THE CAPTIVE STAGE

Performance and the Proslavery Imagination of the Antebellum North

DOUGLAS A. JONES, JR.

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Douglas A. Jones, Jr.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS
Ann Arbor

Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
⊗ Printed on acid-free paper

2017 2016 2015 2014 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-472-07226-2 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-472-05226-4 (paper : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-472-12043-7 (e-book)

Cover illustration: E. W. Clay, *Life in Philadelphia*, "Dat is bery fine Mr. Mortimer . . .". Philadelphia: S. Hart & Son. Courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.

To the loving memory of my grandfather,
Robert C. Jones (1931–2009),
who taught me the beauty of books and baseball.
Et tu, Brute?

Acknowledgments

The Captive Stage emerged out of my dissertation for the Department of Drama at Stanford University. For that project, I could not have asked for a more supportive and stimulating set of pedagogues than that I enjoyed at Stanford. In class and in conversation, Alice Rayner, Jisha Menon, Branislav Jakovljevic, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Allyson Hobbs, Gavin Jones, and Michele Elam were and continue to be my teachers. I owe Michele a special debt of gratitude for providing intellectual avenues and teaching opportunities in the Department of English; I hope my interloping there was not too much trouble. The members of my dissertation committee—James Campbell, Peggy Phelan, and Harry J. Elam, Jr.—were nothing but nurturing and bracing, and their excitement for the project continued to sustain me away from The Farm as I worked on pulling some sort of manuscript out of the dissertation. The peripatetic, one-on-one "seminars" I shared with Jim were terrifically generative and delightful; I will always cherish the hours we spent walking around campus, drinking coffee, and talking about everything from the economic history of guano to the relationship between critical theory and the historiography of American slavery. Although Jim had just arrived at Stanford when it was time for me to form my committee, he embraced my work and me from the beginning. I still recall my first meeting with Peggy, when I interviewed for admission to the department, and even in that brief conversation she inspired me to become the best scholar I could be, to always pursue the "fire in the bones." My work is all the better because of her warmth and generosity, and I will always consider her a kindred spirit, not least because of our mutual love of Beckett and basketball. There are not enough laudatory adjectives to describe the intellectual, professional, and personal support I received from Harry. A recurring scene will suffice, I suppose: after someone learns that Harry was my advisor and dissertation chair, he or she pauses, then utters something along the lines of, "Whoa. Lucky." Lucky, indeed. Thank for you everything, Harry.

For necessary diversions and stimulating conversations I thank fellow

Stanford graduate students Eric Shed, Daniel Stringer, Jakeya Caruthers, Virginia Preston, Imeh Williams, Isaiah Wooden, Derek Miller, Jessica Nakamura, Sebastián Calderón Bentin, Lindsey Mantoan, Angela Farr-Schiller, Nigel Hatton, Jennifer Harford Vargas, Lupe Carrillo, Elda Maria Roman, James Estrella, James Hairston, Jamillah Bowman, Robyn Beavers, and Jason Mercer; my Bay Area crew: Tristan and Amoy Walker, Tyler and Faith Scriven, Nic and Lindsey Barnes, Marlon and Sharifa Nichols, Matt Hunter, Erin Teague, Damon Jones, Erica Campbell, and Kelsey Moss; friends in the field, especially Kyla Tompkins, Nicole Fleetwood, Soyica Colbert, Uri McMillan, La Marr Bruce, Harvey Young, Heather Nathans, Julia Fawcett, John Muse, Christopher Grobe, Brandi Catanese, Faedra Carpenter, Shane Vogel, Gerry Cadava, Aaron Tobiason, and Michelle Granshaw; and, of course, my boys from Baltimore: Brent Englar and Ryan Hollis.

After Stanford, I was fortunate enough to begin my career at Princeton University, where colleagues in the Department of English and the Center for African American Studies (CAAS) always offered encouragement, guidance, and models of excellence. For this, I am especially grateful to Bill Gleason, Diana Fuss, Anne Cheng, Daphne Brooks, Tera Hunter, Wallace Best, Caroline Rouse, Noliwe Rooks (now at Cornell), Imani Perry, and Eddie Glaude. I also thank Keith Wailoo from Princeton's Department of History and Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs for his kindness and mentorship. Both Keith and Eddie took me under their respective wings, and I wish for all those who are beginning their careers in academia the kind of care and encouragement these senior colleagues continue to give me. Although I held faculty positions in English and in CAAS, my primary home at Princeton was the Society of Fellows. My time at the Society was invaluable: our Friday seminars, Tuesday lunches, and informal exchanges have made me a more venturesome critic and historian. I thank Carol Rigolet, former director of Princeton's Council of the Humanities, and her incredible staff—Cass Garner, Susan Coburn, Penny Stone, Jay Barnes, and Lin DeTitta—for their generous administrative support. Mary Harper, Executive Director of the Society of Fellows, is nothing less than a marvel, and the ways in which she ushers young scholars into the profession is exemplary. Susan Stewart, Director of the Society of Fellows and my colleague from the Department of English, leads with dignity and magnanimity, and the grace that she brings to the professoriate is unmatched. I am forever indebted to Susan and Mary for welcoming me into the Society. The beauty of being dedicated to the life of the mind shined forth from the senior and junior fellows at the Society, and I am especially appreciative of the laughs, camaraderie, and cognac I shared with the fellow fellows of my

cohort: Hannah Freed-Thall, Ellen Lockhart, Tey Meadow, and Joel Lande. I miss you all.

I thank my colleagues in my new institutional home, the Department of English at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, who have wholly embraced me and my work from the time of our first meetings, especially Carolyn Williams, Cheryl Wall, Elin Diamond, Michael McKeon, Emily Bartels, Meredith McGill, Evie Shockley, Brad Evans, Michelle Stephens, Abena Busia, Chris Iannini, Ryan Kernan, Nick Gaskill, Andrew Goldstone, Margaret Ronda, Carter Mathes, Stephánе Robolin, and Bode Ibironke. My undergraduate students at Princeton and at Rutgers always kept me grounded and tolerated my tangents, and the graduate students I worked with at both institutions—especially Kameron Collins, Brittney Edmonds, Eric Glover, Joshua Bennett, and Francisco Robles of Princeton as well as Alex Mazzaferro at Rutgers—have shown me that the futures of the fields of (African) American cultural studies and literary history shine brightly.

My editor, LeAnn Fields, has remained a stalwart supporter of this project since our first conversation over our first gin and tonic while I was still a graduate student. I am honored to be part of her esteemed list, and the impact that she has made on our field is inestimable. It has been a pleasure getting this book through production, and for that I am grateful to LeAnn, the anonymous readers, Alexa Ducsay, Marcia LaBrenz, and the entire staff at University of Michigan Press for their efforts and expertise. An excerpt version of chapter 2 appeared as "Black Politics but Not Black People: Rethinking the Social and 'Racial' History of Early Minstrelsy," *TDR: The Drama Review*, 57.2 (2013): 21-37. I thank my editors, Catherine Cole and Tracy C. Davis, for their wise counsel on the piece, and MIT Press Journals for permission to reprint parts of the article.

Several archivists, curators, and collections supervisors have assisted me during all phases of my research and writing. I thank the librarians at Stanford University Libraries, Princeton University's Firestone Library, National Archives, Library of Congress, John Hay Library at Brown University (especially Rosemarie L. Cullen and Kathleen Brown), New-York Historical Society (especially Rob Delap), Somers Historical Society (especially Grace Zimmerman), Harvard Theatre Collection, National Gallery of Art, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. I also thank the kindly baristas and staffs at the many coffee shops where I wrote, read, or edited parts of this book, especially those of Philz Coffee (Palo Alto, Middlefield), Small World Coffee (Princeton), and Lenox Coffee (Harlem).

Three friends deserve special recognition. Aida Mbowa became my best

friend during graduate school. Her infectious smile and *joie de vivre* allayed the strains of seminars, exams, the dissertation process, and the job market. Robin Bernstein, an exemplary scholar and selfless teacher, read parts of the manuscript at a late stage in the process, and provided invaluable feedback; she rescued this book in many ways. And Radiclani Clytus is always at the ready when I need help with a problem or want to grab some steak-frites. That all our discussions somehow make their way to questions of nineteenth-century cultural production and literary history makes our friendship all the more productive and, probably, a bit wacky.

My family's unconditional support of my work propels me forward. The Enumahs—Festus, Lois, Lisette, Sam, and Zach—have made me feel nothing but welcome in their learned clan, and I cherish the quiet and not-so-quiet times we share in southwestern Georgia. My father, stepmother, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins always know how to get me away from work when I need to get away from work, and my mother has always affirmed, and helped me to achieve, my dreams. I didn't make it to the major leagues, Ma, but I was always too slow, anyway—and I don't have to take steroids to write books! Finally, no one has done more for me during this process than Tirzah Enumah. Our life together has made me a better teacher, scholar, and, most important, man.

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Introduction

The "Common Sense" of Slavery in the Free Antebellum North

In his keynote speech at the 1848 National Negro Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, Frederick Douglass offered perhaps the most incisive description of free black subjectivity in the antebellum north: "In the Northern states, we are not slaves to individuals, not personal slaves, yet in many respects we are the slaves of the community."[1] Although they were not human chattel "entirely subject to the will of . . . masters," to use the words of the 1847 Louisiana slave code, African Americans in the north were denied the basic individual rights and equitable social relations that defined freedom in the American polity.[2] The official policies and everyday customs that exacted these denials derived in large part from the institution of slavery itself. That is, legislative bodies and common (white) Americans relied on the underlying premises and institutional practices of slavery to create a world of race-based inequities, proscriptions, and violence that legitimated Douglass' characterization. To be a "slave of the community" that was the antebellum north was to live a decidedly captive life, one beset by daily repudiations of both positive liberty ("freedom to") and negative liberty ("freedom from").[3] Of course, the "typical" life of a slave and the "typical" life of a free African American were hardly one and the same; Douglass himself resisted that equivalence, as his qualified rhetoric suggests. Nonetheless, the ever-growing numbers of free black people in the north from the beginnings of gradual emancipation in the late eighteenth century found themselves bound by a society that believed their very freedom was a hindrance to its progress and must be curbed as much as legally and socially possible.[4]

The irony, of course, is that white northerners believed slavery, too, was an economic, moral, and social blight. Thus, the anomalous or "peculiar" existence they imposed upon African Americans, the "slaves of the community," might solve the ills of chattel slavery *and* the "problem" of black freedom.[5] Animating this solution was a complex of assumptions, ideals, and logics that, *in toto*, deemed African Americans were, on the one hand,

unfit for equal participation in the polity, while on the other, ideally suited to serve the personal and collective interests of their white counterparts. In other words, northerners cultivated a proslavery imagination with which to maintain and, over time, widen the gulf between black freedom and full black inclusion. On the whole, this public mind did not amount to a defense of the propriety of chattel slavery as an institution or a call for the re-enslavement of African Americans therein.[6] Rather, it conditioned the development of a new set of social and political relations built on the simultaneity of universal freedom and an indissolubly hierarchical racial dichotomy.

Benjamin Martin, a delegate to the 1837–38 Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, deftly captured this ideological balancing act: "No person would go further to protect [African Americans] in all their natural rights [than I] . . . but to hold out to them social rights, or to incorporate them with ourselves in the exercise of the right of franchise, is a violation of the law of nature and would lead to . . . the resentment of the white population."[7] Though white northerners frequently infringed African Americans' natural rights—most notably during the 1830s with the spate of mob attacks against black people and their property—Martin's distinction is a useful one. Whereas southerners rejected the doctrine of universal natural rights outright, black freedom compelled invested publics and thinkers in the north to concern themselves primarily with the question of race and social rights. They strove to accommodate the belief in fundamental racial difference (e.g., inherent black inferiority) and satisfy the demand for race-based distinctions (e.g., black disenfranchisement) in a polity that no longer had slavery to perform that resolution. The proslavery forms and figures they relied on and further developed offered the most compelling affective and conceptual terms with which to justify and project new forms of black captivity within a free society.

It was the proslavery imaginative work that northerners undertook in their cultural and social practices that allowed for the juridical, legal, and statutory rejections of black inclusion, such as Pennsylvanians' decision to heed Martin's entreaty and vote to disenfranchise all African Americans in the state. Indeed, the law and other systematized formations of social thought very often emerge from, and respond to, the unofficial, disorganized, and contradictory complex of knowledge we enact in cultural formations. Antonio Gramsci termed this knowledge "common sense," and in order to trace the (ongoing) formation of economic, legal, and political structures, he argues, "the starting point must always be that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude and which has to be made ideologically coherent."[8] While social and cultural historians

have thoroughly charted the specifics of those structures that coalesced into new frameworks of socio-racial life in the antebellum north, there has been too little emphasis on the ways in which the popular attitudes that produced those structures were fundamentally proslavery.[9] *The Captive Stage* centers on the formation of this proslavery imagination because, as common sense, it constituted the "terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness" of antebellum northerners was "actually formed."[10]

Put another way, the frightful conditions African Americans endured were not the products of an abstract racism or generalized racial aversion; rather, they emerged as the effects of northern constituencies with specific desires that renderings of black bondage as a positive good articulated and legitimated. Because of the "metaphorical aptitude" of blackness in the dominant imagination, which Saidiya Hartman defines as either the "fungibility of the commodity" or "the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves," they crafted multiple proslavery figurations with distinct and even contradictory aims in mind.[11] The wide array of means and ends that made up this intellectual work underlines its functionality as common sense because, as Gramsci conceptualizes it, common sense is not "a single unique conception, identical in time and space" but "takes countless different forms."[12]

The diverse constituencies who fashioned the proslavery imagination of the antebellum north ranged from paternalistic patricians to the white working class of urban centers, from nostalgists of the Revolutionary era to perfectionist social reformers. As I consider throughout this book, they did so in an array of theatrical practices, performative texts, representational modes, discursive regimes, and literary genres. Despite their respective ideological and representational differences, however, they all found African Americans somehow useful to the polity. This conceptual affinity differentiated them from other white northerners who also rejected full black inclusion, such as the legislatures and invested publics who hoped emancipation would lead to the end of black people in the region or those who created and contributed to the colonization movement.[13] American proslavery thought and culture always valued black people, economically or otherwise, and affirmed they belonged in the U.S., however coerced and circumscribed their place therein might be.

James Gilbert Burnett's drama *Blanche of Brandywine*, which premiered in New York City in 1858, provides an instructive illustration of how northerners imagined this socio-racial arrangement. Burnett adapted the play from dime novelist George Lippard's book of the same title. He and his

partner, Joseph Jefferson, decided to mount a production of *Blanche of Brandywine* because they were looking for a strong "military drama" with "marches, and counter-marches, murders, abductions, hairbreadth escapes, militia trainings, and extravagant Yankee comicalities boiled over in every chapter."[14] Performed at the height of sectionalist tension and only two years before southern secession and Civil War, Burnett and Jefferson's production offered audiences a grand re-staging of a historical event that all Americans cherished: the American War of Independence. At the center of the narrative is the slave character Sampson, whose acts of heroism and self-sacrifice signify the importance of black people to the founding of the American republic and, somewhat more obliquely, suggest that their perpetual subordination to their white counterparts is necessary for the republic's ongoing welfare.

In its representations of the import of a subjected black presence to the U.S., the play imagines a world of romanticized interracial reciprocity. For example, when British and Hessian soldiers attempt to capture American colonists whose hideout Sampson guards, he stands firm and pledges himself to his master and future nation.

> Look heah, you may tear dis niggar limb from limb, but you no pass this door; had been watching you tis ten minutes. Dam scouldrels all ob you. My moder was sick, hab no friend in de world, war dyin; massa Frazier gib her wittals, missa Blanche gib her medicin; spose I let you pass dis door, see you to debil fust! Stan' off—stan' off.[15]

Sampson's position recasts proslavery claims of the supposed benignity of the institution as a saving grace for himself, his race, and society. In this view, slavery facilitates a necessary quid pro quo between black and white. But the institution no longer existed in the north, and its resurrection was far beyond the realm of possibility in 1858. For this reason, *Blanche of Brandywine* suggests that the most productive forms of racial complementarity in a free society require African Americans to maintain roles as similar to those of slaves as the law will allow.

That Burnett and Jefferson did not use Sampson's actions to question slavery in any way evidences northerners' confidence in, or at the very least toleration of, proslavery thought in terms of the socio-racial possibilities it allowed them to imagine. Indeed, despite conflicts with the south over the expansion of, and political power accorded to, slavery, the play was extremely popular, and two of the era's most celebrated actresses, Laura Keen and Sara Stevens, starred in its initial run.[16] *Blanche of Brandywine* did not

become a kind of rallying cry for northerners to declare a moral superiority over slaveholders and their apologists. The action of the play would have allowed Burnett, Jefferson, and their audiences to do just that, but they refused. In the final scene, for example, Sampson fights alongside George Washington in the Americans' victory in the Battle of Trenton (1776), which, historically, boosted the morale of the Continental Army and revitalized American resolve. Burnett and Jefferson describe it this way: "Bus[iness] of fight ad. lib., and then Washington appears on a bridge with offices and Standard Bearer. [Etc.] Sampson has a Hessian. R[ight]."[17] Rather than promote his valiant and selfless acts to press for freedom and citizenship, as those slaves and free people of color who aided in the Revolutionary effort actually did, Sampson champions his place in the national family as a slave.[18] The refusal to re-stage those demands was normative in dominant cultural production; it reflected not only northerners' rejection of black citizenship but also their acceptance of black captivity in its many forms.

Such refusals also help explain the seeming inconsistency that characterized the north throughout the antebellum period: namely, the simultaneous elimination of chattel slavery within its borders but its continued protection of the institution elsewhere. In his first Inaugural Address on March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln gave this sentiment its most memorable articulation: "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists."[19] Rather than categorize northerners' moral aversion to slavery and their acceptance of it elsewhere as paradoxical, I argue they maintained an essentially proslavery stance because to protect and perpetuate an institution, wherever it might exist, is to defend it. Thus the proslavery imagination that northerners cultivated not only served their own (imagined) social ends, it also aligned them with slaveholders and their apologists, and helped preserve the nation in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In works such as *Blanche of Brandywine* and in words such as Lincoln's, we also find, however implicitly, a position that further accorded with slaveholding interests: the rejection of black colonization.[20] Like the texts and practices I consider in this book, colonization emerged as a solution to the "problem" of free blackness. Although late eighteenth-century thinkers, most notably Thomas Jefferson, sometimes considered the merits of black re-settlement outside the U.S., colonization did not become a concerted national movement until the formation of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816. The ACS began primarily through the efforts of clergymen who envisioned it as an organ of benevolent reform. Its members argued that African Americans would be better off in their "natural"

environment, Western Africa, and could serve as permanent Christian missionaries there. Furthermore, they believed the removal of African Americans would remedy the strain the black presence caused intra-white relations. The organization's founder, Robert Finley, lamented how slavery and white racism exacerbated geographical, ideological, and political differences. A Presbyterian minister from New Jersey who served as president of Franklin College (which became the University of Georgia), Finley even castigated northerners for their negative views of the south: "No people are more alive to the claims of justice, humanity and generosity" than southern planters.[21] This view did not mean Finley approved of slavery; on the contrary, he believed the institution

> has an injurious effect on the morals and habits of a country where it exists. It insensibly induces a habit of indolence. Idleness seldom fails to be attended with dissipation. Should the time ever come when slavery shall not exist in these States, yet if the people of color remain among us, the effect of their presence will be unfavorable to our industry and morals. The recollection of their former servitude will keep alive the feeling that they were formed for labor, and that the descendants of their former masters ought to be exempt, at least, from the more humble and toilsome pursuits of life.[22]

In Finley's view, only total colonization, which included abolishing chattel slavery throughout the U.S., would restore social harmony and position the nation on course toward its most productive constitution: an all-white polity of highly industrious citizens.[23]

Thus, colonizationists like Finley conflicted with proslavery-minded northerners because the latter did not want to rid the U.S. of all black people. This ideological difference is indicative of these groups' demographic makeup: relatively, colonization was most popular in areas with the smallest proportions of black residents, whereas the proslavery imagination I trace was cultivated in locales with the largest free black populations. In the colonial and early national north, most slaves lived in cities, and after emancipation they stayed there and were joined by ex-slaves from rural areas.[24] As social historians have documented, cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, Providence, and especially New York City offered African Americans greater autonomy and more economic opportunities than did the country and smaller towns.[25] Thus, the concentration of free black people gripped the legislative bodies and ordinary white citizens of those cities, prompting them to undergo a sweeping reconsideration of the meaning

and possibilities of racial difference. I argue that proslavery ideology was constitutive of these efforts, as those northerners who rejected black citizenship and racial equality in general molded and re-molded defenses of chattel slavery to fit their particular socio-historical contexts. To call the proslavery imagination of the antebellum north an exclusively urban phenomenon would be too absolute, however, because of its non-urban influences and its wider reaches. Nonetheless, because the majority of African Americans lived in cities, where they crafted their most conspicuous forms of resistance and most lasting political identities, nearly all of the texts and practices I explore in this book were produced in those locales.

In its effort to detail the proslavery mind that antebellum northerners fashioned as means to regulate the course of black freedom and counter the aims of black activism, *The Captive Stage* turns most centrally to cultural performance. This approach attends to historical and historiographical demands as well as theoretical ones. For one, it was the performative sphere (e.g., oratory, marches and parades, protests such as the Boston Tea Party) that affirmed colonists' revolutionary mettle against the British before the onset of extended armed conflicts. Americans not only conceived self-rule in these acts, they also *embodied* it, which is why literary historian Jay Fliegelman has defined their "independence as a rhetorical problem as much as a political one."[26] Consequently, the young nation established performance as its favored mode of expressivity with which to project collective possibility and social prescription. Furthermore, performance seemed to inscribe the democratic ideal within its very ontology: the form invited all Americans, as either actors or spectators, to participate and make (literal) sense of themselves and their relation to each other. And, indeed, all segments of the population—rich and poor, white and black, free and enslaved—relied on practices such as theatre, dance, oratory, and civic display to grapple with, and shape the direction of, their respective worlds. Most important for this book, they very often used the stage to come to terms with an untested and unfolding social reality in their midst—widespread black freedom—and to guide its trajectory going forward. Thus, an examination of northerners' culture of performance yields perhaps the most comprehensive and operative scope of their proslavery imagination.

The collective affective and intellectual work that *The Captive Stage* explores was part and parcel of the "rich shared public culture" that, according to Lawrence Levine, defined antebellum sociality.[27] That is to say, the proslavery sense at the center of the theatrical and performance practices I consider in this book was, indeed, common. In the second volume of his

magisterial *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville explains the ways "drama" and "theatrical representations" archive mass thought in democratic polities:

> The literature of the stage . . . constitutes the most democratic part of their literature. No kind of literary gratification is so much within the reach of the multitude as that which is derived from theatrical representations. Neither preparation nor study is required to enjoy them: they lay hold on you in the midst of your prejudices and your ignorance. *When the yet untutored love of the pleasures of the mind begins to affect a class of the community, it instantly draws them to the stage.* [. . .] At the theatre alone the higher ranks with the middle and the lower classes; there alone do the former consent to listen to the opinion of the latter, or at least to allow them to give an opinion at all. At the theatre, men of cultivation and of literary attainments have always had more difficulty than elsewhere in making their taste prevail over that of the people, and in preventing themselves from being carried away by the latter. *The pit has frequently made laws for the boxes.*[28] (emphasis added)

Although later in the chapter de Tocqueville vastly underestimates how popular theatregoing was in the 1830s and 1840s, his observations regarding the "multitudes" and their effect on dramatic literature and theatrical performance betray how these cultural products functioned as a shared common sense. The knowledge he describes as "untutored" and lacking "study," Gramsci would describe as "spontaneous" and incoherent; when de Tocqueville declares "the pit has frequently made laws for the boxes," he anticipates Gramsci's argument that philosophy is common sense made "coherent and systematic," albeit in a different analytical context and rhetorical register. With performance culture, then, everyday Americans could become crafters and carriers of proslavery thought. From the dramas of the post-Revolution era that pondered the role of free African Americans and slaves in the new republic to blackface minstrelsy of the Jacksonian period that helped foster a white working-class cultural identity and political consciousness amid the development of wage labor capitalism to the racial melodramas of the 1850s that allowed audiences to weep over the sectional crises that would eventually rend the nation: all of these cultural projects, which I explore in *The Captive Stage*, chart out a chaotic ideological terrain that not only worked to defend chattel slavery or its underlying socio-racial theories in service of other forms of black captivity; they also stimulated

and complemented the philosophical and elite-produced apologias of the institution that intellectual historians of proslavery thought study almost exclusively.[29]

My focus on performance culture also highlights the significance of embodiment to popular imaginings of new forms of racial subjectivity (e.g., free blackness or whiteness in a society without slaves). The speculative possibilities of the stage parallel those of racial performativity because, tautologically, race is performed. "Definitions of race, like the processes of theatre," Harry J. Elam, Jr. explains, "fundamentally depend on the relationship between the seen and unseen, between the visibly marked and unmarked, between the 'real' and the illusionary."[30] This is not to say, of course, that race is mostly an abstraction and lacks phenomenal reality; on the contrary, the affective, corporeal, and psychological materiality resultant to racialized social experience attests to the "fact" and "case" of racial life.[31] But those men and women who shaped several of the racial discourses I explore in *The Captive Stage* often went much further, arguing that their performances confirmed emergent theories of racial biologism. Thomas "Daddy" Rice, the period's most famous and influential blackface minstrel, made this claim most explicitly. Following an 1837 performance in Baltimore, Rice told his audience that his Jim Crow act "effectually proved that negroes are essentially an inferior species of the human family, and they ought to remain slaves."[32] This declaration, which I read in more detail in chapter 2, signals a central irony at the core of antebellum northerners' proslavery imagination: the performers and their publics who staged constructions of blackness as justifications of black captivity and racial inequality neglected to account for the fact their efforts were *staged*; that is, African Americans were not essentially or naturally (fit for) anything.

For their part, African Americans could not make such theoretical or critical claims and simply leave it there; they knew the importance of performance to the shaping of the public mind and decided to confront their (proslavery) detractors on that very cultural front. That is, because of the "democracy" of performance, they, too, used theatrical and civic stages (e.g., the street) to express their particular conceptions and demands—and they did so from the very beginnings of emancipation, as I explore in chapter 1. With virtually no recourse to the realm of formal politics, performance and other forms of cultural production offered the most viable and, in many respects, effective means with which to forge interventions of political significance. Thus looking back to the early national and antebellum periods does reveal what political theorist Richard Iton identifies as Afri-

can Americans' "hyperactivity on the cultural front," but it is also to account for how and why aesthetic and cultural formations became perhaps the most fertile ground for the cultivation of black political identities and black engagements with the nation's democratic discourses and ideals.

Consider, for instance, Frederick Douglass' 1848 address at the National Negro Convention in Cleveland, with which I began this introduction. The speech and Douglass' leadership at the convention constituted a turning point in his public career and catapulted him to national stature, even though he had been a sought-after speaker on the abolitionist lecture circuit since 1841 and had published his popular *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in 1845. According to the *Daily True Democrat* (Cleveland), Douglass presided over the convention with "dignity and ability," and in response to their rival newspaper's disparagement of Douglass' intellect, the same paper asserted: "Frederick Douglass is a man, who if divided into fifty parts would make fifty better men than the editor of the *Plain Dealer*."[33] Such appraisals of Douglass, both positive and negative, began to appear among (white) non-abolitionist syndicates with far greater regularity after the 1848 convention. Just as critically, Douglass' performance also solidified his place as a leading figure of the black public sphere. In the midst of Douglass becoming a self-determined sociopolitical actor and independent thinker—which his editorship of the *North Star* beginning in 1847 and his budding estrangement from William Lloyd Garrison signaled most decisively—the convention provided the stage upon which he demonstrated to those African Americans in attendance, as well as those who read the proceedings and reviews, how the combination of his singular talents and unique perspective (i.e., Douglass had escaped from slavery just a decade before and became legally free less than two years prior) expressed their demands for universal freedom and citizenship with uncommon power and urgency. Indeed, although delegates passed resolutions and crafted petitions as means to redress African Americans' collective grievances, it was most often the performances at the conventions that animated the most meaningful forms of ideological innovation and social change.

For all of their similarities to the processes and procedures of formal politics, the conventions are understood best as a form of cultural production. As I explore further in chapter 4, the performance and textual practices of the convention movement directly countered the proslavery formations that daily beset free black life. By the time Douglass performed his "Address" in 1848, African Americans had been holding national meetings for nearly twenty years (and state meetings for almost ten). Throughout

that history, meetings functioned as training grounds for local, state, and national black leaders, but starting in the early 1840s they took a decidedly radical turn: with worsening forms of racial inequality, such as the disenfranchisement of all African Americans in Pennsylvania, and the rise of mob violence against black people and their property—all of which, I argue, proslavery performance culture stimulated—delegates to the conventions, and the black public sphere at large, became far more militant in their rhetoric and approach; that is, they doubted the efficacy of moral suasion and therefore dedicated themselves more forcefully to political and, in a few signal cases, insurrectionary action. This ideological and tactical transformation profoundly distressed the vast majority of white abolitionists and sympathizers. Notwithstanding their disapprobation of chattel slavery and racial terror, these men and women rejected full black equality in the political and social spheres, let alone violent black uprisings. In response, they fashioned their own dramatic and theatrical representations of complaisant and submissive blackness with which to offset the force and influence that Douglass and other fiery, self-determined African Americans performed. Proslavery ideology was critical to these renderings of free black subjectivity because, as chapters 4 and 5 show, it allowed white social reformers, abolitionists, and their northern publics to imagine African Americans as *necessarily* subordinated in the polity, though free from the horrors of chattel slavery. Indeed, even antislavery reformers were very often under the sway of the proslavery mind: "Opposing slavery and hating its victims has come to be a very common form of Abolitionism," Douglass proclaimed in an 1856 article he titled "The Unholy Alliance of Negro Hate and Abolitionism."[34]

As responses to the effects of African Americans' public performances of full black autonomy, which themselves were responses to the effects of other performances such as blackface minstrelsy, white reformers' imaginings of free blackness contributed to the back-and-forth dynamic that constituted the shape of the proslavery imagination of the antebellum north. Because of that dynamic, *The Captive Stage* forefronts the interplay between African Americans' culture of performance and that of their detractors. This method, which I employ both within and between chapters, best illustrates the ways multiple publics molded their shared ideological conviction—that is, free black people must remain captive in the American polity—to contest African Americans' "political aesthetics," which literary historian Ivy Wilson defines as their "various art forms [that] put into high relief the efficacy of affect to engender and sustain collectivities of social belonging" or what I would call full inclusion.[35] Put simply, northerners

honed their proslavery common sense in direct opposition to the inclusionary claims African Americans embodied in their civil, oratorical, and theatrical performances.

In the nation's first decades, if not beyond, it was black performance that most captivated skeptical and antagonistic white onlookers. From the very beginnings of emancipation, for instance, African Americans staged parades to celebrate religious holidays, mourn the deaths of community members, and commemorate historical events. More broadly, the performances asserted their rights to public space, condemned structural and everyday racism, and laid claim to the U.S. as their own. The African Lodge of Freemasons in Boston was one of the first institutions to mount parades, as the protocols of Freemasonry dictated, and, given the acute exigencies of the city's free black population, they were necessarily political. White Bostonians "reacted to these black Masonic public activities with curiosity and mild satire," literary historian Joanna Brooks finds.[36] Yet as more and more legally emancipated and personally manumitted slaves flocked to Boston and other cities to build their lives as free people, institutions such as the black Masons and civic performances such as black parades acquired a phenomenal presence that could no longer be snubbed with simple parody.

To be sure, a large degree of the effect of this presence emerged from the sheer audacity and the conspicuity of a swelling collective of former slaves and their descendants. Yet just as critically, African Americans couched the parades in the nation's founding discourses and narratives, therefore endowing their performances with a rhetorical and symbolic potency that struck white publics to the core. In short, early national African Americans were too good at doing and being America. As one orator declared at a parade commemorating the 1808 abolition of the transatlantic slave trade: "That we are faithful to our country, we have abundantly proved: where her Hull, her Decatur, and Bainbridge, fought and conquered, the black bore his part, stimulated by the pure love of country, which neither contempt nor persecution can eradicate from his generous heart."[37] According to this view, black patriotism was unshakable, even in the face of white racism and violence, and black sacrifice for the nation was assured, as this testament to African Americans' participation in the War of 1812 suggests. (Earlier black orators made the same assertions citing black efforts in the American War of Independence.) Such avowals throughout the period affirmed African Americans' determination to be central contributors to the national project; as a consequence, white political figures, cultural producers, and invested publics began to reimagine northern society in such a way

that maintained the dominant racial order (i.e., black captivity) but came to grips with the ineluctability of black freedom and the urgency of black politics.

The first chapter, "Setting the Stage of Black Freedom: Parades and 'Presence' in the New Nation," begins with one of those efforts: the work of playwright John Murdock. Murdock's plays, *The Triumphs of Love; or, Happy Reconciliation* (1794) and *The Politicians; or, A State of Things* (1798), constitute the earliest extensive consideration of the condition of free black people in U.S. theatre history. (In fact, *Triumphs* is the first American play to stage the emancipation or manumission of a slave.[38]) Always with an eye on his native Philadelphia, Murdock must have noticed how its free black population, the largest in the nation, more than tripled in the decade, going from less than 4 to nearly 10 percent of the city's entire populace.[39] He also must have taken note of the fact that ex-slaves and their descendants, both city natives and migrants, faced extremely limited economic opportunities and severe social restrictions.[40] For Murdock, the abject conditions African Americans continued to endure after emancipation belied the prospects of black freedom. Thus in his turn to drama, he envisions a role for African Americans in Philadelphia and, by extension, in post-slavery societies that denies them full freedom but, in so doing, safeguards them from its attendant "problems," such as procuring adequate employment, participating in politics, or engaging international affairs.

In their formal and everyday practices, African Americans dismissed such "solutions," and they did so most grandly in the parade culture they developed. Ironically, the means by which the parades enacted African Americans' claims for full inclusion were black nationalist. Unlike the better-known iterations of the 1850s and 1920s, the earliest formations of black nationalism in the U.S. did not seek racial separation but, rather, equal participation and shared stakes in the polity.[41] Using the tools of black nationalism such as racial solidarity and race language (e.g., us vs. them; descendants of Africans; sons of Africans), parade participants' inclusionary claims grew increasingly assertive over time. This swell of demands and rhetorical fervor provoked counter-responses from white publics, the most significant of which was the highly popular "Bobalition" series of broadsides. The first broadsides were published in Boston in the mid-1810s and circulated throughout the U.S. and in parts of England through at least the 1830s. Bobalition mocks the processional and sartorial manners with which black northerners commemorated the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in their parades, rendering them as uniformed or well-dressed simians. But the broadsides are especially disparaging of

black oratory and speech—hence "Bobalition," a contortion of "abolition." As I argue at the end of chapter 1, the ways in which Bobalition figures black orality draws on a proslavery logic that argues the African (American) lacks the oratorical, and therefore intellectual, abilities that mark those constituted for liberty and self-government in a republic. This effect relied on the mutually productive relation between embodied performance and print culture in the period, when, as Michael Warner notes, Americans "often insisted on seeing writing as a form of speaking."[42] The broadsides, in other words, were performative texts that enacted the reputed ridiculousness of black citizenship.

To be sure, the imagined orality of Bobalition drew on earlier forms of black derision such as those popular in late eighteenth-century almanacs and newspapers. But Bobalition is unique in the very direct ways it engaged black activism and sought to undercut its aims. Cultural historians have noted how this effort was "pedagogical" in that the broadsides taught "the white public to see black people as inherently different, unable to speak, and subject to public ridicule," but they have been less particular in terms of identifying how these racial lessons were, at bottom, proslavery.[43] If we attend to the ways proslavery ideology is at the core of Bobalition, we not only gain a better understanding of its effectiveness in the period but also of the animating force of the cultural practices it influenced. Of the practices for which Bobalition set the stage, blackface minstrelsy was the most instrumental and influential in terms of frustrating black inclusion. Like Bobalition, minstrelsy arose in direct contestation to black communal and institutional activism. In their caricatured and grotesque performances of black subjectivity, blackface minstrels and their audiences laughed off racial equality in any form as absurd; with corked-up faces, distorted physiognomies and gestures, and malapropistic diction, they upheld the propriety of black captivity *and* white freedom.

When blackface minstrelsy emerged in the late 1820s, the need for affirmations of white freedom mushroomed because of the unprecedented class-based stratification of American society that accompanied industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of wage-labor capitalism in the period. White workers (e.g., former artisans, journeymen, and simple mechanics) claimed their predicament was particularly acute because early capitalist production exploited their labor and concentrated the nation's wealth upward into the hands of the rich and the emergent bourgeoisie. As a result, they argued, they were losing their very freedoms. That the free black population was growing and black agitation was increasing in intensity only redoubled white workers' belief they were becoming the

nation's new slaves, replacements for those freed from chattel slavery. With blackface minstrelsy, the white working class honed a theatrical practice with which to contest these economic conditions and socio-racial developments. Chapter 2, "Black Politics but Not Black People: Early Minstrelsy, 'White Slavery,' and the Wedge of 'Blackness,'" traces minstrelsy's origins and examines its early period (1829–43) to explore how and why proslavery thought charged its aesthetic formations and political interventions. I show how early minstrelsy esteemed the antiauthoritarian potentiality of black alterity and "opacity" as means to buffer the fears and uncertainties of the burgeoning white working-class consciousness.[44] But this regard did *not* signal a desire for an interracial working-class alliance, as some have argued.[45] Instead, early minstrelsy was as an especially crafty form of cultural expropriation with which white workers remonstrated economic and social elites and, at the same time, distanced themselves from their African American counterparts; that is, minstrel performers and their publics seized the power of black/slave *politics* but spurned black/slave *people*.

The incongruous relation between the closed texts and social effects of early minstrelsy reflected the broader antagonism between African Americans and their detractors. Black performances for citizenship and social belonging only widened the breaches in the polity's originary social contract that emancipation first inflicted. To that effect, and throughout the antebellum period, African Americans continued to craft a protest culture built on the nation's founding discourses, icons, and narratives. This method of historical repetition and revision, or what literary historian Russ Castronovo calls "deforming history," was a constant of antebellum African Americans' cultural formations and one of their most canny political tactics. Consider the following lyrics from "A Song for Freedom" from William Wells Brown's 1848 *The Anti-Slavery Harp: A Collection of Songs for Anti-Slavery Meetings*:

Come all ye bondmen far and near,
Let's put a song in massa's ear,
It is a song for our poor race,
Who're whipped and trampled with disgrace

Chorus. My old massa tells me O
This is a land of freedom O;
Let's look about and see if 't is so,
Just as massa tells me O.

He tells me of that glorious one,
I think his name was Washington,
How he did fight for liberty,
To save a threepence tax on tea.

Chorus. My old massa, &c.

And then he tells me that there was
A Constitution, with this clause,
That all men equal were created,
How often we have heard it stated.

Chorus. My old massa, &c.[46]

These lyrics, which antislavery audiences would sing to a popular melody as was the standard practice for antislavery songbooks, deform history in at least two crucial, interrelated ways: one, the slave becomes an interpreter of the meaning of the nation's founding, which George Washington, a "threepence tax on tea" (i.e., the Tea Act of 1773), and the Constitution (which should be the Declaration of Independence) emblematize; two, and more obliquely, the democratic potential of that meaning is inextricably linked to the fate of the slave. That is, if colonists rebelled against Great Britain and founded the U.S. in response to the "political" slavery they suffered, then, surely *chattel* slavery, which subsumed political and all other types of human subjugation, legitimated black rebellion and full inclusion in the American polity.

The way in which Wells Brown and other African Americans deformed history rankled their antagonists who argued deploying Revolutionary-era history to press for black social and political rights was absurd and at odds with the Founders' intentions.[47] Chapter 3, "Washington and the Slave: Black Deformations, Proslavery Domesticity, and Re-Staging the Birth of the Nation," probes how this contest over the founding moment took shape in antebellum theatre and performance culture, paying particular attention to the functionality and value of proslavery conceits and conceptions in the practices of those who opposed racial equality. As theatre-makers and audiences re-staged the events and persons of the Revolutionary period—through performances like P. T. Barnum's widely popular exhibition of Joice Heth (1835–36), the purported 161-year-old former slave of the Washington family, or plays like *King's Bridge Cottage* (1826), *The Patriot* (1834), and *The Revolutionary Soldier or, The Old Seventy-Sixer* (1847, 1850)—they

imagined a form of proslavery domesticity that benefitted blacks and whites alike. The figure of George Washington was central to these works because, as a kind of a demigod in the national imagination as well as lifelong slaveholder, he endowed historical and almost sacred legitimation to the efforts of those who denied black inclusion on proslavery premises. African Americans, in turn, forged an ambivalent relationship to Washington, making sure to pay obeisance to the so-called father of the nation all the while remaining wary of his fraught iconicity. Wells Brown's "A Song for Freedom" succinctly captures that irresolution: "I think his name was Washington," the slave sings.

As noted, the backlash that Wells Brown's deforming history and other black cultural projects provoked came from all segments of the northern population, including social reformers and the white abolitionist establishment. The final two chapters of *The Captive Stage* analyze how these groups made use of, and therefore contributed to, the northern proslavery imagination as part of their efforts to restrain black autonomy and freedom. Although social reformers were strongly anti-theatrical, condemnatory of the lax and salacious sociality that normative theatregoing encouraged, by the early 1840s they could no longer ignore the considerable hold the stage maintained on the nation's collective imagination. Thus, they built their own theatres and developed their own performance ethic with which to promote their cultural and social ideals. Like the reformers themselves, these spaces and practices were bourgeois, dedicated to the principles of self-control, personal abstention, and collective efficiency. The rise of these entertainments constituted a "minor revolution" in American theatre, as theatre historian Bruce A. McConachie describes it; men like Moses Kimball of Boston and P. T. Barnum of New York City, for instance, pioneered the matinee as well as family-oriented museum theatres, which "promised their patrons chaste entertainments in environments closer to the church and the front parlor than traditional playhouses."[48]

Most accounts of mid-nineteenth-century reform theatre center on its role in large-scale movements such as those for temperance, abolitionism, and women's suffrage; yet scholars have paid little, if any, attention to the ways antebellum reformers used the stage to imagine and encourage new casts of free black subjectivity.[49] Thus chapter 4, "The Theatocracy of Antebellum Social Reform: 'Monkeyism' and the Mode of Romantic Racialism," explores how the aggressive and independent-minded black public sphere that began to materialize in the early 1840s, which white reformers viewed as another bothersome social ill, animated these theatrical efforts. The chapter begins with a reading of how performances by Frederick Douglass

and ex-slave and abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet disrupted normative racial hierarchies and emphasized the importance of black leadership in abolitionism and African Americans' fight for citizenship. The collective of white social reformers rejected their acts, which one critic derisively termed "monkeyism."[50] Using Harry Seymour's temperance drama *Aunt Dinah's Pledge* (1850, 1853) as a case study, this chapter argues that romantic racialism emerged as white social reformers' favored mode with which to project new forms of black life. (That a temperance drama provided the occasion and frame with which to reimagine blackness is unsurprising because most antebellum reformers believed their movements intersected. *"All great reforms go together,"* Douglass declared in 1845.[51]) Romantic racialism, as historian George M. Fredrickson famously theorizes it, derives from proslavery thought and posits the African (American) as inherently docile, moral, and religious; it denies the viability of black self-determination in the modern world.[52] For their part, African Americans conceived of such racialisms, positive or otherwise, as the ideological basis of a broader effort to reenslave them.

The final chapter, "Melodrama and the Performance of Slave Testimony; or, William Wells Brown's Inability to Escape," further interrogates how actual and imagined circumscriptions of black autonomy manifest in another reform performance culture: the staging of abolitionism.[53] As exslaves recounted their lives as chattel, they had to abide by a set of predetermined discursive protocols if they were to achieve legibility and legitimacy among their mainly white audiences. Operating within this circumscribed field of testimony, fugitive and former slaves such as William Wells Brown pragmatically, and perhaps unavoidably, deployed racial types (such as the "happy darky" and the foppish black dandy) and cultural forms and literary genres (such as blackface minstrelsy and melodrama) first fashioned to disparage black subjectivity and therefore delimit black freedom. One of the most illustrative of these performances is Wells Brown's melodrama *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom* (1858). In an extended reading of *The Escape*, this chapter contends that by means of the play's dramaturgical structure and narrative arc, Wells Brown dismisses the possibility that African Americans can achieve full inclusion in the north or anywhere else in the U.S. Such judgments, I argue, worked to strengthen the slaveholding status quo. Ultimately, *The Escape* prefigures a program of voluntary black emigration from the U.S. that Wells Brown increasingly championed in the years immediately following his first tour of the play in 1858.

By the late 1850s, the merits and historical necessity of black emigration

were clear to men and women like Wells Brown, who once believed economic and so-called moral uplift would rectify racial inequities and catalyze national emancipation. As leading emigrationist Martin Robinson Delany memorably put it, "We love our country, dearly love her, but she don't love us—she despises us, and bids us begone, driving us from her embraces."[54] The chapters of *The Captive Stage* assemble a narrative of the ways multiple northern constituencies, by means of their respective performance forms and practices, spurned antebellum African Americans' love for the U.S. and its democratic principles and possibilities. Although these constituencies aimed their cultural projects toward different political and social ends, one proslavery notion linked them all: above all else, black people must serve the economic, moral, political, and social needs and interests of their white counterparts. This form of racial ascription dominated the collective American imagination in the first half of the nineteenth century and, as a result, ensured that the new stage of northern black life that widespread freedom inaugurated would be a decidedly captive one.

The archives, repertoires, and ideologies *The Captive Stage* engages were born of the most consequential institution of American life before the Civil War: chattel slavery. Although the U.S. abolished chattel slavery in 1865 and, therefore, negated the immediacy of defending the institution, the proslavery common sense that I recognize as constitutive of the antebellum north continued to shape American performance culture and racial signification in society at large. Despite universal emancipation and the enshrinement of black citizenship in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1868), the dominant imagination still construed blackness as the mark of subjects who should be most captive, while whiteness marked those who should be most free. The emergence of sharecropping, the rise of lynching, and the instatement of Jim Crow in the second half of the nineteenth century, among other harrowing social realities, signified to those living in the wake of the Civil War that a good deal of the institutional practices and ideological premises of slavery remained very much in existence. As Hartman trenchantly puts it, "Slavery was both the wet nurse and the bastard offspring of liberty."[55]

With those practices and premises (seemingly) behind us, we would be remiss, I think, to argue they are no longer alive today. At the very least, they certainly *haunt* us. Haunting, sociologist Avery F. Gordon explains, "is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance)."[56] Avery's theory of haunting

helps explain how Americans can, at moments, still feel held captive by chattel slavery's affects and meanings. The recent spate of white *and* nonwhite college students donning blackface (or at least the exposure of a practice that has always been popular) illustrates how the sociocultural force of the institution continues to shape twenty-first-century life.[57] In one instance from the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in 2011, six white sorority sisters wore blackface to a costume party because they wanted to attend as the Huxtable Family of the "Cosby Show." It is most likely the case that these young women, like many in their generation, are big fans of the "Cosby Show" and believed their costumes were signs of respect for the landmark television program. But, as USM Dean of Students Eddie Holloway noted, their costumes signified far more than the Huxtables: "Though it is clear that these women had no ill intent, it was also clear that they had little cultural awareness or competency, and did not understand the historical implication of costuming in blackface."[58] Above all, these students were unaware of the fact that the fun they sought to have rested on a cultural history of racial derision and degradation that renders black people as the least worthy of human dignity in American society. It is no wonder, then, that African Americans and other invested persons condemned their blackface acts and those of other college students.

But the ire blackface engenders is about more than disrespect and the lack of decency. Its critics also recognize, however unconsciously, that blackface is a performance practice that is animated by race-based circumscriptions of freedom and citizenship in the American polity; it transmits the very proslavery common sense I delineate in the pages that follow. This is to say, although *The Captive Stage* confines itself to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of the performances, texts, narratives, figures, and modes that constitute the book's objects of analysis continue to signify beyond the time and spaces of chattel slavery; they have transmogrified into "ghosts" that still have "real presence" in American culture and society.[59]

ONE | Setting the Stage of Black Freedom

Parades and "Presence" in the New Nation

In the aftermath of the armed conflicts of the American War of Independence, a series of "quiet" structural revolutions commenced.[1] The United States had to instate an untested system of democratic governance called republicanism; implement new economies of capital, exchange, and labor predicated on the individual's absolute right to property; and readjust to the large-scale demographic shifts the war produced.[2] The role of slaves and free people of color in the emergent polity surfaced as a markedly fraught question. On the one hand, dominant civic discourses rendered whiteness the precondition of citizenship. On the other, the prevalence of the rhetoric of egalitarianism threatened the permanence of such race-based civil circumscriptions.[3] That many slaves and free people of color had distinguished themselves in the Revolutionary cause and demanded full citizenship in return made questions of civil inclusion all the more pressing.

These demands helped quicken antislavery sentiment in the period, when many already doubted the viability of slavery in a new nation founded on principles of democratic freedom. Indeed, northern state legislatures enacted gradual emancipation statutes, and slaveholders in all regions (most notably the Upper South) manumitted slaves in vast numbers.[4] The increasing masses of free black people did not attempt to isolate themselves from their former masters; rather, they sought to expand the polity in such a way that included them as equal participants.[5] In this effort they crafted a protest culture that merged (inherited) African notions of community, institution-building, and personal obligation to Enlightenment discourses and political practices.[6] These doings, along with the patterns of black migration throughout the North American continent that emancipation instigated, laid the groundwork for what would become African America.

Throughout the early national period, African Americans continued to stress that their efforts toward the formation of the U.S. were at the core of their identity. As literary historian John Ernest writes, "In the pages of the

early [black] historical texts, one encounters frequently both the history and prehistory of African American contributions to American military and political history."[7] The most venerated and recurring historical figure in this literature is runaway slave Crispus Attucks. Attucks was one of the first men British soldiers killed in the Boston Massacre, an initiating event of the American Revolution, and he quickly became the iconic signifier of selfless black patriotism.[8] His story appealed to early black writers and other "integrationist historians" because his martyrdom, as they would have classified it, and other contemporaneous acts of black sacrifice evidenced the ways African Americans had always been at the nation's center.[9]

Yet in official and normative accounts of the American Revolution from the period, Attucks' death is little more than a footnote, if that. For example, the most famous rendering of the Boston Massacre, Paul Revere's 1770 engraving *The Bloody Massacre Perpetuated in King Street Boston on March 5th*, does not graphically depict Attucks. Historian Marcus Rediker argues that Revere's engraving, which he contends "may be the most important political work of art in American history," excludes Attucks because he was "the wrong color, the wrong ethnicity, and the wrong occupation to be included in the national story."[10] But all stories—national or otherwise—invite us to read them against the grain, and the narrative Revere sought to tell with his engraving is a case in point. For instance, Attucks' name does appear in the subtitle of Revere's print as one of the Massacre's victims. Moreover, as cultural historian Tavia Nyong'o notes, "no one else is depicted either individually or realistically in the print."[11] Nyong'o suggests that "rather than see Attucks either included or excluded by Revere's print," we should "understand [Attucks'] status as an *exception*" because "it is impossible to say finally whether or not he is included or excluded, because he is clearly both."[12] Thus, Revere's listing of Attucks as one of the slain patriots destabilizes the narrative limits that the amorphous, yet racially all-white rendering presents visually. Even if Attucks is not discernibly "in" *The Bloody Massacre*, he is certainly there—throughout it, above it, under it.

Nyong'o's reading of Attucks as a figure of exception haunting Revere's engraving suggests an instructive way to frame free black life in the post-Revolutionary period. For African Americans living in the wake of the nation's founding, they lacked the *security* of being an American and the *surety* of being a non-American; instead, they were at once both, existing in what I would call the state of black exception.[13] This racial state has generated dialectics of desire and disgust, resistance and repression, and value and valuelessness that have beset black freedom since the nation's beginning and, for many, continue to trouble the viability of black freedom it-

self.[14] As theorist Lindon Barrett asks, "What are the particulars of negotiating social and civic relations in a society in which one remains part of a constantly expended present absence?"[15] In one form or another, this question has animated the ways African Americans have imagined the nation, their place within it, and the practical resources with which to overturn their condition as the excluded members who are also the included nonmembers of the American polity.

This chapter looks at some of the ways these imaginings crystallized into a culture of black parade performance that spurned the state of black exception and aimed to position African Americans as self-determined citizens and bearers of American possibility. More specifically, I explore how early national black publics across cities and towns in the north used commemorative parades to press for universal emancipation, black citizenship, and social equality. While African Americans grounded the parades' rhetorical, performance, and textual practices in the immediate concerns of black life, they were equally interested in the direction of the entire nation and of American democracy. Indeed, these civic performances mark the beginnings of a collectively honed political consciousness that draws from black struggle a set of imaginative and pragmatic resources with which to expand democratic possibilities for all Americans.

Hostile onlookers did not construe black parades as a kind of pedagogy that elucidated what the American polity could and should be; they viewed such acts as absurd at best and menacing at worst. That threat stemmed in large part from the fact that the parade, which was "the characteristic genre of nineteenth-century civic life," rendered ex-slaves and their descendants' demands highly legible and therefore potent.[16] Hundreds, sometimes thousands of African Americans participated, and their use of the nation's most cherished form of civic display signified to antagonistic white audiences an attempt to seize the nation. The parades, of course, were not projections of a black-controlled nation-state with a subordinate white population; rather, they were (re)presentations of African Americans as a free people deserving of the promises of American democracy.

The culture of parading that early national African Americans crafted also vexed certain antislavery northerners because its affirmations of American subjectivity pointed to an increase in the black presence. Many in the north, particularly in New England, supported emancipation because they hoped it would lead to the end of black people in their midst.[17] But, as the parades suggested in the grandest of scales, African Americans had no intention of disappearing. This reality became even more daunting for many in the region when they grappled with the fact that they no longer

had the racial and social protections slavery once offered.[18] The question of what to do with a mass of free black people rarely arose before the 1780s because legislating bodies, slaveholders, and other invested white publics could not foresee large numbers of ex-slaves laying claim to the nation and demanding full inclusion therein. It took the realities of emancipation, notably including black activism, for them to begin to take seriously the overriding question of black freedom, which Thomas Jefferson succinctly articulated in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781–82, 1787): "Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expence of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave?"[19] With this query, Jefferson pinpointed the fundamental quandary of abolishing slavery. While northerners refused to incorporate the ex-slave into the state as an equal member, they did imagine new forms of black captivity with which to retain him. Some of the most representative of these efforts took shape in the plays of John Murdock, and, as I explore in what follows, they provided a model for future cultural producers to meld the assumptions of proslavery ideology with the realities of black freedom.

"CITIZEN SAMBO": A PROBLEM FOR THOUGHT

John Murdock was a white hairdresser in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia. As a member of the artisan class, he was afforded time to contribute to the city's budding theatre culture. Theatre historian Heather S. Nathans argues that a "rise of class awareness" significantly informs Murdock's plays because of the "diminution in both [artisans' and mechanics'] political and economic influence." His dramas "presented the Philadelphia Murdock knew, a hodgepodge of recent German and Irish immigrants, slave and free blacks, Quakers, artisans, and wealthy elites."[20] Murdock's *The Triumphs of Love; or, Happy Reconciliation* (1794), for example, considers how these various groups attended to some of the period's most pressing concerns, including the slave uprisings in Santo Domingo and the parameters of political representation in the newly formed U.S. More relevant to the concerns of this chapter, *Triumphs* explores the conditions that led to and followed the onset of black freedom in Philadelphia, and it does so through a narrative of post-war intergenerational conflict. The older generation of characters, especially Jacob Friendly Senior, objects to the profligacy and sybaritism of the younger generation, particularly that of George Friendly Junior. Among George Junior and his peers' most troubling habits and

practices, slaveholding is perhaps the most acute for Jacob Senior because, as a Quaker, it conflicts with his religious and moral convictions. Quaker antislavery activism dates back to the late seventeenth century and, institutionally, culminated in the creation of the world's first abolition organization, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), which formed in 1775.[21] In Jacob Senior's view, which is to say the view of Quakerism, slavery is an institution that not only contradicts divine law but also nourishes the "rank weeds of vice [to] overgrow the seeds of virtue" in both man and society.[22]

Ultimately, George Junior accepts the way of his Quaker forebears, and manumits his slave, Sambo, after watching "the honest creature" perform an "untutored, pathetic soliloquy" on the physical and psychological wounds of the "barbarous, iniquitous slave-trade."[23] Before George Junior does, however, he recalls the so-called merits of being a slave; as he sees it, the life of the slave is hardly the worst lot one can endure: "And yet how many thousands of the poorer class of whites are there, whose actual situation are [*sic*] vastly inferior to his [i.e., the black slave's]."[24] Over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, and especially in response to the rise in wealth inequality that early wage-labor capitalism produced, this claim became an ever-common refrain of proslavery ideologues. George Junior's use of it does not prevent him from freeing Sambo, but his comment does signal the ways white northerners believed slavery was something of a saving grace for the mass of black people; it also points to the qualms that accompanied statutory emancipations and personal manumission, the "moral" qualifications that prevented former masters and even non-slaveholding white people from treating their newly freed black counterparts as equals.

What is even more noteworthy about the use of this proslavery claim in *Triumphs* is that Sambo himself repeats a version of it in the very soliloquy that leads to his manumission.

> Sambo what a gal call a pretty fellow. . . . Can tink so, so, pretty well. He tink; he berry often tink why he slave to white man? why black foke sold like cow or horse. He tink de great somebody above, no order tings so.—Sometime he tink dis way—he got bess massa in e world. He gib him fine clothes for dress—he gib him plenty money for pend; and for a little while, he tink himself berry happy. Afterwards he tink anoder way. He pose massa George die; den he sold to some oder massa. May be he no use him well. When Sambo tink so, it most broke he heart.[25]

Sambo is trapped, here, within a muddied logic. No sooner than he questions the bestial ways whites imagine and subsequently treat black people, he expresses his gratitude that he has the "bess massa in [the] world." Then, later in the scene, he takes another turn and makes clear that his assessment of George as a "good" master does not in any way dampen his desire to be free. Sambo's equivocality, along with George's later reserve regarding slave manumission, lays the conceptual and narrative groundwork for the play's ensuing speculation on what many saw as the wrongheadedness of grounding abstract notions of liberty in the form of black emancipation. In this effort, Murdock pursued a question that, in my view, has shaped the course of American social history: "Sambo, suppose you had your liberty, how would you conduct yourself?"[26]

After George asks this of Sambo and subsequently frees him, Sambo declares, "O massa George, I feel how I neber feel before. God bress you. *(Cries.)* I muss go, or my heart burst," then exits. He quickly returns, now alone on stage, and tells the audience, "When massa George ax me how I like go free, I tink he joke: but when he tell me so for true, it make much water come in my eye for joy. *(Sings.)* Den Sambo dance and sing./ He more happy dan a king./ He no fear he lose he head. He now citizen Sambo."[27] Sambo's effusion in this solo act, it bears noting, is as much a celebration of *white* freedom as it is his own. By means of the figure of manumitted black slave, one happier "dan a king" (George III) in this case, the scene evoked Americans' recent triumph over monarchial authority and commemorated their (white) freedom from "political slavery." But immediately after hailing himself "citizen," Sambo exits, and only appears in *Triumphs* once more. In that scene he is drunk and belligerent, and George remarks that Sambo is in a "situation I never saw him in before."[28] Sambo's drunkenness is not an instance of racial stereotyping, however, because in the previous scene George and his white friend, Careless, are belligerently inebriated. Thus, drunkenness and, by extension, other forms of intemperance emerge in the play as problems of freedom rather than those of an essential racial (i.e., black) disposition. The behavioral symmetry between Sambo and his erstwhile masters, coupled with the paean to republican ideals he sings following his manumission, suggests that he has begun to wear the mantle of American citizenship. In fact, Sambo's final line in *Triumphs* is "Liberty and [e]quality . . . for eber."[29]

Triumphs offers no further clarification of the fate of "citizen Sambo"; but Murdock's 1798 follow-up, *The Politicians; or, A State of Things*, returns him to the stage. In this play, Murdock explores the lingering partisan hostilities that stemmed from the ratification of the highly controversial Jay

Treaty of 1794, which helped the U.S. deter another war with Great Britain by strengthening economic ties between the two nations, and from American investment in the French Revolutionary Wars.[30] According to *The Politicians*, these tensions consumed all order of persons, from the wealthy merchant to the enslaved. Murdock's representation of slave investment in these affairs is hardly complex, as slaves simply ape their respective masters' views: Caesar "don't like" the French because his "massa no like 'em" and Pompey "dam[s]" the English because his "massa no like English."[31] But what about Sambo? How does he, as a "citizen," contribute to the discourses of American partisanship and international relations?

As if to avoid ambiguity, Murdock's play attends to these questions with striking clarity. To begin, Sambo refuses to favor the British or the French as the U.S.'s preferred partner in matters of diplomacy, trade, and war. Instead, he espouses American isolationism, a ready marker of personal virtue in the period that George Washington famously esteemed and encouraged in his 1796 "Farewell Address": "Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation," he argued.[32] But Sambo does not make such rhetorical or deliberative arguments to justify his isolationism; instead, he simply follows the lead of his former master: "I go we massa too. . . . Ah, for he country! massa say, dam French, dam English; he say, what e debil business have we do wi two bully nation? he say, let em fight and be dom'd."[33] Like his slave friends, Sambo does not rely on, or even seemingly possess, the democratic ideal of self-reliance. Thus, Sambo must remain captive, the play suggests, despite his freedom from chattel slavery. In fact, Murdock accentuates this resolution to the "problem" of free blackness by confining Sambo within the discursivity and spatiality of slavery: not only does he continue to call George "massa," but he also appears onstage with slaves only.

The value in turning to *The Triumphs of Love* and *The Politicians* to explore the concerns of free black life in 1790s Philadelphia rests on the fact that, as comedies, they produce a kind of historiographic effect. That is, the plays conform to what dramatic critic Alice Rayner theorizes as the ontology of comedy: plays that "function explicitly as social documents," "insist on being understood in the concrete and particular," and "present us with a socialized ethic."[34] Indeed, Sambo's plight within and across the plays evidences the ways African Americans in late 1790s Philadelphia did not live in a world very far removed from the one they endured while enslaved. Like other newly free black people across the north, black Philadelphians largely continued to work as domestics, often for their former masters with whom they sometimes continued to live, and in other unskilled jobs that

left them with little economic or social wherewithal to build fully autonomous lives. Even with the establishment of independent, black-led benevolent associations such as the Free African Society (FAS) in 1787 and religious institutions such as St. Thomas African Episcopal Church and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, both in 1794, the black condition was "not so high that [African Americans] saw their interests as distinct from those of the enslaved."[35] In the late 1790s and early 1800s, and especially in cities like Philadelphia, free black life could look very much like slave life because white northerners did not care to invest the energy and resources necessary for its betterment. Their "overriding concern," writes historian Gary B. Nash, "was to repair their war-torn society and secure a place for themselves in the new republican order."[36] In fact, a great many of them believed that the growing numbers of African Americans in the north hindered both of these aims.[37] For observers like Murdock, the solution was a new form of captive blackness for which his Sambo was its model "citizen."

However, the manner of "citizenship" Sambo represented repelled the vast majority of African Americans, and they actively refused its limits. Their demands for full inclusion heightened the urgency of Jefferson's query: "Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state?" In the dominant imagination, the ramifications of black retention and incorporation were worrying, if not frightful, because they ran counter to the economic, political, and social foundations upon which the ideology of American republicanism rested.[38] For this reason, the activism of ex-slaves and their descendants induced an epistemological disturbance; they destabilized and disrupted settled social knowledge. In their demand that Americans collectively re-conceptualize their relation to each other and, therefore, the nation itself, African Americans enacted what theorist Nahum Chandler calls the "problem of the negro as a problem for thought."[39] That is, their efforts necessitated re-imaginings of racial difference in/as social life in the American polity.

Compounding the "problem" that early national African Americans constituted for the broader public was their insistence that their labors and their very nativity affirmed the nation as theirs. Ironically, the principal strategy with which they cast their inclusionary strivings was racial solidarity. Philosopher of religion Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. explains that these solidaristic efforts and the "nation language" that emerged from them "grounded common experiences and relationships in the effort to combat American racism. No extra degree of particularity was required, for race was merely an explanation that helped account for certain experiences in order to respond more effectively to specific problems."[40] What early na-

tional African Americans inaugurated, then, was a tradition of black nationalism that forcefully asserts their rights to freedom, citizenship, and social belonging.[41] They did so most generatively when they paraded in commemoration of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, state emancipations, and the formation of black institutions.[42]

FEELING THE (BLACK) NATION AND ITS TEXTUAL "PRESENCE"

The parade culture that African Americans crafted was not a simplistic imitation of white Americans' parades. Instead, they drew on their African and slave heritages, notably the festivals of Negro Election Day and Pinkster. From the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, slaves in cities and towns throughout New England annually elected "kings" or "governors" who wielded symbolic and, at times, material power over their black counterparts. These elections were offshoots of whites' election celebrations, when, according to one late nineteenth-century account, slaves and free people of color were "peculiarly alive to the effect of pomp and ceremony and not only made every effort to be present, but the imitative instinct stirred them to elect a governor themselves."[43] Though Negro Election Day was derivative of several of the formalities of white elections, the particulars of those doings "manifest African-derived style throughout, in everything from structures of social organization to clothing practices," as cultural historian Monica L. Miller argues.[44] The same is true of Pinkster, which was contemporaneous with Negro Election Day but observed in New York and New Jersey. Pinkster was originally a Dutch celebration of Pentecost and the beginning of spring that slaves re-shaped to fit their particular psychological and social needs. (In his 1845 novel *Satanstoe; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts*, James Fenimore Cooper described it as "the great Saturnalia of the New York blacks."[45]) Both Pinkster and Negro Election Day allowed slaves to dance, display fancy dress, and showcase oratorical flair to the wider community; in all of these acts they merged African, European, and slave aesthetics. These processes of cross-cultural and interpersonal exchange mark the beginning formations of New World black subjectivity, and the polyvalent sense of self that slaves fostered and performed in the festivals endowed them with expressive registers with which to negotiate and, at times, withstand the harrowing and often alien world of slavery.

But Negro Election Day and Pinkster were about just that: the world of slavery. Masters and other white authorities sanctioned, subsidized, and

often participated in them. Thus, the festivals were carnivalesque, similar to those of southern plantations that Frederick Douglass characterized as "safety-valves" designed "to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity."[46] Their immediate effect was to offer the slave something of a release from bondage, but ultimately they upheld the normative social order. So, while participants of Negro Election Day and Pinkster honed an aesthetic sensibility that influenced later affective, corporal, and sartorial forms of black expressivity and performance, the festivals themselves leveled little, if any, threat to the institution of slavery. If anything, they strengthened it.

Ex-slaves and their descendants knew this. As free people, they appropriated the aesthetic and performative habits of Negro Election Day and Pinkster but had little use for the festivals themselves; instead, as historian Shane White notes, they "expend[ed] their considerable energies elsewhere."[47] That elsewhere was in the formation of independent religious orders and secular institutions such as literary societies, mutual relief funds, and voluntary associations; it was also in the creation of a parade performance culture that united black communities across the north.[48] As concerted products and producers of black freedom, the parades constituted what Saidiya Hartman might call an "oppositional culture," a mutually constitutive set of affects, texts, and practices "poised to destroy [the] designs of mastery."[49] Oppositional cultures are intentional, strategic, and teleological; they project, and strive toward, heretofore non-normative futures. Although African Americans usually commemorated past actions in their parades, they always anticipated a future of universal emancipation and full black inclusion.

In their announcement of their parade to the public of Salem, Massachusetts, for example, the Sons of the African Society encapsulated the inclusionary aims that animated the culture of black parading in the period. Like other early national and antebellum African Americans who banded together to establish similar voluntary associations, the Sons of the African Society "formed [themselves] into a society for the mutual benefit of each other, behaving all times as true and faithful citizens of the Commonwealth in which [they] live, and that [accepted] no one into the Society who shall commit any injustice or outrage against the laws of their country."[50] When this group of thirty "well dressed" black men decided to parade in commemoration of the first anniversary of their association, they hoped their parade would make explicit its members' shared commitment to the U.S.[51]

If the Sons of the African Society's paraded affirmations of American nationalism did not immediately signify among the Salem public, the spec-

tacle of it certainly struck the editors of the city's primary newspaper, the *Salem Gazette*. They called it "a novel exhibition," and its short review described the form and sequence of events:

> A number of Africans . . . paraded in procession through the street to Washington Hall, where a discourse was delivered to them by the Rev. Mr. Webb, of Lynn, and a contribution was made for their benefit. They afterwards returned in the same manner from the Hall to the Treasurer's house, where they dined. They were about 30 in number, were well dressed, wore the insignia of their brotherhood, and were accompanied with instrumental music. We are informed that their characters are respectable.[52]

This account outlines the standard structure of black parades in the first decades of the nineteenth century: processional ranks to and from the primary meeting place, orations, communal meals, sartorial accouterment, and musical accompaniment. Although they often celebrated different historical events or institutional milestones, the parades usually took this shape. With this reproduction of form, the parades functioned as rituals of continuity and rejuvenation that merged the resources of the past and the concerns of the present in order to cast a future of democratic possibility. In an 1865 remembrance of the parades, radical abolitionist and physician James McCune Smith described their regenerative function: "The colored people of New York [and elsewhere in the north], from an early date, carried themselves with a free air which showed that they felt themselves free, and on more than one occasion alarmed their best [white] friends with their bold action [i.e., parading]. . . . Secure in their manhood and will, they did parade, in large number . . . easily thrusting aside by their own force the small impediments which blocked their way."[53] Thus in their displays of black freedom, the parades simultaneously reinvigorated it, because freedom, like its denial, is performative: it does not rest on the page but must be embodied into actuality.

The spectacle of self-organized, civic-minded collectives of African Americans in northern cities and towns enacting their freedom by means of the nation's most meaningful symbolic frames markedly, and perhaps unavoidably, disturbed white onlookers. Unlike Negro Election Day or Pinkster, the parades were explicitly interventionist and political. This is why, as McCune Smith recalled, those black New Yorkers' "white friends" discouraged them from taking to the streets: black parades could not be deemed innocent or, like the slave festivals were, temporary loosenings of

normative restraints with which subjects enter a new social order only to return to the older, often strengthened order. Instead, early national black parades became the "framework for the development of black politics," as White argues, and the politics that emerged most forcefully out of that framework were black nationalist.[54]

Black nationalism in the early national period was not a strategy with which to invert the prevailing racial hierarchy and to position black over white. Rather, it was a mode of action that, in its broadenings of the meanings and possibilities of American democracy, sought to alleviate the particular problems and sufferings that beset slaves, former slaves, and their descendants in the U.S. Henry Sipkins' 1809 "Oration on the Abolition of Slave Trade," for example, demonstrates how the rhetoric and practice of this form of black nationalism simultaneously affirmed the particulars of black experiences in the American polity *and* African Americans' deep attachment to the U.S. Sipkins was only twenty years old when he delivered the oration, but as the son of Thomas Sipkins, one of the founders of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) in New York City in 1796, he belonged to a leading family in the black and abolitionist communities. In the "Oration," he used the phrases "my African brethren," "my beloved Africans," and "descendants of Africans"—just as Henry Johnson in his "Introductory Address" to Sipkins' speech employed "us Africans and descendants of Africans"—to distinguish black subjectivity from all others. Furthermore, he delivered the "Oration" at the "African Church in the City of New York" (i.e., AMEZ Church) and identified himself as "Henry Sipkins, a descendant of Africa" when he published the text in pamphlet form later that year.[55] Despite his avowals of black particularity, however, Sipkins argued that white effort was essential to the betterment of African Americans. In his laudation of whites' "philanthropic exertions" that led to the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, he proclaimed: "To these [white men and women] we owe our preservation from a second bondage; and on these depend the prospect of future felicity. Their ever-memorable acts were such as the paternal hand rearing its tender offspring to mature years, and planning for its edifice of virtue and happiness."[56] Embracing the racially hierarchical paternalism that eventually prompted African Americans in the late 1820s to begin to separate themselves from white patronage, Sipkins imagines a world of democratic inclusion within which African Americans live peaceably and equitably alongside their white counterparts, a world in which "*slavery of every species* shall be destroyed."[57] The "species" of slavery that Sipkins condemned were not only the various manifestations of chattel slavery throughout the U.S., but also

the very forms of political and social captivity that he and other African Americans endured in the free north.

The first iterations of black nationalism were not only thoroughly American in their ends but also in their means.[58] Its architects fused the singularity of black American experiences with normative figurations of national myths and ideals. In his 1808 oration at one of the first public celebrations of the end of the transatlantic slave trade, which took effect on January 1 of that year, abolitionist Peter Williams, Jr. modeled this approach:

> [At] that illustrious moment, when the sons of '76 pronounced these United States free and independent; when the spirit of patriotism, erected a temple sacred to liberty; when the inspired voice of Americans first uttered those noble sentiments [of the Declaration of Independence]; and when the bleeding African, lifting his fetters, exclaimed, "am I not a man and a brother;" then with redoubled efforts, the angel of humanity strove to restore to the African race the inherent rights of man.[59]

This reading tied the destiny of the "African race" to the progress of American history. For Williams and contemporaneous African Americans generally, black nationalism was a particular expression of American nationalism. That is to say, while the chief aim of black civic protest was citizenship and social inclusion, its architects understood the necessity of distinct political strategies because their race suffered from distinct forms of discrimination, exclusion, and violence. Glaude argues that a "moral obligation of we-intentions" animated these strategies, that is, "a sense of being one of us, the force of which is essentially contrastive in that it contrasts with a 'they' that is made up of violent white human beings."[60] While contrastive, early national African Americans' (moral) language of "us" against "them" did not reflect a desire for the permanency of these categories; that is, they sought to achieve an American "us," a new sociality free of race-based division and violence. Indeed, the realization of such a world was their overriding "we-intention."

Orations such as Sipkins' and Williams' as well as the wider parades were critical in this regard because they were what first allowed African Americans across the north to conceptualize and articulate their intentions as shared, as those of a "nation." Nationhood coheres around the terms of membership and identification, a set of criteria with which to determine who belongs and who does not. This imaginative bond of oneness, which

"manifests" in performances such as parades or orations, upholds a nation's existence; it demands that its members accept particular discourses and mythologies, and that they do so *at once* across differences of place and space. In his foundational theorization of nation formation, Benedict Anderson emphasizes this notion of "simultaneity," which is "transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar."[61] Nation temporalities require its subjects make (national) meaning out of their shared embeddedness in a world that "ambles sturdily ahead."[62] Anderson argues that "the development of print-as-commodity [was] the key to the generation of wholly new ideas of simultaneity" and thus to the nation.[63] Yet his stress on print-capitalism is too limiting insofar as it does not account for the nontextual means with which simultaneities and nations are enacted. Slavoj Žižek helpfully explains the insufficiency of "symbolic identification" (i.e., print culture) alone to these formations: "To emphasize in a 'deconstructionist' mode that Nation is not a biological or transhistorical fact but a contingent discursive construction, an overdetermined result of textual practices, is thus misleading: such an emphasis overlooks the remainder of some *real*, nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency."[64] Žižek's turn to the affective and the aesthetic, what he calls the "*real*, nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment," takes into account the ways a nation is felt into being, how we corporeally "know" its reality. Thus, a nation emerges as the result of interdependent textual *and* performative affects.

When African Americans in and near New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and other northern locales joined to parade in the early nineteenth century, they knew their (black nation within a) nation existed because they felt its actuality. It was with and through the parades that African and African-descended people (re-)united and (re-)committed themselves to the betterment of their own people and, by extension, the U.S. In fact, the parades functioned as rituals do, in that they aestheticized, formalized, and sustained structures of (national) feeling among their participants. As Žižek writes, "A nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices."[65] As a political affect, the "enjoyment" the parades offered black paraders and spectators was the assurance that they were *simultaneously* engaged in the struggle to abolish slavery and achieve equal participation in the polity.

The parades' structural similarities, which I outlined above, reinforced this feeling of affective and political simultaneity among geographically

and even historically dispersed participants. Yet for my purposes, the texts of the orations archive their shared affects and aims most clearly. The orations were the climax of the parades, and they focused all attention on one sight, the speaker, who was nearly always a prominent member of the community. As cultural historian Geneviève Fabre notes, orators stressed that they and their black audiences were American above all, and, in notable respects, they were the nation's chosen people: "They tried to evaluate the contribution of black people in the building of the nation, to assess the progress of the race and its capacity for self-government, and to develop race pride as well as race memory. More significantly, the speakers were setting themselves in the place of the Founding Fathers, as those who could take the dream of liberty one step further and perhaps bring it to completion."[66] Orators couched these themes in diverse idioms, ranging from the theological to the sociological, and the political to the historical. For example, Episcopal minister and leading Philadelphian Absalom Jones analogized the end of the international slave trade to the deliverance of the Israelites in the Book of Exodus; Federalist Joseph Sidney of New York City used his oration to juxtapose what he recognized as the depravity of southern society with the enlightenment of New England; Sidney also exhorted black men who could vote to do so for Federalists rather than Democrats, whom he labeled "the enemy of our rights"; New York abolitionist and eventual board member of the American Anti-Slavery Society Peter Williams, Jr. traced slavery and black misery to European imperialism and material excess, what he called "the desire of gain."[67] This multiplicity of rhetorical modes indexes the expansiveness of early black political discourse as well as the ways in which African Americans contributed to the dynamism of what one antebellum chronicler of rhetoric termed "the golden age of American oratory."[68]

In her study of colonial and early national oratory, *Eloquence Is Power*, cultural historian Sandra Gustafson traces how women and Native Americans reshaped dominant forms and tropes of American political speech in order to foster equitable roles in the new nation's political and social orders. In their attempts to "remake forms of eloquence," Gustafson writes, these "figures of difference" were "met with real but sharply limited success in the public domains of the early republic."[69] This description, I argue, is equally apt for black orators at the time, who, as part of their parade culture, forged a tradition of politicized oral performance that achieved "real but sharply limited success": a language of black nationalism, on the one hand, but also a deepening of white antagonism that animated a counter-tradition of deriding black (political) speech, on the other.[70] In

their efforts to remake American eloquence in their image and in the terms of their experiences, black orators, like women and Native Americans, sought to speak their race into the general body politic as equal contributors and beneficiaries. This strategy was extremely shrewd because, in the dominant imagination, one's worthiness for citizenship and indeed for freedom itself derived in large measure from his facility as a speaking subject. These cultural politics were what propelled African Americans to spotlight the orations at the parades; that is, they hoped to countervail the ways white publics used the racialized postulations animating the Anglo-American "oratorical revolution" (i.e., blacks lack "reason" and "sentiment," to use Jefferson's terms) to "define the distinctiveness of Americans, a distinctiveness that excluded African-Americans from that definition."[71] With their orations, African Americans sought to affirm the fact that the African (American) did hold what literary historian Jay Fliegelman describes as the "particular cultural code whose audibility signified the possession of a sensibility . . . of being an American, the principle of national differentiation."[72] No wonder, then, black orators greeted their audiences as "fellow citizens." Far more than a rhetorical flourish, this appellation was a performative speech act that engendered the very (affect of) American subjectivity that it expressed.

The hailing of ex-slaves and their descendants as "citizens" was only the initiating gesture in the orations' rebuke of assumptions of black oratorical deficiency. In their performances of critical memory, historical reasoning, and political theorization, orators invalidated the broader proslavery notion that the African (American) is incapable of literary or rhetorical genius and therefore his race is unfit for full inclusion in a free polity such as the American republic. Jefferson offered the most lasting formulation of this theory in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, when he compared Native Americans to Africans and African-descended people: "The Indians, with no advantages of [the company and tutelage of whites], will often carve figures on their pipes not destitute of design and merit. They will crayon out an animal, a plant, or a country, so as to prove the existence of a germ in their minds which only wants cultivation. They astonish you with strokes of the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated. *But never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration.*"[73] Of course, the oratorical praxis on display at the parades was well above the "level of plain narration." For example, in his January 1, 1808 "Thanksgiving Sermon . . . On Account of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, On That Day, By The Congress Of The United States," Episcopal priest Absa-

Tom Jones brilliantly analogized the plight of black people in the U.S. to that of Hebrews in the biblical story of Exodus. With the end of the transatlantic slave trade as his most immediate "proof," Jones assured his Philadelphia audience that God was on the side of the oppressed and would deliver black people from captivity:

> The history of the world shows us that the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage is not the only instance in which it has pleased God to appear in behalf of oppressed and distressed nations, as the deliverer of the innocent, and of those who call upon his name. He is as unchangeable in his nature and character as he is in in his wisdom and power. The great and blessed event, which we have this day met to celebrate, is a striking proof that the God of heaven and earth is *the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.*[74]

Jones' stirring sermon fused the theological and politico-historical, a move in which, as Glaude puts it, "Africa is reread; the middle passage and slavery are reread; America is reread; and aspirations for freedom and citizenship are formulated as divinely sanctioned ends."[75] Indeed, the sermon, like all the speeches performed at other parades and freedom celebrations, dismissed Jefferson's proslavery logic in both its form and content, and those black "citizens" present helped bear those dismissals in and through their very bodies.

Organizers of the parades did not want the orations to affect only those in attendance, however. They sought to give the speeches a textual afterlife, so they published transcripts along with proceedings of the parades. (Jones, for example, published his sermon "for the use of the congregation."[76]) Historian Richard Newman argues that these textual forms of early national black protest "created a bridge to white leaders and citizens," but they were also a "bridge" among African Americans themselves, fortifying their sense of simultaneity.[77] They circulated transcripts and proceedings in their homes and in the social spaces of their voluntary and mutual relief societies, whose rolls were economically, politically, and religiously diverse.[78] Unlike newspapers and other textual matter that exacerbated personal and regional tensions among white Americans in the period, black print culture helped allay differences among black readers and listeners because it allowed them to recognize just how similar their experiences and concerns were.[79] With these small, yet crucial networks of print circulation, early national African Americans used textual formations to complement their performance practices of (black) nation-building.[80]

Although a discussion of the dynamics of this textual enterprise is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that, in their circulation of oration transcripts and parade proceedings, *ordinary* African Americans participated in the American Republic of Letters, the explosion of classically informed writing and print practices in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[81] Theoretically, the Republic of Letters was a depersonalized, discursive public sphere built on an ideal of self-negation. As Michael Warner explains, "Persons who enter this discourse do so on the condition that the validity of their utterance will bear a negative relation to their persons. These perspectives are not to be separated: the impersonality of public discourse is seen both as a trait of its medium and as norm for its subjects."[82] Despite its seeming anonymities, the Republic of Letters was, effectively, racialized as white because, according to its dictates, one had to possess education, property, and a "modern" sensibility to participate fully—the very markers associated with whiteness. But if African Americans could distinguish themselves as reading and writing subjects in the Republic of Letters, they surmised, then they would have proved their fundamental *nature* was the same as that of white Americans or Europeans.[83]

Black orators were wary, however, that a Jeffersonian-minded skeptic would read their texts and assume a white man wrote them. When Peter Williams, Jr. published the text of his 1808 oration, for example, he had four influential white men attest to the authenticity of his authorship. As he put it, "Having understood that some persons doubt my being the author of this oration, and thinking it probable that a like sentiment may be entertained by others who may honour this publication with a perusal, I have thought it proper to authenticate the fact, by subjoining the following certificates."[84] With its paratextual apparatus, Williams' published speech instantiated the practice of white verification of black authorship, a literary convention in the period that ranged from at least Phillis Wheatley's 1773 book of poetry, *Poems of Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, to antebellum slave narratives, which were often subtitled "Written By Himself."[85] With their respective certifications, Williams and other black writers sought to nullify doubts regarding their authorial and intellectual abilities—and therefore those of their race.

The four certifications Williams adjoined did more than identify him as the sole author; they also attested to his facility as a speaking subject, one capable of eloquence or "sublime oratory," to use Jefferson's phrase, by standing in place of his past/passed presence as a kind of ongoing presence. That is, each certification functioned as a signature might, which attempts to countervail the spatial and temporal realities of the signer's ab-

sence. As Derrida writes, "By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past *now* or present which will remain a future *now* or present."[86] In other words, signatures do more than alert us to one's former presence; more crucially, they work to *maintain* that presence as the graphic or textual trace of who is absent. Signatures are fundamentally performative in this sense in that they enact a kind of presence in the place of seeming absence. As such, the certifications Williams affixed when he published his address, including Williams' own, worked to (re)stage something of his presence, if not his performance, for future readers.

The texts of the orations and the wider proceedings also helped (re)enact the parade presence of their readers, including for those who did not attend. Reading these printed materials (out loud) worked to pull readers into the fold of the action, allowing them to take part imaginatively in the event and count themselves among the participants. At the end of abolitionist Joseph Sidney's published oration from an 1809 parade in New York City, for example, his publishers included the details of the parade: what associations participated, sartorial accouterments, the formation of the participants, and their route. They closed the text with the following *nota bene*: "The committee, after service, shortened their route on account of the numerous spectators, and dismissed at the place of rendezvous, with the greatest acclamations of joy."[87] Given the novelty of the event, and indeed of black freedom itself, the seemingly plain language of the text could do more than represent a past/passed action; at the very least, it might reproduce something of the affective bond of the parades. Thus, the contingently performative nature of the parade texts had the potential to transform their (black) readers and auditors into bearers of the event and its social and political force. Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, we might think of this "reading posture" as a "sustained and intense engagement" that "simply *is* theatrical, trances themselves entrancing."[88] The texts that African Americans and their patrons published were attempts to do just that: namely, to *entrance* readers into the world of the parade performances.

In this way, the oration transcripts and parade descriptions were more than accounts of what happened; when read, they functioned as (intended) continuations of something of the happening itself. That is, the texts did not simply "save" or even "record" the parades; rather, they were the (affective) remains with which to extend the parades into future actualities. Embedded in each of the texts was a performative force, a script perhaps, that impelled its reading publics to *do* something. This force redoubled as the

effect of the period's lack of aesthetic distance, if not distinction, between reading and listening. In other words, the written text as *read* became a text as *performed*, which is to say that the modes of writing and reading that structured early black literary aesthetics were fundamentally modes of action and transformation.

THE "SENSES" OF BOBALITION

There is little evidence of what, if anything, the printed oration transcripts and parade proceedings compelled African Americans' detractors to do. But the parades themselves moved them to react, so they created their own textual responses that ridiculed black parades and its participants. The most important of these was the "Bobalition" series of broadsides that circulated throughout the north from the mid-1810s to the 1830s. The series drew on caricaturizations and satirizations of slaves and African Americans in late eighteenth-century newspapers and almanac literature, but differs in that it directly confronts black political culture. Indeed, the acute specificities of the broadsides attest to the potency of black nationalism in the first decades of the nineteenth century; that is, white publics could not ignore the re-imaginings of the nation that African Americans literally paraded on the streets.

The publication of Bobalition began in Boston following the War of 1812, when African Americans, like other constituencies, embraced the heightened nationalist fervor that swept the U.S.[89] Those printed in and near Boston quickly became the prototype. On the top third is an illustration of parade participants dressed in either militia regalia or their best formal wear, and a caption underneath that announces the occasion. The bottom two-thirds is usually divided into three columns: the first spells out the rules and route of the procession, and it is most often in the form of a letter from the president or secretary of a voluntary association to a participant in the parade; beginning somewhere in the second column is a series of historical and political toasts the paraders will raise; and in the third column are lyrics to a song, normally dedicated to a black woman, that will follow the toasts. This outline of the broadsides is admittedly rough, and there are exceptions such as an 1825 broadside that is divided into two columns rather than three.[90] Nonetheless, it gives a sense of the broadsides' shared form and, importantly, how its reproduction over time functioned similarly to the shared structure of the parades: both fostered a sense of simultaneity among its respective publics.

Consider, for example, the 1821 *Grand Bobalition, or 'Great Annibersary Fussible.'* It depicts twelve men, facing right and marching down a cobblestone road in two-by-two formation. The two men leading the procession clutch staffs, four more carry lances, and another hoists a flag. Each wears identical militia livery and regalia, featuring a braided tailcoat and prominent bicorn with plume. Their matching uniforms, though nondescript, denote they belong to the same voluntary or mutual relief association. Under the image, a caption reads: "ORDER OF DE DAY—Containing de CONSTRUCTIONS to de SHEEF MARSAL, de TOSE which will be gib on de GLORIOUS OCCASHUM, and ODER TINGS too many, great deal, to TICKLEISE. N.B All dis be rite not by de fist of de PRESIDUMPT, and gib to de Printer to be superdanglify in English."[91] Along with that of the title, the caption's orthographic excess renders the image absurd; despite the marchers' discipline and attention to detail, the parade is essentially a divertissement. The whole of the broadside, like that of others in the series, produces its own kind of presence that stands in for past/passed performances at the parades. In this case, that presence is a crude and vacuous blackness, which, in the dominant imagination, signified African Americans were unsuited for citizenship, if not for freedom itself.

The ideological force that Bobalition wielded was considerable, and it rested on the centrality of print-performance culture in the period.[92] As "print amplified the range of an oration," reasoned and sensible speech amplified legitimate citizenship.[93] Bobalition was not simply racist humor, then, but an attack on black verbal and literary expression that undermined African Americans' inclusionary demands. To be sure, the broadsides' "notations" of black speech were not wholly new; they derived in part from slave diction standardized in colonial and early national theatre cultures.[94] But these theatrical representations lacked the emphatically oppositional charge that animated Bobalition. In *Grand Bobalition, or 'Great Annibersary Fussible,'* for example, a letter to the appointed "Sheef Marsal," Cato Cudjoe, from the "Shocietee" President, Cesar Crappo, gives instructions on the formation, music, and order of the procession. Written in derisive and often nonsensical dialect, the letter features a header, "Bosson, Uly 14, 18021," a greeting, "Most superfluous Sir," and a "bosecrip" (i.e., postscript) that frame the letter; its transitions become "moreober" and "furder"; and it references "Massa Shakespole." Such representations of black writing and speech dismiss black intellect, functioning much the same way as black skin color did: as a sign of those who must remain politically and socially subordinate in the American polity.

The purported absurdity of black citizenship and patriotism that Bo-

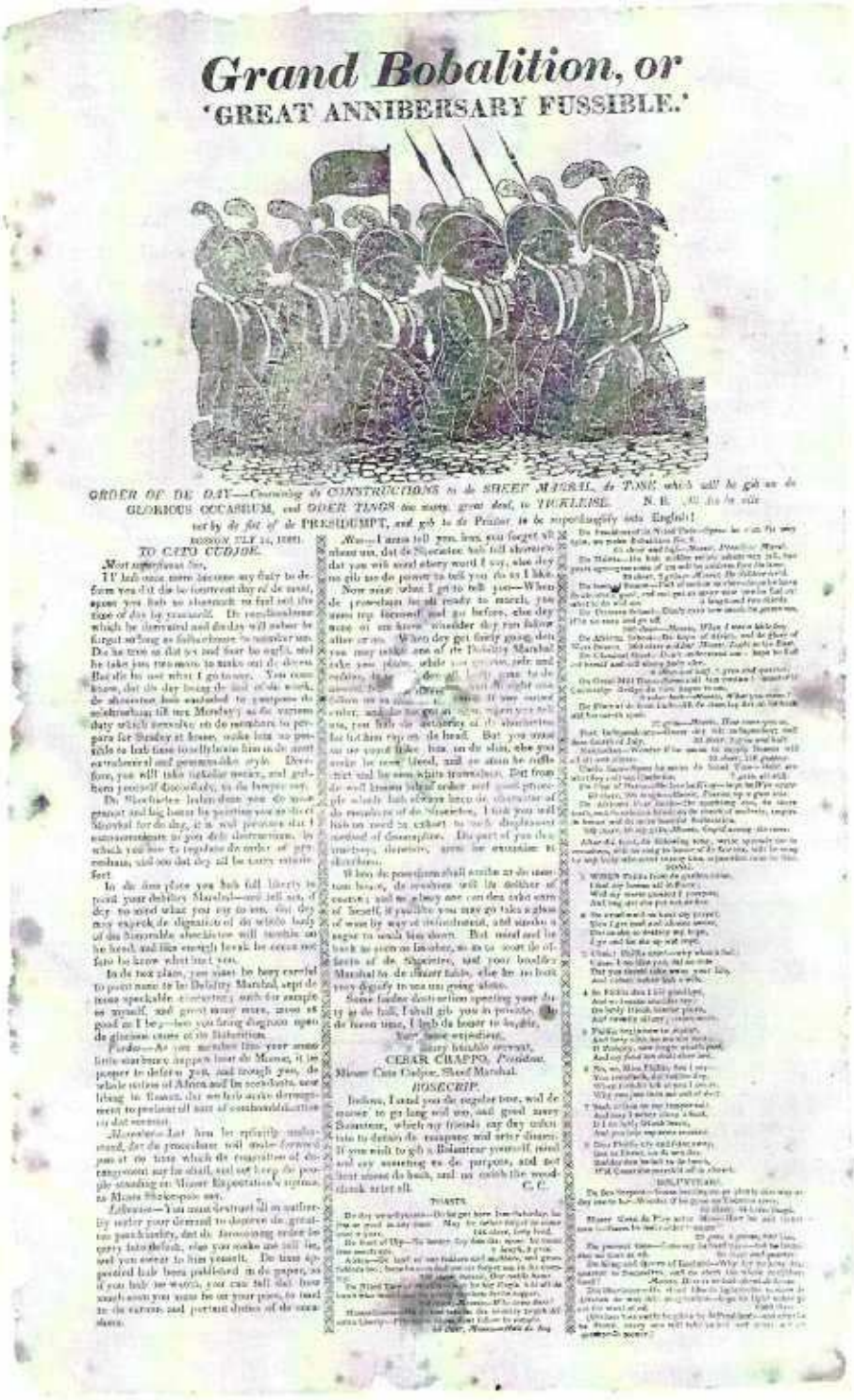

Figure 1: *Grand Bobalition, or 'Great Annibersary Fussible'* (1821). Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-40690.

balition's distorted renderings of black speech enacted was part and parcel of the broadsides' most fundamental claim: namely, black people lack full humanity. Although discourses of racial inherence did not take hold of the collective American imagination until after the 1830s, there were important meditations on the so-called nature of race in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[95] These inquiries were often comparative, querying the existence of a common humanity between races. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, for instance, Thomas Jefferson speculated on the "physical" differences between white and black; he considered questions of color, affect, figure, hair, renal function, pulmonary structure, and the brain.[96] Jefferson and his contemporaries' quasi-scientific approach to the study of race and racial difference culminated in the influential antebellum field of ethnology. Ethnologists worked within and across a range of disciplines in the natural sciences, including craniology, Egyptology, physiology, trichology (the study of hair), and zoology; they concluded that the races of mankind, as they would put it, were affectively, corporeally, and intellectually dissimilar in their very makeups.[97] (Darwin invalidated ethnology in the late 1850s.) The (pseudo-) scientific and quantitative approaches constitutive of ethnology and its anthropological antecedents do not figure in Bobalition, but the broadsides do contribute to the same intellectual genealogy: a tradition of thought that posits the African (American) is somehow lacking in his humanity and therefore must remain captive in a free society. Bobalition advances this claim, however obliquely, in its representations of black speech because the period's prevailing discourses posited that deficiencies in the faculty of speech signaled probable deficiencies in one's very humanity. Of course, the elocutionary and rhetorical shortcomings in Bobalition are intended to signify the human shortcomings of all black people, not just those of individual parade participants.

When producers first began to publish Bobalition in the mid-1810s, the U.S. was still an oral culture; thus, the immediacy of speech remained central to the ways Americans conceptualized forms of personal and collective subjectivity. The ongoing influence of eighteenth-century religious expression, most notably within evangelical Protestantism, accounted in large part for the continued emphasis on orality in the early nineteenth century (hence, the Second Great Awakening). But it was the collective of secular discourses, the so-called American Enlightenment, that most informed the socio-racial logics that structure Bobalition. Speech, these discourses held, is the medium of reason, and reason is what separates humans from all other beings in the natural world. John Quincy Adams, for example, emphasized this view throughout his theories of oratory and rhetoric, and he

began with it in the "Inaugural Oration" to his influential *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* (1810):

> The peculiar and highest characteristic, which distinguishes man from the rest of the animal creation, is REASON. It is by this attribute, that our species is constituted the great link between the physical and intellectual world. . . . It is by the gift of reason, that the human species enjoys the exclusive and inestimable privilege of progressive improvement, and is enabled to avail itself of the advantages of individual discovery. As the necessary adjunct and vehicle of reason, the faculty of speech was also bestowed as an exclusive privilege upon man; not the mere cries of passion, which he has in common with the lower orders of animated nature; but as the conveyance of thought; as the means of rational intercourse with his fellow-creature, and of humble communion with his God. It is by the means of reason, clothed with speech, that the most precious blessings of social life are communicated from man to man, and that supplication, thanksgiving, and praise, are addressed to the Author of the universe.[98]

As the "exclusive privilege[s]" of man, then, reason and speech become the qualitative markers of one's humanity; more specifically, defects in speech signify defects in reason, and the inability to reason fully marks those who are not fully human. This line of reasoning is the guiding premise of Bobalition, and its constitutive distortions of black speech, even if invented, suggest that black people are and will remain less human than their white counterparts because speech itself, Adams maintained, is "the source of all human improvements."[99]

In accounting for the ideological effects at work in Bobalition, Adams' theorization of the interrelation of reason, speech, and the human is also useful in terms of its implications regarding slavery and freedom in the U.S. Although neither volume of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* directly addresses the institution of American chattel slavery, Adams champions the importance of rhetoric to the story of Exodus in the Bible. He writes, "When the people of God were groaning under the insupportable oppression of Egyptian bondage, and the Lord of Hosts condescended, by miraculous interposition, to raise them up a deliverer, the want of ELOQUENCE was pleaded. . . . To supply this deficiency . . . another favored servant of the Most High was united in the exalted trust of deliverance [i.e., Aaron], and specifically appointed, for the purpose of declaring the divine

will to the oppressor and the oppressed; to the monarch of Egypt and the children of Israel."[100] In Adams' exegesis, the deliverance of Hebrews from slavery in Egypt required both the spiritual authority of Moses *and* the rhetorical eloquence of Aaron; early national African Americans, for whom the story of Exodus powered their political imaginations perhaps more than any other biblical or historical narrative, also believed in the centrality of rhetoric in the fight to end the various forms of slavery they endured, which is why they initiated what would become a lasting oratorical tradition from the very beginnings of emancipation. With Bobalition, African Americans' detractors sought to blunt the power of black orality because they, too, believed the spoken word to be central to the production of (American) freedom. The history of the U.S. was the most meaningful and immediate testament to this view, as the rhetorical revolution that colonists waged against the British was just as critical as their armed revolution.[101]

Furthermore, Adams' *Lectures* contend that the spoken word does not simply produce freedom but, just as crucially, enhances it moving forward. Speech, he claims, promotes "progressive improvement," "individual discovery," and "rational intercourse [between] fellow-creature[s]."[102] For Adams and Americans in the early nineteenth century generally, these acts and conditions flourish most in democratic-republican polities, among which the U.S. was the exemplar. Their view suggests that the performance of eloquent speech distinguishes those subjects most capable and indeed those most responsible for the positive development of a free society; therefore, they should be the freest. By contrast, those who are the least articulate must remain the least free in that society because they retard its progress. This is the proslavery appeal at the center of Bobalition, an appeal its producers made most forcefully in their (mis-)representations of *how* African Americans spoke, more than what they spoke.

For its many admirers, Bobalition's graphic renderings of contorted black diction only redoubled its proslavery effect and ideological cogency. That the broadsides allowed Americans to *see* the purported defects of black speech worked to impress further the "truth" of those defects, and therefore the defects of black humanity itself. Indeed, the Aristotelian notion that sight is the most epistemologically productive of the senses remained operative in the period, and in the contemporaneous Anglo-American philosophical tradition, the Scottish aesthetician and philosopher Lord Kames gave it its most cogent articulation. In his influential *Elements of Criticism* (1762), which Jefferson and other American Enlightenment figures admired, Lord Kames argued that the "eye is the best avenue to the heart," and therefore "writers of genius . . . represent everything as passing

in our sight; and, from readers or hearers, transform us as it were into spectators."[103] The "genius" of Bobalition, which it certainly warrants to be called, is precisely the way it visualizes the oral; that is, in confronting the broadsides' textual abundance, one has no choice but to "see" black speech as sounded. Bobalition's graphic representations of the sounds of blackness reinforced the "truth" of blackness that those sounds were meant to convey because, according to the period's prevailing aesthetic theories, the visual "both strengthens the illusion of an immediate engagement and more effectively influences future behavior."[104]

The most common ways in which Bobalition visualized deficient black orality were catachresis, misspellings, malapropisms, and puns. But the broadsides also relied on other techniques. For instance, the *Grand Celebrashun ob de Bobalition ob African Slabery!!!* (1825) renders black oral maladroitness by way of its word arrangements. At the top of the broadside is an image of two black men standing face-to-face, both wearing top hats and tailcoats. By means of a speech bubble, which were popular in the political cartoons of the period, the man on the right asks, "What is de day ob de grand CELEBRASHUN [?]" The other answers, "BOSSON, ULY 14, 1825, and little arter."[105] The placement of their words in this exchange renders their already ridiculous speech doubly preposterous; the man on the *right* initiates the dialogue, therefore upsetting the normative procedure of reading left-to-right. Furthermore, his words wrap around the speech bubble in such a way that all but "Celebrashun" is upside down. The resultant interplay of aural and visual derision undercuts the men's seeming refinement and success that their accouterment and clothing might otherwise signify. Indeed, the visual representations of black speech in *Grand Celebrashun* render the prospect of racial equality as the potential of black freedom utterly incongruous.

The production of this effect was the predominant aim of Bobalition. But across the individual broadsides there is no single demand regarding what role African Americans should fulfill in the north. Some broadsides express proslavery arguments. *The Grand Celebration! Of the Abolition of the Slave Trade"* (1817), for example, includes the toast, "'Tis better to be a well fed SLAVE den a damn poor half starve FREE negur."[106] Others, like *Grand Bobalition, or 'Great Annibersary Fussible'*, cheer antislavery sentiments, toasting "Massachusets" because "He de fuss tate in dis country to give African liberty—Pity more of um dont follow he sample."[107] *Bobolition of Slavery!!!!!* (1818) is more biting in its reproof of the U.S., "[To] De Nited Tate—de land of liberty, sept he keep slave at de South," but nonetheless affirms the nation as African Americans' rightful home: "[To] Massa

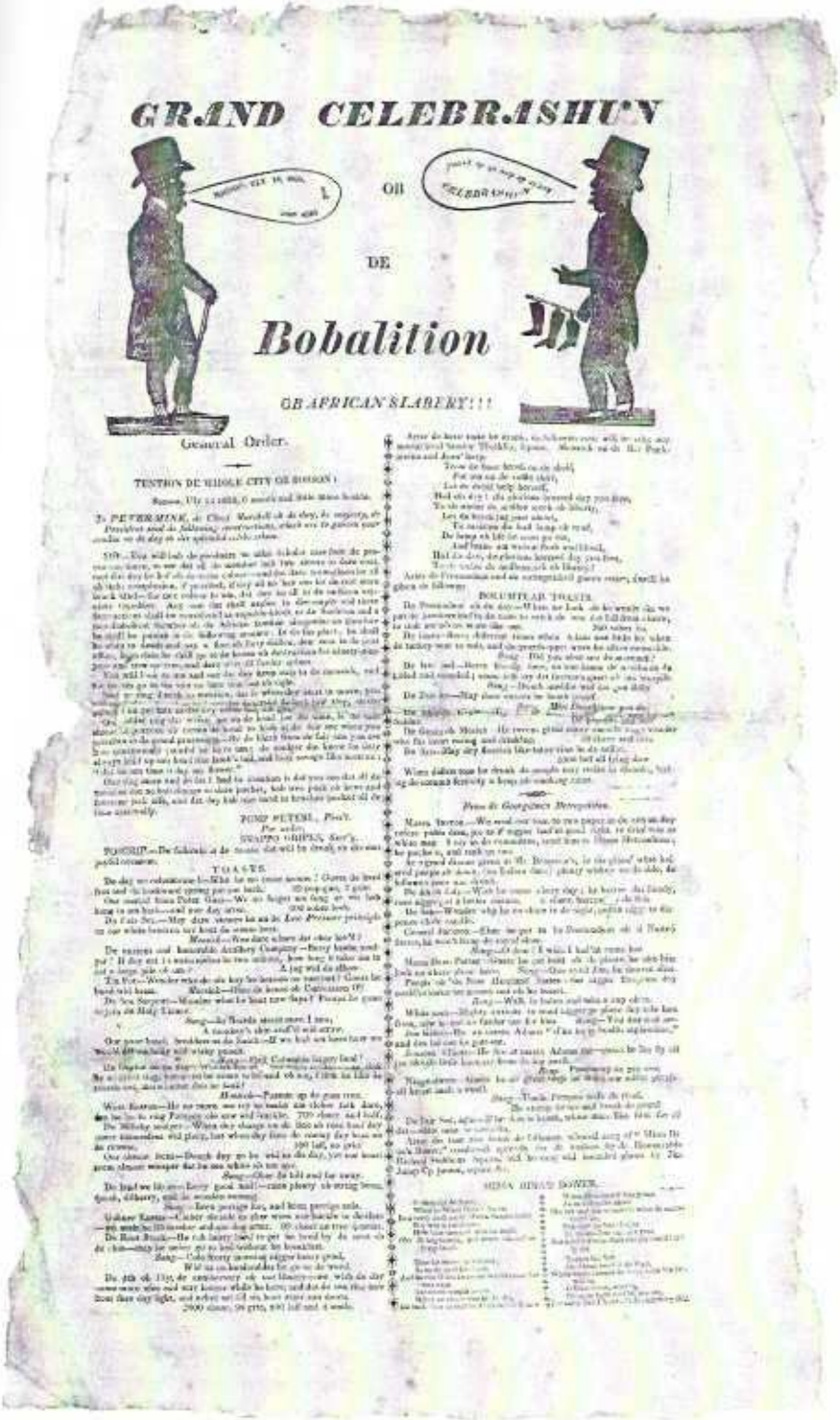

Figure 2: *Grand Celebrashun ob de Bobalition ob African Slabery!!!* (1825). Library of Congress, LC-USZ62–40688.

[Henry] Clay [of the American Colonization Society]—If he want brack man to go lib in Africa why he no go show him de way heself."[108] The diverse and often contradictory sentiments expressed across the broadsides reflect the multiple ideological commitments that characterized dominant racial thought in the north, yet in their respective articulations they all share one overriding conviction: African Americans must remain somehow captive in the American polity.

In this way, Bobalition modeled a way to apply the arguments of proslavery ideology to the realities of black freedom; it influenced a range of antebellum cultural projects, from Edward W. Clay's hugely popular *Life in Philadelphia* series of cartoons (1828–30) to blackface minstrelsy.[109] In 1837, black abolitionist Hosea Easton argued that the prevalence of Bobalition and similar forms of proslavery graphic literature functioned as a public pedagogy of sorts, categorizing them as part of a "baneful seed which is sown in the tender soil of youthful minds."

> Cuts and placards descriptive of the negro's deformity, are every where displayed to the observation of the young, with corresponding broken lingo, the very character of which is marked with design. Many of the popular book stores, in commercial towns and cities, have their show-windows lined with them. The barrooms of the most popular public houses in the country, sometimes have their ceiling literally covered with them. This display of American civility is under the daily observation in every class of society, even in New England.[110]

Easton does not specify the particular "cuts and placards" he observed in these locations, but Bobalition's influence on whichever they were is clear. Indeed, Bobalition was "simultaneously a technology and a trope," as historian Corey Capers aptly describes it, and the broadsides' fusion of the mechanistic and the imaginative offered a manner of racial representation that northerners craved and appropriated for the rest of the antebellum period.[111]

For white northerners unwilling or unready to expand the bounds of democratic inclusion and extend citizenship to their black counterparts, Bobalition was especially compelling because it produced or, better, enacted a "self-evident truth" that upheld race-based circumscriptions in the polity: namely, the African (American) is unfit for equal participation therein. In their "translations" of black parade performances into the generic realms of farce and satire, the broadsides worked to render the neces-

sity of black captivity axiomatic.[112] Thus, Bobalition was not simply something northerners laughed at, but, more important, something they acted from. With its emphasis on black speech and linguistic incompetence, Bobalition tapped into, and consequently boosted the currency of, a set of ever-common racial theories positing black people's constitutional—that is, human—deficiencies vis-à-vis other races; most notably of these, the belief that African Americans were inherently lacking as speaking subjects and therefore unqualified for full freedom in the increasingly modern world. The "broken lingo" constitutive of Bobalition, to use Easton's phrase, became the lexicon with which white northerners both heard and saw black speech in the early nineteenth century, despite the rhetorical flair that early national African Americans performed at the parades as well as in pulpits and in other public spaces. Put another way, Bobalition conditioned the "ear" and "eye" of the dominant racial imagination of the north, both set to deride black political speech and reject the inclusionary appeals of black political formations. These proslavery "senses" did not amount to a demand for the reinstitution of chattel slavery in the region; rather, they strengthened and "legitimated" white northerners' resolve that African Americans must remain captive in the realm of existential indeterminacy that would characterize free black life throughout the antebellum period.

TWO | Black Politics but Not Black People

Early Minstrelsy, "White Slavery," and the Wedge of "Blackness"

During an 1833 anti-abolitionist riot in New York City, a mob of an estimated two thousand people descended on the Chatham Street Chapel, where they found the entrance blocked by locked iron gates. Inside the chapel, a committee of abolitionists was busy laying the foundation of an "association to oppose slavery, and reaffirm the doctrine of their revolutionary forefathers," as one member put it.[1] That association would become the New York City Anti-Slavery Society, a regional precursor of the American Anti-Slavery Society that formed later that year. After the adoption of resolutions concerning the group's function and structure, the abolitionists gave the keys to the janitor and instructed him to allow the mob to enter the chapel. When the rioters discovered their targets had escaped by way of private passages, and therefore violence against the abolitionists was no longer possible, they resolved to "amuse themselves" another way.[2]

Thus the mob decided to hold a mock antislavery meeting. Several of the rioters forced a black bystander to assume the role of white abolitionist Arthur Tappan, chair the proceedings, and deliver a speech. Although the conscripted participant resisted performing, "his audience would take no denial." He eventually addressed the mob, and he did so in a stunning, yet dangerous improvisation that recalled the orations at black commemorative parades:

> I am called upon to make a speech! You doubtless know that I am a poor, ignorant man, not accustomed to make speeches. But I have heard of the Declaration of Independence, and have read the Bible. The Declaration says all men are created equal, and the Bible says God has made us all of one blood. I think, therefore, we are entitled to good treatment, that it is wrong to hold men in slavery, and that—[3]

The rioters halted his speech with "yells and curses" then "broke up their meeting and dispersed"; they did not anticipate such daring eloquence in the face of their violent multitude.[4] Indeed, the mob made the mistake of allowing "Tappan" to speak for himself, and he refused to do so in the fatuous, grotesque, and obtuse ways that typified black characters in dominant performance culture, which was what the mob expected from him.

Of all the antebellum cultural practices that shaped normative expectations of how African Americans should conduct themselves, blackface minstrelsy was the most formative. During its early phase (1829–43), when the "Tappan" incident occurred, minstrelsy's points of articulation between free black life were particularly strong. But after 1843, in response to the economic depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s as well as its own commercialization, the form began to solidify its pro-plantation ideology and nostalgia.[5] For critics like cultural historian Eric Lott and especially musicologist Dale Cockrell and cultural historian W. T. Lhamon, this periodization best represents the course of antebellum minstrelsy; that is, "an early radical phase followed by its co-optation by commercial and middle-class interests by the 1850s."[6] In their highly influential accounts, these scholars suggest that much of what made early minstrelsy "radical" is that it "asks poor [and disaffected] whites to align themselves with blacks against the civil sense that it was 'a gross outrage' to do so."[7] This proposed alliance, they contend, reflected white workers' desire to forge bonds of working-class solidarity with their black counterparts. This chapter disputes that claim, which has become an "increasingly orthodox" one; instead, I argue that, with early minstrelsy, white working-class northerners expropriated black performance culture and developed a distinct strand of proslavery thought with which to bring about their socioeconomic betterment at the expense of African Americans'.[8]

To be sure, early minstrelsy poses a complex set of analytical challenges because of its polyvalent and ostensibly contradictory enactments. Although the form's texts and practices register an admiration for its antiauthoritarian and crafty black characters, its extra-theatrical contexts undercut, or even nullify, the esteem its figurations accord African Americans and slaves. These contexts, which I explore throughout this chapter, manifest in early minstrelsy's white supremacist Jacksonian politics as well as its discursive and visual reliance upon the battered and bruised black body for its humor.[9] Furthermore, the particulars of production also trouble the notion that those who crafted and craved the form sought solidarity with their black working-class counterparts. Perhaps more than any other fac-

tor, white actors and managers barred the onstage contributions of actual African Americans, even though their performances usually took place near black communities.[10] Black performance by black people would have subverted the mechanisms of identification and structures of (inter)racial feeling that white audiences (predominately male) worked out for themselves in minstrelsy—structures they used to buffer the ongoing vicissitudes of industrialization and the entrenchment of wage labor capitalism. Instead, African Americans remained outside the theatrical frame, and blackface minstrelsy emerged as a performance form for, by, and about the white community.

To begin to untangle early minstrelsy's complex and seemingly antithetical implications, I turn to its origins in order to grasp the aesthetic foundations and social impulses that charged its formation. An examination of these underlying conditions explains how early minstrelsy was, indeed, a "form of engaging the black 'Other,'" but not one "supportive of action to correct the Other's social plight."[11] Rather, white working-class performers and publics relied on the ideological and spatial propinquity they shared with African Americans to fashion minstrelsy in such a way as to sustain their distinctive race- and class-based ends. In this effort the rejection of African Americans as performers was crucial, and "Tappan's" improvisation at the Chatham Street Chapel reveals why: there was always the threat they might move off script and subvert early minstrelsy's ideological thrust.

RASCALITY AND THE SURPLUS OF BLACK/SLAVE PERFORMANCE

Within the gestures, music, and narratives of minstrelsy, the traces of black performance praxis are evident. Lhamon has done the most thorough job of charting the cross-racial pollination that characterizes minstrelsy's prehistory. He argues that this exchange was fostered most decisively in sites of market and labor, in sites such as New York City's Catherine Market "and other early spots for the performances of American culture [where] there was an eagerness to combine, share, join, draw from opposites, play on opposition. An enthusiasm for the underlying possibilities in difference continually reappears in this popular-folk culture of the Atlantic diaspora."[12] What made this interplay of difference possible was something of a concentration of slaves, ex-slaves, and their descendants in the public spaces of northeastern markets and town squares.[13] In fact, this concen-

trated, cross-racial cultural reciprocity took place in other locales throughout the country, too, in places such as the ports of Baltimore and Charleston, sites of early canal construction, and the haunts of rivermen along the Mississippi River system.[14]

Within these spheres of cultural interchange, what most attracted those white participants who would eventually hone early minstrelsy was what black rivermen called "rascality." This unofficial code of living among black men working the rivers and at ports combined legal and extralegal action for personal advantage and collective benefit. As one historian puts it, "While these men were not above occasionally swindling other working-class people, for the most part their actions were directed at the region's elites. They lied to, cheated, and stole from bankers, shopkeepers, plantation owners, and merchants—the people who possessed the wealth they coveted. . . . But money was not the only thing that mattered to these men. [Black riverman] Charles Brown, for instance, combined the pursuit of ready money with efforts to liberate runaway slaves."[15] Yet illegality did not constitute all of rascality. It was also a way of life that stressed unabashed expressions of individuality in which black men "lived by their own wits as confidence men and tricksters. This independence was an important part of their black masculine identity that prized not only the more common working-class virtues of toughness and strength but also cleverness, dexterity, and flamboyance."[16] It is clear why rascality appealed to young white workers: its dual, often simultaneous function—to defy elites and enact pride in oneself and one's class—provided them a mode of performance with which to decry their new position as maltreated wage earners and those men of capital who created it.

The terms of rascality, particularly its emphasis on "cleverness, dexterity, and flamboyance," are undoubtedly related to the gestural and rhetorical lexicons of the interracial performances at markets that prefigured blackface minstrelsy. For scholars of early black cultural production, if not for contemporaneous observers themselves, one of the most productive sites of rascal performance was Catherine Market, which was located in lower Manhattan directly across the East River from what is now Brooklyn Heights.[17] Starting sometime in the late eighteenth century and lasting until at least the 1820s, Catherine Market constituted a stage where slaves displayed their mercantile and performative goods for black and white consumption. According to Thomas De Voe's famous retrospective 1862 account, slaves who had "leave of their masters for certain holidays, [would], for 'pocket-money,' . . . gather up everything that would bring a few pence or shillings . . . and bring them in their skiffs to [Catherine] Mar-

Figure 3: *Dancing for Eels at Catherine Market* (1820). Unknown Artist, Private Collection (Sotheby's Inc., 1973 auction).

ket." In addition to selling their small wares, slaves "were ever ready, by their 'negro sayings or doings,' to make a few shillings more." In fact, De Voe claims, "the first introduction in this city of public 'negro dancing' no doubt took place at this market."[18] He goes on to describe the stages and music of the dances: slaves performed on their own "shingles," a "board [that] was usually about five to six feet long, of large width, with its particular spring in it," and "their music or time was usually given by one of their party, which was done by beating their hands on the sides of their legs and the noise of the heel." When money "was not to be had" for the best dancer, he received fish or eels.[19]

De Voe's description outlines enactments of the canny, improvisational, and inventive aesthetics that form liberatory black performance—a rascal aesthetics that has marked radical black performance ever since.[20] These aesthetics resisted easy accounting and legibility because, under the gaze of the performers' masters, overseers, and other observers, they signified on multiple and at times contradictory levels. Because of its significatory abundance, then, slave performance attracted diverse constituencies.

Slaves' dancing for eels as well as their "Negro sayings and doings," which prefigured the wordplay and tricksterism of early minstrelsy, were popular because audiences found "different values in the [performances] at the same time."[21] The sheer talent of slave performers attracted many in the audience.[22] For other spectators, the political material of the performances was what most enticed them: namely, a fleeting yet affective corporeality that resisted captivity itself. Thus, slaves' performances for money or eels at Catherine Market were also rascal-radical enactments of freedom and selfhood.

Following performance theorist Fred Moten, we might think of these liberatory significations as the surplus of black/slave performance. When slaves sang and danced at Catherine Market, there was more at stake than competition and the possibility of material gain. This surplus is subject to what Moten terms a "material reproductivity" that pursues "another liberty waiting activation."[23] Slave dancers and doers at Catherine Market and other contemporaneous performers of rascality pursued liberty in their productions (in addition to money or eels). Their performative, political materiality marks one of the beginnings of a black radical (performance) tradition, a history that runs from slavery to freedom.

Yet there is a cutting, ultimately ghastly twist to this story of reproduction. Those who donned burnt cork grasped the unruliness and therefore sociopolitical potentiality of the surplus of black performance; that is, they used that surplus to activate *their* "liberty waiting." White performers and publics latched onto the disorderly material of rascally black performance and expropriated it to create blackface minstrelsy, the nation's first popular entertainment.

"WHITE SLAVERY" AND BLACK INSURGENCY: TWO DISCOURSES

As a bracketed theatrical form, blackface minstrelsy began to emerge in the late 1820s. To be sure, blackface performance appeared well before this period, but what we now recognize as the choreography, figures, forms, music, and narratives that constitute minstrelsy cohered as a kind of theatrical whole in the early Jacksonian period. For instance, it was at this time when actor George Washington Dixon performed his signature song, "Coal Black Rose," in New York City over a span of three nights in 1829, each time at a different venue—The Chatham Theatre, the Bowery Theatre, and the Park Theatre.[24] Although Dixon had already successfully toured the country by that point, performing from Charleston, South Carolina, to Salem, Massa-

chusetts, these three performances of his blackface act at New York City's iconic theatres catapulted him to stardom and fostered the craze that surrounded "Coal Black Rose."[25] Also in the late 1820s, Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice, who became the most famous blackface minstrel before the Civil War, honed his "Jim Crow" in the western theatres of Louisville, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh.[26] Rice's time in what was then the west marks how the cultural world of the frontier also contributed to early minstrelsy's performative vocabularies and parabolic structures.

Dixon's popularity and Rice's frontier acts, therefore, simply reinforce the widely accepted notion that minstrelsy was an invention of the north and west, not of the south. As Lott puts it, "One might begin by recognizing that the minstrel show most often glossed not white encounters with life on the plantation (minstrel-show mythographers to the contrary) but racial contacts and tensions endemic to the North and the frontier. The chiefly working-class orientation of cultural interchange in the North and Southwest was responsible both for installing this new entertainment in its northern class context and for the kinds of racial representation to be found there."[27] These "racial contacts and tensions" of the north and the frontier emerged from the practice and gradual end of slavery in these regions, a process that started in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Slavery in these two regions centered most on domestic service, small-scale farming, and artisanship rather than on the plantation regime that was ubiquitous in the south.[28] Nonetheless, the fact that the staging of slaves and ex-slaves took hold in the north, where slavery was (for the most part) no longer practiced, suggests something about the institution's importance to how that region constructed and understood itself. Put simply, minstrelsy became a kind of aesthetic surrogate for the loss of slavery in the north.

That said, early minstrelsy was not a nostalgic attempt to theatricalize a "history" of slavery. Rather, its intent and appeal rested on its explicitly imagined futures. The deliberate and marked differences between actual slave life, in the north and elsewhere, and representations of slaves on the minstrel stage reflected the economic, political, and social desires of white northerners *looking forward*. Lott calls this psychic energy the "social unconscious of blackface"; that is, "the conflicts and accommodations that lay behind the transformations" that white artists and their publics made to black cultural formations.[29] Certainly their psychological and sociopolitical needs powered the dynamism of those transformations. The most important of these changes was the substitution of actual blackness with the "blackness" that would typify the minstrel stage. Yet white desire and ef-

fort alone did not charge that transition; the actions of an increasingly assertive free black community in the north also contributed to this change, yet few critics of early minstrelsy have taken that public into account.[30] Black agitation helped precipitate the social turmoil that characterized the late 1820s and early 1830s, and blackface minstrelsy became one way to attenuate and regulate its pressures.[31] That is, the form functioned simultaneously as a conduit of white assertion and as a buffer against black protest.

But what were some of the circumstances of the period that framed the inception of blackface minstrelsy and therefore help make sense of its fluctuating and at-times-contradictory negotiations? To begin, a rhetoric and praxis of "common man" politics resulted in the inauguration of Andrew Jackson in 1829 as well as the formation of a "radical popular movement [the Working Men]—led by a committee composed primarily of journeymen mechanics."[32] At the same time, black activism was reaching national proportions: in 1829, when the first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal* (New York), shut down after a remarkable two-year run, another, *The Rights of All* (New York), quickly began publication. That same year, Richard Allen, founding bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and one of the most powerful African Americans in the nation, and his cohort began plans for a national convention of black delegates to explore strategies of collective uplift; and David Walker published his jeremiad, *Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, which prophesied a murderous racial reckoning and circulated in the north and the south.[33] Although scholars of the period often treat white working-class Jacksonianism and contemporaneous black political ideology in isolation, these historical formations were not as separate as the historiography suggests. Indeed, one place of intersection was minstrelsy, and not least because those who crafted its aesthetics, figurations, and spaces consciously avoided the sociopolitical consequences of black politics.

The popular allows for such a (dis-)junction because, as Antonio Gramsci remarks, the contents of common culture are always contested; its borders are never settled but always in process.[34] Because common culture operates on a shared popular level where everyone (believes he or she) is a legitimate contributor, it is not subject to philosophical or formalist coherence and systematization. Lott notes that "popular forms and popular audiences are less fixed referents than sites of continual reconstitution[;] the popular [is] less an object than a space."[35] He finds that the spaces of early minstrelsy allowed for such interchange of cultures and therefore of the belief systems of blacks and whites. Yet even in his groundbreaking study

of blackface minstrelsy, *Love and Theft*, Lott hardly attends to black responses to the form, not to mention wider, concurrent black social and political formations that also framed minstrelsy's inception. The vast majority of the literature on early minstrelsy follows this example, tracing what I view as an unfortunate instance of historical continuity in which scholars borrow the model of those who crafted minstrelsy itself: they refuse black people except when they are advantageous to one's particular narrative. But what happens when we admit black doings into the historiographic frame? How did they figure (within) the popular spaces of early minstrelsy? In terms of the writing of the history of those spaces and their contents, in what ways do the actions and discourses of African Americans in the late 1820s and early 1830s refocus the claim that early minstrelsy imagined a cross-racial alliance of disaffected workers?

To begin to answer these questions, I want to consider the rise of white working-class discourse vis-à-vis black political discourse in the period because this method helps clarify how and why minstrelsy's white working-class publics aligned themselves with black politics but refused black people. Starting in the late 1820s, white workers began to conceive of their relation to capital, wage labor, and private enterprise as one of enslavement.[36] This conceptualization engendered and unleashed a set of discursive and ideological resources that animated and fortified their politics throughout the Jacksonian period.[37] One of the most conspicuous of these was the notion of "white slavery," which eventually helped foment Free Soil politics in the late 1840s and early 1850s.[38] As a general hermeneutic, the discursive figuration of "white slavery" allowed white workers to imagine themselves as free republican citizens who controlled the rights to, and fruits of, their labor.[39] They framed that figuration in historical terms, declaring that developments of capitalism contravened American ideals. "White slavery" evoked the forfeitures and perils that workers and, by extension, the nation suffered in its feverish and unrelenting processes of industrialization (i.e., the move from agrarian economies, and the shift to wage labor and centralized manufacturing) in the first decades of the nineteenth century.[40]

This historical narrative was a nostalgic and, in significant respects, fanciful vision of a precapitalist past that, along with the rhetorical figure of the "white slave," helped align white workers with their revolutionary forefathers, especially Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson who most forcefully outlined the rights and virtues of independent artisanship. The Founding Fathers, of course, used the metaphor of slavery to conceptualize the colonial relationship to Great Britain. The key difference was that their

"slavery" was based on the lack of *political* representation, whereas Jacksonian workers believed theirs stemmed from *economic* concerns such as the rise of wage labor and the increasing concentration of property in the hands of the few. There was, though, one crucial similarity: the Founders and the white working class after 1829 both declared that their respective "enslavements" violated republicanism. And, as Edmund Morgan has famously argued, black slavery was critical to the ideological formation of American republicanism: "The presence of men and women who were, in law at least, almost totally subject to the will of other men gave to those in control of them an immediate experience of what it could mean to be at the mercy of a tyrant. Virginians [and others who witnessed slavery] may have had a special appreciation of the freedom dear to republicans, because they saw every day what life without it could be like."[41] Yet one could argue that that "special appreciation" of freedom and republicanism did not rely on the *continual* enslaving of black people, especially by the 1830s. If republican identity in the late eighteenth century depended on the darker negatives of slavery to expose the very terms of that identity, hadn't the conceptual, definitional work of black bondage run its course?

The discourse of "white slavery" remains one of the fundamental concerns here. Critics of early minstrelsy find that "ragged white publics hoisted [early minstrel figures] to flag their own, even their mutual, condition" with blacks and that "when not distracted by the class makeup of some abolitionist organizations . . . [they] were quite ready to hear the merits of antislavery"; they suggest that the discourse of the "enslaved" white worker was an objection to slavery in *any* form, black or white.[42] Eric Foner, in a foundational article on abolitionism and the labor movement, makes the case most clearly:

> After all, inherent in the notion of 'wage slavery' [or 'white slavery'], in the comparison of the status of the northern laborer with the southern slave, was a critique of the peculiar institution as an extreme form of oppression. . . . The entire ideology of the labor movement was implicitly hostile to slavery; slavery contradicted the central ideas and values of artisan radicalism—liberty, democracy, equality, and independence.[43]

In this view, normative white working-class discourses condemned slavery, racial or otherwise, because it was anathema to free labor and Americanness itself.

But there were two significant factors that troubled the material and

political functionality of these discourses as censure of *black* bondage: the prevalence of the term "white slavery" and the ubiquitous comparisons of the conditions of the white northern worker vis-à-vis that of the black southern slave. When white workers conceptualized their condition as one of slavery, they used the term "white slavery" much more frequently than "wage slavery" (and "wage slavery" was also used less often than "slavery of wages").[44] For one, "wage slavery" was too ambiguous because it left the possibility that black workers and even slaves would use it. As historian David Roediger writes, "The advantages of the phrase 'white slavery' over 'wage slavery' or 'slavery of wages' lay in the former term's vagueness and in its whiteness, in its invocation of *herrenvolk* republicanism."[45] Moreover, the usage of "white slavery" fostered a qualitative valuation of the white laborer alongside the black slave, an approach that ultimately performed a kind of proslavery work. Such comparisons "computed rates of exploitation that putatively showed that a much greater proportion of the value produced by a Black slave was returned to him or her than was returned to the white slave in the North," Roediger finds. In contrast to "white slavery," then, chattel slavery was rendered a benevolent institution, and proslavery ideologues circulated this judgment in legislatures, newspapers, and pulpits in order to defend black bondage and boast of its goodness.[46] Thus the discourse of "white slavery" constituted an apology for chattel slavery.

Moreover, the comparisons between northern labor and southern slavery suggest that those who adopted the discourse of "white slavery" did not believe that their situation was at any time the same as black bondsmen's. Despite the belief among the majority of small artisans and wage-workers that the destruction of the apprentice system and the rise of capitalism signaled a form of enslavement, to reduce their definition of freedom to one understood solely in the terms of political economy is to miss the dynamism of class formation and racial ideology. Such crude economism ignores other modes of being and self-definition (such as the emphasis on manliness, street honor, and drinking) that antebellum urban workers used to enact their freedoms. Although these modes were at times related to changes in labor conditions, economic factors alone do not account for how those practices might have shifted or signified. Furthermore, that the discourse of "white slavery" was able to materialize in the first place and take hold as it did, and that many of those who fought for the claims it denoted and connoted would later form the Free Soil movement and political party, certainly signaled the political and social subjectivity of the free—precisely what the (black) enslaved lacked.

My focus on "white slavery" is an attempt to come to grips with how white labor racialized questions of slavery. It unsettles the argument that early blackface minstrels and their working-class publics opposed slavery in any form because the institution subverted democracy in its concentration of economic and political power in the hands of wealthy elites and catalyzed oppressive labor conditions that all races had to endure. Or, as Cockrell claims, early minstrelsy enacted their audiences' "contrary [positions] to the interests of middle- and upper-class Americans" and was more interested in problems of class rather than those of race.[47] As the discourse of "white slavery" makes clear, however, this characterization of white working-class political economy (and, by extension, ideologies of slavery) misses the very complex ways in which that thinking was fundamentally a *racialized* one. White labor's objection to slavery was an objection to *their* "enslavement"—that is, the steady dissolution of artisanship and workers' weaknesses against the strongholds of northern men of capital and southern slaveholders. It is specious to forefront issues of class over those of race in early minstrelsy: race *and* racism influenced white workers' understanding of their rights as citizens and as a class; their whiteness denoted their political and economic freedom. Concerns of class and race were so intertwined in early minstrelsy that separating them for the purposes of historical analysis is methodologically inappropriate and leads to erroneous conclusions about the form.

Thus, despite the fact that the interracial origins of minstrelsy flaunted black rascality as embodied resistance to enslavement, white audiences of early minstrelsy rejected racial equality because it would severely curtail the economic and political promise they affixed to whiteness. Furthermore, the white public had long fostered a collective fear of universal black freedom on the basis that widespread violence would be the cause and/or effect of such a goal. (The Civil War, it seems, bore out this prognostication on the grandest of scales.) In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), Thomas Jefferson offered a lasting summation of this view: "Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race."[48] From Jefferson's time through at least the Jacksonian period, the high number of personal rebellions among slaves as well as the belief that black criminality was a natural or social inevitability signaled to many, particularly proslavery ideologues and proponents of African colonization, the social danger of realizing racial equality.[49]

African Americans themselves considered the role of violence in the amelioration, or lack thereof, of their condition. The most vocal and influential in the Jacksonian period was David Walker, whose *Appeal* outlined the destruction that a racial reckoning might cause. Walker published the *Appeal* in Boston, and sailors, churchgoers, and other free African Americans smuggled the pamphlet into all parts of the eastern seaboard, including the south. The treatise marked the birth of a militant antislavery politics.[50] Like the vast majority of other black thinkers in the north, Walker conceived the abolitionist struggle as inextricably bound to the fight for full black inclusion. His revolutionary and bloody exhortations are not confined to the world of the south and its networks of slaves and slaveholders; that is, the *Appeal* outlines an apocalypse of the nation as a whole because of the universal shortcomings of rights discourses.[51]

What is most remarkable about the *Appeal* is its explicitness in this regard. Walker's plan of destruction is plain and unequivocally racialized. For example, he cautions, "If you can only get courage into the blacks, I do declare it, that one good black man can put to death six white men; and I give it as a fact, let twelve black men get well armed for battle, and they will kill and put to flight fifty white men. . . . Get the blacks started, and if you do not have a gang of tigers and lions to deal with, I am a deceiver of the blacks and of the whites."[52] Although Walker's rhetoric was not as publicly echoed among African Americans, white publics feared that the kind of bloodshed he envisioned was within the realm of possibility. When the *Appeal* was smuggled into slave states and read in secret meetings throughout the nation, authorities worried that Walker's words would instill "courage" in slaves and African Americans, who would then turn to slay their masters and oppressors. In fact, some contemporaneous commentators believed that Nat Turner had heard or seen the *Appeal* and that it played a role in his epochal 1831 slave rebellion in Southampton, Virginia.[53]

Of course it is impossible to quantify in any exact measure how the *Appeal* affected black insurgency. Historian Peter Hinks writes, "Walker's *Appeal* made appearances in the United States from New Orleans and Boston. The scale of its identifiable circulation is impressive, but it still leaves open questions about how much further it penetrated in Southern slave society and just what [was] the impact of that penetration."[54] The same can be said of the *Appeal* in the north. But the point is not so much to establish that the *Appeal* directly caused bloody acts of black resistance; rather, it is to note how the text marked the boundaries of the performative field of black oppositionality and ideology in the period. Hinks is correct to note that "Walker was a product of [the black/slave] tradition of resistance rather

than the other way around. Yet the pamphlet was nevertheless a rallying point in several locations for conspiring and resistance and could have sustained other efforts."[55] Thus, the *Appeal* and its popularity signify the antebellum black public sphere's horizon of possibility and its ever-forming national collectivity. As literary historian Elizabeth McHenry explains, "The story of the *Appeal* points to the tentative beginnings of a cooperative system for the distributions of knowledge and pertinent information in antebellum black communities, through which printed texts were primarily consumed collectively rather than individually."[56] Though these beginnings were not so tentative by 1829, as I explored in the previous chapter, the epistemological and material functionality of the *Appeal* and the budding forms of African Americans' institutional activism reveal how black striving against oppressive, often violent normative relations—protest practices that ranged from literacy to rascality, from moral reform to massacre—was strikingly multiple and at times contradictory.

What is also clear is that the *Appeal*, or at the very least the structures of radical black oppositionality from which it borrows, also functioned as a kind of rallying point for *white* observers, from common people to political elites. After authorities in Virginia and Georgia discovered copies of the *Appeal* shortly after its publication, the mayor of Boston, H. Gray Otis, wrote letters to alert his southern counterparts that he and "the New England Population" held Walker's "vile pamphlet" in "absolute detestation." Otis told William Branch Giles, governor of Virginia, that he believed the *Appeal* "is disapproved of by the decent portion even of the free coloured population in this place, and it would be a cause of deep regret to me, and I believe to all my well-disposed fellow-citizens, if a publication of this character and emanating from such a source, should be thought to be countenanced by any of their number." To the mayor of Savannah, William Thorne Williams, Otis admitted that although "he ha[d] no power to control the purpose of the author," the city of Boston is "determined . . . to publish a general caution to Captains and others, against exposing themselves to the consequences of transporting incendiary writings into your and the other Southern States."[57] Both letters were subsequently published in the *Enquirer* of Richmond, Virginia, an attempt to provide evidence to a wider southern audience that the white north was united in its opposition to black insurgency.

What I am suggesting here is that racism was not the only factor that inhibited black inclusion in the theatres of early minstrelsy and other contemporaneous white working-class sociocultural formations. White workers were also uneasy about the chance that the emancipated slave and the

fully incorporated African American might release from their breasts "the unconquerable disposition" of vengeance that white oppression put there in the first place.[58] If we recognize the conceptual and material implications of the interrelation of race, class, and performance in the 1830s and early 1840s, the fraught ideological field that the producers and publics of early blackface minstrelsy negotiated becomes clearer. On the one hand, black performance offered them a set of gestural, linguistic, and narrative resources with which to confront and ultimately contest the brutalities of a changing economy and the resulting oppression of the working class. On the other hand, whites feared that emancipation and the expansion of equal rights to African Americans might lead to violent reprisals and an abrogation of the legal and extralegal rights that whiteness granted. These conditions regulated the development of minstrelsy and its "black" politics, a politics that was both anti-capital and proslavery.

THE POLITICS OF "BLACK" PERFORMANCE AND BLACK WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

The "black" politics that early minstrelsy fostered was the product of white working-class publics' need to position themselves as a mistreated, yet singular community. For them, Lhamon observes, "the metaphor of blackness came to signal a worst-case condition that others who were neither black nor fully empowered could join and deploy to signal their own disaffection."[59] Yes, but the identificatory bond audiences had with early minstrel figures was not linear or one of direct equivalence; white spectators did not simply see their (blackened) selves on stage. The aesthetic and cognitive relation between staged "black" identities and their audiences was fraught with antagonism, coercion, and equivocation. In fact, *any* process of identification (or purposive copying) can never be wholly mimetic but is always modified by the producer's desire, expectation, and fear. These revisions become clearer within the representational (e.g., theatrical) frame because there the conscious alterations and disavowals of the object are emphasized. The most meaningful change the producers of early minstrelsy made to the origin(al)s was the removal of black people and the restyling of their politics for those of "blackness." In short, the pragmatic and strategic overlay of the blackface mask allowed early minstrel publics to operate both within *and* outside the oppositional materiality and significations of black culture.

As these performers and publics invested in the modes of alterity and

antiauthoritarianism constitutive of black (political) culture, they simultaneously expanded the bounds of that culture to the point of near unrecognizability. Their "exaggerations" of black life and refusals to "represent the colored man . . . as he is," to borrow Frederick Douglass' description of blackface minstrelsy, resulted in casts of grotesque blackness that were essential to antebellum processes of self-making; that is, they allowed Americans to define themselves as a *this* in contradistinction to a (black) *that*. The appeal of minstrelsy's grotesque blackness emerged from its elasticity, that it respected few affective and figural bounds. Bahktin's gloss on the grotesque is useful here because it helps explain the multiple lines of gratification early minstrelsy extended its audiences, on the one hand, and its audiences' ability to withstand the most objectionable of its representations, from racial amalgamation to black revolution, on the other. Bahktin writes, "In the example of the grotesque, displeasure is caused by the impossible and improbable nature of the image. . . . But this feeling is overcome by two forms of pleasure: first . . . we find some place for this exaggeration within reality. Second, we feel a moral satisfaction, since sharp criticism and mockery have dealt a blow to these vices."[60] Throughout the antebellum period, performers and critics sought to establish minstrelsy's authenticity. One of the most revealing of these efforts was that of actress and diarist Fanny Kemble, who claimed northern blackface minstrels did not go nearly far enough in their portrayals of slaves. In her 1838–39 journal, she declares: "Oh, my dear E—, I have seen Jim Crow—the veritable James: all the contortions, and springs, and flings, and kicks, and capers you have been beguiled into accepting as indicative of him are spurious, faint, feeble, impotent—in a word, pale Northern reproductions of that ineffable black conception."[61] Such pseudo-anthropological estimations, coupled with the traces of black/slave performance praxis at the origins of minstrelsy, endowed the form's grotesqueries with a seeming veracity that made them not simply palatable but irresistibly pleasurable.

Even if certain spectators believed that the representations of slave and free black life they witnessed onstage were somehow real, they nonetheless deflected the actualities of blackness that black people had to endure (i.e., being the slave or the noncitizen) in service of their own betterment; that is, they used blackness as a *metaphor* for the lowest condition whites endured in the polity. To be sure, a number of the texts of early minstrelsy do seem to be concerned with the fate of slaves and free African Americans; but this is only on the page. In performance, these texts signified in radically different ways. The theatrical and social contexts (over-)determined how early minstrelsy made its aesthetic and sociopolitical sense. For example, white

men performed in blackface, thus the words did not come out of black mouths before white and black audiences. As well, the gestural and linguistic contortions that defined early blackface minstrel performance unsettled its physical and ideological threats. "Exaggerations or distortions of dialect, or gestures meant to underscore the complete nonsense of some songs," Lott explains, "might effectively dampen any too boisterous talk."[62] Performance, in other words, cut short the full meaning of those black political structures at the core of early minstrelsy.

Consider, for instance, the 1835 song "Jim Crow Still Alive!!!!" In it, Jim Crow sings instructively of the differences between whites and his "race":

> What stuff it is in dem [i.e., whites]
> To make de debbil brack
> I'll prove dat he is white,
> In de twinkling of a crack.
> So I wheel about, etc.
> [. . .]
> Now my brodder niggars,
> I do not tink it right,
> Dat you should laugh at dem,
> Who happen to be white.
>
> Kase it dar misfortune,
> An dey'd spend every dollar
> If dey could only be
> Gentlemen ob color.
>
> It almost break my heart,
> To see dem envy me,
> And from my soul I wish dem
> Full as brack as we.[63]

To Cockrell, Lhamon, and similar-minded critics, these sentiments signal a real desire of Jim Crow's white working publics to band with their African American counterparts. But what about the fraught theatrical and social contexts that fueled the composition and performance of this song and others like it? In my view, Jim Crow and his white "brodder niggars" were not so interested in the African Americans they excluded from the stage and the pit, the treasured spot in the audience of white working-class men. Rather, their investment was in black performance and political material,

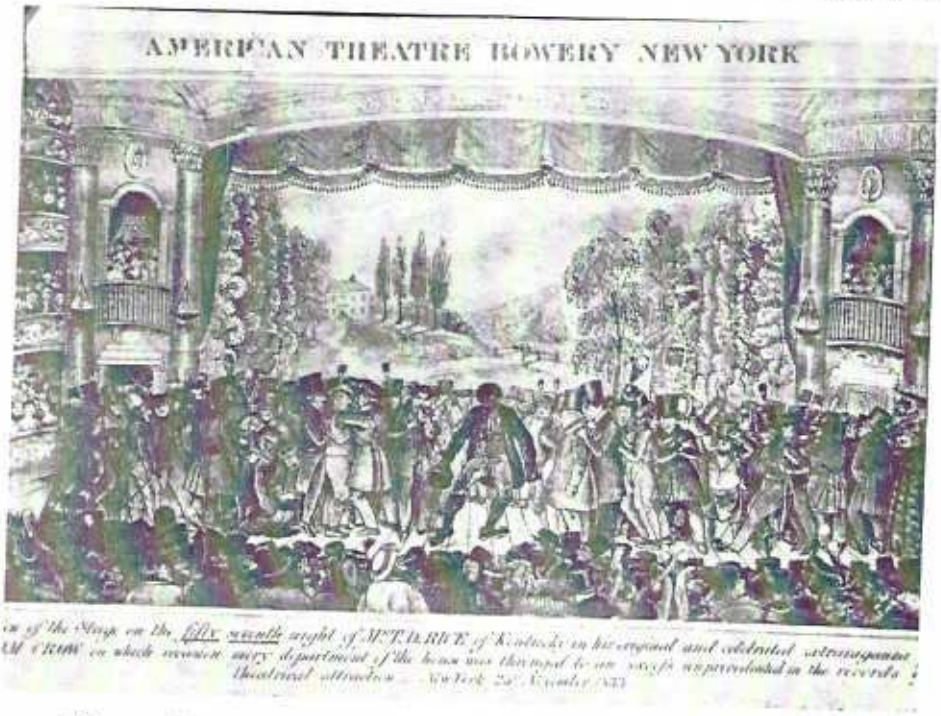

Figure 4: T. D. Rice as Jim Crow and His "Black" Public, Bowery Theatre, New York City, Nov. 25, 1833. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

not black men. When white "gentlemen ob color" and "brack" men reveled with Jim Crow in the spaces of early minstrelsy, they performatively and socially constructed their own "race": the "blacks."

In the event that black spectators, who were restricted to the gallery, might have looked past minstrelsy's racial derision and interpreted the pro-"black" sentiments as pro-black, T. D. Rice made sure they knew his performance practice was not evidence of antislavery sentiments or evidence in favor of black inclusion. In a curtain speech during an 1837 performance in Baltimore, Rice cleared up any ambiguity (if there was any) about his Jim Crow acts. *The Baltimore Sun* reprinted the words of "Mr. Crow":

> Before I went to England, the British people were excessively ignorant regarding "our free institutions." (Hear) They were under the impression that negroes were naturally equal to the whites, and their degraded condition was consequent entirely upon our "institu-

> tions;" but *I effectually proved that negroes are essentially an inferior species of the human family, and they ought to remain slaves.*—(Some murmurs of disapprobation from the boxes, which was quickly put down by the plaudits of the pit.) You will never again hear of an abolitionist crossing the Atlantic to interfere in our affairs.—(Tremendous applause.) I have studied the negro character upon the southern plantations. The British people acknowledged that I was a fair representative of the great body of our slaves, and Charles Kemble attested the faithfulness of my delineations.—(Three Cheers)
>
> Ladies and Gentlemen:
> It will be ever a source of pride to me that, in my humble line, I have been of such signal service to my country. (emphasis added.)[64]

Here, Rice affixes specific proslavery meanings to his work, which the dominant audiences of early minstrelsy, white working-class men in the pit, applauded. His admission, I argue, should serve as an interpretative frame for his (and others') blackface performances before 1843, one that topples Cockrell's claim that "one of the most curious features of 'Jim Crow'" was the "sympathetic, even respectful, expression of what it was to be black in a country with slavery."[65] In addition, the speech wholly repudiates Lhamon's argument that, with Jim Crow, Rice (and his audience) "never requests nor assumes higher status than society allows its lowest figures. Grotesquerie of blacks is [Rice's] vehicle, not his target."[66] As this curtain speech made clear, however, black grotesquerie was both Rice's vehicle *and* his target; he imagined his work not simply as anti-abolitionist but as patently proslavery. To claim Jim Crow as a champion of antebellum blackness is, at best, to work within a too-rigid binary of black and white. Instead, it is critical that we admit "blackness" into the social fold, and position Jim Crow as its "racial" icon. (It bears noting that neither Cockrell nor Lhamon engages Rice's proslavery curtain speech in their respective studies.)

Since Rice delivered this speech after his performance at the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore, one of the primary port cities of the slave south, it makes sense that his audience cheered his words. But Rice's ties to southern audiences and his proslavery affirmations did not hamper his or other Jim Crow delineators' appeal in the north, notwithstanding the nation's steadily escalating sectional crisis. Samuel Cornish, co-editor of the *Colored American* (New York) with Philip Bell, hoped Rice's admission in Baltimore might, at the very least, dissuade his paper's black readership from attend-

Figure 5: "Mr. T. Rice as The Original Jim Crow" (1830s). John Hay Library, Brown University Library.

ing minstrel performances. He reprinted Rice's speech as it appeared in *The Baltimore Sun*, and introduced it with a firm denunciation of minstrelsy and the theatres that produced it: "I sincerely hope after reading the following no colored American will ever again so disgrace himself, or his people by patronizing such performances, nor even the theatres where they are exhibited."[67] While the immediate impact of Cornish's remonstrations is unclear, such exhortations had no long-term effect in terms of steering black audiences from blackface minstrel performances.[68] What, then, prompted African Americans to continue to patronize performances built on derisive representations and grotesque figurations of their race?

One way to account for this seeming incongruity might be to look beyond the stage and its enactments of black disparagement and ridicule, but to the broader milieus of early minstrelsy. These spaces, such as the Bowery Theatre in the 1830s and the Chatham Theatre in the early 1840s, celebrated and encouraged manly ways. This masculinist ethic appealed to many African Americans, especially the black working class.[69] Like their white counterparts, black workingmen and workingwomen embraced rascality and flouted Victorian mores. They rejected bourgeois ideals such as temperance and somber displays of community and selfhood, charging that the reformers who espoused these ideals were out of touch with the realities of black life and ignorant of effective political action.[70] For example, the Stewards' and Cooks' Marine Benevolent Society served alcohol at their third anniversary celebration in 1840, even though it knew the *Colored American* would be there to cover the event. In his article, the reporter for the *Colored American* assured his readers that "of the wines we did not partake," but, despite his objections, he wished that if "the angel of temperance could wink at any indulgence, it would be over a scene like this, where men, spared by the perils of the sea, united after long separation, sit down to enjoy a fleeting hour which, in too many cases, may to them never return."[71] Of course, the stewards and marines cared little for the approval of the *Colored American* or of other bourgeois institutions and outlets; they were going to have their drink and toast their labor and mutual relief efforts because drinking was an integral part of their social ethic. Indeed, the Stewards' and Cooks' Marine Benevolent Society refused to change its ways merely because bourgeois reformers deemed it necessary for personal salvation and therefore collective racial uplift.

That the *Colored American* and its syndicates might bend on temperance did not somehow make their sociopolitical measures more appealing to the black working class. Besides, as historian Leslie Harris notes, black bourgeois reformers very often "viewed other objections to moral reform as

more threatening to the cause of racial equality."[72] One of their most hardline convictions was that African Americans should be somber in their performances of community and selfhood, obtain a classical education, and train in a skilled profession.[73] But many black workers objected to such prescriptions, charging that a man like Cornish knew little of what they endured, and, therefore, he was ill equipped to dictate behavior and offer solutions. The most eloquent and vocal defender of black working-class mores in the period was porter Peter Paul Simons, whose ideological battles with Cornish and other black middle-class reformers gripped the free black community in the late 1830s. Simons' labor-based activism and his refusal to renounce the habits of black common life betray the sharp cultural and ideological differences that stratified African Americans in the Jacksonian period.[74] These differences trouble Cockrell's central argument that middle-class reformers' efforts "to scapegoat white, common Americans by painting *them* the racists" drove the "wedge in the real and reasonable alliance between white and black common Jacksonians."[75] Black workingmen and workingwomen largely separated themselves from bourgeois reform and rejected its claims, and white workers in northern cities knew that.[76] In my view, the wedge that forestalled an alliance between black and white working-class Jacksonians was the explosion of discourses that questioned a shared humanity between the races and positioned African Americans as the (inherently) inferior race, discourses that the disaffected white populations used for their own social and political gain.[77] The cultural machinery of early minstrelsy helped define that wedge and drove it deeper.

Analytically, though, Cockrell's image of a wedge is useful because it connotes a beginning mutuality, a shared *mentalité*, between the black working class and the white working class that might have deadened particular antagonisms of racial difference. As labor theorist Stanley Aronowitz explains in more general terms, "Social movements consist of more than their immediate demands for the redress of grievances. The precondition of sustained protest and contestation is a congealed community, broadly shared perceptions and values upon which agreement to act may be reached. Participants may retain their individual views, may be in conflict about many aspects of the movement's goals and program, but what marks their unity is not only shared enemies, but a strongly held sense that they share the same worldviews."[78] Because black labor held similar worldviews with white labor, the *potential* for a kind of antiauthoritarian interracial solidarity was there, as the social and theatrical worlds of rascality suggest. But rather than inculpate the work of the bourgeois or middle class as that which stalled the alliance, I argue the deciding factor was

white workers' promulgation of whiteness and its "racial" offshoot, "blackness," as cultural, historical, and "scientific" legitimation of the singularity and supremacy of their own economic and sociopolitical claims. Early minstrelsy was central to this effort, as its enactments of "blackness" hypostatized innate black inferiority and provided the most extensive cultural defense for the entrenchment of black captivity—"I effectually proved that negroes are essentially an inferior species of the human family, and they ought to remain slaves," Rice proclaimed.

In effect, then, black workers found themselves in a race-based struggle with white society and a "class"-based struggle with bourgeois black reformers. African Americans have always been engaged in such internal dialogues, as black sociopolitical struggle has never turned exclusively on a black-white axis. In the 1830s, the primary concerns of this internal debate involved the protocols of personal behavior and collective proprieties. For example, Simons advocated for the inclusion of women in the political sphere; he took particular issue with African Americans who claimed that women should not be intellectual and social leaders.[79] Their insistence on female docility and domesticity, Simons argued, reflected the worst of bourgeois politics, which in his view were ineffective and perpetuated racial inequality. He contended bourgeois reform was too passive a sociopolitical project, and African Americans who adopted its tenets were waiting for a liberty that would never come. As Simons explained in an 1839 speech before the African Clarkson Association, a mutual relief society, "The basis of the [New York Manumission Society, which was founded in 1785] was to elevate Africans by morals, and this has been upwards of half a century, and what has been done? *Our people were slaves then and are the same today; this northern freedom is nothing but a nickname for northern slavery.*"[80] Simons went on to argue that a program of austere personal conduct, Sabbatarianism, and temperance would not deliver freedom or racial equality, but, instead, produce just quieter and more somber slaves. In fact, Simons believed proponents of moral reform purposely sought to keep African Americans acquiescent: "Yes Brothers, this moral elevation of our people is but a mere song, it is nothing but a conspicuous scarecrow designed expressly, I may safely say, to hinder our people from acting collectively for themselves."[81] In this view, which Simons couched in a rhetorical register strikingly redolent of Walker's *Appeal*, moral reform impeded the realization of black solidarity and black freedom itself; it produced new forms of black captivity operating under the "nickname" of "this northern freedom."

Because moral reform had run what he thought was its largely ineffec-

tive course, Simons called for "physical and political efforts [as] the only methods left for us to adopt."[82] He pushed for more direct means of agitation such as petitioning, grand displays of black freedom and antislavery struggle, and, like David Walker before him, maybe even violence. At the end of the African Clarkson Association speech, he exhorted his listeners to "ACTION! ACTION! ACTION!" because "moral elevation suffers us to remain inactive," and "your children will curse the day of their birth . . . and the almighty himself will spurn you, for the lack of courage and not using properly your agency."[83] Simons' brand of agitation, both in its tenor and its tactics, was democratic or, at least, bottom-up. As Harris argues, he "pointed the way to alternative political actions on behalf of abolition and black equality that could involve greater numbers of blacks across class lines."[84] Along with figures like David Ruggles, who co-founded the New York Committee of Vigilance, Simons encouraged acts that everyday black workers could perform, such as strikes for higher wages or harboring and aiding fugitive slaves. With these efforts, black workers flouted the dictates of moral reform, just as their white counterparts had with their institutional and sociocultural formations.

Thus, the ever-normative view in the study of early minstrelsy that white patrician elites and black middle-class reformers separated black labor from white labor is far too reductive and somewhat specious because black labor largely rejected elites and reformers. Had early minstrelsy's white working-class audiences wanted to forge an interracial labor alliance, they might have clutched the economic condition and sociocultural disposition they shared with black workers and united to combat class- and, perhaps, race-based oppression. What these audiences did do, however, was simultaneously isolate themselves from the black working class and the white establishment; within the minstrel frame and behind burnt cork, they fashioned their own race, the "blacks." As "blacks," they resisted elite oppression from above with black material from below. They did not seek "an ally in the black laborer against their common superiors," as Cockrell claims, because they believed their oppression was singular: namely, white slavery.[85] The grotesque figurations of early minstrelsy allowed its working-class audiences to forge a cultural and political identity that buttressed their own inclusionary efforts as well as to foment proslavery sentiment and racial inequality, a process they employed in response to their fears of black insurgency and the loss of the rights of whiteness.[86] (Racism is always informed by some kind of fear.)

For their part, and as the literal and figurative refuse of the nation's first popular entertainment, African Americans had to endure the pervasive

reach and unceasing appropriation of early minstrelsy's affects, characters, and conceptions. As minstrelsy's critics have maintained since its very beginnings, their struggle was about far more than literary and theatrical proprieties; theirs was a campaign to blunt the force of the cultural practice that, more than any other in the period, undermined efforts for black inclusion. (It's no coincidence that the system of *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation that lasted from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 through the late 1960s was known as "Jim Crow.") The increasing recuperation of early minstrelsy as an attempt to forge bonds of interracial solidarity too quickly moves past this effect because it minimizes how and why the form's actors and audiences used the minstrel stage to fashion their own racial structure: white, black, and "black." If we take this triad as seriously as its creators did, we discover a story almost as "tired" as Cockrell feared, one that is not nearly as "positive" as Lhamon seeks to tell: in matters of class politics, early minstrelsy enacted revolutionary impulses, but in the process it exacerbated the many forms of black captivity in the antebellum north.

THREE | # Washington and the Slave

Black Deformations, Proslavery Domesticity, and Re-Staging the Birth of the Nation

In October 1838, Pennsylvania voters approved amendments to their constitution that enfranchised all "white freeman" in the state, regardless of their property holdings or tax receipts.[1] Pennsylvania's new constitution was one of many post–War of 1812 civil, juridical, and statutory decrees throughout the nation that led to near universal white male suffrage by 1840.[2] These same efforts very often stripped the franchise from the few black men who theretofore held it, and the 1838 Constitution of Pennsylvania became the most notorious case: not only was the state home to one of the largest and most politically active free black populations, but also the designation of "white freeman" made black disenfranchisement a total affair. (By contrast, the 1821 Constitution of New York gave the vote to all white men in the state but retained prohibitive property qualifications for black men that disenfranchised *nearly* all of them.[3]) When black Pennsylvanians first got word of the Constitutional Convention's proposal to restrict the franchise to "white freemen," they immediately began a campaign to defeat the amendment's passage. Robert Purvis, a leading figure in the Underground Railroad and future president of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, crafted the most eloquent and influential remonstrance of the amendment, "Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disenfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania." In the "Appeal," Purvis declared African Americans were especially qualified for the franchise because, above all else, they upheld the nation's highest ideals and values in the face of state-sanctioned inequities and everyday terror.[4]

Along with its rhetorical power, one of the most remarkable details of Purvis' "Appeal" was just how broad its audience quickly became: opponents of the amendment circulated the tract among their syndicates, and, more crucially, the *Public Ledger*, Philadelphia's first penny paper and its most popular daily in the antebellum period, reprinted it.[5] The editors' decision to publish the "Appeal" in the *Public Ledger* reflects how the cam-

paigns for black citizenship and full inclusion increasingly gripped multiple northern publics, particularly those in urban centers.[6] If Purvis' white readers were to accept the premises and pleas of his "Appeal," for instance, they would have had to repudiate the race-specific arguments they used to expand the nation's participatory frameworks. That is, as white common people from the 1820s onward worked to dislodge the hold that the class of economic and political elites maintained on the levers of governance, an undertaking that constituted the dominant ideological and rhetorical engine of Jacksonian democracy, they most often based their claims on the related beliefs in the natural equality of white men and the natural inferiority of black people. Yet Purvis' "Appeal" ran counter to such notions.[7]

Indeed, the collective of African Americans rejected these budding discourses of racial inherence, which became more "biological" or "scientific" as the nineteenth century progressed, and their implications for black participation in the polity. Instead, they continued to claim the mantle of American republicanism as their own, often doing so by appropriating what literary historian Ivy G. Wilson terms "the established rhetoric of the national vernacular."[8] The dominant affects, figures, and narratives of the national vernacular were most often those related to the history of the nation's founding, and African Americans made sure to stress their role as prime agents in that history. In his "Appeal," for example, Purvis recalled the shared sacrifices of the American War of Independence to substantiate his entreaties for black enfranchisement: "In which of the battles of the revolution did not our fathers fight as bravely as yours, for American liberty? Was it that their children might be disfranchised and loaded with insult that they endured the famine of Valley Forge, and the horrors of the Jersey Prison Ship?"[9] As Purvis' interventionist reading instantiated, antebellum African Americans affirmed themselves as architects and, thus, legitimate beneficiaries of American possibility and promise; it was a political strategy they learned from their early national predecessors.

Antebellum black publics were not the only ones looking back to the beginnings of the U.S., however. White northerners, too, returned to the nation's founding events to project the polity's (racial) future. As Ralph Emerson proclaimed at the beginning of his magisterial book, *Nature* (1836), "Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes."[10] Scholars of antebellum cultural production have been particularly attuned to the ways in which these retrospective acts manifest in the great literary and philosophical works of the period, but they have been less attentive to how those

acts took shape in theatre and performance culture, the representational domain where most antebellum Americans would have "revisited" their revolutionary and early national pasts.[11] This chapter explores a number of these less studied performances, centering on a set of theatrical works that reimagined the people, places, and events of the Revolutionary era as means to theorize the place of free blackness in the nation going forward. Several of these texts and practices admitted the historical significance of black people to the formation of the U.S. but refused to accept them as worthy of full and equal participation therein. In the process, these works enacted a uniquely northern strand of proslavery thought: namely, black people as slaves were pivotal to the nation's founding and are therefore most useful to the nation as slaves.[12]

DEFORMING HISTORY: BLACK LEADERSHIP AND AMERICAN REVOLUTIONS

Within these re-stagings of the birth of the nation, the figure of George Washington emerged as audiences' most favored. In the dominant imagination, Washington, above all others, epitomized the virtues of republicanism and mitigated the sectional differences and social and political developments (e.g., the acceleration of capitalism, the entrenchment of essentialist discourse, and hyper-partisanship) that were steadily fracturing the nation. As historian Robert S. Cox explains, "Washington charted a spiritual terrain that linked individuals affectively, not only to kin and kind, but to the extended nation." He was "a way to *think* and *feel* the nation, to create a constellation of love that consolidated family and state in mutually cognizable dependency and that offered a reformist map of the structures of the sundered body politic."[13] Although Cox's primary interest is Washington's "postmortem career" within Spiritualism, the mid-nineteenth-century religious movement built on communing with the dead, his reading applies equally to the ways in which Washington signified within normative theatrical formations. (Of course, theatre is its own "dubious spectacle" within which the living encounters the dead.[14])

African Americans were far more ambivalent toward Washington. As a lifelong slave owner, he too readily upheld proslavery arguments and race-based inequities.[15] Because Washington offered "messages of freedom" *and* "examples of proper domestic management of one's slaves," an aporia beset his figuration; his was a "confused identity" that, as cultural historian Russ Castronovo puts it, "functioned as a telling symptom of a national

inconsistency, of an incoherent American body."[16] African Americans remained well aware of the narrative and symbolic problematics Washington posed their struggle toward citizenship and full inclusion, but, given his preeminence in the national imaginary, they could not wholly jettison him, either. Frederick Douglass' manipulation of the name "Washington" in his personal life and literary work is illustrative of this negotiation. While enslaved, Douglass dropped Washington (along with Augustus) from his name, thus rejecting the supremacy of his master and, more obliquely, the Founding Father himself. Yet the mutinous slave protagonist of his 1852 novella, "The Heroic Slave," is "Madison Washington," a character that Douglass modeled on his ideal combination of intellect, righteousness, and passion. Castronovo argues, "Douglass' changing attitudes not so much represent an acceptance of the national legacy as they indicate the development among nineteenth-century African Americans of a narrative strategy that repeats history in order to deform it."[17] The move to "deform" history was one of the primary tactics antebellum African Americans used to revise the national vernacular and craft what literary historian John Ernest brilliantly terms a "liberation historiography," a mode of writing and a body of texts with which to bring about universal emancipation and citizenship.

Washington was a significant figure in black deformations of history because he functioned as something of an epistemological hook that conjured two interconnected ideals that engrossed antebellum African Americans: charismatic leadership and revolutionary possibility. With a more conspicuous national black public sphere materializing in the late 1820s and early 1830s, the desire emerged for magnetic leaders who could maintain some sort of cohesion among African Americans across the north, west, and even some parts of the south.[18] Unlike the imaginative ties that early nineteenth-century print and performance practices fostered among newly freed slaves and their descendants, black agitation from the Jacksonian period through the Civil War—not to mention unprecedented advances in steam, rail, and print technologies—brought geographically disparate African Americans into far greater material contact. Indeed, the circulation of the first black newspapers, national and intra-state conventions composed of black delegates dedicated to racial uplift, and a more radical abolitionism made the "national" of a black public sphere more actual than notional. These developments brought into relief the signal differences of behavioral sensibility and reform strategy that split along lines of class, complexion, and region. Accordingly, the call for black leadership surfaced more as an appeal for negotiators and translators of this ideological polyvalence rather than a desire for a single master vision.[19]

The archival predominance of the class of antebellum black leaders obscures this dynamism. Political and sociocultural "thinking" among the masses of black communities most often took place in more ephemeral and performative sites, through what historian Patrick Rael aptly describes as "shared daily experiences and participation in a cultural milieu of words and rituals that united them and gave meaning to their lives."[20] Those black men and women who became leaders and spokespersons emerged from this milieu, within which they honed their individual personas. The rhetorical praxis they developed was the product of the way their singular talents were collectively conditioned by a people hardly, if at all, removed from slavery. In other words, the public voice of antebellum black politics was not only a speaking *for* the race, but also a speaking *from* it. Thus, we should not treat even the most contentious of African Americans' entreaties as idiosyncratic; rather, we should approach it as the consequence of some sort of widely shared aim. Calls for continued revolution, for instance, reflected African Americans' desire to see the nation extend to all segments of the population the democratic possibilities American independence actualized. For them, the American Revolution was not past or complete; that is, the rhetorical and perhaps some of the armed interventions colonists waged against Great Britain in the eighteenth century were necessary to end black captivity in its multiple forms in the nineteenth.

Much like their parents and grandparents had in the wake of the nation's founding, antebellum African Americans classified black revolutionary action as thoroughly American, and they often relied on the figure of George Washington to signify as such. For example, in his 1843 "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," ex-slave and radical abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet argued that slave insurrection was in the tradition of the best of Western freedom struggles. Praising Denmark Vesey's 1822 attempt to lead his fellow slaves in an uprising in South Carolina, Garnet proclaimed, "He was betrayed by the treachery of his own people, and died a martyr to freedom. Many a brave hero fell, but history, faithful to her high trust, will transcribe his name on the same monument with Moses, Hampden, Tell, Bruce and Wallace, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Lafayette and Washington."[21] This list of exemplary leaders who delivered their people from physical or sociopolitical subjection maintained considerable purchase on the nation's collective consciousness. But Washington is unique here because he is the only American. As such, he validates the promise of (black) revolution on domestic soil.

Despite its complications, the imaginative relation African Americans fostered with Washington was stronger than that between them and the

other men Garnet lists, with one possible exception: Toussaint L'Ouverture. L'Ouverture was the leader of the late eighteenth-century slave uprisings that culminated in the independent nation of Haiti, the first black-led republic in the Western Hemisphere. Throughout the antebellum period, African Americans exalted him as the epitome of black freedom, sacrifice, and self-governance, though they remained wary of identifying with the bloody Haitian Revolution itself too much because they did not want to disquiet the white men and women around them.[22] Perhaps the weightiest of these black-authored encomiums of L'Ouverture was that of ex-slave, abolitionist, and literary pioneer William Wells Brown, "St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots." Wells Brown first delivered this lecture in London in May 1854, then later that December in Philadelphia, and published it in Boston in 1855.[23] In the address, he detailed the first slave uprisings that L'Ouverture commanded, subsequent battles Haitians waged with France to establish and maintain their independence, and the turbulent internal strife that strained the nation during its first decades of existence. Throughout, Wells Brown maintained that only black leadership such as that L'Ouverture performed could lead to the alleviation of black suffering.

For Wells Brown, the necessity for black leaders was both urgent and historically legitimated. To ground his argument, he contrasted the examples of Toussaint L'Ouverture and George Washington:

> And, lastly, Toussaint's career as a Christian, a statesman, and a general, will lose nothing by comparison with that of Washington. Each was the leader of an oppressed and outraged people, each had a powerful enemy to contend with, and each succeeded in founding a government in the New World. Toussaint's government made liberty its watchword, incorporated it in its constitution, abolished the slave-trade, and made freedom universal amongst the people. Toussaint liberated his countrymen; Washington enslaved a portion of his, and aided in giving strength and vitality to an institution that will one day rend asunder the UNION that he helped to form.[24]

The comparative structure of this prescient exposition functions both historiographically and prospectively; it suggests that the decisions of the past do not disappear but accrete to produce future presents. Wells Brown understood his historical moment as bound up with the nation's first moments because, in his estimation, those moments never ceased. As he proclaimed at the end of the lecture, "The indignation of the slaves of the south would kindle a fire so hot that it would melt their chains, drop by drop,

until not a single link would remain; *and the revolution that was commenced in 1776 would then be finished.*"[25]

William Cooper Nell, a leader of the black Boston community and the most notable black historian of the antebellum period, also understood the American Revolution as ongoing. He believed how Americans wrote the history of their revolution was central to its eventual outcome. In 1855, the same year Wells Brown circulated the text to his lecture on Santo Domingo, Nell published *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, with Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons: to which is added a Brief Survey of the Conditions and Prospects of Colored Americans*. He begins the narrative of *Colored Patriots* in 1851, when he and his associates unsuccessfully petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to erect a fifteen-hundred-dollar "monument to the memory of CRISPUS ATTUCKS, the first martyr of the Boston Massacre of March 5th, 1770."[26] (The recognition of Attucks as a national martyr was central to Nell's literary and performance activism, and throughout the late 1850s he pressed for a Crispus Attucks Day.[27] In fact, *Colored Patriots* opens with a rendering of Attucks' death that Nell would use later for a broadside calling for that day of recognition.) Nell's decision to start *Colored Patriots* with his failed effort to raise the monument is no mere anecdotal point of departure. Rather, the account establishes Attucks as the leader of the revolution the text subsequently details. In this sense, the book itself becomes the monument to Attucks; that is, he is "honored as a grateful country honors other [i.e., white] gallant Americans."[28] Furthermore, the 1851 start of *Colored Patriots* initiates the temporal disorder that characterizes Nell's methodology; the book is structured around geography rather than chronology, with each chapter detailing men and women from a specific state. Nell's refusal of a chronological spine helps produce a textual locus of contemporaneity within which "several distinguished colored persons" who did not take part in the armed conflicts of the American Revolution become "Colored Patriots" of it. These include writers and poets, and Nell interpolates samples of their work into *Colored Patriots*.[29] Despite Nell's dating of events, the book's subjects coalesce into a kind of synchronicity or "present" that seeks to bring about a future of universal freedom and black citizenship.

Chapter XII of *Colored Patriots*, "North Carolina," typifies this effect. Nell offers sketches of four men from the state: David Walker, Jonathan Overton, Delph Williamson, and George Horton. Like the structure of the book itself, the arrangement of these brief portraits defies chronology. Walker is listed first followed by Overton, but Overton was born before Walker and the order of their deaths is unclear. (Williamson and Horton

were still alive at the time of Nell's writing.) The flow from sketch to sketch is indiscriminate and lacks transitions; it moves from Walker, writer of the *Appeal* (1829), to Overton, a soldier who served under George Washington in the Continental Army, to Williamson, a slave who witnessed the Revolution, to Horton, the esteemed slave poet. In all, the chapter includes biography, criticism, written testimony, newspaper accounts, and poetry. This diversity of authorial voice and literary genres redoubles Nell's deforming history: that is, to repeat but revise the national past with signal differences of *form* in addition to those of content. As a result, these four North Carolinian men become colored patriots fighting alongside each other in the ongoing American Revolution.[30]

Colored Patriots encapsulates the conceptual, methodological, and narrative tactics with which African American cultural producers and historians deformed the American past as means to reorient the nation's course going forward. They fostered a *positive* view of their shared history, however circumscribed it might have been. More broadly, they anticipated Walter Benjamin's assessment of the stakes and struggle of historiographic representation: "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe if the enemy wins."[31] Garnet, Wells Brown, Nell, and other African Americans who deformed history knew the dead could not be left alone but were central to the battle over the meaning of the nation's past and the progress of its future; so, too, did their antagonists.

THE PASTORAL AND PROSLAVERY DOMESTICITY

The embrace of the dead as "present" and instrumental in American life was ubiquitous in the antebellum period. Spiritualism, for example, was a fast-growing religion in the mid-nineteenth century and was based on its devotees communicating directly with the dead.[32] In addition to the affective and phenomenological bonds that Spiritualists forged with the dead, Americans also used death as a heuristic with which to conceptualize ideal American citizenship. To conceive of democratic participation in terms of death is to strive for a polity without contingency and volatility. As Castronovo explains, "The final release from embodiment plays a resonant role in the national imagination by suggesting an existence, posthumous as well as posthistorical, that falls outside standard registers of the political. . . . The afterlife emancipates souls from passionate debates, everyday engagements, and earthly affairs that animate the political field."[33] The ma-

terial and corporeal differences that divided Americans quickened this theory of "necro citizenship," which "incites a necrophilic desire to put democratic unpredictability and spontaneity to death"; it was a way to project a world free of the unrest and vagaries that racialized and other differently marked living bodies incur.[34]

The problem, of course, is that a democracy is lived, and therefore its particulars are necessarily dynamic, temporal, and variable. But necrophilic antebellum publics claimed otherwise. They argued that the nation's first dead already spelled out those particulars, and it was the living's responsibility to recall the dead's intentions—literally so, if one was a Spiritualist—and fashion the nation accordingly. Others, like the young Abraham Lincoln, were less yielding to their dead (national) fathers and mothers. In the most absolute instances, these men and women committed what Castronovo terms "figurative parricide"; that is, they "abandon[ed] deference to either historical beginnings or continuity."[35] For example, in his 1838 "Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois," Lincoln warned of the dangers of conceding the direction of the future to the dictates of the past. Such an approach, he presciently argued, would devastate American political institutions and rend the nation. In particular, Lincoln claimed that the "interesting scenes of the Revolution" and the "passions . . . against the British" they produced "must fade" because they stymied the affective and imaginative resources necessary for the nation's ongoing functionality and betterment. He went on:

> I do not mean to say that the scenes of the Revolution are now or ever will be entirely forgotten, but that, like everything else, they must fade upon the memory of the world, and grow more and more dim by the lapse of time. In history, we hope, they will be read of, and recounted, so long as the Bible shall be read; but even granting that they will, their influence cannot be what it heretofore has been. Even then they cannot be so universally known nor so vividly felt as they were by the generation just gone to rest. At the close of that struggle, nearly every adult male had been a participator in some of its scenes. The consequence was that of those scenes, in the form of a husband, a father, a son, or a brother, a living history was to be found in every family. [. . .] But those histories are gone. They can be read no more forever. They were a fortress of strength; but what invading foeman could never do, the silent artillery of time has done—the leveling of its walls. They are gone.[36]

Lincoln's historiographical absolutism rendered his particular moment singular, a beginning both distinct and divergent from what came before. He pressed his audiences to unmoor themselves from the past and project their future using their own terms and with their own aims in mind; that is, he urged Americans to seize control of their democracy because they were the ones living it.

Lincoln's entreaty was not only a political intervention but also something of a cultural one. He objected to the way Americans raised the dead in their cultural formations as means to deal with the turbulent newness the Jacksonian period engendered; he argued for the gritty and uncomfortable work of grappling with and through the living. African Americans agreed with Lincoln up to a point but could not fully abandon the dead because the nation's social and political shortcomings proved to them that the revolutionary events of the late eighteenth century were unfinished. Several of their antagonists also refused to concede the past, and looked back to the very same historical moments African Americans did to legitimate their opposition to black freedom and inclusion.

One of the earliest of these re-stagings was Samuel Woodworth's play *King's Bridge Cottage* (1826). Woodworth worked in all areas of literary production as an editor, printer, publisher, and writer.[37] Patriotic renderings of American history and historical actors abound in his body of work, from *Champions of Freedom* (1816), a novel based on the events of the War of 1812, to *Forest Rose; or, American Farmers* (1825), one of the most popular dramas of the antebellum period. *Forest Rose* featured the hugely popular character Jonathon Ploughboy, a stage Yankee that, as theatre historian Bruce McConachie notes, "embodi[ed] republican virtues [and] told stories with a New England twang and balanced rationalistic calculation with sentimental action."[38] Jonathon is Woodworth's most lasting contribution to American cultural history. For its part, *King's Bridge Cottage* was nonetheless significant in its historical moment because it both registered and stimulated the cultural and racial politics of the 1820s north. The play offered a kind of blueprint with which to reconcile the practice of black inequality with the principles of American liberty by means of dramatic retellings of the Revolutionary era.

King's Bridge Cottage premiered at the Amateur Theatre in New York City and resurfaced at least once in the 1830s, when the city's fashionable Richmond Hill Theatre restaged it in celebration of George Washington's birthday.[39] The play follows the capture and subsequent rescue of an American ingénue from her British abductor, a not-too-subtle metaphor for its broader setting of the American War of Independence. Though its char-

acters report on several events that marked the war's end, it is impossible to tell exactly when *King's Bridge Cottage* takes place: its subtitle notes it is "founded on an incident which occurred a few days previous to the evacuation of N. York," which would date the play in 1783, but the action ends with "despatches from the Commander in Chief" that proclaims Cornwallis' surrender, and that would set *King's Bridge Cottage* in 1781. The play's lack of historical specificity was not the result of haphazard dramaturgy. Rather, Woodworth, like many early American playwrights, took liberties with the past because his was project was not historical precision but, instead, socio-national invention and vitalization, the necessary cultural work of a still new republican polity.

With the play, Woodworth suggests black captivity was essential to the preservation of the U.S. The slave character, Cato, declares his worth to the patriot causes of political freedom and national independence but defends the propriety of chattel enslavement, including his own. (Slavery would almost entirely disappear from New York in 1827, when the course of the state's gradual emancipation laws would reach its endpoint. Woodworth and his audiences knew this, so it is possible to read *King's Bridge Cottage* as a kind of yearning for an institution free New Yorkers depended on to legitimate their freedoms.) In his defense of slavery, Cato spells out a form of racial paternalism in which "families" composed of masters and slaves thrive when they maintain bonds of complementarity, mutuality, and reinforcement. Black people needed such care and protection from their white "fathers," according to this view, because they lack the mental and physical wherewithal to function and survive in an increasingly modern world. Throughout the antebellum period, opponents of black inclusion marshaled this "biological" argument, just as proslavery ideologues did in defense of chattel slavery; what makes Cato's iteration of it particularly noteworthy is the way in which he melds it with a nationalist rhetoric.[40] In soliloquy he declares:

> Lad-a-massy, what sabbage scoundrel Ingrish soger be. . . . I wonder Ginerl Washington don't abbertise in de paper, for brack soger? I speck he tink do dat white soger got pluch 'nuff, and dat de nigger run 'way same as if de debill after him. He mistaken if he tink so bout me, for I bin used to berry hard using and terrible sight ob up and down, 'fore good old massa Richardson buy me at de hoss auction; he berry kind to Cato, and I must go gib him little comfort, or cry 'long with him.[41]

At the end of the speech, Cato runs off to take care of his master. Just as he tends to the diurnal needs of Richardson, Richardson keeps Cato from a life of "berry hard using and terrible sight ob up and down." Master and slave live together in a "country dwelling" with its tranquil environs (the other settings in the play are a cottage and the woods). If not for the war and the villainous British officer who kidnaps the play's ingénue, the Americans would enjoy an unending bucolic bliss. But they do not shy from the fight. Cato aids and protects his masters from the British, actions that suggest the slave's role is the maintenance of the home *and* of the nation. What emerges in *King's Bridge Cottage*, then, is a figuration of black-white domesticity that is at once pastoral and historicist.

The pastoral was the prevailing idiom of racial paternalism. As Saidiya Hartman contends, "The pastoral renders the state of domination as an ideal of care, familial obligation, gratitude, and humanity. . . . As a mode of historical representation, the pastoral seizes upon the strains of song and story, invariably part of slave life, as precious components in the depiction of the moral landscape of slave life, in order to give voice to values of the social order in the appropriately simple tones of the enslaved."[42] Though the most enduring inscriptions of this form of the pastoral recur in the discourses, melodies, and narratives of nineteenth-century minstrelsy, works such as *King's Bridge Cottage* also performed the kind of "historical representation" that Hartman describes here.[43] The problem, however, was that such representations of slave contentedness and reciprocity were clearly spurious. That is, if enactments of the pastoral were "emblems of an integral moral economy," the ethicality of that economy was dubious at best because of the actuality of boundless injury and psychic brutality intrinsic to the institution of chattel slavery—those very "scenes of subjection."

As historiography, then, slave domesticity rendered in terms of the pastoral was largely easy to dismiss, but that figured in nationalist terms was not. Slaves *did* play an important part in the fight for American independence and the building of the nation, and Cato's contemplation of black involvement in the war conjures those actions. He asks, "I wonder Ginerl Washington don't abbertise in de paper, for brack soger?"[44] Although Washington might not have advertised in newspapers for black soldiers, there were certainly many who fought as part of the Continental forces, not to mention those slaves and free people of color who provided necessary provisions and support away from the battlefield.[45] Unlike the vast majority of these men and women, however, Cato pledges himself to Washington *and* to a life of slavery; the prospect of freedom for his service does not figure into his calculation. His deeds and words evoke the proslavery figu-

ration of the captive black and the free white working toward the establishment of an enduring national harmony. The facts of black involvement in the revolutionary cause matter little to the socio-racial politics *King's Bridge Cottage* articulates. Instead, the significance of Cato's rumination and of his actions throughout the play, including his efforts to foil the machinations of a British officer, depends on their effect as domestic fantasy: namely, the projection of the mutually constitutive home-family and nation-family.

A romanticized Burkean conservatism animated this fantasy. This set of principles holds that men are not created equal but nature endows, indeed obliges, the talented very few to govern the intellectually and socially inept multitudes. Familial metaphors often express this hierarchy (e.g., "The Father of the Country," "Big Daddy," or "Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe"). Its advocates claimed it to be a sociality of reciprocating protection, ensuring the strong would protect the weak, the weak would provide some necessary service to the strong, and, thus, all parties would thrive "molecularly," as a unit, despite the vicissitudes of the outside world. For proslavery paternalists, race-based chattel slavery was the ideal institution with which to achieve this communal order because, in their view, it fortifies blacks and whites from the perils of bourgeois liberalism, capitalism, and other modern social and political developments. This theory, Eugene Genovese explains, "extended and reinforced the bonds of family life. Accustomed to treat slaves as members of a larger family, the master has his sense of natural family enormously strengthened," just as his slaves should feel protected as part of that family.[46] Sustained by ties of affectivity and affinity, this form of proslavery domesticity seeks to insulate masters and slaves from the uncertainties of change and the menace of time itself.

Of course, emancipation negated the possibility of this slave-based sociality in the north. Nevertheless, northerners transmuted its underlying theories of innate yet complementary differences among the races to shape their expectations of the way the course of black freedom should unfold in the region. From proscriptions on employment and civic inequities to the struggle over leadership in abolitionism and other reform movements, normative treatments of free black life steadily turned on burgeoning discourses of biological essentialism and racial inherence, theories that rendered the African (American) as a "pathetically inept creature who was a slave to his emotions, incapable of progressive development and self-government because he lacked the white man's enterprise and intellect."[47] Plays and performances like *King's Bridge Cottage* instantiated this discourse of inherent black inferiority, but they did so while granting black-people-as-slaves a critical role in the sustenance of interpersonal and na-

tional domesticity. Yet no other cultural event in the period enacted this "compromise" more forcefully than did P. T. Barnum's exhibition tour of Joice Heth, a performance that brilliantly synthesized the biological, the historical, and the pastoral in its defense of black captivity.

BARNUM'S HETH: EXHIBITING OWNERSHIP, WRITING MASTERY

From August 1835 to January 1836, Barnum exhibited an elderly black woman called Joice Heth, whom he advertised as "the Nurse of Gen. George Washington (the Father of Our Country) Now Living at the Astonishing Age of 161 Years and Weighs only 46 Pounds."[48] Audiences throughout the northeast thronged to see Heth, who regaled them with tales of raising and even suckling the infant George Washington; sang hymns and other devotions; and engaged in spirited banter. They also marveled at her anatomical peculiarities, which were, as one representative account puts it, "eyes . . . entirely run out and closed," "nails . . . near an inch long and on the great toes horny and thick like bone and incurvated, looking like the claws of a bird of prey," and "nothing but skin and bones."[49] Barnum advertised her as a "natural & national curiosity," and he exhibited Heth at all manner of establishments, from the genteel and Whiggish to the rowdy and Jacksonian.[50] The veracity of her story, or lack thereof, captivated journalists, scientists, and lay audiences during the tour and even more so in the years following her death. Without question, Heth was "one of the first true American media celebrities" and catapulted Barnum on his way to becoming the most famous entertainer of the nineteenth-century U.S.[51]

Though the exhibition's affective and ideological meanings were manifold, I want to focus on two of its interrelated features that most tellingly enacted the fantasy of proslavery domesticity I have been tracing in this chapter: Heth's corporeal link to a mythical national past and the ambiguity of her slave/free status. Barnum's staging of Joice Heth as the pious, at times cantankerous wet nurse of George Washington theatricalized a fantastical coalescence of living history and tranquil black captivity. These relations became vividly material because Heth's wizened body and most intimate of acts were on display: audiences watched her eat, drink, sleep, smoke, and talk; they asked about her bowel movements; they also imagined her suckling Washington—and maybe even themselves. The projection of the self onto Heth's breasts instantiated what performance scholar Uri McMillan calls "mammy-memory," which was "a strange dependence on, and perhaps even nostalgic longing for, . . . black wet-nursing, a social

Figure 6: "The Greatest Natural & National Curiosity in the World. Joice Heth, Nurse to Gen. GEORGE WASHINGTON, (the Father of Our Country,)" (1835). Courtesy of Somers Historical Society, Somers New York.

practice that was predicated on white infants' vulnerability and dependence on their black maternal care-takers for survival."[52] In this way, "Aunt Joice," as Barnum and his co-manager Levy Lyman called her in the promotional pamphlet biography they circulated during the tour, signified as the nation's mammy because she was the national Father's mammy.

The "familial" relation Heth evoked is a fundamentally reciprocal one:

the loving support that she and other slaves give their young white masters is returned because these masters grow up to protect and provide for their slaves. In fact, several commentators remarked on the care and comfort that Barnum afforded Heth, who in their view would otherwise have been a helpless black invalid.[53] The pleasure the exhibition furnished spectators emerged in large part from this paternalist relation. To her white audiences, Heth doubly lacked the mental and physical faculties necessary to survive in the world, and it was her protectors' moral obligation to safeguard her from it.

The exhibition framed its paternalism in biological, historical, and pastoral terms, all of which became far more tangible for those spectators who checked Heth's pulse, fingered her wrinkles, and shook her hand. This staging, it bears noting, was in some ways daring: on the one hand, Heth's purported age, her anatomical oddities, and the bombastic promotion and theatrical trappings of the exhibition established her display as a "freak show"; on the other, the spatial propinquity and haptic relation that audiences shared with Heth undercut the antebellum freak show's normative architecture. Barnum's refusal to erect barriers fostered an intimate spectatorial relation more redolent of a visitation than that of the theatre, and Heth's "visitors" risked the contagions of a perceived "freak" because they were one touch removed from the nation's most venerated historical figures and moments.

Audiences who sought to touch history and thus insert themselves physically into the grandest of American narratives had little concern for what skeptics at the time rightly declared the exhibition to be: a veritable sham. Though it was Barnum's first major "humbug," Heth *qua* national body offered affective, cognitive, and psychological calm for white northerners seeking to withstand the turmoil constitutive of the period. The soothing fiction of the Heth-nursed baby Washington legitimated the even more soothing fiction of a Washington-birthed nation of a people blessed over all others.[54] The ability to touch Heth grounded these fictions into a (black) material reality, and the shaking of Heth's hand was perhaps the most meaningful of those touches. The handshake, as cultural historian Benjamin Reiss neatly puts it, was "for nineteenth-century Americans a fleshy gesture of republicanism."[55] Shaking hands with Heth was hardly an acknowledgment of her republican subjectivity, though; rather, it was a corporeal gateway for her audiences to return to the U.S.'s beginnings. Thus, in addition to the vast interest audiences took in Heth's gnarled physiology—so much that Barnum staged a public autopsy of Heth, which nearly 1,500 people paid the high price of fifty cents to attend—the imagi-

native networks audiences crafted on and through her body were just as appealing as that body itself.[56]

For Reiss, this affective and fantastical labor amounted to a "figurative public servitude to the northern whites who visited her and followed her story."[57] In other words, Heth was the nation's slave, a slave whose bodily acts sustained the emotional, narrative, and even somatic bonds of American mythologies. Because they saw Heth as a living monument to the birth of the nation, men such as Henry Cole, a patron of the tony Niblo's Garden in New York City, objected to the way in which Barnum produced the exhibition. (Niblo's Garden was where Barnum first staged Heth.) Cole wrote to the *New York Sun* in order to "ascertain why SHE who nursed the 'father of our country,' the man to whom we owe our present happy and prosperous condition, should at the close of her life be exhibited as 'our rarer monsters are.'"[58] These "rarer monsters" were the *lusus naturae*, or "nature's freaks," that captivated audiences and a steadily growing class of scientists that would go on to create the field of teratology, the study of congenital and acquired abnormalities.[59] For Cole, Heth did not deserve the gaze of the popular eye or the scalpel of the scientific hand because of what she performed and embodied: she was, as he proclaimed, "the sole remaining tie of mortality which connects us to him who was 'first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen'—and as such, we should protect and honor her, and not suffer her to be kept for a show, like a wild beast, to fill the coffers of mercenary men."[60]

Cole's censure of the exhibition rested on the question of ownership. He argued that Barnum and his associates had no right to profit from displaying Heth because they had no right to Heth. Instead, she belonged to all Americans—literally so. "She is the common property of our country," Cole declared.[61] Given the socio-racial context of his assertion, Cole's notion of Heth as "common property" is closer to an actual designation than a figurative one. Heth was born into slavery, so the feasibility of her (or any black person, for that matter) as chattel was anything but far-fetched. Cole and similar-minded critics of the exhibition did not specify how collective ownership of Heth might take shape, but their view of her as "common property" evidenced northerners' willingness to tolerate, indeed encourage, black captivity.

The public servitude that Cole imagined for Heth reflected how northern attitudes and laws permitted her personal servitude to Barnum. Even though Barnum exhibited Heth in a number of free states—including in Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, all of which were home to abolitionist strongholds—there was no absolute dictate, stat-

utory or juridical, that would have freed her once she entered their borders. Moreover, the irregularity and frequent disregard of interstate comity rendered slaves who traveled north "neither fugitive nor free" but positioned them within a kind of existential limbo.[62] To be sure, those slaves who went before courts had their fates settled, but these decisions did not culminate in a body of case law that states adhered to. In Heth's case, evidently no one, including abolitionists, made a challenge on behalf of her freedom. As Reiss points out, "Few questioned the propriety of [Barnum's] relationship to her, and even fewer latched onto the potential legal issues involved in a Yankee's participation in chattel slavery on free ground. . . . No abolitionist paper seems to have commented on her exhibit, and no abolition society took her up as a cause célèbre."[63] That African Americans did not concern themselves with Heth's cause is surprising, though the years of her tour coincided with a profound fracturing of black leadership; perhaps her case was lost in these cracks.[64] Nonetheless, black silence on Heth's captivity was secondary to the larger chorus of white acceptance of it, an acceptance that Barnum tapped into to promote his tour of Heth and boost his reputation as a deserving cultural idol after her death.

In the exhibition's promotional pamphlet, *The Life of Joice Heth, the Nurse of George Washington*, there is no mention of whether the Heth that northern audiences went to see was free. The pamphlet simply notes that she is extremely pleased with her present condition, particularly in light of the history of her enslavement: when she was "at the age of fifteen," her captors snatched her from the "Island of Madagascar, on the Coast of Africa" to work on plantations in Virginia, where she "was the first person to put clothes on the unconscious infant . . . little Georgy," and in the fields of Kentucky, where she "had been very much neglected, laying for years in an outer building, upon the naked floor."[65] Even more than a marketing effort, Barnum and Levy's published retelling of Heth's personal history, with its affixed "certifications" that purportedly substantiate that history, amounts to a kind of slave narrative. Specifically, *The Life of Joice Heth* is an example of what literary historian Robert Stepto theorizes as an "authenticating narrative" because its "machinery [e.g., letters, newspaper accounts, and testimonials] either remains as important as the tale or actually becomes, usually for some purpose residing outside the text, the dominant and motivating feature of the narrative."[66] What the entire accompanying materials supposedly authenticated was, indeed, extra-textual: namely, the touring exhibition and Heth's ongoing captivity. Thus, the structural apparatus of *The Life of Joice Heth* was similar to that of the vast majority of antebellum slave narratives, but the economic and sociopolitical aims of

Barnum and Levy's text differed radically from the latter's customary anti-slavery intentions.

If *The Life of Joice Heth* reads as proslavery slave narrative, then it was only the first text in a number of antebellum literary renderings of the Heth affair that Barnum wrote (or authorized) that are structured around the binary of white mastery and black captivity. Given Barnum's patent striving and singular ability to gratify public demand, his decision to write repeatedly about Heth and his interactions with other black people using this binary signals just how meaningful northerners' proslavery imagination was. For example, one of the earliest biographical (perhaps autobiographical) portraits of Barnum details his travels with a circus company through "every portion of the Union," and it was "during these peregrinations, [when] he came across the famous Joyce Heth, in Kentucky." When he reached Vicksburg, Mississippi, he "purchased a negro . . . to attend him as a servant." After "several hundred dollars [went missing] from his pocket . . . Barnum suspected the 'nigger,' searched him, found the money, gave him fifty lashes, and took him to New Orleans, where he was sold at auction." While in New Orleans, he visited the nearby town of St. Martinsville where "he sold his streamer and all his horses, receiving in payment cash, sugar, molasses, and a *negro woman and child*."[67] Written in 1845 by an anonymous "foreign correspondent" (most likely Barnum himself) for the *New York Atlas*, a long-running Sunday-only Jacksonian paper, this account makes plain Barnum's thorough involvement in the capital and social economies of slavery, including trading in the New Orleans slave market, which was the nation's largest and most brutal. Yet the narrative does so with a remarkable ordinariness. Its tonal dispassion in its descriptions of the slaveholding Barnum suggests that his exploits in the south would not have upset the paper's principal readership, the urban white working class of the north. In my view, these readers countenanced the brutality intrinsic to chattel slavery not only out of an apathy and, in some cases, desire for broken black bodies, but also out of a yearning to identify with the mastership wielded by one of their very own, the Yankee Barnum.

By the time Barnum (or his amanuensis) published this story of his time in the south, he knew his readership well, and they him, because he had been writing for the *Atlas* since 1841. His first major piece, *The Adventures of an Adventurer*, was an autobiographical novella the *Atlas* serialized over twelve weeks, and he wrote it under the *nom de plume* Barnaby Diddleum. The most anticipated chapters of *The Adventures* were those that recounted the circumstances of the Heth exhibition. Relating his first encounter with the "black beauty," Barnum explains that he "thought this woman a great

curiosity, and that she might be turned to some account by being exhibited." As a result, "a bargain was immediately struck and aunt Joice *became the property of Diddleum* and . . . contributed very extensively to the principal adventurers of an adventurer." For the rest of her life, Heth was then "commanded at my *sovereign will* and *pleasure*."[68] *The Adventures* limns Barnum as an omnipotent and omniscient master, yet that description lacks the turgidity with which the novella frames his talents as a showman and businessman. Instead, the plain diction renders his slaveholding an uncontentious and unexceptional practice.

Barnum broadened the slave owner persona he delineated in the *Atlas* when he turned to Heth in his 1855 autobiography, *The Autobiography of P.T. Barnum: Clerk, Merchant, Editor, and Showman*, to describe his assumption of the slave buyer's gaze.

> I was favourably struck by the appearance of the old woman. So far as outward indications were concerned, she might almost as well have been a thousand years old as any other age. . . . She was apparently in good health and spirits, but former disease or old age, or perhaps both combined, had rendered her unable to change her position; in fact, although she could move one of her arms at will, her lower limbs were fixed in their position, and could not be straightened. She was totally blind, and her eyes were so deeply sucked in their sockets that the eyeballs seemed to have disappeared altogether. She had no teeth, but possessed a head of thick bushy gray hair. Her left arm lay across her breast, and she had no power to remove it. The fingers of her left hand were drawn down so nearly to close it, and remained fixed and immovable. The nails upon that hand were about four inches in length, and extended beyond her wrist. The nails upon her large toes also had grown to the thickness of nearly a quarter of an inch.[69]

Barnum's quasi-ethnography of Heth instantiates the hyper-scrutiny that buyers and traders performed on and through enslaved black bodies in their search for profit—though, unlike most, Barnum searched for decrepitude in his potential chattel rather than vitality. Their gawking, poking, and prodding along with their subsequent recording of those actions in writing helped produce what historian Walter Johnson calls "an aesthetics of domination," that is, the "language and categories and objectifying gaze" essential to chattel slavery and white supremacy.[70] Barnum contributed mightily to these aesthetics, and his antebellum theatrical displays, from Heth to his

1860 "What Is It?" in which he exhibited an African American man in a wooly costume as the potential link between humankind and the animal kingdom, reflected the ways proslavery categories and conceptions were constitutive of antebellum northerners' socio-racial imagination.[71]

Consequently, biographer A. H. Saxon's brusque dismissal of Barnum's racial politics is far too shortsighted. He insists, "Let us be candid about the matter and have done with it: Barnum's opinion of blacks during the pre–Civil War era was no higher than that of most of his countrymen, whether Southerners and Northerners."[72] On the contrary: we certainly should not "have done with" the fact that Barnum shared prevailing racial views, but, instead, turn to his supremely popular performance and literary practices as appeals to, and evidence of, the collective (northern) hearts and minds that produced those views. As for his exhibition of Joice Heth and subsequent literary accounts of it, Barnum tapped into a desire for a form of domestic harmony that aligned audiences with Washington and affirmed magnanimous white mastery as an ideal of Americanness. This sort of racial paternalism, inextricably nationalist and proslavery, remained popular in northern performance culture because it included African Americans in the republican project but excluded them from equal participation therein. And just like with Barnum's Heth, the citation of George Washington was very often the critical hinge.

THE PROSLAVERY ICONICITY OF WASHINGTON IN PAINTING AND PERFORMANCE

While Barnum's exhibition of Heth rested on fancifully invented narratives of Washington's infancy, other Washington-based performances of proslavery domesticity such as George Jaimson's *The Revolutionary Soldier; or, The Old Seventy-Sixer* (1847, 1850) relied on ignoring the ways Washington questioned slavery later in his life.[73] In *The Revolutionary Soldier*, an icon of Washington upholds chattel slavery as a boon to both the family and the nation. In his important theory of signs, Charles Sanders Peirce's description of the icon helps account for the phenomenological force and semiotic heft of Washington's proslavery iconicity in *The Revolutionary Soldier* and, more generally, of the use of icons in performance. He writes, "An *icon* is a representamen [i.e., sign] which fulfills the function of a representamen by virtue of a character it possess in itself, and would possess just the same as if its object did not. . . . For a pure icon does not draw any distinction between itself and the object. It represents whatever it may represent, and,

whatever it is like, it in so far is. It is an affair of suchness only."[74] The icon, then, fosters an immediacy of feeling and a certainty of recognition. These temporal and epistemological aspects, among others, differentiate the icon from the *index* (something like a hydrometer or weathervane, which necessitates an existential or causal relation with its object to make meaning) and the *symbol* (something like a word or document, which has an arbitrary relation with its object and relies on social habits and conventions to signify). In *The Revolutionary Soldier* the icon of Washington that affirms the play's racial and national appeals is a portrait, and, according to Peirce, portraits, along with statues, are classic examples of icons.

The Revolutionary Soldier premiered at the historic Federal Street Theatre in Boston in 1847.[75] The play, which takes place at the Goodwin estate ("a scene near Boston"), opens with Mrs. Peabody, the estate's chief housemaid who is probably Irish, and Enoch, the Goodwins' slave, discussing why their master, a decorated veteran of the American War of Independence, has been firing his gun early that morning. They remember that the day is the sixteenth of October and, as Enoch puts it, "massa Nathan always up at five o'clock" on that date to "kind o'circumcelebrate de fuss time he shake hand wid Massa Washington."[76] Goodwin then enters, wearing his Continental Army uniform, and Enoch asks if he should take the overcoat and clean the "ole seventy-six buttons." Goodwin tells him no, because it is his daughter Fanny's wedding day, "so I shall keep it on." He continues, "It will serve to keep up my spirits; and with this on I can more easily console myself for the loss I sustain in parting with my daughter. I've parted with many good friends with this coat on."[77] Despite Goodwin's sadness from the "loss" of his daughter, the scene is essentially a joyous one, and George Washington is central to its production.

But the tenor of the play takes a swift turn in the following scene, as Goodwin starts to wonder whether he will lose his estate. When he was younger, his rival stole and signed his own name to the estate's original deeds. At the beginning of the third scene, we learn those papers are in the possession of the thief's son, Augustus Fritz Marson, who has travelled "three or four thousand miles from home" (i.e., London) to the "land of half-civilized beings" (i.e., the U.S.).[78] With the help of a mercenary American lawyer, the aptly named "Mr. Leechy," the British Marson lays claim to the property as his "by law," and Goodwin cannot prove that Marson's father illegally took the documents decades ago. (In soliloquy, Marson admits his father stole them: "This deed, however, I have heard him mention was taken to England by him through mistake. I believe my father was in the habit of taking things through mistake."[79]) Consequently, Goodwin

tells his servants to "stop your preparations for the wedding" and "commence packing up" his belongings because he will soon have to hand over the estate to Marson.[80]

Later in the play, as she is busy "removing pictures from the wall" of one of the estate's apartments, Mrs. Peabody comes across a portrait of George Washington. While unhanging it she cries out, "O! this picture, that has hung here so long!—immortal Washington!—I never thought I should take you down! Well, well! (Wipes her eyes)."[81] In this moment, the icon doubly focuses the (ostensible) tragedy of the Goodwins' impending penury because its removal from the walls marks not simply the loss of their property, but, more critically, a loss at the hands of an Englishman; in this battle the British are victorious, usurping even "Washington." Yet in the midst of Mrs. Peabody's lamentation, Enoch runs in "almost out of breath." He asks for "Massa Nathan," then commands, "Stop, Misse Peabody; you can stop luggin' de tings out ob dere places. Place ole Massa Washington back in he place again."[82] Enoch just learned that the deeds to the estate have been stolen back, therefore "Massa Nathan [can] lef de tings along whar dey is, 'case all [is] right!" Before Mrs. Peabody can return anything to its former place, however, Enoch declares his adoration of Washington by way of performing with the icon.

> (*Dancing and capering, goes to the portrait of Washington, and dances round it, singing*) Old Massa Washington a berry good man.[83]

Given Enoch's satisfaction with his existence as the Goodwins' slave, his dance with the portrait does not intimate antislavery sentiments; it is highly untenable that his affection for Washington stems from Washington's gradual embrace of abolition at the end of his life and the course of manumission and care he laid out for his slaves that was to take effect after his wife died. Even at the time of Washington's own death in 1799, historian Richard Newman notes, "very few white Americans commented on" the change in his view of the propriety of chattel slavery.[84] Instead, and certainly by the early 1850s, Washington's iconicity reached its greatest force in proslavery thought and cultural production. In fact, *The Revolutionary Soldier* was so firm in its defense of slavery that it played at the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore, and it was the particulars of this run in a major slaveholding city that provided the production details that Jaimson included in the script when he published it in 1850.

For audiences in Boston where *The Revolutionary Soldier* premiered, Enoch's dancing and capering with the portrait of Washington, which the

black-faced actor almost certainly performed using the choreographies of the minstrel stage, might have reminded them of a similar moment in another play that also premiered in Boston, George Lionel Stevens' *The Patriot* (1834). A dramatic paean to the American Revolution and the formation of the U.S., *The Patriot* was Stevens' attempt to reinvigorate national unity at a time of increasing sectionalism, an attempt that was somewhat ironic given that Stevens was British. The play's subtitle reads, "A Drama, in Three Acts, Wherein is Introduced A *National Chant*, Containing the Names of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence. Adapted to Be Represented in All Theatres of the Union on Public Days of Rejoicing."[85] Hoping to appeal to northern and southern audiences, Stevens renders slavery a benevolent institution of domestic reciprocity, where slaves affirm their allegiance to the home and to the nation. The play's slave character Sambo, for example, claims a special relationship with Washington because his ancestors were slaves of the president. When Sambo's master tells him to clean and prepare a bust of Washington for an Independence Day display, he exclaims, "Yes, mass—de big Washinton, me lub him, massa! were he 'live, me would hug him massa, as him Sambo do."[86] Sambo's embrace of the bust, like Enoch's dance with the portrait, performed the romance of master-slave life that proslavery ideologues and their sympathizers contrived to shroud the brutality of chattel slavery.[87]

The forms of proslavery domesticity enacted in *The Patriot* and *The Revolutionary Soldier* bring to mind American neoclassicism of the late eighteenth century, especially the decorative and visual arts. Portraits of George Washington were central to this movement because, as Federal man *par excellence*, he seemed to embody the classical ideal: order, solemnity, and the consummate blend of physical power and intellectual cogency. Indeed, Washington and other leaders of the American Revolution served as perfect models for the neoclassical painter and, later, sculptor because they proved not only more favorable than pagan, pre-Christian figures from antiquity, but also more relevant in that they were the ones, in normative accounts, most responsible for the birth of the new nation. These works—especially the paintings and studies of Benjamin West and his students Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, Edward Savage, and others of the so-called American School—were crucial to the development of a national sense of self, providing the visual complement to the classically informed philosophies and political theories that animated the American Revolution and shaped the constitutionality of the U.S. Their aesthetic and representational effects reached beyond the eighteenth century because, as historian Caroline Winterer argues, "next to Christianity, the central intellectual project in

America before the late nineteenth century was classicism."[88] Of course, one of the most significant aspects of that project was the way Americans reshaped the classical institution of slavery into its *neo*-classic form: namely, race-based chattel slavery. And despite its brutalities, chattel slavery could be an important subject for neoclassical artists, ranging from Revolutionary-era poet Phillis Wheatley to antebellum sculptor Hiram Powers.[89]

Two of the most significant neoclassical paintings of Washington—John Trumbull's *George Washington* (1780) and Edward Savage's *The Washington Family* (1789–96)—feature slaves in their settings. Trumbull was the son of Jonathon Trumbull, who was governor of Connecticut from 1769 to 1784, and he served in the Continental Army, in which he rose to the ranks of aide-de-camp to Washington and other American generals. He drew on these personal experiences and observations for his painting of a number of the nation's most influential historical actors and events, such as the Battle of Bunker Hill and the signing of the Declaration of Independence.[90] Trumbull conceived of his artistic practice as "paying a just tribute to the memory of eminent men, who had given their lives for their country."[91] Washington did not perish in battle like others whom Trumbull sought to memorialize in his paintings, but he certainly qualified as one who sacrificed greatly for the American cause; ultimately, Washington became Trumbull's most favored personal subject. George Washington Parke Custis, Washington's adopted son, argued that Trumbull's representations of Washington were the most true to life: "Hence, *for the correct figure of Washington we must refer, in all cases, to the works of Trumbull.*"[92]

Perhaps the exactitude Trumbull achieved in his paintings of Washington was an effect of the special bond Trumbull believed they shared. In his autobiography, Trumbull calls Washington his "fast friend"; accordingly, *George Washington* is the most intimate of all his works.[93] While it shares many of the formal properties that characterize his other portraits, *George Washington* stands apart in its composition: it is, I believe, Trumbull's only full-body portrait in which the subject looks straight ahead at the viewer. Further, *George Washington* is direct and lively, and lacks the careful wistfulness that typifies the works he produced after 1784, when he began to study closely with Benjamin West in London.[94] Trumbull's deep personal affinity for Washington manifests in the portrait's vibrancy, particularly in the ebullience of Washington's countenance. The source of this affective register is not restricted to Washington's relation to Trumbull and the viewer, however; it is redoubled by the portrait's depiction of another pair of "fast friends": Washington and his slave, William "Billy" Lee.

Washington purchased Lee, whom he called "mulatto Will" in his led-

Figure 7: *George Washington* (1780). John Trumbull. Oil on Canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Charles Allen Munn, 1924 (24.109.88).

ger, in a lot of four "sundry slaves," which included Lee's brother Frank, in May 1768 from a Mrs. Mary Lee of Westmoreland County, Virginia, for a total of one hundred forty-nine pounds and fifteen shillings. Lee was the most expensive at sixty-one pounds and fifteen shillings, but he turned out to be the most valuable of all Washington's slave investments.[95] He was Washington's huntsman and riding companion, which was a testament to Lee's riding prowess, as many Virginians agreed with Thomas Jefferson that Washington was "the best horseman of his age and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback."[96] Moreover, by 1770 Lee had distinguished himself as a valet, so much so that Washington started referring to Lee in his diary as his "mulatto manservant," his "boy" and his "body servant."[97] Throughout the American War of Independence, Lee stayed by his master's side, serving as Washington's "Revolutionary attendant" who, as one early nineteenth-century account described him, "periled his life in many a field, beginning in the heights of Boston, in 1775, and ending in 1781, when Cornwallis surrendered, and the captive army, with unexpressible chagrin, laid down their arms at Yorktown."[98] In his *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, which he began to compile in 1826, George Washington Parke Custis dubbed Lee the "ancient follower, both in chase and in war, [who] formed a most interesting relic of the chief," who had died in 1799; Custis also noted that, with "his master having left him a house, and a pension of one hundred and fifty dollars a year, Bill became a spoiled child of fortune."[99] Upon his death, Washington offered "his mulatto Man William" something far more valuable than these and other material conveniences, however; he granted Lee "immediate freedom," which made Lee the only one of Washington's 124 slaves freed by the will, and he did so "as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War."[100]

George Washington pays tribute to Lee's "attachment" to Washington, which Trumbull witnessed during his dealings with both men during and following the war. In the portrait, Lee sits astride a thoroughbred to Washington's left. Both men are in the foreground, against a backdrop of sweeping strokes of neutral colors. While Trumbull dedicates most of his attention to Washington's appearance and mien, he does delineate features of Lee's aspect. The most conspicuous of these details is Lee's ornate and deep red turban, the most eye-catching use of color in the entire painting. There is no indication in Washington's or his contemporaries' writings that Lee practiced Islam, but there is a very good chance that he descended from Muslims. The Spanish brought Muslim slaves to Florida beginning in the mid-sixteenth century; thus, as historian Michael A. Gomez notes, "the

Muslim presence in North America antedates the arrival of the English colonists."[101] Moreover, seventeenth-century British and American slavers often preferred slaves from heavily Islamic areas in West Africa because they believed those Africans were more exploitable and compliant than other Africans.[102] In the U.S., the records and runaway advertisements of Georgian and South Carolinian slaveholders evidence a strong Islamic presence in those states, Gomez finds, while Virginian planters "were not as discriminating."[103] Washington himself held no ethnic or tribal preference for his workforce. In a 1784 letter to his former aide-de-camp and friend Tench Tilghman, Washington wrote, "If they are good workmen, they may be of Assia, Africa, or Europe. They may be Mahometans, Jews, or Christian of any Sect—or they may be Athiests."[104] Lee was most likely a descendant of other "good" Muslim slave "workmen" in Virginia, and his wearing a turban would have been a practice he inherited from them, even if he did not know its religious and ethnic meanings.

Another striking detail is Lee's face. With his head slightly raised, he looks admiringly at Washington yet ready to heed his master's command. Trumbull paints Lee's face with remarkable specificity, which was certainly an act of respect for Lee and his service to Washington and the future American republic. This careful treatment distinguishes *George Washington* from other contemporaneous renderings of Lee. In French engraver Noël Le Mire's 1780 *Le Général Washington*, for example, Lee wears his turban but his visage is more imprecise and racially stereotypical, particularly around the eyes and nose. *Le Général Washington* is also noteworthy compared to *George Washington* because in the engraving Lee does not look at Washington but stares off into the distance. To be sure, Lee is an integral part of Le Mire's work, but its primary interest is Washington's political triumphs, as Washington holds a copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Treaty of Alliance with France, and stands atop torn copies of post-war reconciliation documents with Great Britain. In *George Washington*, however, the focus is on the charismatic Washington and his attachments to Trumbull (i.e., the viewer) and Lee. The portrait is as familiar as it is stately, and Lee is inseparable from its memorialization of Washington. Its gallant tones and corporal particularities yield an intimate, complementary relation between master and slave, a relation that was indispensible to the formation of the (future) nation itself. Thus, complementing the "distinction" *George Washington* achieved as "the first portrait of [Washington] in Europe" was the fact that it also introduced him to the world as a magnanimous slaveholder, one whom proslavery ideologues could champion as a caring master whose efforts demonstrated the grand potential, indeed necessity, of the institution of chattel slavery.[105]

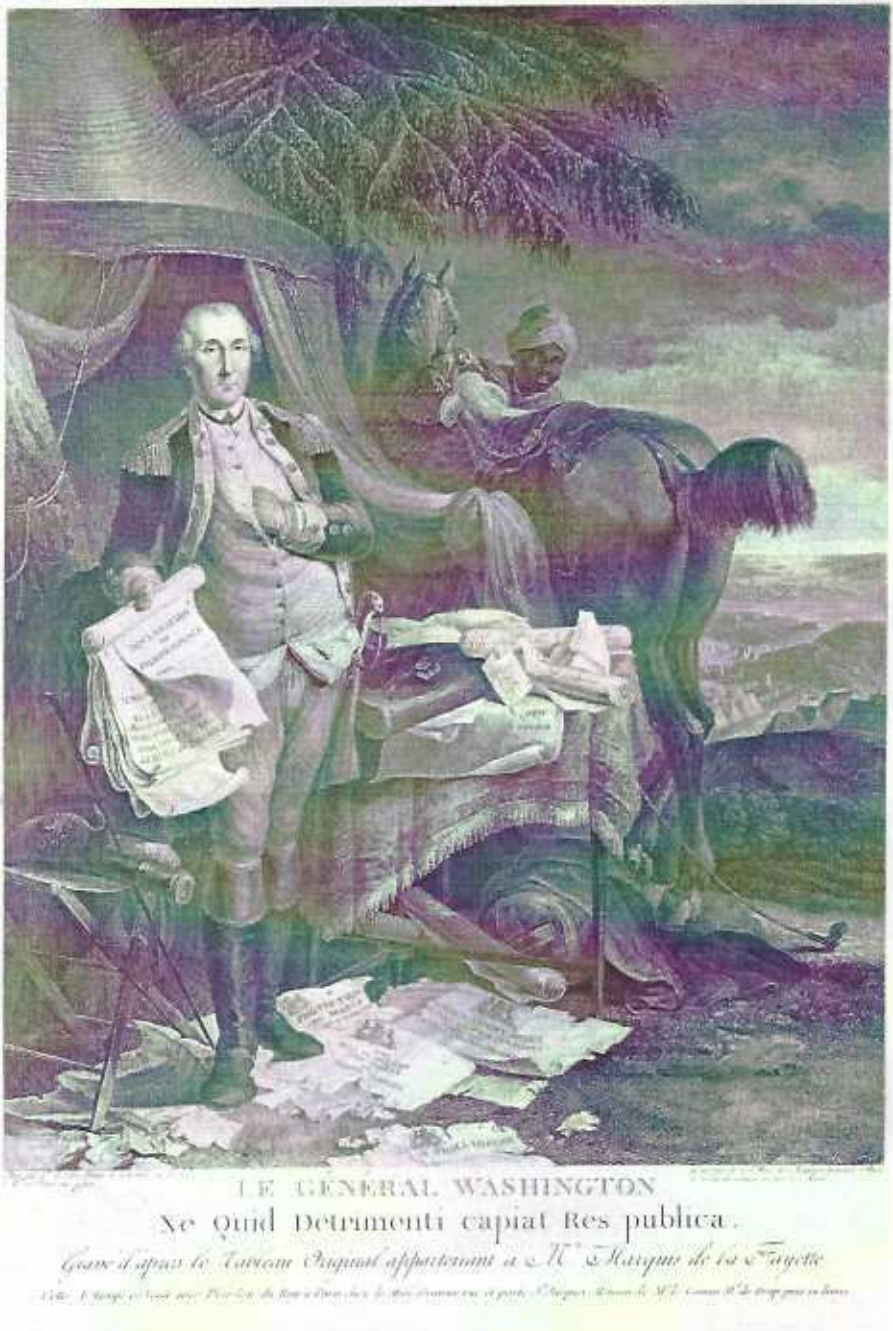

Figure 8: *Le Général Washington* (ca. 1785). Noël Le Mire. Engraving. Library of Congress, LC-USZ62–102494.

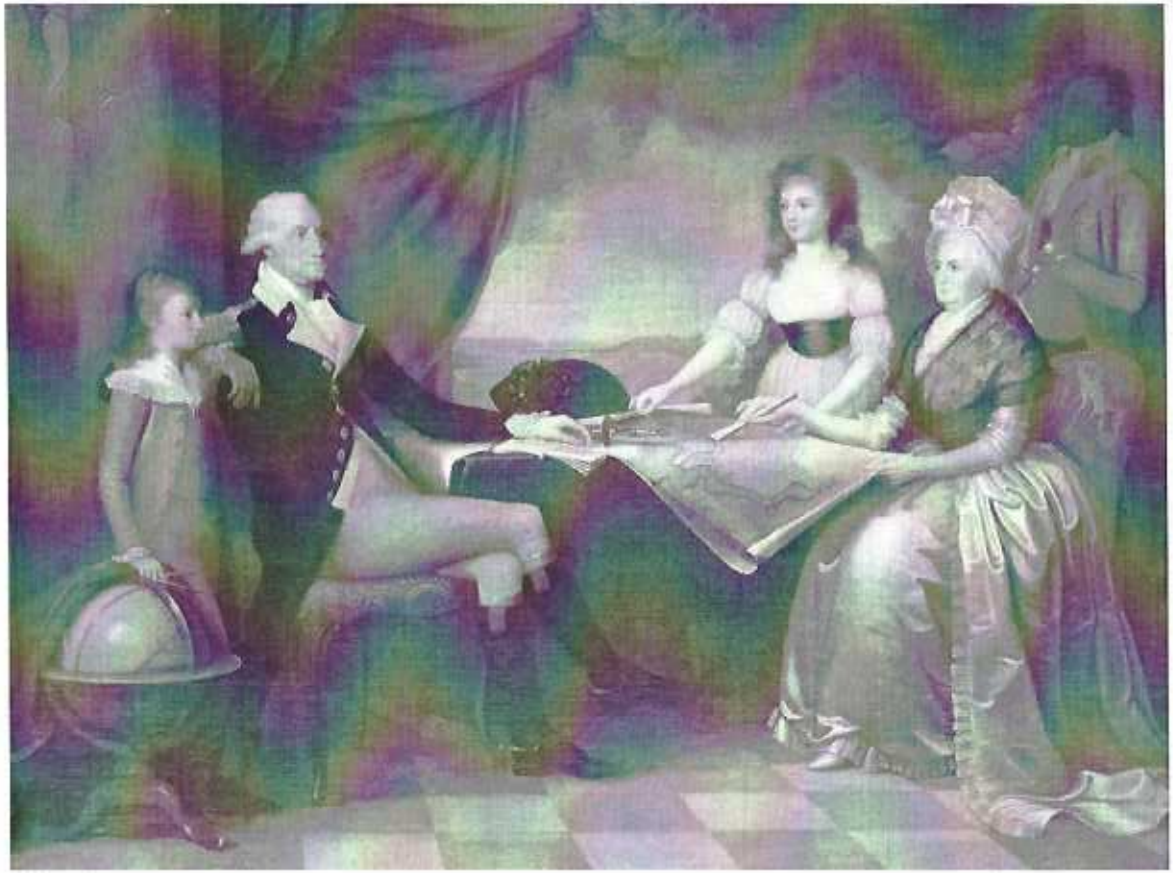

Figure 9: *The Washington Family* (1789–96). Edward Savage. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Art, Andrew Mellon Collection, 1940.1.2.

The (seemingly) idyllic relationship between Washington and Lee in *George Washington* is taken from the battlefield and resituated in the home in Edward Savage's *The Washington Family*. In 1789, Harvard University commissioned Savage to paint a portrait of now-president Washington; and from 1789 to 1790 Washington, his wife Martha, and her grandchildren Eleanor Parke Custis and George Washington Parke Custis, both of whom Washington adopted, sat for the Harvard and other private commissions. George and Martha Washington gave Savage new sittings in 1795, and he used these and the earlier sittings to complete the nine-foot-wide *The Washington Family* in 1796.[106] The painting lionizes Washington's virtues as a patriarch, one who presides comfortably over his sober and dispassionate nuclear family and, more implicitly, the newly constituted United States at large. Indeed, against a backdrop of the Potomac River, George wears military garb; Martha and Eleanor consider plans for the under-construction capital city, the District of Columbia; and George Custis holds a pair of navigational dividers and leans against a globe: *The Washington Family* affirms Washington's place as the "father" of the newest world power. But the portrait also attests to the fundamental source of the U.S.' power, chattel slavery, because, behind Martha Washington's chair, Billy Lee stands in waiting.

In full livery and without his turban, Lee nearly recedes into the background of *The Washington Family*. Unlike its representation in *George Washington*, his face in Savage's portrait is listless and lacks particularity. Moreover, Lee does not look at his master but stares off in a different direction than any of the Washingtons. He seems to share little human relation with his masters; if Trumbull paints Lee's role as Washington's close companion, Savage paints it as Washington's chattel. To be sure, the representational disparities of Lee in *George Washington* and in *The Washington Family* betray differences of emphasis between the two artists; but they also evidence how, in the postrevolutionary era, "natural rights–style arguments [against] slavery . . . no longer had the kind of strategic purchase they had a decade earlier," as literary historian Eric Slauter describes it.[107] With its lack of interest in Lee's visage and disregard of his contributions to the founding of the nation, Savage's portrait suggests the slave (in the painting) could be any black person because, despite the claims of natural rights discourses, blackness qualifies *all* black people for bondage. Further, Savage's erasure of Lee in *The Washington Family* reflects the increasing racialization of dominant American neoclassical theory: not only were black people incapable of producing satisfactory forms of classically informed art and inquiry, but also they lacked the intellectual and physical ideals

worthy of aesthetic treatment.[108] In this view, even the singular and valiant Lee did not deserve visual individuation and, by extension, freedom in the new nation, despite his status as a "member" of the Washington family.

When antebellum cultural producers looked back to the revolutionary era to legitimate their opposition to black inclusion, they often did so with the sort of historical haziness that Savage visualized in his painting of Lee, all the while maintaining the familial tenor of his work *The Washington Family* and the heroic tones of Trumbull's *George Washington*. These works, including *King's Bridge Cottage*, Barnum's exhibition of Heth, and *The Revolutionary Soldier*, enacted a form of proslavery domesticity, both of the home and of the nation, which seemed true to the intentions of the nation's founders and, consequently, rebuffed the inclusionary claims of African Americans. The figure of George Washington anchored these re-stagings of the birth of the U.S., all of which championed productive and obedient slaves above all other forms of black subjectivity. These performances did not project a future of earned freedom and full inclusion for slaves' descendants, as African Americans argued they deserved; rather, they functioned as cultural and "historiographic" justifications for ongoing forms of black captivity in the antebellum north.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Frederick Douglass, "An Address to the Colored People of the United States" (1848), in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 119. A general note on spelling: I have maintained several original spellings and acceptable British variants, thus rendering a succession of sics unnecessary.

2. Louisiana Civil Code of 1847, Article 173.

3. Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2001), 26.

4. Northern states enacted gradual emancipation statutes between 1777 and 1804. Only Vermont banned slavery completely, which it did in its first state constitution of 1777.

5. "Peculiar" was one of antebellum African Americans' favored terms to describe their condition. See Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107–30.

6. With the rise of radical abolitionism in 1831, there was an explosion of published and performed defenses of black captivity throughout the decade. In the north, these efforts were more rejections of the political and social aims and implications of abolitionism than they were defenses of chattel slavery as an institution. See Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1987), 261–85.

7. Benjamin Martin, quoted in *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Constitutional Convention 1838*, vol. IX, 321.

8. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971, 2005), 421.

9. One notable exception to this claim is the work of historian Joanne Pope Melish, who argues, "The process of gradual abolition in New England actually inscribed the practices of slavery itself in what was quite arbitrarily defined as a 'free society' to which it gave birth." Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 87. In terms of the literature on free black life in the antebellum north, the foundational work remains Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). Since the late 1990s, there has been an explosion of interest in the topic. One of the most thorough and insightful of these studies is Patrick Rael, *Black Identity*

and Black Protest in the Antebellum North (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

10. Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1997), 431.

11. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

12. Gramsci, 419–20.

13. Melish, 76–80.

14. Joseph Jefferson, *The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson* (1889), reprinted in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (New York: Century Company, 1890), 709.

15. James Gilbert Burnett, *Blanche of Brandywine: An American Patriotic Spectacle* (New York, 1858), 14.

16. George Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, Vol. VII (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927–49), 37–38.

17. Burnett, 40.

18. See Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

19. Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address" (1861), in *Selected Speeches and Writings* (New York: Library of America), 284. Lincoln was quoting himself from his 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas.

20. Lincoln, it bears noting, never fully rejected black colonization. See Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011).

21. Robert Finley, "Dialogues on the African Colony," in Isaac V. Brown, *Memoirs of the Rev. Robert Finley, D.D., Late Pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation at Basking Ridge New Jersey and President of Franklin College, Located at Athens Georgia, with Brief Sketches of Some of his Contemporaries and Numerous Notes* (New Brunswick: Terhune and Letson, 1819), 341–42. In "Dialogues," Finley imagines a series of three dialogues between William Penn, founder of the Pennsylvania province, Paul Cuffe, the black emigrationist and shipping magnate who urged African Americans to relocate to Western Africa, and Absalom Jones, the famed black minister and abolitionist who fervently opposed colonization. Their conversations take place in heaven, where the recently deceased Cuffe and Jones join Penn. As expected, Penn and Cuffe ultimately convince Jones of the necessity of colonization. See also Rev. Robert Finley, Letter to John P. Mumford, quoted in *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Vol. 1 (1815, 1825; reprint, Washington, DC: Way and Gideon, 1826), 2.

22. Robert Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, in Brown, *Memoirs*, 142.

23. Although African colonization was a voluntary effort in that the only people who left were free African Americans who chose to, the long-term vision of colonizationists was the removal of all blacks from the U.S. As George Fredrickson writes, "[Colonizationists] meant that their own program—transporting free people of color to Africa—did not constitute a challenge to the

'right' of slaveholders to control their human chattels and dispose of them as they saw fit; but they generally made it clear that their real aim was to increase voluntary manumissions as part of a movement toward the total elimination of black servitude in the United States." *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (1971; reprint, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 10. For more on Finley, see Christopher Castiglia, *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 102–22.

24. Ira Berlin, "The Structure of the Free Negro Caste in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 9.3 (Spring 1976): 300.

25. See ibid.; Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

26. Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 3. See also Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

27. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 9.

28. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Random House, 2000), 596–97.

29. Larry E. Tise, for instance, in his *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840*, centers on the work of northern clerical elites who published "either a book, a pamphlet, or a periodical defense of slavery which argued in favor of the indefinite perpetuation of servitude" (362). Furthermore, a review of collected selections of pre–Civil War defenses of slavery, such as those edited by Drew Gilpin Faust and Paul Finkelman, also reveals the scholarly tendency to spotlight the words of elites and well-known figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas R. Dew, George Fitzhugh, and Alexander H. Stephens. See Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Paul Finkelman, ed., *Defending Slavery, Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003).

30. Harry J. Elam, Jr., "The Device of Race: An Introduction," in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, eds. Harry J. Elam, Jr., and David Krasner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

31. Both "fact" and "case" are allusions to the existential and phenomenological considerations of racial life in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), especially 89–119; and Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50.2 (Spring 2008): 177–218.

32. *The Baltimore Sun*, November 9, 1837.

33. *Daily True Democrat* (Cleveland), September 7, 1848; *Daily True Democrat* (Cleveland), September 11, 1848.

34. Frederick Douglass, "The Unholy Alliance of Negro Hate and Abolitionism," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 5, 1856.

35. Ivy G. Wilson, *Specters of Democracy: Blackness and the Aesthetics of Politics in the Antebellum U.S.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7. Throughout this book, I use the term "full inclusion" to denote what legal scholar Mark Weiner calls "full citizenship in the cultural sense," or the recognition of the "civic majority" that another "group 'belongs,' that it shares certain basic characteristics with the community." Mark Stuart Weiner, *Black Trials: Citizenship from the Beginnings of Slavery to the End of Caste* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 2004), 8.

36. Joanna Brooks, "The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62.1 (January 2005): 77.

37. Russell Parrott, "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade," in *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860*, ed. Richard Newman et al. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 79.

38. Heather S. Nathans, *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787–1861: Lifting the Veil of Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40.

39. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 143.

40. Ibid., 125–33.

41. The classic study of black nationalism in the U.S. from the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century remains Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (1978; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

42. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 21.

43. Corey Capers, "Black Voices, White Print: Racial Practice, Print Publicity, and Order in the Early American Republic," in *Early African American Print Culture*, ed. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 111, 126.

44. Daphne Brooks defines black opacity as "dark points of possibility that create figurative sites for the reconfiguration of black and female bodies on display. A kind of shrouding, this trope of darkness paradoxically allows for corporeal unveiling to yoke with the (re)covering and re-historicizing of the flesh. Dense and spectacular, the opaque performances of marginalized cultural figures . . . [are] able to confound and disrupt conventional constructions of the racialized and gendered body." Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

45. See Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Lhamon, "Introduction," to *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

46. William Wells Brown, *The Anti-Slavery Harp: A Collection of Songs for Anti-Slavery Meetings* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1848), 37.

47. Russ Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 190. See also Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Dis-Covering the Subject of the 'Great Constitutional Discussion,' 1786–1789," *Journal of American History* 79 (1992): 841–73.

48. Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820–1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 158. Both Kimball and Barnum censored the plays they produced. As Kimball alerted the Boston public in an advertisement for his museum theatre: "It is respectfully submitted that in all Pieces produced at this Establishment, all profane expletives and indecent allusions will be totally expunged" ("Boston Museum," *Boston Evening Transcript*, September 2, 1843). As far as matinees were concerned, Barnum's were so popular that he "found it expedient and profitable to open the great Lecture Room every afternoon, as well as every evening on every week-day of the year," but the "day exhibitions were always more thronged than those of the evening" (P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs: Or, Forty Years' Recollections* [New York: American News Company, 1871], 120).

49. One recent example that explores the relationship between the theatre and the movements for temperance, abolitionism, and women's suffrage is Amy E. Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

50. John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 159.

51. Frederick Douglass, "Intemperance and Slavery: An Address Delivered in Cork, Ireland, on 20 October 1845," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, series 1, *Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John Blassingame et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), vol. 1, 56.

52. George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (1971; reprint, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 97–129.

53. Dwight A. McBride, *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 4. I should note that I have decided to forgo extended analyses of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in light of the vast scholarly literature that traces its enormous impact on American sociocultural life; that is, I hope *The Captive Stage* serves as a supplement to that literature by adding some texture, which does not involve *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to our understanding of antebellum performance culture. For a brilliant, paradigm-shifting study of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s effect on mid-nineteenth-century material and theatrical cultures, see Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

54. Martin Robinson Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (Philadelphia, 1852), 203.

55. Ibid., 139.

56. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xvi.

57. On April 16, 2013, Lambda Theta Delta of the University of California, Irvine, an Asian and Asian-American fraternity, released a video on YouTube of

one of its members wearing blackface and performing as rapper Jay-Z. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bEz9RTsie8&feature=youtu.be.

58. Eddie Holloway, quoted in Jamelle Bouie, "College Students, Blackface and How to Talk About Race," *The Nation Online*, November 18, 2011.

59. Gordon, xvi.

CHAPTER 1

1. Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3.

2. There is an extensive literature that details the economic and political exigencies of the post-Revolutionary period. For a thorough and finely wrought survey, see Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

3. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Dis-Covering the Subject of the 'Great Constitutional Discussion,' 1786–1789," *Journal of American History* 79 (1992): 844. See Frye, especially 45–242.

4. See Ira Berlin, "The Structure of the Free Negro Caste in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 9.3 (Spring 1976): 297–318; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 50–118. Berlin defines the Upper South as Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

5. For example, in 1780 a group of seven free "poor Negroes & molattoes" petitioned the Massachusetts revolutionary legislature for voting rights because the state taxed them, explicitly equating their demand with the colonial charge of taxation without representation. "Many of our Colour (as is well known) have cheerfully Entered the field of Battle in the defense of the Common Cause and that (as we conceive) against a similar Exertion of Power." In another case in 1784, a North Carolina slave called Ned Griffin appealed to the state's General Assembly asserting that by way of his "Contract [i.e., serving in the war in his master's place] and merit he is Intitled to his Freedom." Both of these petitions are reprinted in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People of the United States* (New York: Citadel Press), 14–15.

6. As Paul Gilroy writes, "The intellectual and cultural achievements of the black Atlantic populations exist partly inside and not always against the grand narratives of the Enlightenment and its operational principles." Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 48. See also Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

7. John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794–1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 80.

8. For a striking pre–Civil War black-authored analysis of Attucks' death and black participation in the American War of Independence, see William

Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: Walcutt, 1855). I explore the form and function of this text in chapter 3.

9. Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 7, 33–68.

10. Marcus Rediker, "The Revenge of Crispus Attucks; or, The Atlantic Challenge to American Labor History," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 1 (2004): 36, 38.

11. Ibid., 43.

12. Ibid., 47.

13. This term is clearly indebted to political theorist Georgio Agamben's notion of the state of exception in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), and *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

14. See Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28.2 (2010): 31–56.

15. Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 95.

16. Mary Ryan, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Avery Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 132; Shane White, "'It was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741–1834," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 39.

17. Melish, 76–80.

18. For how this unfolded in New England, see Melish, *Disowning Slavery*. For how it took place in New York, which had the largest slave population of any northern state at the turn of the nineteenth century, see Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 72–288; and Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 79–184.

19. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781–82; London: Stockdale, 1787), 229.

20. Heather S. Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 93. For more on Murdock, see Heather S. Nathans, "Trampling the Native Genius: John Murdock versus the Chestnut Street Theatre," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 14 (2002): 29–43.

21. Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1–23.

22. John Murdock, *The Triumphs of Love; Or, Happy Reconciliation* (Philadelphia, 1794), 14.

23. Ibid., 52.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 51–52.

26. Ibid., 52.

27. Ibid., 53.

28. Murdock, 68.

29. Ibid., 69.

30. According to Nathans' research on the play, theatre managers avoided staging *The Politicians* right away because they considered it "too controversial for audiences already on edge from the difficult party politics of the late 1790s." (Nathans, *Slavery and Sentiment*, 48 n. 98).

31. John Murdock, *The Politicians* (Philadelphia, 1798), 20.

32. George Washington, "Farewell Address" (1796), in *George Washington: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 974.

33. Murdock, *The Politicians*, 20–21.

34. Alice Rayner, *Comic Persuasion: Moral Structure in British Comedy from Shakespeare to Stoppard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 7–11.

35. Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 21–27.

36. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 70.

37. Melish, 84–162; Nash, 66–211.

38. See Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (1975; New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

39. Nahum Chandler, "Of Exorbitance: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought," *Criticism* 50 (2008): 345–410.

40. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 164.

41. See Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (1978; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 15–58.

42. See Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Meaning and Memory in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808–1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 16–53.

43. Jane de Forest Shelton, "The New England Negro: A Remnant," *Harper's Magazine* 88 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), 535.

44. Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 84.

45. James Fenimore Cooper, *Satanstoe: or, The Little Page Manuscripts; a Tale of the Colony* (New York: D. Appleton, 1873), 69.

46. Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 66.

47. White, "It was a Proud Day," 31.

48. Glaude, 82–104; White, 31–50.

49. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjections: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 48.

50. *Salem Gazette*, March 18, 1806.

51. *Salem Gazette*, March 21, 1806.

52. *Salem Gazette*, March 18, 1806.

53. James McCune Smith, "Introduction" to Henry Highland Garnet, *A Memorial Discourse* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1865), 20–21.

54. White, 49–50.

55. Henry Sipkins, "An Oration on the Anniversary of the Slave Trade; De-

livered in the African Church of New York City, January 2, 1809," (New York, 1809), in Dorothy Porter Wesley, *Early Negro Writing, 1760–1837* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 365..

56. Ibid., 371.

57. Ibid., 373 (emphasis added).

58. Glaude, 44–104; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 323–48.

59. Peter Williams, "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; Delivered in the African Church in the City of New York, January 1, 1808" (New York, 1808), in Wesley, 350.

60. Glaude, 15–16.

61. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; reprint, London: Verso, 1991), 24.

62. Ibid., 33.

63. Ibid., 24–39.

64. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (1993; reprint, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 202.

65. Ibid.

66. Geneviève Fabre, "African-American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century," in *History and Memory in African American Culture*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Robert G. O'Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 73.

67. Jones reprinted in Porter, 335–42; Sidney reprinted in ibid., 356–64; Williams reprinted in ibid., 344–54.

68. Edward Griffin Parker, *The Golden Age of American Oratory* (Boston: Whittemore, Niles, and Hall, 1857).

69. Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence Is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 246, 257.

70. In *Eloquence Is Power*, Gustafson explores black sacred orality, but not African Americans' secular rhetoric.

71. Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 3–4.

72. Ibid., 191.

73. Jefferson, 233 (emphasis added).

74. Absalom Jones, "A Thanksgiving Sermon, Preached January 1, 1808, In St. Thomas's, or the African Episcopal, Church, Philadelphia: On Account of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, On that Day, By the Congress of the United States" (Philadelphia, 1808), in Porter, 337.

75. Glaude, 94.

76. Porter, 335.

77. Newman, 79.

78. Wilder, 81; *passim*.

79. On these tensions among white listening and reading publics, see Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1–29; 161–222.

80. On the political importance of black literary subjectivity in the antebellum period, see Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1–140; Joanna Brooks, "The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62.1 (January 2005): 67–92.

81. See Joanna Brooks; Joseph Rezek, "The Orations of the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the Uses of Print in the Early Black Atlantic," *Early American Literature* 45.3 (2010): 655–82.

82. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 38.

83. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (Autumn 1985): 1–20.

84. Williams reprinted in Porter, 353. The signers of Williams' manuscript were Benjamin Moore, bishop of the Episcopal Church of New York; Ezekiel Cooper, minister and historian of the Methodist Church; and John Murray and William T. Slocum. All were powerful members of the New York Manumission Society. Ibid., 353–54.

85. See Robert Stepto, "I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control in Four Slave Narratives," in *The Slave's Narrative*, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 225–41.

86. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 20.

87. Porter, 363–64.

88. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 115.

89. The earliest surviving of these broadsides is *Invitation, Addressed to the Marshals of the "Africum Schocietee," at the Commemoration of the "Abolition of the Slave Trade"* (Boston, 1816). The Boston Public Library holds a copy of it. Besides Bobalition, there were also "Reply to Bobalition" broadsides, which "censure both the unknown authors of the initial broadsides and the rowdy white celebrants of the annual celebrations of artillery election and Squantum," and "Riot" broadsides, which "simultaneously define black gender relations as disorderly and dramatize the tyranny of white mobs that attack black households with excessive force." In this chapter, I confine myself to Bobalition but my readings therein apply generally to Reply and Riot. As historian Corey Capers argues, all three forms of the broadsides "were part of a dialogic series; their producers intended them to be read in conversation with one another." Corey Capers, "Black Voices, White Print: Racial Practice, Print Publicity, and Order in the Early American Republic," in *Early African American Print Culture*, ed. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 113.

90. *Grand Celebrashun ob de Bobalition ob African Slabery!!!* (Boston, 1825), Library of Congress.

91. *Grand Bobalition, or 'Great Annibersary Fussible'* (Boston, 1821), Library of Congress.

92. Writing about colonial New England, Michael Warner explains the inseparable bond between orality and textual production in the period. He writes, "New Englanders . . . used [letters] with an intensity equaled by very few other cultures in the world at the time. Yet in an important ideological way it was an oral society. New Englanders accorded a disciplinary privilege to speech and in most contexts insisted on seeing writing as a form of speaking." This "disciplinary privilege," I argue, remained operative in the early nineteenth century. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 21.

93. Gustafson, 267; see also Fliegelman, 193–95.

94. From the hugely popular Mungo of Isaac Bickerstaffe's transatlantic hit *The Padlock* (1768), to Murdock's Sambo of the post-Revolutionary stage, madcap slave characters delighted audiences with their maladroit and (often unintentionally) punning speech. On Bickerstaffe's Mungo, see Miller, 27–76.

95. Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1963; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32–53; George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 43–129.

96. Jefferson, 264–66.

97. William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 24–196.

98. John Quincy Adams, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory, Delivered to the Classes of Senior and Junior Sophisters in Harvard University*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1810), 13–14.

99. Ibid., 15.

100. Ibid., 15–16.

101. See Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*.

102. Adams, 16.

103. Henry Home of Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. 2, 8th ed. (1762; reprint, Edinburgh: Neill and Company, 1807), 351.

104. Fliegelman, 16.

105. *Grand Celebrashun ob de Bobalition ob African Slabery!!!* (Boston, 1825), Library of Congress.

106. *The Grand Celebration! Of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (Boston, 1817), Boston Public Library.

107. *Grand Bobalition, or 'Great Annibersary Fussible'* (Boston, 1821), Library of Congress.

108. *Bobalition of Slavery!!!!!* (Boston, 1818), Boston Public Library.

109. Shane White and Graham J. White. *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 108. For a highly original reading of Clay's work, see Nyong'o, 77–83.

110. Hosea Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the U. States: and the Prejudice Exercised towards Them* (Boston: Knapp, 1837), 41–42.

111. Capers, 111.

112. Ibid., 109–10.

CHAPTER 2

1. Lewis Tappan, *The Life of Arthur Tappan* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 172.

2. Ibid., 170–71.

3. Quoted in Tappan, 171–72.

4. Ibid., 172.

5. See Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 3–103; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 111–67.

6. Nyong'o, 8. See Lott, *Love and Theft*; Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Lhamon, "Introduction," to *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1–92. The respective studies of Lott, Cockrell, and Lhamon are the most influential treatments of early minstrelsy.

7. Lhamon, "Introduction," 28.

8. Nyong'o, 8.

9. See David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1616–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Multiple versions of Jim Crow songs and plays extol Jackson and the policies of the Democrat party. Also, black violence figures prominently in Jim Crow "street prose" and plays such as *Virginia Mummy*. See Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, 95–135, 159–77, 386–98.

10. African Americans did attend early minstrel acts as spectators. As I explore later in this chapter, black leaders frequently lamented this fact. Before 1843, the black dancer, Master Juba, performed in the haunts of Five Points and in other spaces of Lower Manhattan that scholars often associate with early minstrelsy. Charles Dickens extended high praise for Juba in his popular travelogue of North America, *American Notes* (1842). Between 1843 and the Civil War, there were hardly any all-black minstrel troupes. One of them, Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders, was reviewed by Frederick Douglass in his newspaper, *The North Star*, on June 28, 1849.

11. Cockrell, 161.

12. Lhamon, 3–4.

13. Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Harris, *passim*.

14. On black seamen and port culture, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen and the Age of the Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); on the use of slave, indentured, and free black and white labor in

canal construction, see Peter Way, *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially 1–75, for his discussion of pre-1840 canal assembly.

15. Thomas C. Buchanan, "Rascals on the Antebellum Mississippi: African American Steamboat Workers and the St. Louis Hanging of 1841," *Journal of Social History* 34 (2001): 797–98.

16. Ibid., 798.

17. Observations of Catherine Market are some of the earliest and clearest writing extant on secular black expressive culture in the early U.S.

18. Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Book, containing a historical account of the public markets in the cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Brooklyn, with a brief description of every article of human food sold therein, the introduction of cattle in America, and notices of many remarkable specimens* (New York, 1862), 344.

19. Ibid., 344–45.

20. On radical black (performance) aesthetics as the resistance to enslavement, see Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003)*, especially 1–84.

21. Lhamon, 2–3.

22. De Voe notes there were some "excellent 'dancers'" and that a competition among them "raised a sort of strife for the highest honors, i.e. the most cheering and the most collected in the 'hat.'" De Voe, 344.

23. Moten, 18, 41.

24. George Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, Vol. III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927–49), 400, 413, 421.

25. Cockrell, 96–97. Cockrell's account of Dixon's life is thorough, and, as such, it deserves attention. See ibid., 96–139. Yet I take issue with what Cockrell does with that story, namely, the overlay of Dixon's biography onto the texts of early minstrelsy, particularly "Zip Coon," as a way to elucidate the politics that the form and the character enact. He writes, "Dixon, in all the complex contradictory ways by which meaning follows the song, actually lived out its themes. His life, thus, becomes the glass by which we can magnify 'Zip Coon'" (96). This methodology is limiting because Dixon was hardly the only composer and performer of Zip Coon narratives. Indeed, the discourse and derision of Zip Coon and black dandyism on the whole censured black uplift, the "dangers" of amalgamation, and the communal aspirations of free African Americans. Thus, Dixon's life insufficiently "magnifies" the significations of Zip Coon as a *public* figuration. (What Zip Coon might have meant to Dixon is something else.) To find parallels between a character and an actor who played that role is to reduce significantly, and therefore neglect, the extent to which that character signified—a reduction that, in Cockrell's case, fails to account for the importance of Zip Coon within broader political and social formations.

26. In the preface to an 1829 version of "Jim Crow" reprinted in his indispensible compilation, *Series of Old American Songs* (Providence, 1936), S. Foster Damon writes that all three cities laid claim as the birthplace of Jim Crow. Indeed, since the 1830s, there has been little consensus as to how and where Rice began

his act. In my view, this is how it should be because it most reflects the character's functionality: the narratives and meanings of Jim Crow are in many ways just as ambiguous as the contemporaneous "west" from where he hails.

27. Lott, 38.

28. On the differences between slavery in the north, south, and west before 1830, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

29. Lott, 39.

30. Nyong'o, 8–9, 103–34. Lhamon and Cockrell use few, if any, black responses to the form. When they do attempt to understand northern black life, they turn most to police blotters or marriage records to establish intimate sociality—and therefore shared racial and political beliefs—between whites and African Americans. Yet these isolated criminal and erotic relations between individuals are too limited in terms of their evidentiary worth toward broader ideological structures of race. For example, Cockrell writes, "Any reading of the daily newspapers of [Jacksonian] New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, especially the 'Police Court' column, will reveal a common world in which black and whites lived by, worked with, drank among, fought with (to be sure and not to be understated), and loved each other" (85). But "common worlds" are not, *ipso facto*, upheld by common (racial) politics. As I argue in this chapter, the cultural, political, and social history of the Jacksonian north tells a far less utopian story than that Cockrell believes interracial criminality and sex in the period signified.

31. See Rael, *passim*; David Walker, *Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to Those of the United States of America* (Boston, 1829).

32. Wilentz, 172.

33. See Rael, *passim*.

34. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971, 2005), 419–21.

35. Lott, 92.

36. Former artisan and fervent opponent of private property Thomas Skidmore most forcefully articulated this sentiment in his treatise *The Rights of Property to Man!* (1829), which Sean Wilentz calls "the most thoroughgoing 'agrarian' tract every produced by an American" in its argument that "at all times, property rightfully belonged to the entire community." Wilentz, 184–85.

37. For a classic discussion of the dynamics of working-class politics and the Democracy, see ibid., 190–296.

38. See David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1992), 66–77. Roediger traces a history of what he calls "the winding road to *white slavery*." He finds that because "white slavery" was "far more common" than "wage slavery," it "immediately undercut" the ways in which the latter term "called all slavery into question." He goes on to say that "much of the discourse on *white slavery*. . . at times strongly supported the slavery of Blacks" (74). Lott takes issues with Roediger's "skepticism" (Lott's term), arguing that Roediger's analysis suffers from a "fail-

ure to historicize" the terms. He maintains that white labor's alliance with proslavery interests grew "as much out of common enmities as proslavery principles" (Lott, 261, n. 24). As true as this might have been, I suggest that it is not necessarily the case that one of white labor's primary concerns was the black slave. Indeed, one of those "common enmities" between white labor and proslavery ideologues were African Americans and their economic and sociopolitical interests.

39. The term "white slave" also came to signify prostitution and sexual exploitation, thus "genteel factory women rejected the term" (Roediger, 85). For an account of the relation between the term "white slavery" and sexual exploitation in the antebellum period, see Linda Frost, *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850–1877* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 56–87.

40. Wilentz, 62–103.

41. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975), 376.

42. Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, 4; Lott, 129.

43. Eric Foner, "Abolitionism and the Labor Movement in Antebellum America," in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 60–61.

44. Roediger, 71–72.

45. Ibid., 73.

46. Ibid., 76–77.

47. Cockrell, 146–54.

48. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781–82; reprint, London: Stockdale, 1787), 229.

49. In 1838, one Pennsylvania Democrat state official put it this way: "[T]he divisionary line between the races, is so strongly marked by the Creator, that it is unwise and cruelly unjust, in any way, to amalgamate them, for it must be apparent to every well judging person, that the elevation of the black is the degradation of the white man; and by endeavoring to alter the order of nature, we would, in all probability, bring about a war between the races" (Benjamin Martin, quoted in *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Constitutional Convention 1838*, vol. IX, 321). Influential colonizationist Edward Everett frequently argued that free African Americans should be expatriated outside the United States because their "ignorance" and "want" predispose them to crime. Away from the U.S., he claimed, they might remedy their sociological problems and therefore become productive, law-abiding subjects. See Edward Everett, *Orations and Speeches on Various Occasions* (Boston: American Stationers' Company, 1836), especially 309–22.

50. Charles M. Wiltse, "Introduction" to *David Walker's Appeal, In Four Articles: Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but In Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), ix.

51. David Walker, "Preamble" to the *Appeal*, ed. Peter Hinks (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 5; see ibid., 47–82.

52. Ibid., 27.

53. Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 167–72.

54. Ibid., 152. See *To Awaken*, 116–72, for Hinks' important discussion of the circulation of the *Appeal*.

55. Ibid., 172.

56. Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 36–37.

57. *Richmond Enquirer*, February 18, 1830.

58. Walker, 27.

59. Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, 4.

60. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 305–6.

61. Fanny Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839, Volume 2* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1863), 96.

62. Lott, 119.

63. "Jim Crow Still Alive!!!" (Philadelphia 1835). The Library Company of Philadelphia holds a copy of this score.

64. *The Baltimore Sun*, November 9, 1837. The review for *The Baltimore Sun* admits that although these were not Rice's exact words, they capture "the substance of his address."

65. Cockrell, 88.

66. Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, 23.

67. *The Colored American*, December 9, 1837.

68. In early 1841, an "informant" for the *Colored American* sent an account detailing his experience at a minstrel performance. "But what crowned the whole," he reported, was that "he never saw so many *colored persons* at the theatre in his life." According to this informant, the "play was no 'Jim Crow,' nor 'Zip Coon,' but a burlesque upon the colored people" in which the actor "was lost to all self respect, and sunken in the lowest depths of degradation and vice, with his face painted to represent a colored man." Despite this offering of standard minstrel fare, "hundreds [of black spectators] were there, and among whom were many very respectable looking persons." Part of what might also have drawn so many African Americans to the theatre that night was that management, "as a temptation to the poorer and lower classes," lowered ticket prices for the gallery to "twelve and a half cents" from the customary fifty cents. Caught in the middle of the economic crisis that followed the Panic of 1837, theatres throughout the north struggled to remain open. This strategy of cutting prices helped this particular theatre to "survive a short time" longer, according to the paper. *Colored American*, March 6, 1841.

69. The March 6, 1841, account in the *Colored American* notes there were "very respectable looking" African Americans in the audience. Most likely, many of these spectators were simply well dressed workingmen and workingwomen, given how small the black middle class there was and the necessity for that class to follow certain personal and collective standards of behavior, including antitheatricalism, for survival. More to the point, respectability and

"middle-class" appearance were often performative strategies of resistance. These "very respectable looking persons" in the gallery were, in a sense, enacting their own counter-performances of blackness that undermined the "blackness" performed onstage.

70. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 170–216.

71. "Steward's and Cook's Marine Benevolent Society," *The Colored American*, May 2, 1840.

72. Harris, 202.

73. Ibid., 170–216.

74. Ibid.

75. Cockrell, 169.

76. As social historians have shown, white and black workers lived near and frequently with each other. See Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, especially 72–133; White, *Somewhat More Independent*, especially 150–216.

77. See George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 43–129.

78. Stanley Aronowitz, "Writing Labor's History," *Social Text 25/26* (1990): 175.

79. Peter Paul Simons, "Address," reprinted in "A Wicked Conspiracy," *The Colored American*, December 30, 1837.

80. Peter Paul Simons, "Speech" Delivered Before the African Clarkson Association (1839), in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, Volume 3, ed. C. Peter Riley et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 289 (emphasis added).

81. Ibid., 289.

82. Ibid., 291.

83. Ibid., 292.

84. Harris, 216, 170–246.

85. Cockrell, 161.

86. Lott, Cockrell, and Lhamon all find that bourgeois abolitionism was significantly, perhaps wholly, responsible for the failure of the working class to realize interracial solidarity.

CHAPTER 3

1. On race and the franchise in pre-twentieth-century Pennsylvania, see Edward Price, "The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780–1900," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 100.3 (July 1976): 356–73.

2. See Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990), 53–164.

3. *Reports of the Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of 1821 Assembled for the Purpose of Amending the Constitution of the State of New York: Containing all the Official Documents Relating to the Subject, and other Valuable Matter* (Albany, 1821), 357–78.

4. Robert Purvis, "Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disenfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania" (Philadelphia, 1837), re-

printed in Richard Newman et al., eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 133–43.

5. *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), April 16, 1838.

6. To see how this vast trail of reports on "negro suffrage" played out in Philadelphia, for instance, see *Public Ledger*, January 20, 1838; *Public Ledger*, January 22, 1838; *Public Ledger*, February 6, 1838; and *National Gazette and Literary Register*, February 11, 1838.

7. As political historians often point out, however, Jacksonians protested the centralization and concentration of power in institutions such as Congress or national banks all the while cheering the formidable and overweening power of the Jackson administration and other executive offices. See Sean Wilentz, "On Class and Politics in Jacksonian America," *Reviews in American History* 10.4 (1982): 45–63.

8. Ivy G. Wilson, *Specters of Democracy: Blackness and the Aesthetics of Politics in the Antebellum U.S.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

9. Purvis, 140.

10. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (Boston, 1836), in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Alfred R. Ferguson, general editor (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971–2008), 7.

11. Russ Castronovo's work is particularly important in this regard. See his *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

12. I have not been able to find in the writings of southern proslavery ideologues an emphasis on the role of slaves in the world-historical events of the American War of Independence as justification for race-based chattel slavery.

13. Robert S. Cox, "Vox Populi: Spiritualism and George Washington's Postmortem Career," *Early American Studies* 1.1 (Spring 2003): 232.

14. See Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

15. Paul Finkelman, *Defending Slavery, Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 29. For a mordant take on the historical and representational shortcomings of Washington vis-à-vis black freedom and inclusion from the period, see cultural critic and sketch writer William J. "Ethiop" Wilson's ekphrastic renderings of Mount Vernon in "Picture IX" of his 1858 "Afric-American Picture Gallery" in *The Anglo-African Magazine*, January 1859, reprinted in William Loren Katz, ed., *The Anglo-African Magazine* Volume 1 (New York: Arno Press, 1968). See also Wilson, *Specters of Democracy*, 145–68.

16. Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation*, 39.

17. Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 354; Castronovo, 190.

18. For one of the most thorough accounts of the emergence of the antebellum black public sphere, see Patrick Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

19. Ibid., 12–53.

20. Ibid., 45.

21. Henry Highland Garnet, "Address to the Slaves of the United States" (1843, 1848), in *Pamphlets of Protest*, 163.

22. Mitch Kachun, "Antebellum African Americans, Public Commemoration, and the Haitian Revolution: A Problem of Historical Mythmaking," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26.2 (Summer 2006): 249–73.

23. William Wells Brown, *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots. A Lecture* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855).

24. Ibid., 37.

25. Ibid., 38 (emphasis added).

26. William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution: with Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons: to which is added a Brief Survey of the Condition and Prospects of Colored Americans* (Boston: Walcutt, 1855), 13–14.

27. For a brilliant reading of Crispus Attucks Day, see Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 54–68. On Nell's relationship to drama and theatrical production, see Heather S. Nathans, *Slavery and Sentiment of the American Stage, 1781–1861: Lifting the Veil of Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 238–46.

28. Nell, 18.

29. Nell, 231–32, 233–35, 211–13, 156.

30. Ibid., 231–35.

31. Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 225.

32. See Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

33. Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship*, 4.

34. Ibid., 6.

35. Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation*, 9.

36. Abraham Lincoln, "Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois" (1838), in *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 1, ed. John Nicolay and John Hay (New York: Francis D. Tandy Company, 1905), 47–48.

37. Samuel Woodworth, *The Poetical Works of Samuel Woodworth*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Woodworth (New York: Scribner, 1861), 11–30.

38. Bruce McConachie, "American Theatre in Context, from the Beginnings to 1870," in Don B. Wilmeth and C. W. E. Bigsby, eds., *The Cambridge History of American Theatre: Beginnings to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 154.

39. George Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, Vol. III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927–49), 648.

40. See Hosea Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the U. States: and the Prejudice Exercised towards Them* (Boston: Knapp, 1837), 35–46.

41. Samuel Woodworth, *King's Bridge Cottage* (New York, 1826).

42. Hartman, 52–53.

43. Two prominent examples are the songs "My Old Kentucky Home" (1853)

by Stephen Foster and "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" (1878) by James A. Bland.

44. Woodworth, *King's Bridge Cottage* (New York, 1826).

45. See Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (1961; reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

46. Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 187.

47. Fredrickson, 101.

48. Anonymous, *The Life of Joice Heth, the Nurse of Gen. George Washington* (New York: Printed for the Publisher, 1835). This text, as Barnum eventually admitted, was written by his co-manager of the Heth exhibit, Levi Lyman.

49. *New York Evening Star*, August 22, 1835.

50. Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 90–105.

51. Ibid., 2.

52. Uri McMillan, "Mammy-Memory: Staging Joice Heth, or the Curious Phenomenon of the 'Ancient Negress,'" *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 22.1 (2012): 36.

53. Reiss, 100–105.

54. De Tocqueville put it this way: "The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one. Their strictly Puritanical origin—their exclusively commercial habits—even the country they inhabit, which seems to divert their minds from the pursuit of science, literature, and the arts—the proximity of Europe, which allows them to neglect these pursuits without relapsing into barbarism—a thousand special causes, of which I have only been able to point out the more important—have singularly concurred to fix the mind of the American upon purely practical objects." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Bantam Books, 2000, 2004), 548.

55. Reiss, 69.

56. Ibid., 134–40.

57. Ibid., 7.

58. *New York Sun*, August 20, 1835.

59. See Rosemarie Garland Thompson, "Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1–22.

60. *New York Sun*, August 20, 1835.

61. Ibid.

62. See Paul Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), especially 3–19, 46–69, 126–45; Edlie L. Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), especially 1–18, 77–126.

63. Reiss, 26. Barnum did upset antislavery clergy in Providence, Rhode Island, but he used their fervor against them, claiming that the proceeds of the Heth exhibition there would go to antislavery causes, including the purchase of her great-grandchildren still enslaved in Kentucky. His ruse worked: the clergy urged the public to patronize the exhibit and thus helped increase Barnum's profits. See ibid., 74–78.

64. See Rael, 82–117.

65. Anonymous, *The Life of Joice Heth, the Nurse of Gen. George Washington*, 3–5.

66. Robert Stepto, "I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control in Four Slave Narratives," in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 226–27.

67. *New York Atlas*, April 20, 1845, reprinted in Phineas T. Barnum and James W. Cook, ed., *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader: Nothing Else Like It in the Universe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 114.

68. Phineas T. Barnum, *The Adventures of an Adventurer: Being some Passages in the Life of Barnaby Diddleum* (1841), reprint in ibid., 21–22 (emphasis added).

69. Phineas Taylor Barnum, *The Autobiography of P.T. Barnum: Clerk, Merchant, Editor, and Showman* (London: Ward and Lock, 1855), 54–55.

70. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 188. Johnson cautions that it is necessary to recognize that these aesthetics and the "phantasmic dreams" they limn "must be made material if they are to come true," and the less powerful frequently shape and direct those materializations.

71. For more on the "What Is It?" exhibition, see James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 119–62.

72. A. H. Saxon, *P.T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 84–85.

73. Another example is James Gilbert Burnett's 1858 *Blanche of Brandywine*, which I discuss in the Introduction.

74. Charles Peirce, "The Categories Defended Lecture" (1903), in *The Essential Charles Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893–1913)*, ed. The Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 163.

75. George Jaimson, *The Revolutionary Soldier* (Boston: William V. Spencer, 1850). The Federal Street Theatre was the leading theatre in Boston from its opening in 1798 through at least the 1830s.

76. Ibid., 3–4.

77. Ibid., 4.

78. Ibid., 9.

79. Ibid., 9–10.

80. Ibid., 13.

81. Ibid., 19.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, The A.M.E. Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 137.

85. George Lionel Stevens, *The Patriot* (Boston, 1834).

86. Ibid., 36. *The Patriot* also borrowed directly from the contemporary minstrel stage. Throughout the play, Sambo sings and dances his own version of "Jim Crow": "'Weel about—turn about—do just so—ebery time weel about jump Sambo.'"

87. Hartman, 53.

88. Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 1.

89. See Eric Thomas Slauter, "Neoclassical Culture in a Society with Slaves: Race and Rights in the Age of Wheatley," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2 (2004): 81–122. In late 1775, Wheatley sent Washington a letter of support and a poem, "To His Excellency George Washington." In a February 1776 letter, he thanked her and proposed a possible meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Literary historian and biographer Vincent Carretta doubts the two met in Cambridge that winter because it would have been too dangerous, but suggests the two might have visited each other in Providence that April. Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 154–57. For more on Powers and the relation between antebellum sculpture and slavery, see Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 21–51.

90. John Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences and Letters of John Trumbull, from 1756–1841* (New Haven: B. L. Hamlen, 1841), 17–38.

91. Ibid., 93.

92. George Washington Parke Curtis, Mary Randolph Custis Lee, and Benson John Lossing, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1860), 521 (original emphasis).

93. Trumbull, 75.

94. Ibid., 90–98.

95. George Washington, *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799: Series 5 Financial Papers, 1750–72*, Ledger Book 1, 261.

96. Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Walter Jones, Monticello, January 2, 1814, in Thomas Jefferson and Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Writings* (New York: Library Company of America, 1984), 1319.

97. George Washington, *The Diaries of George Washington*, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), vol. 2, 238n, 278, vol. 3, 276n.

98. George Washington Parke Curtis et al., 157, 488.

99. Ibid., 157. Washington's will only stipulates thirty dollars a year for Lee "during his natural life," not one hundred and fifty. George Washington, "Last Will and Testament" (1799), in *George Washington: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 1024.

100. Ibid. There were more than 124 slaves at Washington's service at the time

of his death, but he did not have legal jurisdiction over the rest, who were either dower slaves from Martha Washington's first marriage or leased from other masters.

101. Michael A. Gomez, "Muslims in Early America," *The Journal of Southern History* 60.4 (November 1994): 683. See also Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

102. Gomez, 684–87.

103. Ibid., 687.

104. George Washington to Tench Tilghman, Mount Vernon, March 24, 1784, in *Writings*, 555–56.

105. Carrie Rebora Barratt, "Faces of a New Nation: American Portraits of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 61.1 (Summer 2003): 25.

106. Charles Henry Hart, *Edward Savage, Painter and Engraver: And His Unfinished Copper-Plate of "The Congress Voting Independence"* (Boston, 1905), 6–14; Wendy Wick Reaves, *George Washington, an American Icon: The Eighteenth-century Graphic Portraits* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 1982), 43.

107. Slauter, 121.

108. See ibid., 81–122.

CHAPTER 4

1. Marc Robinson, *The American Play: 1787–2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 28.

2. In 1890, reflecting on authorial agency and the compositional dynamics of mid-nineteenth-century American drama, playwright Dion Boucicault noted: "Public opinion [was] the highest and sole court of jurisdiction in literary and artistic matters . . . and the drama is, therefore, made by the collaboration of the people and poet." Dion Boucicault, quoted in Jeffrey H. Richards, ed., *Early American Drama* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 444.

3. Plato, *Laws*, quoted in Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 53.

4. Plato frets, "When they crowd into the seats in the assembly or law courts or theatre, or get together in camp or any other popular meeting place, and, with a great deal of noise and a great lack of moderation, shout and clap their approval or disapproval of what is proposed or done, till the rocks and the whole place re-echo, and redouble the noise of their boos and applause. Can a young man's heart remain unmoved by all this? How can his individual training stand the strain? Won't he be swamped by the flood of popular praise and blame, and be carried away with all the stream till he finds himself agreeing with popular ideas of what is admirable or disgraceful, behaving like the crowd and becoming one of them (492b-c)." H. D. P. Lee, trans., *The Republic*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin, 2003), 214.

5. In 1824, the *North American Review* lamented that American playwrights