from a decidedly more sentient perspective than Crummell, and he used his writing to make this evident. His efforts to differentiate his approach to studying and understanding black persons from Crummell's efforts are best evident in *The Souls of Black Folk's* chapter that bears the bishop's name, "Of Alexander Crummell."²³² Ostensibly, Du Bois included the chapter to eulogize Crummell after his death in 1898. While the chapter celebrates Crummell's life, it should not be read simply as affectionate eulogy but as commemoration: in as much as the chapter commemorates Crummell and his thought, it also celebrates them as the person and methodology of a former era.

Du Bois's romanticized Crummell fits the archival record. Du Bois's papers suggest that his relationship with Crummell may have been limited to the professional and intellectual realms. In 1941, decades after Crummell's 1898 death, a researcher preparing a manuscript on Crummell got in touch with Du Bois after perusing through the Schomburg's Crummell Papers and wrote, "I found that you knew him." The researcher

²³¹ Gates and West, *Future of the Race*.

²³² Philosopher Williams-Golding has noted that this chapter is symmetrically opposite Du Bois's chapter on Booker T. Washington and that its affectionate tone inverts the assailing work he conducted on Washington's thought. See William-Golding, p. 245.

asked Du Bois to send any biographical information he might have for Crummell.²³³ Du Bois's response was short and peculiar, given the reverence he bestows on Crummell in *The Souls of Black Folk*. "I am afraid I cannot help you much in the case of Alexander Crummell," he wrote. In short sentences Du Bois then notified the researcher that his grandfather had worked at the church where Crummell had served as rector, referred him to the chapter he had written on Crummell—what he called "an interpretation of his life," informed him Crummell had been the president of the American Negro Academy and that he had succeeded him after his death, and then closed: "Despite all this I have no source of knowledge as to the facts of his life. Sorry I cannot help you."²³⁴

Du Bois's note to the researcher may confirm the suspicions Crummell's biographer Wilson Moses, raises about Du Bois's relationship with Crummell. He labels Du Bois's chapter on Crummell an idealized portrait of the pastor. Wilson judges: "Du Bois's short biography promises much but leaves a great deal to the imagination. The life is sketchily presented, and the character is sentimentalized [...] Du Bois's handling of Crummell was filiopietistic, but in all his published writings, although the occasionally mentions and even quotes him, Du Bois records no conversations with Crummell, no

²³³ Letter from Ernest Baer Johnson to W. E. B. Du Bois, November 7, 1941. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

²³⁴ Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Ernest Baer Johnson, November 20, 1941. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

anecdotes concerning his administration of the American Negro Academy, no observation on his interactions with his peers” (247)²³⁵

Yet, even this case might be overstated. While it is true that Du Bois had presented Crummell in sentimentalized terms, Du Bois’s very use of sentimentalization was by no means “philiopietistic” but a staged departure from the philosophical approach Crummell advocated. It was a new approach.

Five years after Crummell’s death in 1898 Du Bois’s chapter “Of Alexander Crummell” appeared in *The Souls of Black Folk*, and in it Du Bois immersed Crummell in the very world of sensation that Crummell had bemoaned bounded subjects to their lower nature. In the chapter, Du Bois figured Crummell as a drifting combatant who, in a world of black disenfranchisement, warred with and finally fended-off the strong, if not potentially debilitating emotions that external elements had compelled—anger, humiliation, and despair. In short, Du Bois narrated a vision of sentient subjectivity that contrasted the take Crummell had long sermonized concerning the internal life of Soul. In Du Bois’s vision, one’s subjectivity stipulated contact with and potential influence from perceived others. Du Bois opened:

This is the story of a human heart,—the tale of a black boy who many long years ago began to struggle with life that he might know the world and know himself.

Three temptations he met on those dark dunes that lay gray and dismal before the wonder-eyes of the child: the temptation of Hate, that stood out against the red

²³⁵ Moses also suggests that Du Bois seems to be unaware of Crummell’s interaction with his grandfather, Alexander Du Bois, but Du Bois’s letter to the researcher referenced above suggests this might not be the case. See Moses, *Alexander Crummell*.

dawn; the temptation of Despair, that darkened noonday; and the temptation of Doubt, that ever steals along with twilight. Above all, you must hear of the vales he crossed,—the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

(134)

Du Bois's decision to make his Crummell a child again heightens his Crummell's vulnerability to outside elements or any external object, given that his Crummell potentially meets hazards with naivety. Far from the world of invisibility that the real Crummell theorized, Du Bois's young Crummell senses objects—here, dark and dismal dunes—in a manner that transcends just threat; the objects stupefy him as he looks on them with near Kantian awe.²³⁶ In Du Bois's estimation, his Crummell's task, "that he might know the world and know himself," was to negotiate such external objects. The very language of crossing that Du Bois used inferred that one's movement from one place to another ("across vales") before every other consideration ("above all") always stipulated the potential for encounters with objects on the landscape. On and moving through such intersubjective topologies, subjects risked humiliation and even death as they potentially surrendered sovereignty to external objects.

Du Bois gave provenance for this vision of a sentient subjectivity, and it contextualized that the main difference he conceived between his and Crummell's accounts of the world was Crummell's foundation of monotheist belief. Crummell may have held one being above all others, but Du Bois extended divinity to all. For Du Bois,

²³⁶ Kant described such stupefaction as he discussed conscience in *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*.

sentient subjectivity was an ongoing process that required meeting others and negotiating them as potentially supreme beings. Summing up the century in which Crummell carried out his life, Du Bois argued:

The nineteenth was the first century of human sympathy,-- the age when half wonderingly we began to descry in others that transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself; when clodhoppers and peasants, and tramps and thieves, and millionaires and--sometimes--Negroes, became throbbing souls whose warm pulsing life touched us so nearly that we half gasped with surprise, crying, "Thou too! Hast Thou seen Sorrow and the dull waters of Hopelessness? Hast Thou known Life?" And then all helplessly we peered into those Other-worlds, and wailed, "O World of Worlds, how shall man make you one?"

Du Bois described a nineteenth century in which subjects not only recognized divinity in the self but also began to identify this "spark," this life in others; he labeled this process "sympathy."²³⁷ In Du Bois's sympathy objects are transformed to life-filled beings, equal beings with the ability to defy the divinity of an other's self. Power is not exclusive but dispersed. Even subjects that the American century considered expendable were vested with divine power. Whether millionaire or thief, one recognized that others had the ability to alter one's life just as one could alter an other's life. If all subjects had such power, Du Bois presumed, the task became negotiating it for the sake of interrelation and, even, intimacy. Sympathy was a process necessary for sentient life. In other words,

²³⁷ Du Bois's assertion reminds of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which Whitman edited throughout his life.

Du Bois implied that the solution to problems occurred in relation.

For fear of suggesting Du Bois's departure from Crummell too severely and provoking questions of why Du Bois summons Crummell at all, it is important to note that Du Bois figured himself as part of Crummell's intellectual genealogy. He had already, in *The Souls of Black Folk's* third chapter, disavowed, if not assailed, the brand of materialist (as in accumulation of goods) leadership he felt Booker T. Washington represented.²³⁸ Conversely, while he did not agree fully with Crummell's program, the chapter suggests that he certainly respected his thought and his ideals and that he had great affection for the intellect that had promulgated them.

Even Crummell biographer Wilson Moses reads Du Bois expressing his affection for Crummell, even if he understandably finds suspicious the stark differences between the Crummell that Du Bois portrayed and the one we find in the archive. While Moses notes that what drew Du Bois to Crummell was their affinity for studying spiritual ways to obtain human fulfillment, because he does not see Du Bois understanding spirituality as a scientific element of corporeality, he is left searching for Du Bois's personal motivation for his interest in feelings. Moses concludes that Du Bois adored Crummell as "the substitute for the father he had never known" and, doubling-down, that Du Bois bowed to Crummell "as a son in some patriarchal society might bow to receive his father's blessing or birthright" (*Creative Conflict* 125).²³⁹ Plainly put, because Moses

²³⁸ See Du Bois, "Of Booker T. Washington."

²³⁹ Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*.

disregards sentience as an area of academic inquiry, he judges that Du Bois must be negotiating personal daddy issues.²⁴⁰

Moses writes that “[f]or Du Bois, as for Crummell, the essential prerequisites for human fulfillment were neither wealth, nor cheap political savvy, but character and spiritual values” (*Golden* 137).²⁴¹ Yet, he charges Du Bois, who he dubs “an imperious intellectual, a Harvard graduate with a sense of noblesse oblige” with wanting a personal connection to Crummell and for sentimentalizing him in what he deems a vague, dreamy, and romantic narrative (*Golden* 138).²⁴² The truly sensuous manner in which Du Bois portrayed Crummell confounds Moses to the point that he judges: “Du Bois did not know, or chose to ignore, much about Crummell at the time he wrote the eulogy, and Crummell’s ambition, irascibility, and sardonicism do not impinge on the author’s imagination” (*Creative* 125).²⁴³ Then, placing Du Bois outside of the circle of Crummell’s acquaintances, he suggests that Du Bois’s work on Crummell was complete fabrication. He jabs, “[Du Bois’s] portrayal must have occasioned a wink and a nudge from Crummell’s acquaintances” given that “Crummell was an entirely different kind of cat” (125).

Moses’s irritation with Du Bois and his work—Moses also denounces Du Bois’s use of terms in “Conservation of the Races” as “disgracefully inconsistent” (*Golden* 135)

²⁴⁰ Other scholars suggest the same paternal reasons for Du Bois’s interest in Crummell. See Stuckey, *Slave Culture* and Levering Lewis, *Du Bois*.

²⁴¹ Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age Of Black Nationalism, 1850 -1925*.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Moses, *The Golden Age Of Black Nationalism, 1850 -1925*.

—leaves Du Bois’s disidentification from Crummell undetected for him even though he diagnoses many of its symptoms. Moses recognizes Du Bois’s interest in sentience, but because he does not consider Du Bois’s interest in sentience to be scientific or academic, he dismisses it as lacking rigor and resorts to personal exegesis—a box of filiopiety for Du Bois. As a result, for him, Du Bois’s affinity to Crummell stems from “his appreciation for the nonmaterial world in which the elder statesman of racial mysticism had dwelt ” as opposed to existing in spite of it (*Golden* 137).²⁴⁴

While Du Bois understood his work as a departure from Crummell’s ideal, he certainly respected him and his position, and his writing suggests he believed he was its next iteration. Du Bois’s association with Crummell may have been more with the ideas and the ideals rather than the person himself, and even then, at least in the arena of sentient subjectivity, it was more of a disassociation. Crummell was dead. Du Bois saw it as his time to push his own agenda for black intellectual life—one that attempted to visit the actual on the ideal.

Du Bois’s choice of epigraphs in “Of Alexander Crummell” alluded to his wish to insert the sentience into ideal Crummell had advocated. Both the Tennyson poetic lines from “The Passing of Arthur” and the six opening musical bars of “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” that Du Bois selected as epigraphs for the work performed double-duty for Du Bois: each at once valorized Crummell and highlighted Du Bois’s vantage as the survivor who gets to tell Crummell’s story and move forward freely with his own. In the Tennyson narrative poem, Bedivere, the last surviving knight of King Arthur’s

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

roundtable, tells King Arthur's story. Like Du Bois does for Crummell, Bedivere recounts from his perspective the struggles the legendary leader faced as he endeavored to adapt to a swiftly changing world. King Arthur becomes a symbol of an idealized past who is undone by the raw sensuousness around him.²⁴⁵ He dies in Bedivere's arms at the end of the poem.

In a scene where Bedivere expresses his reverie that his dead king's earthly strife yields him an afterlife that welcomes him as a hero, Bedivere delivers the lines that Du Bois quotes at the outset of his Crummell chapter:

Then from the Dawn it seemed there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars. (*Souls*)

The sensuous welcome Bedivere hopes greets Arthur to the fair afterlife indicates Bedivere's appreciation for the battles that Arthur waged for his ideals, and it suggests Bedivere believes that these should be commemorated. Bedivere imagines celebratory cries emerging, though hardly perceptible from his vantage, from the immediate future. In this manner, the sensuous welcome Bedivere hopes for Arthur would appear to predict a reconciliation of ideals with sense.

Du Bois chose an epigraph from a work that Tennyson described publicly as focusing on the long war between sense and soul.²⁴⁶ Tennyson's "Passing of Arthur" was a poem from his larger series, "The Idylls of the King," which he worked on and published in sections throughout his life. When Tennyson, then poet laureate of Great Britain and Ireland, completed the work, he wrote an epilogue that fulfilled Queen Victoria's request to him to have the work honor her late king. The same epilogue also offered readers indication that Tennyson had crafted Arthur's epic having in mind the very context of renewed sentient subjectivity that Du Bois would later, across an ocean and at a later date, argue marked nineteenth century relations. Tennyson asked:

But thou, my Queen,

Not for itself, but through thy living love

For one to whom I made it o'er his grave

Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,

New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul

Tennyson viewed himself as a cultural translator of sorts. Through his life's work on Arthur he was reading into the Victorian nineteenth century the same tension between Sense and Soul that he believed followed human life over and again in previous centuries. As Joseph Denney explains in his 1911 introduction to the work's reprinting, by "new-old" Tennyson meant that he would recount old stories "as a nineteenth-century

²⁴⁶ Tennyson would also offer these thoughts to his son. Tennyson's son reports he said, "I intended Arthur to represent the ideal Soul of Man, coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh." See *Idylls of the King*, ed. Hallam, Lord Tennyson [London: Macmillan, 1908], 443

poet, and with the best ideals of his own age in full view; that, while retaining the mediaeval imagery, he will adapt the legends to the feelings and sentiments of his own generation” (xxx).²⁴⁷ He argued that sense’s tension with soul took a number of forms: “Some call the conflict of Sense against Soul the war of body against spirit ; others, the war of the actual against the ideal; others, the war of the possible against the desirable; others, the war of the imperfect against the perfect” (xxx).²⁴⁸ These tensions tell us more about those between Crummell and Du Bois views.

If Du Bois used Tennyson’s passage to analogizes the late fictional King Arthur to the late Crummell, it also stands to reason that Du Bois, as narrator of Crummell’s life, places himself in the role of Bedivere, the surviving combatant who gets to tell his former leaders story and. To follow the analogy still further, it positions Crummell as Soul’s advocate and Du Bois’s as Sense’s. It also announces Du Bois as Crummell’s survivor with freedom and power to alter the future.

At the end of his Crummell chapter, like Bedivere looking upon the his dead leader, Du Bois looks on Crummell’s work in the nineteenth century:

He did his work,--he did it nobly and well; and yet I sorrow that here he worked alone, with so little human sympathy. His name to-day, in this broad land, means little, and comes to fifty million ears laden with no incense of memory or emulation. And herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor,--all men

²⁴⁷ See Denney, “Introduction.”

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

know something of poverty; not that men are wicked,--who is good? not that men are ignorant,-- what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men. (141)

Du Bois's claim that Crummell worked with little sympathy does not present a moral judgment but is merely Du Bois's assessment of Crummell's methodology. In the world that Crummell left behind, Du Bois lamented not one's material, moral, or factual state, but that the relations these states potentially produced in the natural world went unheeded. Du Bois was pivoting to his focus on sentient relations.

The musical notation Du Bois included from "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" likewise suggests that Du Bois's interpretation of Crummell's life extended further than mere eulogy, and that it was announcing him as the next iteration of that black intellectual genealogy. Later, in the same collection's final chapter, "Of Sorrow Songs," Du Bois would remind his reader that he had begun his telling of Crummell's life story with "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" "the song that all men know," and he would label it "the cradle-song of the death." Placing death in a cradle seems irreducibly strange initially. On the one hand, because a cradle houses fertility's products. Du Bois suggested that productivity could be had from death. Like slaves left behind on plantain who sang "Swing Low" looking for ways of escape and salvation, Crummell's death, though painful, had left a mark that others could pick up.

Sentience in *The Soul's of Black Folk*

When W.E.B. Du Bois reprinted his 1897 "Strivings of The Negro People" in a new collection of "essays and sketches," *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), he re-titled the

piece “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and made it the first chapter of his new work. The renamed piece and its placement at the collection’s opening had the effect of repositioning its author for the reader. The change from “of The Negro” to “Of Our” both emphasized a shift in the perspective from which the author wrote and it exhibited the author inhabiting a direct and sensual relation with a set of others. No longer was the author the disembodied, objective observer of “The Negro People,” but instead Du Bois had situated himself decidedly into the set of relations about which he wrote as a racialized and—as his addition of the word “Spiritual” gestures—a sentient subject. Although Du Bois’s revisions have received much attention in academic literature, this matter of a sentient subjectivity—which Du Bois saw fit to parse and foreground and to place under the rubric of “Souls,” a move that already suggests its heft in his thinking—has received little attention in scholarship about him.²⁴⁹

Although Du Bois’s work presents an adamant case for including materiality in representations of black life, his case does not receive a hearing in a number of major scholarly works. While several scholars have attended closely to the significance of revisions Du Bois made to chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk*, the stuff of a sentient subjectivity has received little extended, literal consideration in academic treatments of his work.

Literary scholarship often understands *The Souls of Black Folk* as an extended metaphor for an idea of black life. For instance, in a long-standing, often-cited reading of

²⁴⁹ For examples of scholarship that attends to these revisions see Stepto, *From Behind the Veil*; Aptheker, “Introduction”; and Zamir, “*The Souls of Black Folk: Thought and Afterthought*.”

Du Bois's collection, Robert Stepto emphasizes what he sees as the work's representational aspect (1979).²⁵⁰ He asserts that Du Bois's renamed first chapter may be "the single most important title revision" of the collected "fugitive essays," given that it "establishes the tone of the whole" (54). For Stepto, this title revision is the first in a series of efforts that Du Bois made in order to marshal "runaway" writings into a singular narrative distinct from a collection of documentary reports. As Stepto outlines in two premises at the outset of his analysis, "First, [*The Souls of Black Folk*] is not merely an assembled text, but also an orchestrated one; second the orchestrated materials are far more written, metaphorical, archetypal than they are edited, prosaic, and documentary" (52-53). Stepto's thrust is to suggest that Du Bois's work offers readers something special given that it is imaginative and, to his eye, does not settle with mere observation. The implication, undergirding Stepto's critique is that the act of documenting or witnessing is prosaic, ordinary, and unremarkable.

Working from these premises Stepto derives notable meaning from *The Soul of Black Folks*'s form, understanding it as an allegory for human subjectivity. He argues that Du Bois's revisions dramatize his wish to more stridently assert his black identity. He holds that Du Bois's work intentionally yoked differing literary forms in order to mimic the multiplicity of his black racial identity. Per Stepto, the manner in which Du Bois arranged the revised chapters created an aesthetic that differentiated Du Bois's approach from that of Booker T. Washington's and other contemporaries. Specifically, Stepto contends that Du Bois distinguished himself by transcending Washington's almost

²⁵⁰ Stepto, *From Behind the Veil*.

exclusive attendance to black people's material needs and instead represented black people's spiritual needs. Stepto's assertions culminate to his conclusion that *The Souls of Black Folk* was "nothing less than the full-blossoming of Du Bois's *rhetoric* of Negro uplift" (55, my emphasis). In short, in his analysis of Du Bois's work, Stepto implies that for Du Bois blackness was at base a rhetorical project, not so much a material one. Stepto lays emphasis on blackness as a mode of thought that can be apprehended and interpreted through text. Analyzing what he sees as the persuasive suture and re-arrangement of Du Bois's pages, as in the premises that guide his analysis, when Stepto compares Du Bois to Washington, he again deemphasizes materiality in Du Bois's work. Stepto's critical apparatus relies on his interpretation of Du Bois conducting figurative work, even if to the exclusion of the materiality it was made to reference.

Other scholars have taken a similar approach. Houston Baker adopted a view in accordance to Stepto's when he described what he regards as Du Bois's aesthetic. Baker initially calls the collection a "numinous passage of spiritual landscapes" but soon settles on labeling it a "dioramic" "cultural performance" that "offers a bright sounding spiritual display of men, women, institutions, doctrines, debates, follies, tragedies, hopes, expectations and policies that combine to form a 'problem'" (1987, 58)²⁵¹. For Baker, the images of *The Soul's of Black Folk* construct an abstract idea—"a 'problem.'" Baker's interpretation suggests that Du Bois, perhaps ironically, responded to black persons conceptualization with still another conceptualization of blackness, albeit his own. Nancy Bentley agrees with Baker and emphasizes that even the "fractures and fissures" of Du

²⁵¹ Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*.

Bois's "montaged text" furnish apt metaphors for the "record of interruptions, ideological contradictions, and political willfulness that are the historical marks—the identifying scars—of the literary dream of human equality whenever it is tested against human history" (2012, 284).²⁵² Bentley reads Du Bois's work conducting emblematic endeavor even within text breaks and caesura. In sum, for each of these scholars, *The Souls of Black Folk* functions as a sort of aesthetic semiosis of black experience. What animates their academic understandings of *The Souls of Black Folk*, even if only implicitly, is that Du Bois's artful language—his figures of speech, his idiosyncratic suturing of texts, and so on—produced an aesthetic object that represented the idea of black lives. To put it another way, these scholars build their analytic apparatus on the assumption that Du Bois's work relies on imagination rather than "prosaic" material witnessing.

The impulses in these scholars' work may have found its genesis in a moment of the American academy that Barbara Christian described in her 1987 essay by the same name as the "race for theory."²⁵³ Christian used the term "race for theory" to label two modes of meaning-making—the first prevalent, the second uncommon—that she detected in the work of her contemporaries. In her first use of the term she identified a predominant thrust, "a takeover in the literary world by Western philosophers of the old literary elite," wherein scholars, attempting to seize control over a widening field, prioritized knowledge-making itself to the texts it was meant to explore (51). Such work, Christian contends, "intimidated, devalued" the other "race for theory" by writers of

²⁵² Nancy Bentley, *Frantic Panoramas: American Literature and Mass Culture, 1870-1920*.

²⁵³ Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory."

color, women, and third world writers who were engaging in theorizing all their own that was distinct from the modes of knowledge-making that predominated the academy and that operated unidentified because they was undetectable to an “old literary elite” for its interest in both the sensual (52).

Perhaps it was in this context of writing against a moment in which black letters were undervalued as objects deserving particularized critical thought and, even more concretely, dedicated institutional and disciplinary space, that the excitement and the pressure to reaffirm those letters’ status as complex aesthetic objects deserving of inquiry prescribed the analytic super-emphasis on their artfulness. Such a context bears significance even decades later where the tactics persist because the environments in which they were created also persist. Of this writing, in an academy in which valuation of black texts has moved forward and yet still remains embattled, critical emphasis on aesthetics has likewise maintained proportionate rank.²⁵⁴ We need only read how in his most recent installment of a career of essays explicating Du Bois’s philosophical thought Nahum Chandler states his critical orientation so defiantly you understand it is not commonplace.²⁵⁵ Arguing that any study of Du Bois’s conception of blackness should ultimately maintain persons and their relations at its center, Chandler imposes that such a study “cannot and should not presuppose the object of its concern, the object given to it, as a simple transcendental entity, whether hypostatized as an object of a discipline of

²⁵⁴ See Nell Irvin Painter, “Black Studies, Black Professors, and the Struggles of Perception.”

²⁵⁵ See Nahum Chandler, *X-The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*.

knowledge (such as society or culture) or as a discrete social entity (such as a racial or ethnic or cultural group or a “national identity” or some derivative thereof)” (2013).

Literary scholarship on Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* has proceeded with a stubborn attachment to reading Du Bois’s engaging primarily in figurative work about figurative things. In turn, it has obscured Du Bois’s insistence on materiality. This penchant for understanding Du Bois through metaphor neglects a critical approach that comprehends Du Bois not so much as a poet whose rhetorical moves we ought to retrieve and disassemble but more as a principal investigator whose work presupposes the work of the poet by undertaking an analysis of the protocols that make studies of black persons possible in the first place. With *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois offered a scientific conjecture interested in seeing how sentience played on a textual field on which readers imagined black persons and ultimately presumed for them ontologies that could influence how these black persons’ social status was created. Using sentience as a touchstone of expressed physical reality, Du Bois showed the need for a set of ethics concerning both to what extent and to what consequence for its referents imaginative elements should be able to proliferate unregulated.

To think in this way, is to think literally about the question at the outset of *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois often put to Du Bois that he resolves to answer: “How does it feel to be a problem.” Du Bois was feared that people were afraid to give sentience to concepts. For they would have to recognize they were not concepts any longer. Where sentience is given to a problem.

Du Bois initiated his readers to the idea that representation was an imperfect tool. At the very outset of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois both exhibited his respect for representation and its potential power and made no effort to vest his concomitant suspicion of it. The promise of “The Forethought,” the brief albeit dense introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk*, evinced Du Bois’s vexed feelings concerning representation. Addressing his reader directly, he imparted:

I pray you, then, receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me, forgiving mistake and foible for sake of the faith and passion that is in me, and seeking the grain of truth hidden there.

I have sought here to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive. (5)

Du Bois offered that in the text that followed he had endeavored to provide only indefinite rendition. He clearly stated his goal to represent black spiritual lives in “vague, uncertain outline.” For Du Bois to make vagueness his objective in a written account seems peculiar, particularly given that he had given his reader reason to distinguish this objective from both carelessness or apologia. In the paragraph immediately preceding his stated goal of imprecise rendition, Du Bois had provided the pro forma apology for any liability or lack of skill he may have suffered as a writer.²⁵⁶ He beseeched his readers to forgive errors in the text, entreating them to look beyond the printed word’s shortcomings and its prolixity in order to locate its latent truth. Specifically, in a nod to his own sentient

²⁵⁶ Scholars have noted the apology for infelicity as a common feature in nineteenth century American letters. For examples, see Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story* or Olney, ““I was born.””

being, Du Bois asked his readers to forgive any technical shortcoming of his text to “his passion.” In other words, he asked them to prefer to the flawed textual representation the feeling presence that it referenced. In so doing, Du Bois implied that there was some “thing” beyond the text that the text would not been able to apprehend comprehensively. Only after having offered this disclaimer did Du Bois shift to a new paragraph in order to share his objective for imprecise. He distinguished his goal from error or gaffe. For this reason, Du Bois’s quest for uncertainty and imprecision should be interpreted as his intent methodology: a calculated attempt at artlessness.

Du Bois had submitted the “sketch” as his tool to achieve the artlessness he sought. The “sketch”—a modality that he had singled out as significant at the outset of *The Souls of Black Folk* when he subtitled the work “Essays and Sketches”—must be understood as central to his scientific process. The “sketch” was Du Bois’s grudging concession to representation’s power. To sketch was to delineate something only roughly, to present only its prominent features—its facts, usually as the basis for the more finite, larger composition. In short, to sketch was to limit the artifice of construction inherent to representation. In using the sketch Du Bois at once highlighted and harnessed its imprecision.

The sketch accorded with Du Bois’s scientific approach and the ethics for which he strove. Du Bois’s use of the sketch foregrounded his reticence to offer his readers representation of black lives that they might presume comprehensive or fully enclosed. While Du Bois wanted his text to provide a framework for thinking about black spiritual lives, he did not want his reader to use that framework, one he believed inherently

incapable of representing exhaustively, to delimit those lives. Using the sketch, then, Du Bois offered a solution against presumed fixity and a delimitation of representation.

The sketch operates as *prima fascia* evidence of Du Bois's vexed feelings regarding representation. Du Bois disclosed it like a scientist at the outset of a study disclosing the benefits and drawbacks of the methodology. While the sketch was a tool that acknowledged representation's limitations to present its referents fully, Du Bois's very use of it simultaneously operated as a concession that representation was useful for changing ideas about the material it was made to reference. The sketch was a tool that operated with an awareness of representations restrictions and its potential both always at the fore.

Yet, Du Bois sought to employ the sketch as a tool that worked with sentience itself. Du Bois furthered his description of just what his sketch would capture with calculated artlessness. Immediately following his introduction of sketch and his declared attempt at imprecision, he shared:

Leaving, then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls. (5)

What Du Bois meant by “view faintly” is immediately unclear. The faint view Du Bois proffered—his sketch—initially seemed only to permit his reader the modality of sight —“you may view faintly.” In this manner, it seems more a declaration of limitations rather than an invitation to the reader; it appears to be yet another disclaimer that what Du Bois would render for his reader he would do so only indistinctly. Nevertheless, no

sooner did Du Bois offer the modality of sight than he conflated it with another: the modality of sensation. Specifically, Du Bois interestingly offered his reader the opportunity to “view” sensory experiences—“the passion of sorrow,” “the plight of soul.” In this vein, Du Bois’s use of “faintly,” would have reminded readers of its etymology as a word that registered the range of senses: sight, sound, and touch. To “view faintly” was to “view” with all the senses—to inhabit a full, if potentially indistinct, sensory experience. The promise at the outset of *The Souls of Black Folk*, then, is to yoke the imaginative—the sketch—with the sentient, and to argue for their inseparability.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

By featuring the late nineteenth century work of Ida B. Wells, Charles Chesnutt, Pauline Hopkins, and W. E. B. Du Bois, this project has aimed to provide a black intellectual history that shows how negotiating feelings—both those of others and one’s own—has been a critical practice of black life. Attending to feelings, themselves the material imprint of being acted upon, provides a valuable tool to understand the conditions of one’s subjectivity.

Through an analysis of the work of late nineteenth century black thinkers this project has argued that as these black writers fought against black persons’ commodification and disenfranchisement in a post-emancipation literary world that continued to regard black persons as property, they were themselves caught up negotiating the very same dynamics of commodification in the everyday lives that they were conducting in the material world. The parallels between how they navigated such dynamics in their flesh-and-blood lives and in their writing lives are instructive, as these writers show that attending to feelings, far from irrational, silly work, is intellectual work that provides opportunity to understand the symbolic system ordering people’s lives and unlocks the potential, if necessary, to seek redress.

To elucidate how feelings are in constant exchange between persons and how these are indicators of larger social and epistemic forces operating out of view, I have used empathy as a schematic tool that makes plain how feelings between persons are themselves imbricated within a constantly operating symbolic order. This work was

embedded with a warning made plain: thinking of empathy as a moral achievement as opposed to an epistemic technology haunted by its origin as a tool of commodification allows the deleterious affective dynamics occurring between persons to remain out of view and to operate unquestioned.

Indeed, the underlying assumption of this project has been that feelings are not irrational—not the stuff of inconsequential relation and whim, but rational indicators of one’s perceived ontological status within a larger symbolic order. As such, attending to these, navigating these, and negotiating these, carries the potential to break open a path to change the conditions of one’s own subjectivity.

Wells, Chesnutt, Hopkins, and Du Bois staged this conversation about feelings in their written work. The texts that they offered to their readers, or that they sought to entice them with, proposed a provisional space of possibility, both of culture and outside of it; it was vestibular—at once subject to demolition and potentially productive. The differing genres in which these writers wrote and that I examined here—whether private correspondence, newspaper editorial, periodical fiction, or scientific report—show how these writers often exploited, if not anticipated and refused, the reader expectations that they diagnosed were embedded in their respective genre. Doing so enabled them to carry out their political aims of black enfranchisement with more precision. Thus, Wells, Chesnutt, Hopkins, and Du Bois showed that feelings did not occur naturally, outside of time and history, but were deeply contextual and interstitial.

On another note, what also emerges in this project is not just the conversations that these black thinkers were having with would-be white readers, but the discussions

black thinkers had with and among themselves regarding how to live, and how to proceed with, black life. As the mentoring relationships between Wells and Douglass as well as Du Bois and Crummell show, these conversations were not limited to one historical moment, but carried on generation to generation.

This assertion gestures to future work. Much work remains investigating how a critical understanding of empathy or the critical processes underway when one “feels into” an other can lead to better understandings of relations between perceived sames. Hortense Spillers years ago called for an “intramural protocol of reading” which she defines as “how to see, really, when what you’re looking at is perceived to be some of your own stuff—a subject history, a historical subjectivity. Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, how do ‘look-alikes; behave toward one another?’” (278).²⁵⁷ Scholars like Ifeoma Nwankwo and Brent Hayes Edwards have responded to this call, harnessing the concept of black cosmopolitanism and diaspora respectively, to see how black persons related with one another across national boundaries. To this writer, this project has begun to show that examining the approaches black thinkers experimented with as they sought to represent black life on the written page reveals the intragenerational conversations and contestations that took place and that shaped and informed intramural black life. There is much work to be done on this yet.

To be sure, this project’s work also provides a rubric through which to understand an aspect of how race operates in our current political moment. If we understand the recent killings of black persons at the hands of the police and other enforcement officers

²⁵⁷ See Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, p. 278.

as shots fired into what Fred Moten calls “insurgent black life”—that is, shots against black life acting in ways that some persons feel it should not or expect it should not, the stakes of understanding feelings as a critical practice are as high as they ever were. A critical approach to feelings—how these are performed, represented, and negotiated—anticipates and has the potential to redress such a dynamic. Showing how feelings are markers of expectations and that managing these expectations could be the difference between death and life, reinforces the importance of work that takes into account affective modalities. This work is about how persons relate, and it allows investigators of black life to build a vocabulary that consolidates decades of scholarship, if not centuries of living, on black feelings, even if these have not always announced explicitly their accounting for them.

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