

Antislavery Media: Circulating Revolution in the United States

By

Zach Marshall

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(English)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2017

Date of final examination: 3/17/2017

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Russ Castronovo, Professor, English

David Zimmerman, Professor, English

Monique Allewaert, Associate Professor, English

Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, Professor, English

Jonathan Senchyne, Assistant Professor, School of Library and Information Studies

© Copyright by Zach Marshall 2017
All Rights Reserved

for Hannah and Ramona

Acknowledgements

Many people have played a role in bringing this project to its finish. First, I must thank my advisors for the guidance they've offered along the way. To my director Russ Castronovo for helping me early on to hone an idea for the project and responding to multiple drafts of each chapter of the dissertation, always encouraging me to sharpen my central arguments. To Monique Allewaert for early on giving me advice about how to think about textuality and mediation and responding to chapter drafts. To David Zimmerman for his detailed feedback on my chapters and for helping me talk through my ideas to make them more persuasive. To Cherene Sherrard-Johnson for carefully reading and responding to the finalized dissertation at the defense. To Jonathan Senchyne for introducing me to the study of print culture and book history.

Many others have also offered support over the years as readers and respondents to my work in progress. Ambar Meneses for your careful responses to each of my chapters, pushing me to focus on a central arc of an argument, helping me to punchily articulate the sub-arguments, and listening to me talk through what I really wanted to say. To the following for critical readings of my chapter on astronomical events: Soyica Diggs-Colbert and my cohort at the Futures of American Studies, Julia Dauer, and especially the readers at *J19*. To two for responding to my chapter on singing and for several productive conversations about sound studies: Theresa Nguyen and Mary Caton Lingold. To many respondents at conferences over the years. To guest lecturers for the Americanist Speaker Series who had conversations with me about my work, including Meredith McGill, Ivy Wilson, and Christopher Freeburg. To Rebecca Steffy Couch for telling me to look more carefully at scholarly writing I appreciated in order to become a better writer. To Nancy Linh Karls and the UW Dissertation Camp for helping me to think about how my writing process supports the work I produce. To Jarrett Chapin for always

challenging me to consider and articulate connections between our reading group's material and my research. To Brad Hughes for always asking about and being interested in my research.

I'm also grateful for the funding that made it possible to complete this work: from the English department through teaching appointments and two summer fellowships, from the Mellon foundation for a summer fellowship, and from the University of Wisconsin-Madison for a University Fellowship.

Finally, to my friends and family for emotional support: my parents, parents-in-law, and Ramona. And especially to Hannah for always being supportive and for working hard to ensure that I had the time and space to carry out this work. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Ephemeral Media	1
Ch. 1: Signs in the Heavens and the Distress of Nations: Heavenly Media in Nat Turner, John Quincy Adams, and the Second Adventists	26
Ch. 2: Supporting the Substance: Reading Sojourner Truth's Sonic Tactics	54
Ch. 3: "An Immense Chain of Swamps": Fugitive Networks in Dred and Twelve Years a Slave .	93
Ch. 4: Incendiary Media: Antislavery Print's Material-Ephemeral Impact	130
Bibliography.....	167

Abstract

This project examines ephemeral media—their substance, their communication circuits, and narratives about how they worked—in order to reimagine the objects, encounters, networks, and affects of communication in the nineteenth century. Many slaves, free blacks, and whites communicated in ways that disrupted the system of slavery. Some like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe used print; others used songs and eclipses, undertheorized forms of media that were more transient than print but just as consequential. Media studies calls attention to the physical forms of communication rather than to content alone, but the field has often overlooked how narrative shapes the ways media operate, especially for sounds or environments, whose printed descriptions are more durable than their forms. Bringing the methods of media studies to the literature of slavery enables me to conceptualize revolutionary claims, such as an eclipse’s potential to coordinate an interstate revolt, a swamp’s potential to link remote hideouts with Southern plantations, and singing’s ability to stop a riot. Communicating via eclipse, swamp, song, or newspaper—methods often overlooked in media and literary studies—advanced users’ revolutionary goals: prompting slave uprising, altering listeners’ consciousness, or carving out social space in forbidding landscapes.

This project broadens what count as media objects to include substances that are short-lived yet material, such as sound waves, ecological environments, astronomical events, and paper and ink. Ephemeral media exist in the print record through accounts about the unique affordances of particular modes of communication by printers, preachers, poets, scientists, and statesmen. Often interpreted as rhetorical or imaginary, these accounts recur across contexts, forming cultural narratives that project and amplify a medium’s function. I argue that users adopted these media in order to interrupt bystanders’ consciousness, challenge regional communication networks, connect with distant communities, and destabilize reader’s beliefs. Such attention to ephemeral media calls for renewed attention to material substances and

circulation patterns in antislavery texts from *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* to Stowe's antislavery novels and William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *The Liberator*.

Introduction: Ephemeral Media

Towards the end of his jeremiad on Nat Turner's recent slave insurrection in Northampton, Virginia, William Lloyd Garrison makes the following observation in *The Liberator*:

Ye accuse the pacific friends of emancipation of instigating the slaves to revolt. Take back the charge as foul slander. The slaves need no incentives at our hands. They will find them in their stripes—in their emaciated bodies—in their ceaseless toil—in their ignorant minds—in every field, in every valley, on every hill-top and mountain, wherever you and your fathers have fought for liberty—in your speeches, your conversations, your celebrations, your pamphlets, your newspapers—voices in the air, sounds from across the ocean, invitations to resistance above, below, around them! What more do they need? (*The Liberator*, Sept. 3, 1831, p. 3)

Garrison's remarks rebut an accusation frequently made against abolitionists: that they used print to spread insurrectionary ideas to slaves. Garrison, however, downplays the unique ability of print to foment revolution by positioning print within a broader media environment. He redraws the circuits of communication so that slaves are not acted upon by abolitionist print but by the passing circumstances of their everyday lives: not only the brutalities of slave life, but also landscapes ("in every field, in every valley, on every hill-top and mountain"), sounds ("your speeches, your conversations" and "voices in the air, sounds from across the ocean"), annual rhythms ("your celebrations"), even the sky and the grave ("invitations to resistance above, below"). Following David Walker's lead in the *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), Garrison believed slaves were awash in a myriad of media that pointed out the injustice of slavery.

What might scholars of media and slave literature discover if they took William Lloyd Garrison's claim as a call to broaden the category of media to include short-lived communication practices, contexts, and events? What new circuits of antislavery communication across supposedly separate locations, communities, and disciplines might such a broader definition uncover? This project takes up the task of theorizing ephemeral media, recovering them from the literature of slavery, and showing how slaves and free people adopted and circulated them to accomplish their revolutionary goals.

For much of the field's existence, media studies has focused on durable objects that mediate communication. Marshall McLuhan's field defining work *Understanding Media* (1964) established this focus on the apparatuses of mass communication—television, telephone, radio, film—and this framework informed much subsequent work on media. Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982) claimed that writing is a technology that changes the way people think and interact with each other because of its ability to store information outside of human memories. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) famously posits novels and newspapers as the two primary technologies for creating and circulating national consciousness. Friedrich Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999) uses the media objects from its title as a structure for its reflections on the ways mass media shape modern life. Niklas Luhmann's *The Reality of the Mass Media* (2000) argues that people know the world primarily through mass media outlets such as news and advertising agencies.¹ Although Lisa Gitelman offers more comprehensive definitions of media and technology than these other five in her second book on media history *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (2006), her work

¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, trans. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999); Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, Kathleen Cross, trans. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000).

nevertheless tends to focus on durable objects: gramophones, tinfoil, the internet, the PDF.² This emphasis on material objects reverberates in fields that overlap with media studies such as book history or print culture studies, which prioritize objects like books or newspapers as stable locations for their respective disciplinary conversations.³ Although these fields' scope often extends beyond objects into communication circuits and reading modes, the book or print object usually remains the focus of such studies because of its ability to record information in a durable form.

One problem with focusing on objects is that it limits the amount of attention devoted to the complex forces at play in mediation. Raymond Williams makes a significant deviation from this focus on media objects, arguing that the category of media should be subsumed into the category of social practices.⁴ Williams writes the following concerning art and media: "Every specific art has dissolved into it, at every level of its operation, not only specific social relationships, which in a given phase define it..., but also specific material means of production, on the mastery of which its production depends. It is because they are dissolved that they are not 'media'" (163). Within Williams' larger argument about how the relationship between artist and art object changes over time, he claims that social relationships should take precedence over contemporary emphasis on media objects. On the other hand, Williams' preference for social practice as the defining category of cultural analysis may go too far, and W. J. T. Mitchell claims Williams's shift dilutes the coherence of media as an analytical category by reducing everything to social practice.⁵ Instead, Mitchell proposes an approach to media that holds onto the importance of a material object but also attempts, similarly, to nuance the definition by showing

² Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: New Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006). For an argument regarding the durability of the internet and digital documents, see Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

³ Cf. McGill's "The Materiality of the Text."

⁴ Raymond Williams, "From Medium to Social Practice," in *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 258-264.

⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005), 204.

how media depend on more than singular material forms but on complex networks of spaces, objects, and people. Mitchell offers ten “theses” on media, the following three of which are most relevant for my argument: “3. A medium is both a system and an environment. 4. There is always something outside a medium. 5. All media are mixed media.” (211).⁶ Mitchell’s theses challenge simplified concepts of media: a medium is never just a discrete thing like a cassette tape but rather “a complex social institution that contains individuals within it” (213).

Like Mitchell, Gitelman adds nuance to the theory of media by naming the multiple aspects of mediation the field often downplays. Gitelman writes, “I define media as socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaging with popular ontologies of representation” (7). Gitelman’s definition contains at least five parts: a) the matter or substance of a medium (“technological forms”); b) the practices one must engage in to use a medium (“associated protocols”); c) the communities that are necessary for an act of communication to occur (“different people on the same mental map”); d) the knowledge about media captured in stories people tell about what media do and how they work (“popular ontologies of representation”); and, implicitly, e) proper timing, since all these parts have to happen simultaneously or in sequence at different locations on a communication circuit for communication to occur. By showing how a medium’s material form (object form for Gitelman) is one small part in a larger structure, Gitelman’s definition opens up a space for thinking about media in the early nineteenth century that were less durable than print. Unlike Williams’ shift in focus from media to social practices, Gitelman holds onto both media and social practices. Gitelman’s both/and stance is significant for my project because not all the media I study are

⁶ Theses seven through ten explain how Mitchell conceives of images as the “principal currency of media,” which I’m not sure I fully agree with—he bases his argument on a split definition between visual images and assumed embodiment (for speech), that ultimately privileges the visual in a way that certainly wouldn’t hold within the field of disability studies.

objects, and yet considering them as social practices puts agency into the hands of communities, neglecting the ways that practices materialize in forms that circulate on their own. Moreover, her emphasis on “popular ontologies of representation” controversially and productively argues that narratives about a medium’s function that circulate among users are as important as how a medium is fabricated. In this project, I take her argument a step further and argue that such narratives not only project but amplify a medium’s effects.

Gitelman and Mitchell both emphasize that, in order to study media, one must pay attention to their users, their environments, the networks they move through, and the practices they promote. Their definitions flesh out an argument Michael Warner makes about technology in *Letters of the Republic* (1990), still a foundational work on media in early America: people shouldn’t think “that technology has an ontological status prior to culture” (7). In other words, media objects do not come inscribed with instructions for how they work but grow into certain uses through mutual interactions with users—users adapting media objects to their needs and users adapting themselves to media objects. If media consist of materials, practices, communities, and knowledge, then by lowering the material requirements to include objects that aren’t as durable or self-contained as books or paintings, new forms of media will become legible. Broadening the material requirement for media suggests that things we might describe as practices, like singing or festivals, or things we might classify as nature rather than technology, like swamps or the sun, can communicate because they intersect with specific knowledge, practices, and communities, to carry information.

This broader definition of media better captures the transitions the concept of media underwent before and during the nineteenth-century. Before object-based media technologies such as daguerreotypes and the telegraph started to narrow applications of the term “medium,” people had a broader concept of media. Raymond Williams pinpoints this historical semantic shift:

There has probably been a convergence of three senses: (i) the old general sense of an intervening or intermediate agency or substance; (ii) the conscious technical sense, as in the distinction between print and sound and vision as **media**; (iii) the specialized capitalist sense, in which a newspaper or broadcasting service – something that already exists or can be planned – is seen as a **medium** for something else, such as advertising.⁷

Definition (iii) indicates broadcast media, especially the news and advertising, which people frequently refer to as “the media” in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Definition (ii) indicates technologies of print, sound, and sight, implying recording technologies such as books, phonographs, and films. Definition (i) indicates something prior to (ii) and (iii), a more general sense which considers a medium to be a substance like air or water that fills a container and acts as a conductor. Williams’ source for the “old general sense” of media as an “intervening agency or substance” comes from Burton, who draws from Aristotle’s *De Anima*. In *De Anima*, Aristotle discusses a “transparent” or “intervening” “medium” which is necessary for color perception, as well as other forms of sensory perception. “So it is the intervening medium that is moved by odor and sound, and it is by the intervening medium that the corresponding sense organ is moved” (31-32).⁸ Air, water, and other substances constitute such intervening media, according to Aristotle, and without media, such as in a vacuum, perception is not possible. As Kevis Goodman explains, eighteenth century scientists frequently used Aristotle’s language of mediation to discuss human sensation and the substances that external stimuli travelled through in order to reach humans’ eyes, ears, and noses.⁹

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 203 (bolding in original).

⁸ Aristotle’s *On the Soul (De Anima)*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, IA: Peripatetic P, 1981).

⁹ Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 20.

In early nineteenth century texts, the concept of medium fluctuated between substances of perception, practices, and physical objects that held meaning. For example, Harriet Beecher Stowe uses the term in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to describe the hair that Eva gave to Topsy before she died, hair that played a part in Topsy's changed behavior and Miss Ophelia's changed perspective: "She [Miss Ophelia] viewed her [Topsy] now through the softened medium [hair] that Eva's hand had first held before her eyes" (Chapter 28, "Reunion"). The January 1859 issue of the *Anglo-African Magazine* contains two broader applications of "medium": in an article on "Alexandre Dumas," "Not a few of the works of Dumas have reached American readers by the medium of translation and republication" (5); and in Martin Delany's article on "The Attraction of Planets," "Supposing every ray of light emanating from this immense surface of two millions four hundred thousand miles of a circle—which doubtless is the case—to be a medium for active electrical attraction, its impulsive influence upon the earth will not for a moment be doubted" (19). In the first example, "medium" describes processes that circulate novels, but novels are not the medium, the process of translation is; in the second, rays of light act as media that carry electricity. Across this cursory sampling of uses, the concept of "medium" describes ad hoc objects, practices, and unquantifiable substances. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of media as substances that conduct information began to converge with the concept of media as distinct objects as people increasingly associated media with technologies created by humans, a convergence which one can see in Williams' definition (ii), especially in print technology.¹⁰ Williams attributes this shift to a crisis in the relationship between art and society in which art and mechanical work were becoming less distinguishable since both were

¹⁰ Even though "technical sense" might not imply *technology*, the phrase does imply specialized knowledge, which wouldn't apply to ordinary human sensation.

commodity forms, a claim similar to Walter Benjamin's argument that mechanical reproduction removes the aura of originality from works of art.¹¹

Even more importantly, a broader definition of media allows us to study media that have been invisible or understudied as media because they lack a durable object. My project addresses such a gap in studies that examine how media circulated reform and revolutionary movements during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Previously, studies of media and reform, especially in book history and print culture studies, have tended to focus on print and writing to the exclusion of most other forms of communication. These studies tend to assume that media forms like novels and newspapers re-form or re-shape social relationships as a way of accomplishing their revolutionary goals.¹² For example, through her focus on print's materiality and the relationship between physical texts and locales, Trish Loughran's *The Republic in Print* (2007) astutely critiques overstatements of print's role in sparking a revolution in the American colonies in 1776.¹³ However, while her critique of print circulation

¹¹ Cf. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin was writing about the early days of film; as a mass-producible commodity, film lost the aura of originality which works of arts possessed. Williams, "From Medium to Social Practice," 160-163.

¹² Jurgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson are, of course, the primary theoretical sources of this idea. Habermas (1964) writes about the use of journalism and the free press during the eighteenth century: "This type of journalism can be observed above all during periods of revolution when newspapers of the smallest political groups and organizations spring up.... the appearance of a political newspaper meant joining the struggle for freedom and public opinion, and thus for the public sphere as a principle" (1575). Anderson (1983) argues that newspapers particularly work to solidify ideas of nationalism through an imagined continuity among readers, something that he claims was even more prominent in eighteenth century colonies than in Habermas's European coffee houses. But this bias is ubiquitously held even in popular discourse, considering that most Americans are taught to revere print documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and Bill of Rights as the sources of "the United States of America" through a colonial separation and a re-establishment of a nation (cf. Loughran xviii).

Nevertheless, I don't mean to suggest that all of American literary studies or history is fully print-centric. Studies such as Jay Fliegelman's *Declaring Independence* (1993), Christopher Looby's *Voicing America* (1996), Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* (1996), and Sandra Gustafson's *Eloquence is Power* (2000) demonstrate that scholars have for a while now been shifting their focus away from "the text" and paying attention to alternatives to print such as oral forms and performance.

¹³ In reference to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*—commonly cited as the text responsible for spreading revolutionary fervor—Loughran writes, "While *Common Sense* is frequently cited as 'the first American bestseller,' it remains one of the most mystified objects in the museum of American history. No printed text has garnered so much responsibility for inciting American nationalism as *Common Sense*, yet its history as a material text has been

from the American revolutionary era down through the American Civil War powerfully historicizes assumptions about print's historical success at spreading revolutionary ideas among mainstream communities, her project does not consider non-print media through which activists have tried to circulate social reforms or revolutionary ideas. My project considers these non-print media, examining communication acts under the system of slavery, where the ability to use print was prohibited in law and restricted in practice. For my project, though, the idea of a reform- or revolution-promoting medium goes beyond media forms that have persuading or spreading information as their primary goal; I also include forms that reshaped the conditions of daily life, which is why I examine a spatial medium like the swamp, which helped slaves to reform their circumstances, but not through persuasion or circulation of information.¹⁴

This emphasis on print as the primary medium of revolution extends to studies of literature on slavery. While many studies have considered the anomalous presence of slavery during the "age of revolution" and attempted to show how an event such as the Haitian Revolution was connected to the presumably more important French and American revolutions, little work has been done to consider how the impulse to revolt spread among populations which contained a minority of print-literate members.¹⁵ C. L. R. James, for example, illustrates this bias toward literate actors and print-based media in *The Black Jacobins* (1938) when he argues that Toussaint l'Ouverture was the ideal leader of the San Domingo Revolution primarily because he was able to read and write. Unlike Garrison, who grounds slave rebellion in slave life in the passage I started with, James emphasizes the story of l'Ouverture reading the Abbé

largely ignored by historians, literary critics, and political scientists alike" (34). Loughran argues that common knowledge about *Common Sense* exaggerates its circulation and influence.

¹⁴ Cf. Frantz Fanon's discussion of natives and guns in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961): "The native who decides to put the program into practice... is ready for violence at all times" (37) and "the guns go off by themselves" (71).

¹⁵ Susan Buck-Morss's article "Hegel and Haiti" (2000) stands out as a potential exception to this claim, but I would argue that her focus is on how ideas about the Haitian Revolution spread through print in Europe (ultimately to Hegel via the journal *Minerva*); even her visual documentation of freemasonry in Haiti provides a narrative about the *existence* of (secret) ideas but not *circulation*.

Raynal's analysis of the deplorable situation of the slaves in the French colony of San Domingo as a primary source of the Haitian Revolution.¹⁶ James also emphasizes l'Ouverture's textual output, namely his *Constitution* and his letters to French ministers. However, James' history points out that l'Ouverture's literacy was highly exceptional, not to mention that l'Ouverture joined the uprising late and rose to a leadership role after the revolution had already begun—results of his literacy, according to James. More recent texts on slavery and freedom similarly focus on writing.¹⁷ Most notably, Peter Hinks's *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren* (1997) traces the circulation of David Walker's *Appeal* into Southern states, implying a connection between circulation of the *Appeal* and Nat Turner's revolt; in the introduction to *Abolition's Public Sphere* (2003), Robert Fanuzzi makes this connection between northern print (Garrison's *Liberator*) and southern revolt more explicit.¹⁸

While historians of slavery have produced many studies of slave revolts, most do not offer sustained analyses of the communication networks they reference but only mention them as potentially interesting topics which are not relevant to their purposes.¹⁹ Michel-Rolph

¹⁶ James does discuss other potential "sources" of the revolution, including the Voodoo rituals which were performed by defected slaves in the hills and plots which came out of these meetings such as a poisoning plot, but he ultimately shapes his history of the revolution around Toussaint and views him as the key to the eventual success of the revolution.

¹⁷ Christopher Hager's *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing* (2013) examines unique manuscripts written by slaves to rethink how the act of writing influenced slaves' perception of their freedom, and David Kazanjian's *The Brink of Freedom* (2016) interrogates grand narratives of freedom by examining the letters of emancipated slaves who were sent to Liberia, but both of these projects use script literacy as one of their primary frames of analysis. Two exceptions are worth mentioning: Daphne Brooks' *Bodies in Dissent* (2006) considers black performance as a primary medium of communicating dissent, and Michael Chaney's *Fugitive Vision* (2009) juxtaposes image and literary representation in order to examine how the disjunctions between image and text critique the system of slavery.

¹⁸ Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997); Fanuzzi writes, "When a copy of *The Liberator* was found on the person of one of Nat Turner's accomplices, Southern governors and legislatures named the abolitionist editor as a virtual accomplice" (xx); Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition's Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003)—Fanuzzi is, however, incorrect in his assertion that Virginian slaves were caught with copies of *The Liberator*.

¹⁹ I base this generalization on three works which I've read, all from the twentieth century, which most twentieth-century scholarly texts I've encountered cite as their main sources. Most studies of slave revolts begin with Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943), which provides excellent encyclopedic narratives of a variety of slave revolts. John W. Blassingame's *The Slave Community* (1972), which is cited by many authors I've

Trouillot (1995) in his analysis of histories of the Haitian Revolution is one of the few historians who points out this problem, “The existence of extended communication networks among slaves, of which we have only a glimpse, has not been a ‘serious’ subject of historical research” (103). While literacy rates were not as ubiquitous in the continental American colonies as John Adams claimed,²⁰ they were likely drastically lower among the slaves of San Domingo, whom slave-owners prohibited from learning to read, let alone operating a printing press. So how did the plan to revolt and the motivation and impetus to act spread among a population that was unreachable by print because of illiteracy and suppression of writing? As Garrison suggests, the answer to this question requires us to broaden our understanding of what counts as communication media.

Contributing to a growing trend in scholarship to expand textual archives, my project examines the ways antislavery activists used strategic communication practices to disrupt the system of slavery. A few recent works have already advocated for expanded notions of communication. For example, Matt Cohen’s *The Networked Wilderness* (2009) demonstrates what a broader definition of text can contribute to literary-historical studies of Native American and settler communication pathways. Cohen asks what the fields of the history of the book and Native American studies might gain if they viewed encounters between Puritans in New England and Native Peoples as sites of multimedia exchange; he writes, “The notion that Native America was doomed by difference is rooted in part in a presumed absence of sophisticated information systems, as compared to those underpinning the English colonial sociopolitical order” (4). Cohen critiques a disciplinary bias toward a certain medium—the book. Along similar lines,

encountered, from Eric Sundquist to Saidiya Hartman, also considers slave rebellion, but draws primarily on Aptheker. Eugene Genovese’s *From Rebellion to Revolution* (1979) was groundbreaking in its time for considering slave revolts from the scale of the hemisphere, but his references to communication networks in slavery contexts are vague.

²⁰ Adams writes, “A native American who cannot read and write is as rare as a comet or an earthquake” (qtd. in Cathy Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word*, 121).

Birgit Brander Rasmussen makes a case for including “non-alphabetic literatures” as objects of literary studies in *Queequeg’s Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature* (2012). Rather than searching for a disciplinary home for such recovery work, Rasmussen argues that the fact of colonial destruction of indigenous and African texts is “an integral element of the literary history of the hemisphere” (139). Not only do their analyses mark a productive intersection between book history and other fields but they also critique some of the boundaries those fields draw around their chosen objects. Like Cohen’s and Rasmussen’s projects, my project aims to focus attention on material media recorded in the literature of slavery that have been obscured by a bias toward print.

Inscribing Ephemeral Media

A more inclusive definition of media comes with some potential risks, specifically the lack of sufficient archival material. However, scholars shouldn’t assume ephemeral media have not been recorded. In many cases, they have been, just not as obviously or as richly as scholars have come to expect. Even though the exact content of an eclipse and people’s response to it hasn’t been recorded on, say, videotape, it has been preserved in other ways, usually through transcription into print. Starting in the early nineteenth century, almanacs recorded the dates, times, and locations where known astronomical phenomena would take place, and newspapers often discussed phenomena before and after they occurred. The challenge of recovering non-print media from print is probably most familiar in the context of music. Musicologists are used to not knowing exactly how music sounded to Mozart because of the relatively higher degree of mediation in eighteenth-century printed scores of music than in late nineteenth-century phonograph recordings or twentieth-century high-fidelity studio productions. Recording music in print didn’t get across exactly how the music should sound, and this problem increased in attempts to record African singing, as Ronald Radano argues, because western notation didn’t

always fit with the conventions of African music.²¹ Nevertheless, printed musical scores constitute (prescriptive) textual recordings of sound. Even ephemeral reading practices can be reconstructed, as Michael Millner argues in *Fever Reading* (2012) where he examines formal accounts of reading, scenes of reading, and formal and material elements of a text to reconstruct historical acts of reading (22-23). Records exist, just in formats that look different from the object of study.

Matt Cohen stages the potential problems with overly inclusive definitions of media within the context of book history—which has grappled for a while now with questions about what can be included under its disciplinary umbrella—as well as potential solutions. He argues that the problem of inclusivity has more to do with disciplinary assumptions than with the value of what such a definition might discover. For example, Cohen examines Edward Winslow’s aid to dying Chief Massasoit; although Massasoit’s health concerns were not recorded in a way that might allow historians to diagnose his case, Cohen pieces together a medical account by reading Winslow’s notes and tracing theories of health and sickness which Winslow had access to. Moreover, Cohen makes a point of not reading this incidence as “exemplary of English advantages over indigenous American cultures” but as representative of “the interconnectedness of the communications systems and medical cultures of the Wampanoag and the settlers.”²² By seeing connections between detail poor records and a context of information exchange between settlers and indigenous groups, Cohen makes sense of the highly networked interactions between Winslow and Massasoit. In short, finding media or networks in a print archive requires more than close (or closer) reading but rather a reading practice that strives simultaneously for breadth and depth.

²¹ Radano writes, “As slave singing succumbed to the violence of text, songs assumed a graphic similarity” (187); Ronald Radano, *Laying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003).

²² Cohen, 66.

If media theorists haven't thought as much about how the media slaves used changed the scale and structure of slave life, their failure may have to do with the fact that some of these media didn't establish a large or long-lasting community of users. As Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree discuss in *New Media: 1740-1915* (2003), all media were once new, and many have been forgotten because they didn't catch on at all, because they received less attention than more popular media, or because users altered them into a new form.²³ Moreover, just because a medium doesn't receive much public attention doesn't mean that subcultures of people aren't using it; in an information-saturated culture, some media inevitably receive less attention. Indeed, some of the media my project examines like swamps were intended to be hidden from slave owners' observation.

These challenges of transcription are greater in the context of slavery, partially because of the cultural differences between African slaves and their white amanuenses, and partly because of the short life spans of early black books, as Johanna Brooks has described.²⁴ Slaveholders actively prevented slaves from learning to read, learning to write, learning to read maps, learning to swim, using drums, and gathering together without white surveillance. Participants in insurrectionary action occasionally used writing—such as Mingo Harth, who kept a list of slaves who agreed to join Denmark Vesey's uprising—but writing was extremely dangerous both because of its ability to betray a specific plan (as Douglass illustrated in *Narrative of the Life*) and because slaves were prohibited from writing in general. Additionally, while many slaves learned to read and write despite legal and de facto restrictions, the majority were not print literate. But as Garrison's jeremiad I started with points out, there are many other modes of literacy, and slaves could have used such literacies to learn and communicate.

²³ Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, *New Media, 1740-1915* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2003), xii.

²⁴ Joanna Brooks, "The Unfortunates: What the Life Spans of Early Black Books Tells Us About Book History," Ch. 2 in *Early African American Print Culture*, Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein, eds. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012), 40-52.

Slaves learned how to read time cycles: the days, the seasons, the calendar of religious and political celebrations; environmental phenomena: the weather, the flow of water across the landscape, the rough spots on roads or railroads, the moon phases and star patterns; cultural practices: European customs, African customs, songs, prayers, speeches, religion based on sacred texts. A slave's image of the world may not have been similar to a slave owner's; perhaps a slave wouldn't understand a geographical framework in which the top of a picture is analogous to "north" but would understand that if they followed a specific path, they could arrive at a place where laws were different. However, to see the slave as less literate undervalues non-textual literacies. Moreover, one could argue that slaves were highly aware of mediation because of their living conditions—carrying out intensely mediated forms of labor for more and less distant overseers and masters.²⁵ Regardless of all these limitations, texts about slavery by slaves, their amanuenses, and white observers inscribed ephemeral media as they described slaves communicating.

If the assertion that slave texts inscribe ephemeral media seems surprising, that is because literary scholarship on slavery has tended to focus on literacy and print, as I've already begun to suggest. From Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Signifyin(g) Monkey* (1987) and the trope of the talking book to *Early African American Print Culture* (2012), books, texts, and print have been the focus of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African-American literary study, which has been important for the field because of the way that texts by black authors have often not been preserved by historians or have gone understudied in a canon that has historically favored texts by European-Americans (see Brooks). Yet the focus of much scholarship on slavery continues to remain on text, literacy, and freedom.

²⁵ Tim Armstrong makes an argument about slaves' role as human technology in "Machines inside the machine: slavery and technology," Ch. 3 of *The logic of slavery: debt, technology, and pain in American literature* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012).

Part of the reason scholars tend to focus on literacy and freedom is that the slave narratives that are most commonly read, taught, and studied foreground these concepts.²⁶ Learning to read or knowing how to read is an essential part of the plot structure of many frequently studied slave narratives: Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789); *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831); Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* (1845) and *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); William Wells Brown's *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (1847); Henry Bibb's *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (1849); Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853); Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). The significance of literacy and freedom across these texts is probably familiar to many, and for the authors I have listed, literacy was a necessary skill for writing one's narrative. But even exceptions to the rule demonstrate the way the slave narratives that have received the most attention draw out certain patterns. A crucial moment in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents* occurs when she writes a letter and has it mailed from New York in an elaborate ruse to fool her owner, an act of misdirection through savvy use of print and the mail which helps her to escape to the North. Even for Henry Bibb, whose narrative makes obtaining literacy secondary to learning the art of escape, the story exhibits an obligation to mention print:

I confess that it was no disadvantage to be passed through the hands of so many families, as the only source of information that I had to enlighten my mind, consisted in what I could see and hear from others. Slaves were not allowed books, pen, ink, nor paper, to improve their minds. But it seems to me now, that I was particularly observing, and apt to retain what came under my observation. But more especially, all that I heard about liberty and freedom to the slaves, I never forgot. Among other good trades I learned the art of running away to

²⁶ Michael Drexler and Ed White's collection of essays in *Beyond Douglass* (2008) pushes back against the way that texts by only a few authors—Frederick Douglass especially—have come to define the slave narrative genre in anthologies and classroom instruction.

perfection. I made a regular business of it, and never gave it up, until I had broken the bands of slavery, and landed myself safely in Canada, where I was regarded as a man, and not as a thing. (16)

In this section, Bibb points out his heightened awareness and aptitude “to retain what came under my observation,” but what he learns is “the art of running away” to Canada; nevertheless, he also mentions “books, pen, ink, paper” and the improvement of one’s mind even though it is not directly related to learning to run away in his story. Furthermore, by focusing on running away, Bibb demonstrates the teleological pull of Northern freedom and the way this pull shapes the plot of his written narrative. In general, the most frequently studied slave narratives have indirectly contributed to an assumption that literacy and Northern freedom are the natural endpoints of any story about slavery.

However, the pull of literacy and Northern freedom obscures other narratives, such as Sojourner Truth’s *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave* (1850) or Elizabeth Keckley’s *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868). Truth was enslaved in New York, emancipated herself before the state officially ended slavery, stayed in contact with her previous master, says she wasn’t interested in learning to read, and travelled the country as an itinerant preacher. Keckley worked as a dressmaker until she obtained enough money to purchase her own freedom, and after she freed herself, she worked in Washington D. C. for both Abraham Lincoln’s and Jefferson Davis’s wives until the Southern states seceded. Narratives such as these do not privilege literacy among other potential skills, and they don’t understand the North or the freedoms it offered to be the endpoint of one’s story about slavery. Indeed, they call for more attention to other skills such as preaching, singing, and dressmaking, and they push back against the spatial practices of Northern freedom, which disconnected many slaves such as Henry Bibb from their communities and families. Freedom had other meanings besides freedom from bondage or a particular spatial politics or the ability to express one’s ideas through writing; freedom could entail grand gestures such as leading an insurrection or small

gestures such as building a community, resisting pressure to align with any religious sect, working in a trade, or speaking one's mind to people in power. Some recent work has challenged this narrow focus of scholarship on the slave narrative, but more work is needed to draw out alternative forms of literacy and means to freedom from slave narratives that do and do not follow these patterns.²⁷ As I argue in this dissertation, many slaves, free blacks, and whites worked to establish freedom in some of the extraordinary and ordinary ways I mention with the goal of enacting revolutionary change in a social, political, and economic structure entangled with slavery.

Drawing from an understanding of what ephemeral media are and how they are preserved in a print record, my project undertakes the task of identifying ephemeral media by reading across a range of texts. Ephemeral media exist in the print record through accounts about the unique affordances of particular modes of communication by printers, preachers, poets, scientists, and statesmen. Like Michael Millner suggests about reading practices, a historical understanding of mediated practices arises out of textual records in a few ways: through prescriptive theories, descriptions of specific communication acts, formal properties of media, and material conditions of media circulation. For example, one can understand how astronomical events functioned as semantic signs by reading about them in different genres of texts: newspapers for descriptions of astronomical events and of people's responses to astronomical events; almanacs, sermons, and religious pamphlets for instructions on how different communities prescribed astronomical interpretation. One can also consider the formal properties of astronomical phenomena—how they look and how regularly they appear. From this array of information, I draw a history of what I call the “heavenly scroll.” It is a highly

²⁷ For studies that have challenged the typical forms of literacy or freedom in the slave narrative, see Carla Peterson's study of black women's oral or newspaper writing in *Doers of the Word* (1995), Xiomara Santamarina's study of working black women *Belabored Professions* (2006), Sylviane Diouf's study of maroon slave communities in the US *Slavery's Exiles* (2014), Daniel Sayer's archeological study of maroon communities in the Great Dismal Swamp, and Janet Neary, “Behind the Scenes and Inside Out: Elizabeth Keckly's Revision of the Slave Narrative Form,” *African American Review* 47.4 (2014): 555-573.

contested medium, given that several communities argued about how it worked, but most media are sites of conflict and negotiation at least for a time rather than passively adopted means of communication.

To accomplish this research on ephemeral media recorded in nineteenth-century texts, I have relied on a range of both digital and print media. Online databases such as *Sabin Americana*, *19th Century US Newspapers*, *America's Historical Newspapers*, *HathiTrust*, and *DocSouth* have been essential resources for my project for three reasons. First, they make texts available which otherwise would be difficult to find without visiting a specific archive, such as John Quincy Adams' speech at the Cincinnati Observatory. Second, they make a large body of digitized texts searchable—especially newspapers. So, for example, they made it possible to find newspaper references to the Leonid Meteor Shower or to serialized fiction about slaves in the swamps through keyword searches. Finally, they make texts such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred* searchable in HTML form, which helps to track the frequency of different keywords across the entire novel.

But print remained an essential medium for carrying out this work. For example, digitized copies of the 1853 atlas I used to see how swamps were depicted was not in high enough resolution to decipher the faint, short dashes which indicated swampland; I had to find the book in Special Collections to decipher the markings on the page. Another problem was how challenging it was to compare large bodies of work against specific volumes or issues. For example, I had to look at several editions of the *American Almanac* in the Wisconsin Historical Society's rare book collection to understand how different editions compared and to realize that the pull-out map of the 1831 and 1834 eclipses was a special but recurring strategy for prescribing certain understandings of solar eclipses (not to mention that the digitized version on *Sabin Americana* begins on page 2—one has to read backward to see the map on page one). Another example is the challenge of reading *The Liberator*. To my knowledge, no book reprint of *The Liberator* exists outside of a few libraries which have archived actual copies of the

newspaper. Most books reprint articles from *The Liberator* in prose blocks outside of their context. While a digitized and (mostly) fully searchable collection of *The Liberator* is available on *19th Century US Newspapers*, it is difficult to skim issues quickly enough to compare and learn how the conventions of the paper developed. Each page takes seconds to load, and reading an entire page at once requires a very large computer screen. To be able to see these developments, I used microform, scrolling through *The Liberator* issue by issue, which turned out to be a very productive mode of reading since I could quickly skim every full page of each issue.

The need for both digital and print media attests not to a digital takeover of the humanities as databases supersede print, but to the necessity of reading at multiple levels and in multiple modalities, especially to recover and theorize something as complex as a medium of communication. Slaves' communication practices hide below the surface-level reading practices valued by digital humanities projects, but they also require more than single instances of unusual communication to be classified as media. Even Garrison's communication practices in *The Liberator* have been flattened out into content, losing the layer of mediation that his newspaper provided. Such an argument may not be surprising since literary scholars continue to argue back and forth about the benefits or shortsightedness of deep and surface reading. However, I argue for the importance of using both methods in complementary ways since my own project's conclusions relied so heavily on both. Among other things, the need for multiple modes of reading attests to the changes in scholarship on the nineteenth century—at the very least, from a time when scholars sat down for long stretches taking notes on texts available only in microfilm and wrote about such texts later, to the present where I frequently use a search function to see if an entire novel or newspaper has a word I'm writing about in the moment.

Defining Intervening Media

Out of all the media that a broader definition might include, this project is most interested in those which slaves used to advance revolutionary antislavery movements. As such, I focus on what I call “intervening media”; this term draws on two meanings of “intervening” to conceptualize how these media work: as I’ve already suggested, these media fill space (like a gas or liquid) and establish pathways that connect otherwise disconnected groups of people: black singers and white audiences, humans and a divine being, separated insurgents, white abolitionists and racist news. As such, they fulfill the five characteristics of media Gitelman describes: substances, communities of users, shared protocols, shared knowledge, and proper timing. Second, these media carry the potential to interrupt people like a bolt of lightning following a path through air or water. While their intent is usually to disrupt the system of slavery, the revolutionary work these media perform doesn’t always look the same. This work ranges from the grand scale of inciting mass slave uprising to the smaller scale of altering a listener’s consciousness.

In order to frame a communication medium beyond the current purview of media or literary studies, the first chapter assembles an archive of astronomical events and observers: Nat Turner’s 1831 solar eclipse, the Leonid Meteor Storm of 1833 that Frederick Douglass records in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and the Second Adventists’ Great Comet of 1843. From discussions of astronomical events in religious tracts, slave narratives, scientific almanacs, and newspapers, I theorize the “heavenly scroll” as a site for learning about the earth’s place in a cosmic drama. Not only Nat Turner but also Christian millennialists and President John Quincy Adams saw astronomical signs on the heavenly screen as a source of divine authority, foretelling destruction or cultural progress. Turner’s assumption that the eclipse communicated his revolutionary vision to slaves across the US shifts the location of media from an object used on the ground to the system of continually unfolding astronomical events.

The second chapter considers the impact of short-lived sound media on the body. Through an analogy between sound and electricity, both scientific discourse and Methodist

revivalism imagined the black female body as simultaneously susceptible to and able to produce music. This ambiguity allowed Sojourner Truth to use singing to disrupt white audiences, diffusing mobs and stimulating abolitionists. Reading the rhythms of Truth's songs within their contexts at camp meetings or antislavery rallies, I show how she deployed singing to move people's bodies and change their minds. By theorizing how black singing registers in print, this chapter offers a way to read song books, performance reviews, and personal interviews in which recorders say they struggled to capture the captivating sounds of black voices.

Chapter three extends the scale of transient media by conceptualizing swampland across the US as an improvised slave network. Drawing from practices of map reading, network theory on the strength of social ties, and Frederick Law Olmsted's account of travelling the South by rail, I examine Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Dred* and Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*. Dred's social network across the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida sets up the swamp as an ecological feature that connects plantation slaves and fugitives across the South. Viewing swamps as a network rather than isolated and isolating landscape features challenges Solomon Northup's exceptional success using the US Postal Service and invites us to reconsider the frequency with which he discusses slave activity in Louisiana swamps. Directly and indirectly, *Dred* and *Twelve Years a Slave* critique the idea of technological progress associated with the growth of media networks like the Underground Railroad or the US Postal Service because of the ways such networks harmed black communities.

The first three chapters' focus on ephemeral media, their locations, and their impact on the body provides insight into the ways we understand print media. My final chapter returns to print in order to reconsider the way quantitative circulation numbers and the durability of certain forms stand as an index of print's impact. Critically examining the circulation of print in the 1835 Postal Campaign and William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*, I argue that print also impacted readers through its materiality, layout, and reading modes. *The Liberator*'s "Refuge of Oppression" column—although it now exists primarily on microfilm reels and database pages—

once upended the way readers understood antislavery, geography, and their own religious communities. As such, *The Liberator's* layout taught readers to be skeptical of all news media that marginalized blacks, leading a disproportionate amount of Southern and Norther readers to fear the paper compared to its relatively small subscription numbers.

Attention to media in nineteenth century texts about slavery provides four significant critical insights to the study of slavery literature and media. The first insight is a new way of reading and understanding passages in texts about slavery that seem incomprehensible to readers focused on print or visual media. For example, scholars who study Sojourner Truth usually focus on the conflicting ways in which her oral speech was inscribed by different writers or the differences in self-representation across her *cartes-de-visite*; few pay attention to her recurring references to sound, singing, and the sonic practices of her Christianity, but from a sound studies perspective, these pieces become legible.

The second critical insight for slavery literature is a challenge to the way people think about the enslaved as completely isolated from information literacy within the institution of slavery. Garrison was not the first to reject public opinion that considered slaves incapable of planning a revolt without the input of white agitators; he reiterated arguments David Walker made in *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. While some important research has been performed recently on black writers and activists during this period, such as Michael Chaney's research on Dave the Potter, scholars should also consider the ways biases toward European modes of literacy foreclose certain avenues of study.²⁸ The field has continued to privilege textual literacy over African or enslaved ways of knowing, which has forestalled the development of more nuanced theories of how slaves brought African knowledge to the US and altered it or passed it on.

²⁸ Michael Chaney, *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008).

One critical insight for media studies is an additional challenge to the ways people think about media history, particularly their assumption that digital or web-based media are “new media,” or that media have progressed among certain technologically determined trajectories to culminate in the Internet. The concept of “new media” carries a strong undertone of social progress that blurs the complex historical field of media. As Gitelman and Pingree point out, people forget that new media do not simply supersede old media in a continual progression from good to better.²⁹ Many distinct forms of media compete to fulfill specific communication and information-seeking objectives, multiple media exist alongside each other, and one medium’s greater popularity doesn’t necessarily index its superiority. A range of political, technical, and market forces shape which media exist when. This kind of media teleology occurs even in the context of slavery. For example, many people continue to think of the Underground Railroad as one of the most positive antislavery developments of the Antebellum period; they often fail to see it as one route to self-emancipation among many or a measure that fractured black communities and drained talented black people from the South.

More importantly for media studies, one of the recurring arguments of this project is that narratives about how a medium works amplify its effects. When more people believed that a meteor storm or a comet was a sign from God, people who weren’t sure were more likely to adopt the same belief, at least for a short time. When a singer said her music would cause her listeners to feel a certain way, listeners often reported feeling what she led them to expect. When people said the swamp was a place where fugitive slaves were living, slaves who needed help were more likely to seek them there. When an editor claimed his newspaper was democratic or open to criticism, many readers believed his claim and interpreted what he published accordingly. The stories increase the material impacts of media. Exceptions in each case exist, but the bigger point is that studying media with ephemeral substances shows how

²⁹ Gitelman and Pingree, xiii.

other ephemeral components of media—such as the stories about what they do and how they work—help carry out the work of media.

Finally, this project increases our sense of the interconnectedness of early nineteenth-century communities. To put it differently, my project is about counterpublics and networks. For example, I trace how Christian interpretations of astronomical phenomena influenced John Quincy Adams' nationalist speech on the importance of proper astronomical viewing; I trace how sound science on musical therapy entered Methodism and influenced Sojourner Truth's understanding of music; I trace ecological and social connections from plantations to swamps and maroon communities; I trace how proslavery news performed an important function for abolitionist readers when it was reprinted in antislavery news. In my chapters, there is no hegemonic public sphere; religious, civic, slave, abolitionist, and proslavery spheres are all in conflict, and ideas move across these supposedly separate spheres. Being able to see this give-and-take is an important payoff of having a broader definition of what counts as a medium.

Ch. 1: Signs in the Heavens and the Distress of Nations: Heavenly Media in Nat Turner, John Quincy Adams, and the Second Adventists

After hearing Nat Turner's testimony in November 1831 regarding the recent insurrection he had led and reminding him of his inevitable execution, Thomas Gray asks Turner whether he knows anything about "any extensive or concerted plan" among slaves beyond Southampton County, Virginia:

His response was, I do not. When I questioned him as to the insurrection in North Carolina happening about the same time, he denied any knowledge of it; and when I looked him in the face as though I would search his inmost thoughts, he replied, "I see sir, you doubt my word; but can you not think the same ideas, and strange appearances about this time in the heaven's might prompt others, as well as myself, to this undertaking?"¹

Turner's response is surprising: he displaces the limited authority of his own word in favor of the greater authority of an external signifier, the "strange appearances about this time in the heaven's," which consist of the solar eclipse on February 11, 1831, and the unusual blue-green discoloration of the sun that occurred on August 13, 1831.² In this moment of their interview, Turner suggests to Gray that these astronomical events could signify to other slaves, independent of interpretive guidance from a leader such as himself, and function as a catalyst for revolts in dispersed geographic locations. Briefly put, Turner identifies the heavens as a medium through which a revolutionary program could circulate.

Understanding the heavens as a medium of communication—what I call the "heavenly

¹ Nat Turner and Thomas Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner: And Related Documents*, Kenneth Greenberg, ed. (New York: St. Martin's P, 1997), 18 [sic].

² Concerning the event on August 13, one observer writes in the *Charleston Courier* 16 Aug. 1831 "the *light* of the Sun had so far diminished, that at noon it presented an appearance precisely similar to that of the late Solar eclipse... except that it tinged every object on which its rays fell, with a very sensible blue color.... The latter circumstances we regard as among the most extraordinary optical appearances that have ever fallen under our observation."

scroll”—requires scholars to expand the category of nineteenth-century media. In the 1830s and 40s, heavenly phenomena on the heavenly scroll seized the attention of viewers and transmitted information in ways that challenged other authoritative media ranging from newspapers to the Christian Bible. Not only slaves like Turner but also religious and political leaders such as William Miller (founder of Second Adventism) and President John Quincy Adams coopted astronomical events as endorsements for their social projects, using them to convene communities of viewers and regulate future astronomical interpretation. The concept of a “heavenly scroll” had its basis in American evangelical Christianity: “heavens” captures the double sense of “sky” and “the place where God lives,” and “scroll” comes from Christian scriptural passages that compare the sky to a scroll.³ Like a panorama, the heavenly scroll unfolded a limited view of a larger divine drama revolving across the heavens, a drama which people on the ground could view and interpret.⁴ Even when nineteenth-century reformers wanted to move away from such religious modes of interpretation, they continued to talk about “the heavens” and maintain belief in a divine being who establishes the natural laws of astronomy. Astronomical events—both predictable and unpredictable ones—seized the attention of viewers. Depending on their race, education level, and religious views, people interpreted different messages from the heavens.

Media scholars often presuppose that media are linked with technology, but before the 1850s, media spanned a broader range of sensory inputs and naturally occurring phenomena. As Raymond Williams defines it, the twentieth-century construct of “media” encapsulates (i) a “substance,” (ii) a means for transferring information, and (iii) a broadcasting service.⁵ By the

³ E.g. Isaiah 34:4: “And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine”; Revelation 6:14: “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together” (King James Version).

⁴ For more on panoramas and the temporality in which they unfolded their visual narratives, see Melissa Gniadek, “Seriality and Settlement: Southworth, Lippard, and *The Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*,” *American Literature* 86.1 (2014).

⁵ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 203.

late nineteenth century, the definition of media as substances carrying sensory information (such as air for sound vibrations) had folded into the definition of media as objects transferring semantic information (such as newspapers or telegraphs), which in the twentieth century became a shorthand term for any news broadcasting organization. However, in the early nineteenth century, the idea of media could just as easily apply to a ray of light as to the reading material it illuminated. In such a world, astronomical events conveyed information to people on the ground.

The heavenly scroll fulfills a few key characteristics of a medium. Discussing humans' mediated relationship to the world, media theorist Niklas Luhmann writes, "Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media."⁶ Luhmann's statement refers to a late twentieth-century world rife with technologies of mass communication; however, his claim that mass media structure people's knowledge about the world applies even to the pre-mass-media world of the early nineteenth century, where people obtained knowledge about their world from a range of media from newspapers to the heavens. Pointing out what makes media distinct—not just an object or a social practice—W. J. T. Mitchell foregrounds "the way media address or 'call out' to us." Turner's narrative in *The Confessions* contends that, in a world where newspapers and books came the closest to functioning as mass media, people also used other media such as the heavenly scroll as sources of knowledge about their world, sources that called out for their attention just as much newspapers sold on New York streets.

One conceptual payoff of the heavenly scroll is that it throws into relief human-medium interactions. While media theorists such as Luhmann, Friedrich Kittler, and Marshall McLuhan argue that a medium's characteristics determine how people use it, Lisa Gitelman asserts that what people believe about a medium matters at least as much as its characteristics:

⁶ Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996), 1.

“communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaging with popular ontologies of representation.”⁷ For Gitelman, a communication medium’s impact on users is not predetermined but varies according to what communities of users think about that medium. More than a source of information to viewers on the ground, the heavenly scroll interpellated bystanders into viewers and respondents. But how people responded to such hailing power differed across higher and lower degrees of religious, secular, or scientific education. Thus, the heavenly scroll constitutes a productive medium for tracing how people’s “popular ontologies of representation” interacted with the apparently determining interpellative power of heavenly phenomena. For example, Christians who see the heavens being described as God’s scroll in the biblical book of Revelation interpreted astronomical events as divine signals. Moreover, in Turner’s case, *The Confessions* functions as an instructional text for revolutionary action because Turner assumes that an eclipse could mediate a divine message between geographically separated humans and explains how divine communication occurs through heavenly signs.

Using people’s responses to a variety of astronomical phenomena on the heavenly scroll across a few different social, geographical, and religious contexts, I work to reconstruct in this essay the gravity and logic of Turner’s claim about “strange appearances” in the heavens that “might prompt others to this undertaking.” To accomplish this task, I piece together from newspapers, pamphlets, almanacs, and religious tracts the interpellative power of astronomical events and people’s various (often conflicting) methods for interpreting them. Astronomical events appearing on the heavenly scroll seized the attention of viewers across vast geographic regions and were subsequently harnessed by a variety of actors for religious, social, and political

⁷ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2006), 7. Friedrich Kittler’s landmark study *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986) begins, “Media determine our situation, which—in spite or because of it—deserves a description” (xxxix). Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (1964) describes the “personal and social consequences of any medium” as the *result* of “the new scale” introduced by a medium rather than a contributing factor in how media are used (7).

purposes. At stake here is both a history of mediation among the masses in the early nineteenth century as well as a more nuanced account of how a medium's characteristics and people's beliefs intersect in a way that directs users towards ideological action. The first section of this essay examines responses to the Leonid Meteor Storm from across the US, the second compares William Miller's and Nat Turner's socio-religious deployment of heavenly signs, and the third considers John Quincy Adams' critique of such popular responses.

The Heavenly Scroll and Interpellation

Nat Turner claims that an eclipse might "prompt" others to follow a certain course of action. Such prompting entails catching bystanders' attention with a sign that provokes them to interpret the sign. In the nineteenth century, astronomical signs on the heavenly scroll interpellated people, an action which is easier to see with unpredicted events than with predicted ones, since standard interpretations of predictable events were relatively more widespread.

One clear example of an unpredicted event was the Leonid Meteor Storm of November 1833, an event which some contemporary astronomers designate the most dazzling meteoric display in at least three centuries.⁸ Frederick Douglass describes this "sublime scene" "when the heavens seemed about to part with its starry train" in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855).⁹ In this display, viewers would have seen anywhere from 50,000 to 150,000 meteors per hour or 14-41 meteors per second (much greater than the next most dazzling display in 1799, which exhibited roughly 30,000 meteors per hour).¹⁰ Many newspaper accounts described shooting

⁸ A meteor "storm" is the name for an especially intense meteor shower. See Joe Rao, "The Return of the Leonid Meteors," *Sky & Telescope* 96.5 (1998): 40. Walt Whitman also observed this event. Cf., Richard Maurice Bucke, *Notes and Fragments: Left by Walt Whitman and now edited by Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, one of his literary executors* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1972).

⁹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in *Frederick Douglass Papers*, Vol. 2, John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, eds. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2003), 245.

¹⁰ Rao, 40.

stars falling like snow or “serpentine forms” or “swords of fire above the earth.”¹¹ The “serpentine forms” in particular indicates how extreme this storm was: as Richard Sanderson points out, meteors travel only in straight lines, but when so many are travelling at once, they create the illusion that individual meteors are swerving on erratic or serpentine paths.¹² According to reports, the light from the shower far surpassed other technologies of illumination so that people awoke in their houses thinking it was morning. In one report, an observer captured the sense of danger inspired by the phenomena: “The light in my room was so great that I could see the hour of the morning by my watch which hung over my mantel, and supposing that there was a fire near at hand, probably on my own premises, I sprung to the window, and beheld the stars, or some other bodies presenting a fiery appearance.”¹³

No one expected the Leonid Meteor Storm to happen because astronomers hadn’t yet figured out what meteors were, let alone how to predict the time or location of their occurrence. On the night of November 12 when the shower began, its brilliance interpellated bystanders, who concluded that the meteor shower was a sign of the end of time and began to panic. Newspaper editors from across the United States ran brief articles on November 13 and 14, 1833, describing how they were suddenly awakened in the night by panicked citizens beating on their doors. In one example from the *Augusta Courier*, the editor writes, “We never saw anything like it. We were waked by a neighbor, who had been aroused in a similar manner by one who supposed the World was coming to an end, as the Stars were falling.”¹⁴ Many newspaper editors, consequently, rushed off a brief account of the phenomenon to which they hoped other newspapers would respond in order to determine whether the phenomenon was

¹¹ From the *Baltimore Gazette*, 13 Nov. 1833: 2, and 14 Nov. 1833: 2, respectively (Web, *America’s Historical Newspapers*); the *Baltimore Gazette* reprinted the 14 November article from the *Washington Telegraph*.

¹² Richard Sanderson, “The Night of Raining Fire,” *Sky & Telescope* 96.5 (1998): 34.

¹³ *Massachusetts Spy* 20 Nov. 1833, reprinted from the *Baltimore Patriot*.

¹⁴ Qtd. In Sanderson, 32.

local.¹⁵

Based on what many reports recorded about the event, a large number of people interpreted the meteor shower as a message from God, written out on the heavenly scroll, forecasting the end of the world. Many people pointed to passages in the Bible to authenticate this view. The meteor showers threw observers from all backgrounds, classes, races, genders, and many regions across the US into a panic: they ran through the streets, repented, or spent the night in intense uncertainty. The editor of the *Baltimore Gazette* described people's responses this way: "We were amused at the different effects produced upon the few beholders,—some in dreadful affright, predicted the end of the world, others of more stern souls were sure that it at least prognosticated some dreadful war; whilst the Philosopher, smiling at their simplicity, calmly viewed the Phenomenon, wonderful as it was."¹⁶

Despite confusion in the general populace, many newspapers from slave states focused conspicuously on slave populations in their descriptions of the chaos. The *Huntsville Democrat* of November 14 offers one example: "Our town was the scene of great commotion, particularly among the blacks, who were praying and shouting in every direction, thinking the Day of Judgment had come."¹⁷ The *Nashville Whig* contained a similar story: "In the country, we understand, great consternation seized the Negroes, many of them believing that the 'end of the world' was at hand.... A gentleman of intelligence and veracity informs us that his whole

¹⁵ Cf. "Brilliant Phenomenon" in the *Charleston Courier* 14 Nov. 1833: 2, and "The Meteoric Phenomenon" in the *New York Commercial Advertiser* 14 Nov. 1833: 2, which refers to Philadelphia newspapers account of the meteors and invites comparison of the phenomenon by claiming the display was more significant in New York. By searching digitized nineteenth-century newspapers and secondary sources that reprinted excerpts from non-digitized newspapers, I turned up articles and reprinted articles about the meteors from states across the US: Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington D.C., Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts.

¹⁶ *Baltimore Gazette* 13 Nov. 1833, "A Shower of Fire." Cf. *Richmond Enquirer* 15 Nov. 1833, "Brilliant Phenomenon": "We have conversed with many persons who were so fortunate as to be awake at the time, or who were called up from their beds to witness so unusual and superb a scene."

¹⁷ From the *Huntsville Democrat* 14 Nov. 1833, quoted in Nicholas Hamner Cobbs, "The Night the Stars Fell on Alabama," *Alabama Review* 22.2 (1969): 149.

neighborhood for three miles round was in commotion, particularly the black population whose apprehensions were fearfully excited.”¹⁸ Despite the fact that a community three miles in circumference was in uproar, the black community in this article from the *Whig* receives specific attention. The *Arkansas Gazette* ran a similar story about the meteors with a similar detail: “Among the ignorant and suspicious, particularly the blacks, it created considerable alarm.”¹⁹

Each of these accounts focuses conspicuous attention on black slaves’ interpretation of the meteor shower according to their Christian Millennial beliefs. Whether it was “Judgment Day,” the “last trump,” or “the end of the world,” white observers were quick to connect blacks’ reactions to Christian millennialism, the belief that Jesus Christ would soon return to the earth and put the world’s political systems to an end as he established his one-thousand-year reign. In reality, many black observers came to conclusions such as these, including Frederick Douglass, who writes, “I was not without the suggestion, at the moment, that it might be the harbinger of the coming of the Son of Man.”²⁰ However, this displacement of millennial interpretations onto only black communities is curious considering that most people were alarmed to the point that they were pulling newspaper editors and professors out of bed in the middle of the night to figure out what was happening. Christian millennialism and other religious modes of heavenly interpretation were popular among whites too. These examples share a formal construction: “Our town... particularly among the blacks,” “whole neighborhood... particularly the black population,” “Among the ignorant and suspicious, particularly the blacks.” This construction functions as a face-saving device for editors who were no longer convinced that the world was ending and wanted a convenient scapegoat for mass hysteria in which they participated.

In general, the heavenly scroll interpellated people. The light from the meteor storm

¹⁸ From the *Nashville Whig*, date unknown, quoted in Cobbs, 152.

¹⁹ From the *Arkansas Gazette* 27 Nov. 1833, quoted in Mary L. Kwas, “The Spectacular 1833 Leonid Meteor Storm: The View from Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 58.3 (1999): 319.

²⁰ Douglass, *Bondage*, 245.

interrupted the order of natural events: people talked about getting up to start milking because they thought it was day or about having sufficient light from the meteors to read by; it also interrupted the order of daily routines: people ran through the streets and under houses, repented of their wicked ways, and intruded upon their sleeping neighbors in the middle of the night. Consequently, the interruption demanded an explanation.

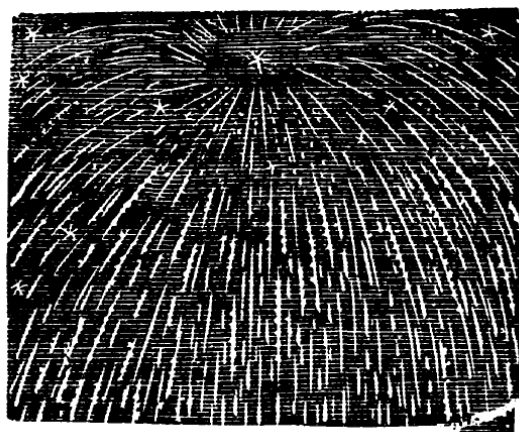
The time that was required to sort out what had happened in print media emphasizes how signs on the heavenly scroll circulated more widely and more rapidly than information in print. People used the common practice of reprinting articles from other towns' newspapers to figure out what had happened and, thus, alleviate the panic that had circulated in one night. However, their ability to gain an understanding of what kind of event had happened was only as fast as a horse or steamboat could travel. People gradually came to an understanding of what had happened and where it happened, though not what caused the event (see fig. 1). For example, on November 14, *The Baltimore Gazette* reprinted articles from the *Washington Telegraph*, the *Alexandria Gazette*, and the *Philadelphia Chronicle* with this introductory note: "*The Atmospheric Phenomenon*, mentioned in our paper of yesterday, was observed in several other places, and attracted as much attention, and produced as much surprise, as it did among many of our citizens."²¹ Newspapers and their circulatory mechanisms and infrastructure took much longer to address the meteor storm than the meteor storm took to incite a widespread panic. Printers in large central cities like Baltimore and Washington D.C. needed five days (from Tuesday night to the next Monday's paper) to realize that it was an event that occurred at least across the United States; communities in smaller, more peripheral locations likely needed longer.²² Although its circulation wasn't as durable as print's, the meteor shower spread panic

²¹ *Baltimore Gazette* 14 Nov. 1833.

²² Cf. *Baltimore Gazette* 18 Nov. 1833: 2, and the *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 18 Nov. 1833: 3, which reprinted the *New York Commercial Advertiser* article from 14 Nov. 1833 (Web, *America's Historical Newspapers*).

across a large portion of the US almost simultaneously, an unprecedented feat in terms of mass communication in the 1830s.

The interpretation of the meteor storm as a divine message about the end of the world was eventually countered by a scientific explanation. By January, 1834, Denison Olmsted (professor of math and natural philosophy at Yale) had collected enough data on the event to give a partial debriefing.²³ Ultimately, Olmsted's two articles in the *American Journal of Science and Arts* offered



To the Editors of the Commercial Advertiser

Figure 1: From the *New York Commercial Advertiser*

a counter-narrative in which celestial bodies entered earth's atmosphere while orbiting the sun in their regular track. These articles were supposed to neutralize the meteor storm's superstitious meanings by putting people "on the same mental map," to borrow Gitelman's phrase—a mental map in which God was not communicating to people about the course of history but about the natural laws of the universe. Regardless, releasing an official scientific interpretation of the events in a scientific journal nine months after they occurred did little to standardize people's collective memories of the meteors, or to change the minds of the people who staunchly held onto their belief that the meteors signaled the second coming of Christ.

²³ Denison Olmsted, "Observations on the Meteors of November 13th," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 25.2 (1834); 26.1 (1834) (*American Periodicals*). Olmsted's first article says less about what substantively caused the phenomenon and more about what kinds of things people consistently observed from a variety of locations across the US. Olmsted collected scientific observations of the meteors from New Haven and Boston, Massachusetts; West Point, New York; Annapolis, Emmittsburg, and Frederick, Maryland; Lynchburg, Virginia; Worthington, Ohio; Salisbury, North Carolina; Augusta, Georgia; and Bowling Green, Missouri. His data put the event into a national frame that also helped to provide a more universal perspective of the meteor showers. Part two of Olmsted's contribution to the *American Journal of Science and Arts* in July of 1834 hypothesizes that what people saw was the result of a cluster of celestial bodies that orbit the sun in an unusual track entering earth's atmosphere, which approaches very near to what actually happened. For more information on scientists' growing understanding of meteors from Aristotle to the nineteenth century, see Mark Littmann, "Struggling to Understand Meteors," *The Heavens on Fire: The Great Leonid Meteor Storms* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 35-52.

Interpreting the Heavenly Scroll

Nat Turner's statement about the eclipse likely sounds like pre-modern astrology to twenty-first-century readers of *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), who hear the claim through the scene in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) where Yankee Hank uses his knowledge of an eclipse to manipulate a medieval audience.²⁴ But many people still thought of the sky as a communication medium in the nineteenth century. Astrological divination, based on the assumption that the movements of planets and stars convey meaning relevant to humans, had existed for millennia, and some people continued to interpret astronomical events—especially spectacular or infrequent ones such as comets—as signs about political upheaval, divine disapproval, or the opportune moment for action.²⁵ Nevertheless, early nineteenth century America is a productive place to study popular reactions to astronomical events for a few reasons. First, the recently increased circulation of newspapers registered more people's responses in more detail. Likewise, searchable databases in the twenty-first century have made such newspapers more easily available to scholars.

Moreover, the growth of nontraditional Christian sects during the Second Great Awakening in the US increased interpretations of and commentary on the heavens among the general population.²⁶ In early nineteenth century America, many people's "astrological" beliefs

²⁴ Some historians have labeled this part of *The Confessions* apocryphal and have argued that Gray included it to distract from more disconcerting evidence and alleviate white fears of more widespread revolt. David F. Allmendinger Jr., for example, argues that this statement is Gray's fabrication. Similarly, Patrick Breen argues that the eclipse was an explanation offered by whites. See Allmendinger, "The Construction of *The Confessions of Nat Turner*" and Breen, "A Prophet in his own Land: Support for Nat Turner's Rebellion in Southampton's Black Community" in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2003).

²⁵ For more on astrology, see Roger Beck, *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007). Beck claims that astrology goes as far back as the Babylonians (c. 1000 BCE). Renee Bergland also traces a tradition from the Greek historian Plutarch to Shakespeare and Milton that reads comets as signs specifically about political revolution in *Maria Mitchell and the Sexing of Science: an Astronomer among the American Romantics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 58-60.

²⁶ Aubin, Bigg, and Sibum note that the number of observatories increased from less than thirty-six to over two hundred over the course of the nineteenth century, and of the observatories index of public interest in science, they write, "The observatory, we argue here, was essential in ensuring the growing social and cultural significance of the mathematical, physical, and cosmological sciences in the nineteenth century. It was simultaneously

were informed by the Christian Bible, which frequently portrays the heavens as a medium upon which God communicates his divine will, such as through strange movements of the sun (to Joshua, in the book of Joshua 10:12-13; to Hezekiah, in 2 Kings 20:9-11), the sudden darkening of the sun (with Moses in Egypt, in Exodus 10:21-22; at Jesus' death, in Mark 15:33), and the strange star that announced Jesus' birth (in Matthew 2:1-11), not to mention many prophecies in which astronomical signs foretell certain events (e.g. Luke 21:25; Revelation 8:12²⁷). Equally important, astrological beliefs about astronomical time structured the annual rhythms of the lives of ordinary people, telling them, for example, during what moon phase planting should begin.²⁸

In this context, Nat Turner's claim that heavenly signs communicated to him (in addition to the Christian scriptures and a divine voice) was hardly an anomaly. Similarly, William Miller—founder of Second Adventism, the most popular Christian millennial movement in America during the 1830s and 40s—famously interpreted heavenly signs in terms of his religious beliefs as communication from God about the end of the world. For Miller and the Second Adventists, the heavens bridged a communication gap between Christians on one side and God on the other. God communicated through heavenly signs which interpreters leveraged as an endorsement of specific socio-religious actions. As a prophet figure, Miller constructed his views through an intensive and extensive study of the Christian Bible, particularly the books of

indispensable in constructing elements of the modern western state and society—among others, European and colonial expansion and the emergence of a public enthusiastic about scientific and technological developments.” *The Heavens on Earth: Observatories and Astronomy in Nineteenth-Century Science and Culture*, David Aubin, Charlotte Bigg, and H. Otto Sibum, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke, 2010), (2). As for the circulation of the Second Great Awakening, Laura Scales notes, “The period was marked by the explosion of revivalism and the rise or popularization of many religious movements, including Methodists and Baptists in the South, Transcendentalists and Unitarians in New England, and Spiritualists, Millerites, and Shakers in New York” (229n4).

²⁷ Luke 21:25: “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring”; Revelation 8:12: And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise” (KJV).

²⁸ See Emily Pawley, “Reading the Man of Signs, or, Farming in the Moon,” *Common-Place* 14.4 (Summer 2014).

Daniel and Matthew, which he believed contained predictions about when Jesus Christ would return to the earth and what signs would precede this event. Miller read various time measurements surrounding apocalyptic prophetic predictions from the book of Daniel (such as prophecies about numbers of “weeks” in Daniel 9) in order to calculate the year when Jesus would return. Miller had formulated his religious beliefs in the late 1820s and early 1830s. His message, in brief, was that Jesus was going to return between March of 1843 and November of 1844, so people needed to prepare themselves.²⁹

Miller supplemented his readings of scripture with interpretations of astronomical events that he believed offered external confirmation of his predictions. Miller and his followers attached great significance to a prophecy made by Jesus in Matthew 24 and two unpredictable astronomical events which appeared to fulfill it³⁰:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (verses 29-30, KJV)

Miller identified the darkening of the sun with an unpredicted atmospheric event which happened in New England on May 19, 1780: a thick cloud of darkness blotted out the sun,

²⁹ William Miller, *Evidence from Scripture and history of the second coming of Christ about the year 1843: exhibited in a course of lectures* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842) (*Sabin Americana*). *Evidence from Scripture* was published at least four different times 1836, 1838, 1840, and 1842 (*Sabin Americana*). For more on William Miller’s visions, see Richard Abanes, “Miller’s Millennial Madness,” *End Time Visions: The Road to Armageddon?* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998).

³⁰ Richard Abanes and Anne Devereaux Jordan both discuss this prophecy and its interpretation, though not in direct connection with Miller. They assume and imply through their brief discussions that these events played a major part in his predictions (Abanes even includes one of the popular depictions of the Leonid Meteor Storm in his text). However, their analysis relies more on R. M. Devens’ entries in *Our First Century* than on any account of Miller’s. Abanes, 217-18; Anne Devereaux Jordan, *The Seventh Day Adventists: A History* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988), 31 (Jordan refers to the incident on May 19, 1780 as an eclipse).

sending people into a panic.³¹ (Significantly, he didn't use an eclipse as his example, probably because the scientific explanation for an eclipse was better known than other events.) The Leonid Meteor Storm of November 1833 fulfilled the second part of the prophecy—"and the stars shall fall from heaven." Given the timing of the meteor storm, many people's intense reaction to it, and its wide publicity, it's likely that the meteor storm increased Miller's public credibility as he was starting his ministry in the early 1830s. He and his followers read these unpredicted and unexplained astronomical phenomena as signs about an imminent revolution of the socio-political order—external confirmation of their scriptural interpretation: God was going to return, end all earthly governments, and set up a new divine order while Miller and his faithful followers watched from safety.

In addition to coinciding with the Leonid Meteor Storm in 1833, Miller's prediction about the world ending in 1843 or 1844 coincided with the appearance of a large Comet in March of 1843.³² Although they were familiar with comets, astronomers hadn't been able to predict the coming of this particular comet, which was reported to have been so bright that it was visible during the middle of the day and looked for a while like it would collide with the sun.³³ This comet interpellated viewers. Many people worried that the comet would collide with the sun and cause it to explode. Miller had predicted at least ten years previously that Jesus would come back and the world would end probably in March 1843, but surely by November

³¹ Even by 1876, when Devens recorded the event in *Our First Century*, it wasn't clear what caused the phenomenon. In reality, it wasn't exactly an astronomical phenomenon but an atmospheric one; forest fires raging miles away created a cloud large enough to cast several states into darkness. Relevant to my point in this section, Devens' account records the tendency of astronomical events to unsettle civil government: the government authorities of one state who are holding legislative meetings move to adjourn since the world is obviously coming to an end. One legislator argues that they should continue their work because if God truly was returning that day, that man wanted God to find him doing his duty.

³² Devens, "Sudden Appearance of a Great and Fiery Comet in the Skies at Noonday.—1843." The comet was visible for roughly the full month of March, and Devens includes accounts of scientific observations of the comet from around the globe (425-26).

³³ Renee Bergland traces the history of comets (which non-scientists often confused with meteors in the nineteenth century: "Comets continued to symbolize violent political change for more than a thousand years"; they also symbolized "rebellion against authority" (58, 59).

1844, and the comet fit neatly with that narrative. To Millerites, the comet forecast Jesus' imminent return, confirming what they already believed. Writing in 1876, R. M. Devens reflects on the significance of the Great Comet for Second Adventists: "There were, too, some persons who, without regarding it [the comet], like many of the then numerous sect called Millerites, as foretoking the speedy destruction of the world, still could not gaze at it untroubled by a certain nameless feeling of doubt and fear."³⁴ Adherents used the comet as a sign to persuade other people to convert to Second Adventism and even to take more extreme measures; some members sold all of their property, refused to harvest their crops, and even climbed trees in the hope of being nearer to the heavens when Jesus returned. The comet provided authority and urgency to the Second Adventists' claims. When the comet disappeared, the urgency which Second Adventists tied to the comet faded as the projected time of Jesus' return—sometime between spring 1843 and fall 1844—drew closer to its final opportunity. Obviously, the world didn't end, and the Millerites faced what was later known as "the Great Disappointment."

Like Miller, Turner reads the heavens as a supplement to the Christian scriptures. By contrast, Turner demonstrates an awareness that astronomical interpretation was a science, and he appears to embrace the science of astronomy as part of his revolutionary program. During their interview, Turner gives Gray an account of his study of astronomical phenomena (which began before 1831), of his interpretation of the eclipses of 1831, and of his assumption that an eclipse could communicate to other people.³⁵

³⁴ R. M. Devens, *Our First Century : being a popular descriptive portraiture of the one hundred great and memorable events of perpetual interest in the history of our country, political, military, mechanical, social, scientific and commercial : embracing also delineations of all the great historic characters celebrated in the annals of the republic, men of heroism, statesmanship, genius, oratory, adventure and philanthropy* (Springfield, MA: C. A. Nichols & Co., 1876): 425. Devens' entry is the only reference I can find that Millerites were actually interpreting the comet along the lines of their theological beliefs; however, Devens' adoption of Millerites as a representative sample of people who viewed the comet from a millennial perspective suggests that smaller Christian Millennialist sects saw the comet as significant for their views.

³⁵ On the basis of the available textual evidence, the biggest problem for anyone reading *The Confessions of Nat Turner* alongside other newspaper reports of the revolt that began on August 21, 1831, is the fact that the eclipse explanation for the cause of the revolt appears in news accounts *before* Turner's capture on October 30, 1831. The revolt was stopped by August 23, and the eclipse explanation appeared in newspapers by late September, a full

Turner's first vision establishes his role in relation to the visions. His first vision occurred when he returned to his master after having run away for about a month: "And about this time I had a vision—and I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened—the thunder rolled in the Heavens, and blood flowed in streams—and I heard a voice saying, 'Such is your luck, such you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bare it.'" ³⁶ Turner's description of the sun being darkened makes it sound like he saw a solar eclipse, a suggestive sign for Turner's ultimate purpose given that, in a solar eclipse, the moon—the lesser heavenly light—temporarily blocks out the greater light of the sun. The disembodied voice also tells Turner that he is called to see "such" visions, suggesting that the darkening of the sun is a repeatable sign. The vision frames "the Heavens" as a scroll that mediates communication between a disembodied divine being and humans like Turner; this construct renders the sun and moon as signals for certain kinds of action appearing on the divine scroll. Suggestively, the voice calls Turner to "*bare* it." Perhaps what Turner meant (and Gray misrecorded) was to "*bear*" the metaphorical burden of his calling or to "carry" his message about revolt to others as a spiritual medium or prophet, but Gray records this word as "bare." Reading this way, Turner is called by the divine being to *reveal* to his fellow slaves not a specific message about revolt but rather the sun's ability to signal revolt. Turner the "barer" is a teacher who shows other people how to read eclipses. ³⁷

month before Turner's capture. Coupled with the fact that we don't have Turner's authorial voice but rather Thomas Gray's record of his testimony, it seems easy to conclude that the eclipse explanation is not the full story. But this conclusion doesn't take into account the way people understood astronomical events at the time. Crucially, Turner's account of his astronomical knowledge in *The Confessions* pushes back against the assumption that the eclipse was a decoy for the revolt's real impetus.

³⁶ Turner, 46. Same in Henry Irving Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: U Mass P, 1971), 309.

³⁷ Laura Thiemann Scales argues that Nat Turner adopts a religious stance that makes him into an active medium during the Second Great Awakening, obtaining, as she claims, divinity itself rather than merely access to divinity in "Narrative Revolutions in Nat Turner and Joseph Smith," *American Literary History* 24.2 (2012): 205-33. Conversely, during the First Great Awakening, people sought the latter—divine access or a kind of passive "mediumship." As for Nat Turner, I have trouble seeing how his visions convey the status of divinity rather than access to divinity; it depends on what the medium of communication is. Scales sees Nat Turner's visions as being mediated by a voice, which she interprets as an internal voice and, therefore, something that is a part of his own subjectivity. But if the

Turner's account of his knowledge of astronomy shows up most clearly in his second vision, for which he claims a kind of scientific authority. In fact, Turner combines scientific and religious interpretation of heavenly signs in a way that favors his revolutionary interpretation. Shortly after his first vision, the Spirit appears to him again:

[A]nd it appeared to me, and reminded me of the things it had already shown me, and that it would then reveal to me the knowledge of the elements, the revolution of the planets, the operation of tides, and changes of the seasons.... And from the first steps of righteousness until the last, was I made perfect; and the Holy Ghost was with me, and said, "Behold me as I stand in the Heavens"—and I looked and saw the forms of men in different attitudes—and there were lights in the sky to which the children of darkness gave other names than what they really were—for they were the lights of the Savior's hands, stretched forth from east to west, even as they were extended on the cross on Calvary for the redemption of sinners.³⁸

The spirit reveals scientific knowledge to Turner: the revolutions of the planets, the operation of tides, and the changes of seasons, all of which concern astronomy, namely the lunar orbit and the slope of earth's axis of rotation as it orbits the sun. Readers of *The Confessions* have noted Turner's scientific knowledge about making paper and gunpowder, but this knowledge about planets is also scientific and more important for Turner because of its communicative potential with other slaves.³⁹ The second part of what the Spirit reveals to Turner is where his scientific

eclipse is the main medium we should pay attention to, the communication is external which is why Nat Turner has to teach other people to interpret what he does. It's hard to pick one or the other; I think the key question is how much emphasis we place on the disembodied voice. Ultimately, I interpret Turner's goal to be reproducing his reading processes rather than centralizing authority in himself.

³⁸ Turner, 47.

³⁹ Kenneth Greenberg in his introduction to *The Confessions* groups Nat Turner's knowledge into two categories: "sacred and secular knowledge" (2). Greenberg explicitly classifies paper and gunpowder making as scientific knowledge, but he groups Nat Turner's reading the heavens for signs with his reading of blood on corn and leaves, presumably placing these in the category of "sacred knowledge" (3). Greenberg, thus, calls Nat Turner a "semiotic rebel" because of his ability to read signs (2). As for readers' greater focus on gunpowder, James Sidbury writes, "historians have often and rightly cited that near-monopoly [in "firepower"] as a chief obstacle to any successful

knowledge takes on interpretive meaning. Most people around Turner are not able to understand “The lights in the sky”—presumably the stars, moon, and sun. However, Turner has a heuristic for interpreting this scientific knowledge through a religious lens. The sky itself is a scroll on which Turner receives messages from the divine being. Once again, Turner’s role is to read the signs and show other slaves how to read the signs.

The importance of learning the science of the revolutions of the planets forms a major feature of the narrative structure of *The Confessions*. Shortly after this portion about “lights in the sky,” Gray records other celestial signs that Turner saw: a loud noise on May 12, 1828⁴⁰; the eclipse on February 11, 1831, which was supposed to be the signal that “I should arise and prepare myself, and slay my enemies with their own weapons”⁴¹; and the reappearance of the sign of the sun’s blockage, meaning the discoloration of the sun on August 13. Turner presents all of these signs to Gray as a long preparation culminating in the final signal of the opportune moment to commence his revolt. This discourse on astronomy forms the basis of the second half of the first long paragraph of Gray’s record of his interview with Turner. This long paragraph ends right before the revolt starts when Turner explains that “the sign appeared again.”⁴² Reading in this way, the messianic preparation narrative which Turner unfolds to Gray in this long paragraph climaxes with his gaining mastery over the science of astronomy through the tutelage of the disembodied voice of the Holy Ghost.

Because of the long explanations Turner gives about his acquiring “knowledge of the revolutions of the planets” and about how he interprets the visions he sees, his narrative functions as instructions for other slaves to do what he did. Turner underscores the instructional

slave insurrection.” *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel’s Virginia, 1730-1810* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997), 66.

⁴⁰ Turner, 47.

⁴¹ Ibid., 48.

⁴² Ibid.

nature of his narrative when Gray asks him the question that is on everyone's mind: whether there was a larger insurrection planned. Turner responds, apparently spontaneously, by referring to the heavens as a general medium of communication about collective revolutionary action: "but can you not think the same ideas, and strange appearances about this time in the heaven's might prompt others, as well as myself, to this undertaking?"⁴³ This moment in Gray's cross-examination reiterates Turner's emphasis on astronomical signs. If people assume God is on the other side of the heavenly scroll—as Turner and many Virginians both white and black did—then having the ability to understand divine messages on that scroll gives an interpreter divine sanction.

Turner's scientific-religious interpretation of heavenly signs such as eclipses differed from Miller's strictly religious interpretation two key ways. First, Miller assumes the signs he observes foreshadow the imminent destruction of the earth and, thus, should not recur. In fact, if the same signs were to recur, they would nullify their original message. But Turner emphasizes the fact that astronomical signs recur, allowing for him to learn how to read them and to believe that other slaves will come to a similar understanding of future heavenly signs.

Second, Turner opens up this interpretive authority to everyone rather than reserving it for himself like William Miller does. In other words, Turner inverts the scale at which the heavenly scroll operates: he extends heavenly reading beyond the solitary individual viewing the heavens to a large community viewing each phenomenon as it unfolds in the skies above an inter-state territory. The 1831 edition of the *American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge*—published in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Cincinnati from 1830 to 1860—visually represents the national scale of such a perspective through a detailed fold-out map attached to its fly page, "A Map of the eclipse of Feb.^y 12th, in its passage across the United States." The map shows the pathway of the eclipse through a shaded area that covers parts of

⁴³ Ibid., 54.

Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Nova Scotia.⁴⁴ (The 1834 edition of the *American Almanac* repeats the map scheme of the 1831 edition and publishes another fly-page pull-out map which displays *both* the previous eclipse of February 12, 1831 and that year's eclipse on November 30, 1834—fig. 2.)⁴⁵ This map collapses the timespan of the eclipse by showing the shadow of the eclipse from all geographical points in one frame. The map also encourages thinking of the eclipse as a national event by framing the geographic space of the eclipse within the national boundaries of the United States and its territories. As for Turner's claim, he groups the people living in the shaded areas into viewing and interpreting communities.

⁴⁴ *American almanac and repository of useful knowledge for the year 1831: comprising a calendar for the year; astronomical information; miscellaneous directions, hints, and remarks; and statistical and other particulars respecting foreign countries and the United States*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1831).

⁴⁵ *American almanac and repository of useful knowledge for the year 1834*, Vol. 5 (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1834).



Figure 2: "A Map of the eclipses of Feb. 12th 1831 and Nov. 30th 1834 in their passage across the United States," from the *American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge* (Gray & Bowen: Boston, 1834). The shadow from Louisiana to Massachusetts is the central path of the 1831 eclipse, and the shadow from Arkansas to South Carolina is the central path of the 1834 eclipse. Image retrieved 2 June 2014 from Michael Zeiler, "Historical Solar Eclipse Maps," 365 Days of Astronomy Podcast, 25 Sept. 2011, <http://www.eclipse-maps.com/Eclipse-Maps/PodcastHistoricalEclipses.html>

As such, Turner worked to establish the heavenly scroll as a communication medium for other slaves in a position similar to his. An eclipse has no stable *a priori* meaning, so for the eclipse to communicate something, Turner needed to put “different people on the same mental map” by spreading a specific way of reading it, albeit a way that seems to have precedent in the widespread religious interpretations of astronomical events. Turner knew that Gray was taking notes, that he was going to write something that would be published in some capacity. Thomas Parramore argues that Turner used Gray and his soon to be published text as “a God-sent medium.”⁴⁶ If, as Parramore suggests, Turner viewed Gray as a means for reaching a broader audience, then his testimony constitutes an attempt to educate other slaves on how to read the heavenly scroll and even coordinate synchronized action. Moreover, the editors of the *American Almanac* claim to have begun their book-selling venture in 1830 precisely because of the astronomical phenomena that were ahead of them: “The eclipse of the twelfth of February is the first of a very remarkable series of five large eclipses of the sun, visible to us [Americans] in the short term of seven years.”⁴⁷ Incidentally, Gray’s text did sell well and many whites feared the circulation of his text for the ways in which it would inspire copycats.

Countering Millennial Readings of the Heavenly Scroll

William Miller wasn’t the only leader disappointed by the Great Comet of 1843. In a speech to the Cincinnati Astronomical Society at the dedication of the first nationally affiliated observatory in November of 1843, President John Quincy Adams celebrated the observatory as a two-pronged means of achieving his goal of American international prestige: first, by constituting a physical marker of American achievements, and second, by discouraging modes of reading the heavens that might threaten civil governments. According to Renee Bergland,

⁴⁶ Thomas C. Parramore, “Covenant in Jerusalem,” in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed., 73.

⁴⁷ *American almanac and repository of useful knowledge for the year 1831*.

Adams' speech responded to the American scientific community's disappointment over the comet of 1843, which made them aware of the lack of American observatories capable of making scientific observations in a regular, institutionalized way.⁴⁸ More broadly, Adams' speech registered frustration with the kind of heavenly interpretation taking place on a wider scale in America, exemplified by leaders such as Miller and Turner.

Indeed, although he never explicitly mentions the comet, Adams makes national shame a theme of his speech and a motivation for establishing the first national observatory. Specifically, Adams laments how America ignored English astronomer Sir William Herschel's discovery that Uranus was a planet in 1781; as the self-professed "patroness of science," America should have been most open to such a rational discovery.⁴⁹ Adams breaks off from this obscure complaint, saying "The theme is painful—let me pass it over."⁵⁰ Returning to the purpose of the Cincinnati observatory, Adams says, "FELLOW-CITIZENS!—The Astronomical Society of the city of Cincinnati, have determined to wipe the reproach from the fair fame of our beloved country."⁵¹ For Adams and the scientific community, a nation's international reputation directly correlated to its proximity to the stars via observation technologies.

Adams' belief that astronomy supports the work of nationalism was motivated by a perceived threat to the nation, a threat deeper than scientific apathy. His speech returns many times to the threats civil government encounter when astronomical events interpellate people who interpret them improperly. Regarding eclipses and comets specifically, Adams says, "Terror and consternation spread universally, at these sports of nature with the passions of man, while their causes remain unrevealed. But when once disclosed they are found to be among the

⁴⁸ Bergland, *Maria Mitchell and the Sexing of Science*, 65.

⁴⁹ John Quincy Adams, *An Oration Delivered Before the Cincinnati Astronomical Society, on the Occasion of Laying the Corner Stone of an Astronomical Observatory, on the 10th of November, 1843*, (Cincinnati: Shepard & Co., 1843), 59.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

simplest and most harmless operations of nature.”⁵² He proceeds to provide a detailed explanation of solar eclipses, lunar eclipses, and comets, arguing that understanding such events will help people to realize how “harmless” they are. This protracted explanation sounds pedantic given that Adams’ audience likely already shared his knowledge of scientific astronomy, but his rant suggests that he and his listeners were concerned about public ignorance, and it serves as a call for broader public education. Similarly, Maureen Perkins describes how British civil authorities in the nineteenth century feared that the unstable act of astronomical interpretation could unsettle earthly governments: “Prophecies had always been suspected by civil authorities.... Prophecy was closely linked with millenarianism, and civil authorities were fearful of the widespread expectation of an end to earthly government.”⁵³

Furthermore, Adams’ anxiety about public ignorance registers the challenge his nationalist goal faces, namely one of ubiquitous circulation. Novels and newspapers help readers to imagine the nation, as Benedict Anderson has famously argued, but those media are inherently limited in the number of people they reach.⁵⁴ Almanacs circulated more broadly across social strata than most books, and civil leaders welcomed almanacs’ scientific explanations since they feared that a superstitious populace would interpret astronomical phenomena as signs of the end of earthly government,⁵⁵ although not all almanacs were

⁵² Ibid., 27.

⁵³ Maureen Perkins, *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time, and Cultural Change 1775-1870*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), 96.

⁵⁴ Anderson writes, “The slow, uneven decline of these interlinked certainties, first in Western Europe, later elsewhere, under the impact of economic change, ‘discoveries’ (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications, drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history.... Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36).

⁵⁵ Maureen Perkins characterizes almanacs as one of the most popular forms of literature among working class populations. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, reformers began to use almanacs—which previously relied heavily on astrological content—to discourage astrological reading and encourage scientific reading of astronomical events. Perkins discusses the *British Almanac*, launched in 1828, as a paradigm reform almanac, which expunged superstitious astrological content and encouraged scientific understanding through its text. She

scientific.⁵⁶ By contrast to print media, “sports of nature” such as eclipses and comets constituted a substantive obstacle to Adams’ nationalist goals—and to the influence of print in Anderson’s account—because of how they “spread terror and consternation universally,” that is, how they were viewable to nearly everyone and how they interpellated untrained viewers.⁵⁷ Conversely, exactly this aspect of the heavenly scroll had proved productive for Turner.

Adams takes care not to disparage religion explicitly in his speech. In fact, he quotes the Christian Bible to support his argument, although he mistakes both the content and purpose of the text he alludes to: “[Thales of Miletus] was contemporary with the prophet Jeremiah, and with king Ahaz, whose sun dial was the subject of a miracle, which proves beyond all question, that the use of the dial was familiarly known and had been so for ages, in the kingdom of Judah” (30). Adams shows his tenuous knowledge of the Bible, confusing Jeremiah for Isaiah and Ahaz for Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:9-11). More importantly, though, Adams skips the main point of the story—the fact that the sun’s movement was a miraculous sign to Hezekiah directly from God—and instead celebrates a scriptural precedent for using scientific instruments such as sundials. Instead of explicitly disparaging religious sects, Adams discusses the effects of the stars on “primitive man”: “He believes that they are susceptible of sensual and of sordid impulses; that they are rivals in love and ambition, and that heaven is as discordant as earth—a perpetual scene

writes, “[I]t was replete with tables of statistics. The promotion of statistics was a feature of the Whig press in the 1830s as it advanced scientific procedure.” Perkins, 55.

⁵⁶ For example, the *Tragic Almanac* published in New York City by C. P. Huestis in 1843 recorded tragic murders from the past year, including stories in which slaves murdered their masters and free blacks murdered white people. Of course, many almanacs saw their purpose as instructive, if not perfectly scientific. The *Churchman’s Almanac for 1831*, published in New York City by the Protestant Episcopal Press, claims that “Almanacs disseminate more widely than, perhaps, any other species of tracts, whatever of amusement or instruction they may contain. Reflecting persons have on these accounts, long regarded and employed them as very proper vehicles for the diffusion of the precepts of economy, morality, and religion.”

⁵⁷ His phrase “sports of nature” draws from a way of viewing nature exemplified in a poem printed in 1780, “Lusus Naturae; or, the Sports of Nature: A Poem” (*Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*). In the poem, an omnipotent and benevolent but distant God looks on while Nature, embodied as a female, plays and entertains herself on earth.

of civil wars, and insurrections, never totally suppressed.”⁵⁸ Of course, by discussing “primitive men” at all, Adams assumes they still existed and continued to threaten the stability of civil government. He and his audience likely thought of the ongoing social discord caused by William Miller and the Second Adventists, who were still anticipating the end of the world that year or the next. Adams’ audience would likely also have remembered the violent insurrection of Nat Turner, just twelve years prior.

Ultimately, Adams hopes the observatory will help to put Americans on a new, less religiously sectarian mental map when it comes to reading the heavenly scroll, which operates according to measurable divine laws rather than extemporaneous divine signs. To accomplish this goal, Adams calls for the mutually reinforcing union of institutionalized government and scientific practice: he wants science to standardize people’s views of the heavens by making the heavens an object of study, reducing threats to civil authority from signifying heavenly scrolls. In return, he argues that governments must support the sciences financially in order to keep receiving the benefit of social stability. Adams views sundials, telescopes, observatories, and almanacs full of calculations (such as the *American Almanac*) as stabilizing media—not only technological tools but also symbols and enforcers of stability that circulated a protocol for the correct (i.e. nonthreatening) way to interpret the eclipse and foreclosed incorrect ways to interpret the eclipse. Ultimately, though, Adams doesn’t want people to stop observing the heavens; he too appeals to the interpellative power of the heavenly scroll, something too fascinating to ignore.

Conclusion

Ways of understanding astronomical events proliferated in the nineteenth century: many people held religiously-inflected assumptions about what the heavenly scroll indicated, while a

⁵⁸ Adams, 46.

minority of reformers who were more educated in natural sciences actively worked against what they thought of as “superstition.” Regardless of their religion or social standing, many leaders leveraged the interpellative power of astronomical events for their own social projects, using them to bolster their authority and persuade people to think and do things they otherwise might not. At stake was not so much a debate between science and religion but rather the authority gained when one leader or group regulated interpretation of the heavenly scroll.

In this context, Turner’s claim that the eclipse inspired him and his assumption that it could inspire others carries more of an insurrectionary tone than previously thought because of how it aligned with popular modes of astronomical interpretation. This method of reading *The Confessions* as a kind of instructional text for revolutionary action demonstrates how an eclipse could function as a communicative medium between humans, with astronomical events and printed texts closing a communication circuit between a divine being and a geographically dispersed community of people. Of course, no other wide scale revolt followed a major astronomical event in the US. Nevertheless, considering the heavenly scroll as a communication medium allows scholars of literature, history, and culture to better understand the intersection (or collision) of astronomical and religious knowledge in America. Furthermore, Turner’s blending of scientific and religious interpretation for revolutionary ends was later a literary-rhetorical strategy that featured in Martin Delany’s novel *Blake* and in Henry David Thoreau’s, Walt Whitman’s, and Herman Melville’s reflections on John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, all three of whom figure Brown as a meteor.⁵⁹ Because of the uneven knowledge and beliefs people

⁵⁹ In his reflection on John Brown’s execution in December of 1859, “The Last Days of John Brown” (1860) Thoreau compares Brown’s actions to a meteor: “John Brown’s career for the last six weeks of his life was meteor-like, flashing through the darkness in which we live. I know of nothing so miraculous in our history” (283). Like a meteor, Brown’s career is both brilliant and brief. By the second to last paragraph of the reflection, the metaphor shifts from Brown’s career to Brown’s lifeless body: “What a transit was that of his horizontal body alone, but just cut down from the gallows-tree! We read that at such a time it passed through Philadelphia, and by Saturday night had reached New York. Thus like a meteor it shot through the Union from the Southern regions toward the North! No such freight had the cars borne since they carried him southward alive” (288). With the benefit of hindsight after the start of the Civil War, Melville and Whitman describe Brown using the same meteor metaphor. Melville’s “The Portent (1859)” from his *Battle Pieces* (1866) refers to “(Weird John Brown) / The meteor of the war” (lms. 13-14). Whitman’s “Year of Meteors” (1859-1860) describes “how an old man, tall, with white hair, mounted the

had about astronomy and because of the recurrence of astronomical events, Turner's statement carried the potential for a significant afterlife. Beyond the bounds of *The Confessions*, slaves frequently held millennial beliefs, perhaps because they stood to gain more from the belief in a day of judgment than free citizens. When an astronomical event intersected with the material and religious conditions of slavery, one can see why Turner thought that other slaves would read an eclipse as a signal for revolution.

scaffold in Virginia" (ln. 4). Whitman's poem in particular situates Brown's body as one in a series of real astronomical phenomena that took place in 1859 and 1860: "Year of comets and meteors transient and strange—lo! Even here one equally transient and strange" (ln. 23).

Ch. 2: Supporting the Substance: Reading Sojourner Truth's Sonic Tactics

In the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Bondswoman of Olden Time* (1850), Sojourner Truth discusses how she used singing for an unusual purpose. At an 1844 camp meeting in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she was participating as a worshipper and itinerant preacher, a band of “wild young men” disrupted the proceedings by openly mocking the speakers, refusing to leave when confronted by the camp’s leaders, and threatening to burn down the tents. Truth says that she caught the sense of fear pervading the worshippers and hid behind a trunk in her tent, thinking that since she was the only black person present, the mob would attack her first. However, she reasoned with herself and resolved to do something: as the noise of the mob increased and a female preacher was “trembling on the preachers’ stand,” Truth went to a small hill and began to sing “in her most fervid manner, with all the strength of her most powerful voice, the hymn on the resurrection of Christ” (116).¹ The sudden impact of her voice singing “It was Early in the Morning” gathered the rioters to her and quieted them. They urged her to sing, preach, and pray for their entertainment (“Sing to us, old woman,” 117). After singing songs and preaching at the rioters’ request for about an hour, Truth bargained with them to leave after one final song. The mob agreed, and Truth replied, “AMEN! it is SEALED,[’]... in the deepest and most solemn tones of her powerful and sonorous voice. Its effects ran through the multitude, like an electric shock; and the most of them considered themselves bound by their promise” (119). Then she sang, “I bless the Lord I’ve got my seal,” and the mob upheld the bargain, departing from the camp meeting.

Singing was a tool that Truth found useful in other situations as well.² During an interview in 1879, Truth told a reporter from the Chicago *Daily Inter-Ocean* about a time when

¹ Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from her “Book of Life”* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

² Charles Mabey points out in *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: NYU P, 1993) that Truth usually sang before or after she gave a speech (222).

she sang at an anti-slavery convention in Boston. William Lloyd Garrison had introduced her and Wendell Phillips as the next two respective speakers; Truth told the interviewer, “I didn’t care about his following, but I thought I can do one thing that he can’t do. I had some home-made songs—I used to make many songs—and I will sing that to begin with and that will stand a good chance.”³ Wendell Phillips was the foremost abolitionist orator and, next to Garrison, one of the figureheads of the abolitionist movement in the 1840s. In order to put herself on equal footing with Phillips, Truth thought about things she could do and he couldn’t, and she settled on singing “I Am Pleading for My People,” a song of her own making.⁴ By Truth’s account, the audience’s enthusiastic applause (“how the people did clap”) signaled her performance’s success.

Explaining why singing was an effective means for manipulating the crowds in these two different contexts—religious and abolitionist—presents a challenge for literary scholars because the power of singing in both situations derives from a force more tangible than rhetorical persuasion or shared cultural and religious practices. Frederick Douglass, for example, reads the impact of slave songs in a way scholars have come to expect when he frames their power in rhetorical terms: the songs “tell a tale of woe,” and they sound in “tones loud, long, and deep” which function as “testimony against slavery.”⁵ Conversely, in the Northampton account, Truth’s songs’ power to contain the mob did not come from their lyrics, which used religious themes, nor from shared cultural practices since the mob had already expressed its hostility to camp meeting protocols. In the Boston account, Truth’s song’s anti-slavery lyrics are appropriate for the context of an anti-slavery meeting, but her story emphasizes how unexpected it was for her

³ “Sojourner Truth. An Interesting Talk with this Famous Colored Woman,” *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, 13 August 1879.

⁴ Margaret Washington in *Sojourner Truth’s America* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 2009) records several individual instances where Truth opened a speech or closed (or both) with “I Am Pleading for My People” (240, 258, 274, 364).

⁵ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave in Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994): 24.

to sing at the convention in the first place. Certainly, part of singing's power in Truth's two accounts comes from the defamiliarizing impact of its sudden appearance in an unlikely context and the singer's visible racial status—Truth points out that she's the only black person at Northampton and hints at the multiple contrasts between herself and Phillips as convention addressors. But in both cases, Truth suggests that a black person's singing entails not only audible and visible defamiliarization but a tangible force.

Truth prioritizes a third factor of singing's power when she describes sounds in material terms. First, in the camp meeting story, she characterizes her voice as a material substance when she compares the sound of her voice (the immediate referent of "its effects") to "an electric shock," an ephemeral but materially palpable substance. Indeed, many accounts of black men's and women's singing and speaking from the nineteenth century point out the palpable force of black songs, often in electrical terms; and while the connection between race and electricity wasn't exclusive, race often influenced listeners' experiences.⁶ Second, in the anti-slavery convention story, Truth characterizes her songs as material objects when she interrupts her story to explain the crafting of her songs—"I used to *make* many songs," not "write" or "make up." By these accounts, a key aspect of singing's power came from its materiality: the way singing packed rhythmic language, music, and the texture of an individual's voice into a single unit, a unit which in the early nineteenth century existed only through vocal performance. As such, black singing established a pulsing, cross-racial connection between the bodies of singers and audience members—between vocal cords and cochleae. Of course, speech in the early

⁶ See, for example, Thomas Wentworth Higginson's *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1864-67), where he describes his regiment of former slaves singing "My Country, 't is of thee": "Firmly and irrepressibly the quavering voices sang on, verse after verse; others of the colored people joined in; some whites on the platform began, but I motioned them to silence. I never saw anything so electric; it made all other words cheap; it seemed the choked voice of a race at last unloosed" (New York: Penguin, 1995) 31. See also William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison's introduction to their 1867 collection *Slave Songs of the United States*: "The last time I myself heard these was at the Fourth of July celebration, at the church, in 1864. All of them were sung, and then the glorious shout, "I can't stay behind, my Lord," was struck up, and sung by the entire multitude with a zest and a spirit, a swaying of the bodies and nodding of the heads and lighting of the countenances and rhythmical movements of the hands, which I think no one present will ever forget" (New York: Dover, 1995): ii.

nineteenth century also established such a bodily connection (and distinguishing between speech and song in the context of oral production and performance is difficult).⁷ But as Truth's and other writers' accounts suggest, when someone makes a sonic connection with listeners in ways that listeners don't expect (singing instead of speech, the voice of a black person instead of a white person), the impact of such a sonic connection consequently moves people's bodies and consciousness in ways they do not expect.

In short, Truth's conceptualization of singing as material and forceful calls for us to read singing by black performers in the early nineteenth century as a form of the "intervening media" which my dissertation project conceptualizes. Intervening media create material connections between communicators in such a way that they also intervene in or interrupt people's usual courses of action, and they do so without infrastructural networks or inscription.⁸ I borrow the term "intervening media" from Raymond Williams's parsing the twentieth-century concept of "media": one meaning that has converged into the contemporary technology-focused notion is "the old general sense of an intervening or intermediary agency or substance."⁹ I draw on two meanings of "intervening" to conceptualize how these media work: they *fill* space like a gas or liquid, thus establishing multiple connecting pathways that seem ordinary unless one imagines trying to shout in a vacuum; as such, these media also carry the potential to *interrupt* people along the communication circuit like a bolt of lightning following a path through air or water.

⁷ Hortense Spillers calls the black sermon part of "the first 'music' I ever heard" and describes it as "a *mezclada* of elements which hone and combine musical patterns (including jazz-like syncopation and blues overview), folk speech rhythms, folk sagacity and proverb, and dramatic/oratorical power" (5). *Fabrics of History: Essays on the Black Sermon* (Brandeis U PhD, 1974).

⁸ In contrast, when people think about communication media, they tend to divide them as Bruce Clarke does into transmission media like the telegraph and inscription media like daguerreotypes, both of which operate on a scale larger than that of bodily interaction and prioritize information, focusing on how people decode the information media carry. Bruce Clarke, "Information," *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010): 164.

⁹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983): 203.

Truth, for example, talks about her songs as things that forge connections on an intimate scale and influence people to think and act without decoding information that has been transmitted to them through the medium of her songs. Truth's amanuenses talk about the impact of her songs in a similar way, rarely meditating on the lyrics of her songs but rather on their charismatic force. Thus, I characterize slaves' songs as an intervening medium because listeners experience singing as imbued with a palpable force, partly because of the medium's physical impact on their bodies and partly because of their expectations about the singers. Consequently, I locate the agency of singing not with the singer or even with listeners so much as with the song itself. Agency is at work in all three locations—in the singer's decision to sing, in listeners' assumptions about the person they see and the sounds they feel, and in the song. Slave songs impacted people physically and influenced people in ways that extended beyond the context of the singing performance.

Of course, reading Truth's songs as material media presents a challenge for historians and literary scholars: Truth's songs are inaccessible in a sonic format since most of them were performed before sound recording technology existed. So how can a researcher gauge singing's ability to push on listeners without having the songs in a sonic format? I follow the lead of sound studies scholars such as Eric Leigh Schmidt, Richard Cullen Rath, and Jonathan Sterne who search the print archive to discover trends in how people talked about sound while also considering how talk impacted people's experiences of sound.¹⁰ Print may seem like a counterproductive place to turn when listening for sounds, but as Schmidt asserts, the

¹⁰ Eric Leigh Schmidt in *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000) critiques what he calls "the larger narratives that have shaped the history of hearing in the modern West" — namely that vision is superior to sound and that sound is lost to moderns who prioritize sight over speech (7). Richard Cullen Rath writes in *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003) that "Any part of the audible world outside that which is reducible to print and writing gets missed" (3) but he proposes to recover such sounds through his argument that sounds had meaning to their hearers, meanings which changed over time. Jonathan Sterne makes a similar argument about how to recover sounds in *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), although he makes a more forceful argument, claiming "human beings reside at the center of any meaningful definition of sound" (11), which I understand as Sterne prioritizing human conceptualization of sound above what some might see as the material or "concrete" aspects of sound.

assumption that print cannot record sound leans heavily on Walter Ong's distinction between the exclusive worlds of oral culture and writing culture, which Schmidt argues aren't as exclusive as Ong claims.¹¹ In fact, print provides a detailed record of how Truth sounded to her audiences because it records the historical context of nineteenth-century listening. Conversely, having a recording of Truth's voice wouldn't reveal why her singing was so influential or why she talks about her singing in certain ways because people hear sounds differently in the twenty-first century than they did in the nineteenth.¹²

But as I've suggested, the impact of Truth's singing involves more than the historical constructs which Schmidt, Rath, and Sterne investigate; one of my starting assumptions is that the material form of Truth's songs is at least partly responsible for the way people talk about the songs' impact. Media scholars such as Friedrich Kittler, Niklass Luhmann, Lisa Gitelman, and Siegfried Zielinski tend to focus on the technologies that capture, store, and transmit sound and light rather than the material form which vocal sound inhabits or the way vocal sound interacts with people's bodies.¹³ Media scholars have tended not to classify songs as media because they don't view songs as material objects, usually a necessary condition for what counts as media.¹⁴

¹¹ Schmidt, 7-8; 16-20; Schmidt also shows how Ong's assumptions were popularized by his mentor—Marshall McLuhan (20-21). Cf. Sterne, 14-15.

¹² Sterne, especially, argues against "transhistorical constructs of sound" (14).

¹³ I make this claim because of the objects most media theorists structure their analysis around. Friedrich Kittler's classic *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999) is, indeed, organized around those three technologies. Niklass Luhmann in *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996) focuses on what he calls "media systems" that restrict people's knowledge of the world, but he limits the mass media to three main sources: news, advertising, and entertainment. Lisa Gitelman in a comparison of media across centuries organizes her analysis around material objects such as the phonograph and the internet in *New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2006). Siegfried Zielinski in *Deep Time of Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2006) focuses on "seeing and hearing by technical means"; though Zielinski advocates "keep[ing] the concept of media as wide open as possible" (33), he still limits his study to objects used for reproducing information in time or space (31). Sterne, though not technically a media historian, focuses on objects such as the stethoscope to learn about the history of sound (cf. ch. 2, "Techniques of Listening").

¹⁴ Some media scholars are beginning to pay more attention to how the body acts as a form of media or a vehicle of mediation. N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999) makes an important distinction between the body and "embodiment." Bernadette Wegenstein in "Body" and Caroline Jones in "Senses", similarly, advocate for viewing the body as central to understanding media in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*.

As a result of this technological focus, media scholars overlook songs, which is a significant oversight for media in the time of slavery since slaves usually had limited or restricted access to material forms of communication technology. Understanding Truth's songs as material media opens up a way to read a kind of object that has so far been outside of the disciplinary fields of literature, history, and media.

In the first part of this essay, I situate Sojourner Truth's description of her songs within two broader (and occasionally overlapping) sonic discourses from the early nineteenth century: a scientific analogy between electricity and sound (especially music) and the sonic practices of Methodism. To give a sense of how these discourses intersect with each other and with abolitionism, I look at several passages in abolitionist Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New-York* (1841-1843), which provides an important record of shifting listening practices in the 1840s.¹⁵ In each of these contexts, concurrent assumptions about race and sex establish social hierarchies which, I argue, singing was uniquely positioned to upset. In the final part, I consider songs ability to impinge on listeners' subjective identity and the impact of songs after they enter print. In addition to providing an argument for formal readings of sound's materiality, I hope to add depth to the way scholars understand slave songs, which they have tended to view as having revolutionary potential but without providing an account of how songs function, characterizing them solely in the terms of "coded messages about resistance" or "vehicles of protest."¹⁶

¹⁵ Lydia Maria Child published her weekly column "Letters from New-York" in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (NASS) from August 1841 to May 1843 during the time she edited the NASS; the column presents weekly sketches of New York City written to friends at a distance, especially friends in Boston. The column appeared in the newspaper next to antislavery content, and it occasionally exhibited anti-slavery content itself, though not always. Later, Child edited the column into a book *Letters from New-York*, from which she excised some of the more explicit antislavery content. Quotations from *Letters from New-York*, Bruce Mills, ed. (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1998).

¹⁶ These characterizations of music come from Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993): 166, and Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 2.

“More Like Electricity”: Singing’s Material Form and Function

To put it simply, Sojourner Truth’s singing does not fit the complex matrix of social norms that surrounded public music-making practices or public address in the nineteenth century. In many ways, categorizing her singing is a challenge because, as a frequent decorum-breaker, she often constitutes an exception. Other women were proscribed for their entry into male-dominated spaces of public address, such as Angelina Grimke or Francis Ellen Watkins Harper. This proscription was primarily the result of social and religious norms, but it is important to realize that contemporary science of race, gender, and sound mutually reinforced this proscription. In contrast to most white and black women of the time, Truth either found ways around social norms or broke them, and she justified her actions through sonic discourse that had intertwining and overlapping roots in both popular science and Methodist theology. While the story of Truth’s sonic tactics cast her as a particularly savvy user of scientific and religious discourse, it also reveals how the logic that subordinated blacks and women on a hierarchy of being could also be made to work backwards against listeners who were higher up the social hierarchy.

Public performances of music tended to divide along lines of the sacred and secular: most music sung or performed was religious in nature, whether in more respectable settings or in the chaotic settings of camp meetings and religious revivals; secular music was rarer and tended to be performed in urban centers, whether upper-class concerts and operas or working class blackface minstrel shows.¹⁷ Whether a sonic performance counted as music at all had a lot to do with where it was performed: a concert hall would flag sound as music whereas a city street might reduce sound to noise. Sex and race factored strongly into who was allowed to perform music or to speak in public. Many thought of female speakers as promiscuous because

¹⁷ For more on social norms surrounding music performance and their settings, see Rebecca Bechtold, “‘She Sings a Stamp of Originality’: Sentimental Mimicry in Jenny Lind’s American Tour,” *ESQ* 58.4 (2012): 493-528; for more on camp meetings, revivals, and religious music in the United States, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1989).

of how their bodies, voices, and passions were on display. Music performed by black singers, especially black women, often elicited similar accusations of promiscuity because of assumptions about black females' excessive sexuality.¹⁸

People saw public female speech as a problem because of its conspicuous materiality. Writing specifically about Angelina and Sarah Grimke, Deborah Garfield explains how audiences viewed public female speech: for the speaker, a lecture "was too frequently refigured by detractors into the visual metaphor of striptease, as if the female voice, confounding sound and flesh, were the exposed body itself" (102); for the listeners, a lecture "wounded the fragile ears of their middle-class female auditors" (101), and if it was understood as a kind of striptease, the female voice also would have hurt the integrity of middle-class male auditors.¹⁹ Significantly, on both sides of the communication circuit, female speech was viewed as more material than rhetorical, "confounding" or intermingling the speaker's "sound and flesh," able to "wound" fragile ears. As such, female speakers (and even writers, as Garfield contends of Harriet Jacobs) always had to restrain their advocacy or denunciations so that they didn't become excessively material. These constraints on female speech usually applied to female singing as well, even as the music scene became gradually more accepting of female performers over the 1840s and 1850s, such as the Swedish Nightingale Jenny Lind who first visited the US in 1850.²⁰

¹⁸ Alex Black discusses how people heard music based on setting and on how they heard black singers in "Abolitionism's Resonant Bodies: the Realization of African-American Performance," *American Quarterly* 63.3 (2011): 619-39.

¹⁹ For more on nineteenth century assumptions about the "fragile ears" of middle-class female listeners, see Deborah M. Garfield, "Earwitness: Female Abolitionism, Sexuality, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," in *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar, eds. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 101.

²⁰ Discomfort with public female singing caused family controversy for the Hutchinson Family Singers: originally, the group was three brothers, Judson, John, and Asa who sang and played instruments, but when they asked their sister Abby to join them, many in their family disapproved. Ultimately, Abby joined the group though.

Sojourner Truth, rather than submitting to these constraints, seized on the materiality of black female sound-making as a way of leveraging her activism. Indeed, unlike Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* or Methodist preacher Jarena Lee's *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*, the material impact of sound on people is a consistent theme of Truth's 1850 *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, A Bondswoman of Olden Time*, from which the Northampton camp meeting account that I started this chapter with comes. In one particularly noteworthy example of sonic tactics, Truth curses her son's former owners, the Gedneys and Fowlers, for their maltreatment of her son, saying "Oh, Lord, render unto them double!" (54, 58); Truth regrets her curse when the Gedney family is devastated after Fowler murders his wife Eliza (Gedney). Nell Irvin Painter reads this statement as a "*maleficium*," a special type of curse for afflicting poor neighbors, possibly with African roots in Truth's case.²¹ Reading Truth's statement as words, the phrase is merely rhetorical; as a curse, it is material, instilled with the power to influence events and people.

Truth frequently explains her religious life in sonic terms. She had once assumed that the volume of her voice had a direct correlation to how well God heard her, so she sometimes went to an island in a stream by a waterfall "so she could speak louder to God, without being overheard by any who might pass that way" (60). Although Truth shows herself in this moment submitting to the social assumption that being loud was rude, she simultaneously portrays herself shouting as loud as a waterfall. In Truth's most significant moment of divine revelation, she describes the experience of receiving a communication from God as electricity: "God revealed himself to her, with all the suddenness of a flash of lightning, showing her, 'in the twinkling of an eye, that he was all over'—that he pervaded the universe—'and that there was no place where God was not'" (65). The fact that Truth uses electricity as her analogy here is not

²¹ In *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996), 35, 300n8.

actually a move away from sound; rather, her choice of analogy taps into a popular scientific understanding of the connection between the materiality of sound (especially music) and the human body in the nineteenth century. To trace the sources of Truth's analogy and their stakes requires making a few twists and turns through the science of music and the theology of electricity, but these moves are important for understanding singing's materiality in the nineteenth century.

Long before Bob Dylan debuted electric sound at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, and before audiences were electrified by amplifiers turned "up to 11," people imagined music's materiality and impact on the body in electrical terms. Starting in the seventeenth century, the scientific community in Europe and the US gradually understood sound, especially music, as a material substance that directly impacted people's bodies. Penelope Gouk traces this shift in the way music fit into European's cosmologies: up to the sixteenth century, musical composers "sought to legitimate their art through knowledge of mathematical principles" but because people began to conceptualize a divide between the arts and sciences, composers instead began to focus on their music's "power to move the passions."²² This general belief in music's power to evoke strong emotions has persisted to the present. By the mid-eighteenth century, people had begun to explain human passions in terms of humoral theory, claiming music had a mechanical effect on bodily fluids and nerves.²³ In the latter half of the eighteenth century, scientists began to explain nerves in terms of electricity rather than fluid, so the explanation for music's ability to move the passions shifted to an electrical analogy. Scientists had begun to believe that music's

²² Penelope Gouk, "Raising Spirits and Restoring Souls: Early Modern Medical Explanations for Music's Effects," in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, Veit Erlmann, ed. (New York: Berg, 2004): 87-105; 89. Cf. James Kennaway, "Stimulating Music: The Pleasures and Dangers of 'Electric Music,' 1750-1900," *Configurations* 19.2 (2011): 191.

²³ Gouk, 97-98. In music therapy accounts, physicians discuss how to use music as a tool for treating patients: "Physicians were undecided whether these spirits actually constituted the sensitive soul itself or were simply its agent, but they agreed that they were transmitted through the nerves and acted as the medium of all sensory and motor functions. Second, the structure of the nerves, too, was in doubt. Some physicians conceptualized them as small pipes through which the animal spirits flowed like a fine liquor. Others claimed the nerves to be more like strings that communicated their effects through elastic, vibrative motion" (98).

physical effect on bodies was like an electrical effect on the nerves. Some scientists removed the analogy, such as physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter, who claimed in 1810 that all sounds were electrical.²⁴ James Kennaway introduces the music-electricity analogy by comparing it with another dominant theory of music and another popular form of entertainment media:

According to [one] approach, nerves are the means by which sensation reaches the imagination, but music remains a matter of the mind and the passions rather than of the body. Others took a more mechanistic view, arguing that music had a direct effect on the nerves, not necessarily mediated by the listening subject or the passions. Unlike novels, it was argued, music did not just stimulate the nerves via the imagination; its effect was direct and more like electricity.²⁵

Although people disagreed about the science behind the relation between music and the body, they agreed that music had a physical effect on people's bodies regardless of whether they were slave or free, white or black, devout or secular. Nevertheless, the order of operation between medium and body is significant for the more material, mechanistic view. The effect of music was more direct on the body than with media like novels, which people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often considered to be one of the most volatile forms of media.²⁶ Novels' more heavily mediated content first enters the brain through the eyes, is decoded, and then stimulates the body. Conversely, in the mechanical view, people don't decode music right away: music collides with the body, produces a physical response, and then is decoded in the mind.

²⁴ Ritter hypothesized in reference to sound in 1810 that "every sound is electrical, and every electrical figure is a sound" (qtd. in and trans. by Kennaway 198).

²⁵ Kennaway, 195.

²⁶ Cathy Davidson notes in *Revolution and the Word: the Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford, 2004), "In the minds of many of America's leaders, the novel was more closely allied with the Whiskey Rebellion and Shays's Rebellion than with the Constitutional Convention" (5); she also notes, "[The novel] required no knowledge of Latin or Greek, no intermediation or interpretation by cleric or academic. It required, in fact—from reader and writer—virtually no traditional education or classical erudition since, by definition, the novel was new, novel" (71).

Most importantly, electricity was a powerful way to imagine connections both within and between human bodies. James Delbourgo explains eighteenth-century assumptions about the connection electricity could establish between mind and body: “Electricity defied the logic of Cartesian dualism, according to which mind and body were separate entities, by putting mind and body into startlingly direct communication.”²⁷ Sir Isaac Newton conceptualized electricity as “a force that mediated between the material and immaterial realms of a divinely ordered universe.”²⁸ Observers noticed that music could also have a dramatic physical effect on people similar to electricity: Gouk points out that composers increasingly used music to arouse listeners’ passions; Kennaway shows that both music and electricity were thought of as “therapeutic and erotic stimulants.”²⁹ So an electrical analogy accounted for music’s simultaneous effect on one’s mind *and* body.

Significantly, this scientific analogy between music and electricity presupposed another analogy which scientists believed had significant explanative power: the analogy between race and sex as markers of inferiority, specifically non-white race and female sex.³⁰ Eighteenth-century naturalists performed experiments to observe the transfer of electricity from body to body; they experimented on men and women, rich and poor people, and whites and blacks, and their findings ostensibly showed that the bodies of women and black people were more susceptible to the transfer of electricity than other bodies. In one case, naturalist Philippe Fermin transmitted an electrical shock from an electric eel through a ring of Guianan slaves holding hands, assuming the shock would travel better through blacks than white people.³¹

²⁷ James Delbourgo, *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006): 8.

²⁸ Qtd. in Delbourgo, 32.

²⁹ Kennaway, 200.

³⁰ Nancy Lays Stepan writes about how the analogy between race and gender helped to create or suppress new knowledge in the sciences in “Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science,” *Isis* 77.2 (1986): 261-77.

³¹ Delbourgo, 186-87.

Similar assumptions of racial and sexual hierarchy bled over into the science of sound.³² However, since women and blacks could also be active producers of sound, the hierarchy posed problems. A good example of these problems is how people complained that the Grimke sisters were “wounding” women’s “fragile ears.” As the hierarchy suggests, women are more easily damaged by sound than men. But on the other hand, women were producing the sounds assumed to be harmful to men and women, thus upsetting the hierarchy. Race worked similarly: when abolitionist Lydia Maria Child reflected on the singing of black Methodist preacher Julia Pell and her black congregation, she wrote, “The gift of song is universal with Africans; and the fact is a prophetic one” (51). Child characterizes African singing as a racial-biological gift that African people share universally (an assumption she backs up by citing cultural-scientific travelogues on Africans), and in the context of Pell’s loud revival preaching, Child casts the black congregation as unusually susceptible to sound. On the other hand, the “gift” of song carries the potential for disrupting other listeners, such as Child herself who claims she is carried away by Pell’s preaching. This hierarchy of who was most affected by electrical shock or sound paralleled eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific hierarchies of sex and race and says more about social constructs than empirical science.³³ Even so, the assumptions that supported this racial and gendered hierarchy also established the ground for a counter-attack from below. Observers claimed women and non-whites were more *susceptible* to sound and electricity than white men, but they also tended to attribute greater *ability* in vocal sound to women and non-whites. As the category associated with the lower order slips between susceptibility and ability, the people

³² Jennifer Stoeber defines what she calls the “sonic colour-line,” a racially marked difference in the way people heard white and black people, complementary to the way people saw race. See Jennifer Stoeber-Ackerman, “The Word and the Sound: Listening to the Sonic Colour-Line in Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*,” *SoundEffects* 1.1 (2011), 19-36. Lawrence Levine in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford UP, 1978) writes, “White southerners, no matter how much they might denigrate the culture and capacities of their black bondsmen, paid tribute to their musical abilities” from Thomas Jefferson to a Mississippi planter to Frederick Law Olmsted; many of their comments show that they attribute African peoples’ ability to sing to biological factors (5).

³³ For more on the study of scientifically codified racial and gendered hierarchies in the US, see Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art* (1995): 39-61 and Nancy Leys Stepan.

associated with that order have a means, or in this case a medium, to disturb people higher up the social hierarchy.

The analogy between sound and electric shock surfaced in contexts other than scientific discourse as well. Indeed, turning to Methodism for a moment to trace how the science of electricity trickled down into popular theology illuminates the explanatory power of the sonic-electricity analogy as well as the potentially insurgent power of sound and electricity. Paola Bertucci traces John Wesley's adoption in 1760 of electrical therapy in his *Primitive Physick* (his guidebook for Methodist ministers to treat common ailments) as an inexpensive way to provide charitable (and proselytizing) medical treatment to the poor. She also explains that electricity was not a theologically neutral concept but came to be incorporated by thinkers like Wesley into a cosmology of ways God intervenes in the world: lightning might be an instance of God's wrath, while electrical therapy could be an instance of God's benevolence.³⁴ Along these lines, Sojourner Truth (who aligned herself most closely with the Methodist tradition) describes God's intervention in her conversion as a "flash of lightning," perhaps indicating both God's displeasure in her (she had been contemplating returning to her old master) and God's benevolent revelation of salvation. Wesley, who was invested in making both scholarly theological discourse as well as scientific discourse understandable to the working classes, incorporated electrical therapy and electrical discourse into Methodist practice at the popular level, making electricity a way to conceptualize God's action in the world, especially God's benevolent action at the intimate scale of healer and patient.

In a religious context where electrical therapy stood for God's benevolent intervention, people began to use an electrical analogy to describe how the effects of a speaker's speech or a singer's song (effects directed by the Holy Spirit) were mediated. In an example from an 1802 camp meeting, an observer describes a preacher's sermon this way: "A speaker [rose] to give a

³⁴ Paola Bertucci, "Revealing Sparks: John Wesley and the Religious Utility of Electrical Healing," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 39.3 (2006): 341-62; 357-58.

short parting exhortation: and wonderful to tell, as if by an electric shock, a large number in every direction, men, women and children, white and black, fell and cried for mercy.”³⁵ The analogy with electricity explains the sermon’s power and that power’s timing—how the congregation of listeners are simultaneously connected and prostrated. The choice of the analogy in a Methodist context likely arises from the benevolent effect of the speech: the congregation cried for God’s mercy, a positive outcome that signals the presence of God’s benevolent intervention.

Similar language of immediate bodily impact was used to describe music in Methodist practice. Julia Pell tells Lydia Maria Child about her religious conversion as an example of how music disrupts Pell’s consciousness. Pell explains that as a child she mimicked Methodist meetings by preaching to her peers. When Pell’s parents tried to suppress the noisy preaching and singing through an aunt’s supervision, all of them, aunt included, experienced a spiritual awakening mediated through singing: “My aunt’s heart was taken hold of that very day; and when we all began to sing, ‘Come to the Saviour, poor sinner, come!’ she cried, and I cried; and when we had done crying, the whole of us broke out singing ‘Come to the Saviour.’ That very instant I felt my heart leap up, as if a great load had been taken right off of it! That was the beginning of my getting religion” (47). Pell’s narrative traces her own religious conversion to a song. Imitative sound-making suddenly resonated with Pell in a bodily way. Singing provokes crying; crying gives way to more singing; singing causes Pell’s heart to “leap up.” The singing propels Pell and her small congregation through the religious experience, influencing bodily responses and religious conversion. Like electricity, music was a way to feel the substance of God’s direct intervention.³⁶

³⁵ From “Letters by the Rev. Samuel M’Corckle, North Carolina”; qtd. in Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 2003): 198.

³⁶ Hatch discusses what he sees as the democratic aspects of the deluge of new religious music that black and white people from various classes created in the early part of the nineteenth century (146-61). For more on the importance of sound in American evangelical religious traditions from the early nineteenth century, see Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003): 122-27. Radano writes, for

Although Child isn't a Methodist, she experiences the direct intervention of sound on her consciousness when she attends one of Pell's sermons. Child, who appears to have enjoyed Pell's performance, nevertheless describes Pell's sermon as disorderly and reproduces a cleaned-up excerpt of it for her readers' consideration. Describing the tone of Pell's preaching, Child writes that her voice gradually rose to "the shouting pitch, common with Methodists," and that "this she sustained for an incredible time" until she exhibited "a huskiness of effort, that produced a painful sympathy in my own lungs" (48). Carla Peterson criticizes Child's choice "to put the disorderly black female body on display" in her newspaper column.³⁷ But Child puts herself feeling disorderly on display as well. Through the logic of sympathy, Child's body reproduces what she assumes is the physical experience of Pell's own body in her lungs. As Pell's preaching continues, Child feels pushed outside the bounds of her own well-to-do white middle-class subjectivity. Child interrupts her narrative with a two-paragraph interjection about herself: "Yet combined as my religious character is, of quiet mysticism, and the coolest rationality, will you believe me, I could scarcely refrain from shouting Hurra for that heaven-bound ship; and the tears rolled down my cheeks, as that dusky priestess of eloquence reiterated her wild and solemn farewell" (50). Here, Child experiences a disruption in her normal subjectivity both in the sense that she feels a break from her conventional thought, feeling, and action, and in the sense that she feels a break from her own agency: she sheds tears and almost shouts, except that the congregation starts a hymn first. Child sums up her response by saying that Pell "gained such power over my spirit."

example, "For [Reverend Benjamin] Abbott and the others whose perspectives were constituted within the contexts of antebellum evangelicalism, sound represented a medium of direct spiritual contact; it stood equally with sightings and visions as the means by which the awakened 'worked the spirit' in relation to God and to others" (126).

³⁷ Carla Peterson, *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 81.

This scene resonates with all the affective elements that were occasionally associated with music, electricity, and mesmerism.³⁸ And, of course, readers would already view Child as more susceptible to such a scene because she is female. But what stands out among these elements is sound: even though Child hears the content of what Pell says in her sermon, that isn't what impacts her, nor is it Pell's bodily appearance. Peterson claims Child's description of Pell puts her "disorderly black female body on display," but Child emphasizes Pell's respectable appearance; it's her loud voice only that's disorderly. Rather, Child experiences her thoughts and actions being pushed in a way that she cannot attribute to the content of Pell's sermon but which she attributes, instead, to the sound of Pell's voice. Child finds her conscious experience constituted by the sound of a black woman's preaching—her previous realm of cool and rational spirituality is pushed to the edges as Pell's noisy Methodism fills the space inside her head.

But like scientific discourse, Methodism and evangelicalism more broadly had to deal with assumptions about race and sex. As music historian Ronald Radano writes, interracial interactions at camp meetings further supported an assumption among whites about Africans' unique capacity for singing.³⁹ Indeed, assumptions about the connection between race and music were not merely the product of scientific discourse but developed concurrently in religious cultures and even urban entertainment. People like Child assumed that blacks had unique vocal abilities, just as they assumed that electricity affected blacks and women more than white men. But as these racial and sexual assumptions slipped between susceptibility and ability, they gained the potential to disrupt the logic of subordination.

Sojourner Truth's description of sound and electricity draw indirectly from scientific discourse and more directly from Methodism. She describes the sound of the divine voice in

³⁸ I don't address mesmerism in detail here because the language in my sources follows electricity rather than mesmerism.

³⁹ Radano writes "Out of the originary wellspring of southern Christian expression arose a musical distinctiveness that would be attributed specifically to the African-American slave" (139).

terms of electricity (if also in a technologically advanced way) in the 1879 interview published in the *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*. Describing her communication with God from her conversion to her present moment, Truth says, “God talked to me the same as He still does. He came to me as a telegraph, like a dispatch to the brain”; later in the interview, she clarifies, “The Lord gave [my name] to me. It came to me just like a telegraph dispatch to the brain, and God made my brain.”⁴⁰ Truth’s explanation of her communication with God merges communication media object with her own body by imagining her brain as a telegraph receiver that picks up electrical impulses. The interview with the *Daily Inter-Ocean* occurs about thirty years after Truth’s work with Olive Gilbert, the *Narrative*’s amanuensis. Throughout that time, Truth continued to use electricity as an analogy for divine communication.

Regardless of where she borrowed the sonic-electricity analogy from, Truth’s use of the analogy fits the broader cultural value of the analogy.⁴¹ The sound-electricity analogy was a popular way to conceptualize what people today might describe as the “hypodermic needle” or “bullet” effect of media—the idea that media bypass people’s subjectivity and directly cause specific effects.⁴² The same fears were at play in discussions of mesmerism during the nineteenth century, which was often associated with electricity and musical instruments such as Benjamin Franklin’s glass armonica.⁴³ However, the difference in Truth’s use of the analogy comes in whom she applies it to. As Kennaway explains, whether people thought of music as electrical or mesmeric, they often did so as a shorthand for talking about music as a form of

⁴⁰ *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, 13 August 1879.

⁴¹ As Nancy Leys Stepan argues, such analogies did more work than simply explain scientific concepts to laypersons but rather contributed to the creation or suppression of new knowledge as they structured scientists’ assumptions. Stepan, 271-73.

⁴² Deborah Lubken traces the history of the “hypodermic needle” concept of media impact in “Remembering the Straw Man: The Travels and Adventures of *Hypodermic*,” ch. 1 of *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*, David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley, eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 19-42.

⁴³ For more on mesmerism and music, see James Kennaway “Musical Hypnosis: Sound and Selfhood from Mesmerism to Brainwashing,” *Social History of Medicine* 25.2 (2011): 271-289; Stanley Finger discusses Benjamin Franklin’s work on music (specifically the glass armonica) and electricity and Franklin’s skepticism of mesmerism in *Doctor Franklin’s Medicine* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006).

hypnosis. Framing music as something that overrides people's agency rallied public opinion against music makers, making them into charlatans at best and social insurgents at worst.⁴⁴ Truth, on the other hand borrowing from Methodist theology and parlance, applies the analogy to God, whom she trusts, and God's material intervention in the world. Moreover, she applies the analogy to herself when she describes speaking to the crowd at the Northampton camp meeting. In this sense, she claims her ability to speak on God's behalf and with God's power. Not afraid of being loud, Truth is also not afraid of talking about her divine authority and her voice's ability *to force* people to move, especially people higher up the social hierarchy.

Sojourner Truth describes her voice in terms of electricity near the end her story about the Northampton camp meeting in her *Narrative*. She speaks to the unruly mob of white men: "AMEN! it is SEALED, repeated Sojourner, in the deepest and most solemn tones of her powerful and sonorous voice. Its effect ran through the multitude like an electric shock; and the most of them considered themselves bound by their promise" (119). Since the "electric shock" carried by Truth's statement persuades the mob to leave the camp meeting for good, introducing the language of electricity in this climactic moment fits the narrative arc of the Northampton story. The sound of Truth's voice has an effect analogous to electricity: the sound transmits a literal "shock" to the listeners, and the shock ripples "through the multitude" like an electric charge. Furthermore, Truth's vocal act makes her listeners feel "bound" by their agreement, effectively transposing the logic of enslavement from Truth onto her hearers. Describing Truth's act of communication in electrical terms allows the force of her statement to be attributed to her voice—especially in this transactional situation. Truth herself does not directly create the shocking effect, but rather her voice, speaking on God's behalf ("AMEN! it is SEALED"). The language of electricity offers a way of talking about the materiality of an otherwise ephemeral and disembodied substance and about asserting power from a subordinate social position.

⁴⁴ Kennaway, 271-72.

Beliefs about sound's material impact on listeners became increasingly important for abolitionists as well, as Child's *Letters* have begun to suggest. In the last few paragraphs of this section, I want to connect the language Truth uses to describe her influence over the mob in 1844 to the language abolitionists used to describe black speakers' influence over them in 1841. Abolitionists wanted to persuade audiences to join their cause, and to do so, they used many different types of media, most obviously print but also, as early as 1831, conventions and circuit lectures throughout the North where they used speeches to win adherents. In the 1840s, abolitionists drew increasingly on the sonic techniques of other reform movements such as the temperance movement and revivalist movements that had spread through the northeast.⁴⁵ For example, William Lloyd Garrison frequently led his audiences in a hymn he composed to the tune of Auld Lang Syne titled "I Am an Abolitionist." As Scott Gac explains, beginning in 1843, abolitionists such as Garrison invited and endorsed the performances of musical groups, especially the Hutchinson Family Singers, at their conventions in order to energize the sometimes dull mood resulting from long debate.⁴⁶ The Hutchinsons, a white Vermont family who performed folk music and who were popular in northern states and even in Europe, declared early in their career their loyalty to social reform movements such as temperance and anti-slavery. They sang with Sojourner Truth on at least one occasion in 1844.⁴⁷ After their initial success at the annual anti-slavery convention in New York in 1843, Garrison and Nathaniel P. Rogers summoned the Hutchinsons to other antislavery conventions throughout the 1840s.⁴⁸ In general, though, the Hutchinsons' music functioned as entertainment at

⁴⁵ For more on how music was used to support various causes from temperance to religious revivals prior to its use in the anti-slavery movement, see Scott Gac *Singing for Freedom: The Hutchinson Family Singers and the Nineteenth-Century Culture of Reform* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007): 56.

⁴⁶ Gac, 60-63.

⁴⁷ Margaret Washington, 162.

⁴⁸ Rogers writes, "I summon them, as such, to the Massachusetts field." "From the Herald of Freedom: Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Society," *Liberator* (Boston), 19 January 1844.

antislavery conventions; their music was most rhetorical as a form of celebrity endorsement of antislavery at concerts outside of the conventions.⁴⁹

At the same time, abolitionists assumed a different quality of sound in black voices, and they sought out slave voices to support their cause in overt rhetorical ways. In 1841, the Africans who rebelled against their enslavers aboard the *Amistad* (including their leader Cinquez) spoke and sang at a farewell meeting in Boston, and in 1842, Garrison invited Frederick Douglass to speak at the annual anti-slavery convention. Then, of course, in his *Narrative of the Life* (1845), Douglass famously called attention to the slave song in his meditation on the songs slaves would compose about the “Great House Farm.”⁵⁰ But even as abolitionists incorporated slave voices into their campaigns for rhetorical and sentimental purposes (problematically in Douglass’s case), the materiality of slave voices exceeded the logic of rhetoric or sympathy.

The language Truth uses to describe her interaction with the Northampton mob resonates with the way Lydia Maria Child describes the speech of Cinquez, the leader of the *Amistad* Africans, at their farewell meeting in Boston. Child discusses the electrical quality of Cinquez’s speech in Mende and how it connected with listener’s bodies without relying on linguistic meaning.

Toward the close of the evening he gave an account, in his native tongue, of taking the *Amistad* from their Spanish masters. His style of eloquence was perfectly electrifying. He moved rapidly about the pulpit, his eyes flashed, his tones were vehement, his motions graceful, and his gestures, though taught by

⁴⁹ For more on abolitionism and listening to Africans sing, see Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999): 3-7.

⁵⁰ Douglass writes, “I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do. I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs.... Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains” (*Narrative of the Life* 24).

nature, were in the highest style of dramatic art. He seemed to hold the hearts of his companions chained to the magic of his voice. (181)

The sound of Cinquez's voice as Child describes it has the power to communicate universally. Although the audience cannot understand the linguistic meaning of Cinquez's Mende sentences, they nevertheless respond as if they understand since they "ever and anon broke forth into spontaneous responses, with the greatest animation" (181). But Child's description shows that Cinquez's speech accomplished more than rhetorical persuasion or miraculous translation. Cinquez's style is "electrifying" and his speech, like Truth's, "chains" the hearts of his listeners with "the magic of his voice." By using the language of electricity—"electrifying," "flashed," and "chain" (scientists studying electricity often used iron chains to transmit electrical current)—Child evokes the bodily connection between speaker and listener that is mediated by voice. In both cases, the imagined connection between speaker and listeners surprisingly reverses the logic of enslavement so that Truth and Cinquez bind or chain the hearts of their listeners.

For Truth describing her own speech and for Child describing Cinquez's speech, the language of electricity offers, first, a way to locate power in a body both socially and scientifically constructed as without power in spaces of public address and, second, a way to conceptualize how that power works against people assumed to have power in those spaces. But more is happening in these scenes than language. Truth's mob departs, and Cinquez's audience is emotionally moved. Within the language and its social construct, the material force of black speech or song moves people.

Singing to White Crowds: Sojourner Truth's Sonic Tactics

If enslaved people could use sound against social hierarchies in a bodily way, then how can we talk about the material forms of that sound? The sound of music, singing and speech (like electricity) is not unmediated or purely rhetorical; like electricity, music travels through a material conductor, usually air. Around the turn of the nineteenth century scientists had begun

to think about sound as a physical wave travelling through the air, and Ernst Chladni used sand on a glass surface to register and render visible the physicality of sound waves. His studies of sound writing circulated in America in science journals such as *Scientific American* and *Electrical World*, and Child mentions them in one of her letters (53).⁵¹ The tricky question for reading Sojourner Truth's songs is how to understand the printed words that are the only record of her songs. I argue that understanding Truth's songs requires not a musical score but rather comprehensive attention to Truth's sonic tactics in her narratives, tactics which worked together to intervene in the thoughts and actions of her listeners, interviewers, and readers.

Truth's story about the Northampton camp meeting shows her voice having a material impact on her audience. The initial song which Truth sings to attract the rioters' attention ("It was Early in the Morning") disrupted the mob's inertia. Elsewhere in the *Narrative*, Truth explains that her singing has a unique capacity to draw a crowd, a capacity she uses to her advantage: at a Second Adventist camp meeting, Truth walks around "attracting many about her by her singing" (110). Similarly, Truth's song at Northampton, directed at the rioters who were heckling another preacher, caught their attention and influenced them to stop what they were doing, walk over to the hill where Truth was singing, and listen to several more songs and a stump speech. Olive Gilbert interrupts her recording of Truth's story to explain the material impact of the song to readers: "All who have ever heard her sing this hymn will probably remember it as long as they remember her. The hymn, the tune, the style, are each too closely associated with to be easily separated from herself, and when sung in one of her most animated moods, in the open air, with the utmost strength of her most powerful voice, must have been truly thrilling" (116-17). Gilbert's choice of "thrilling" signals the physical experience of the audience: they felt a strong wave of emotion, perhaps even a physical shudder of pleasure or discomfort. Truth's singing goes out from her body in waves and reaches her soon-to-be

⁵¹ Sterne, 43-44, 50. Mark Littman claims people thought of Chladni as a kind of mad scientist, *Heavens on Fire*, 46.

audience in waves, creating a physical contact to which the audience responds. Truth resumes the story from Gilbert's brief interruption to explain the immediate impact of the song: "As she commenced to sing, the young men made a rush towards her, and she was immediately encircled by a dense body of the rioters" (117).

The formal qualities of the song Truth chose to sing first—"It was Early in the Morning"—indicate how she used sound to engage bodily movement. In his discussion of blackface minstrel songs, Eric Lott borrows Richard Middleton's distinction between two types of repetition that occur within the lyrical and tonal content of songs: musematic and discursive. Musematic repetition involves the repetition of small tonal or lyrical units ("musemes") and tends to be unvaried; discursive repetition involves lyrical phrases of music that are repeated in different ways. Lott explains that musematic repetition was the less interesting type in terms of content and often was associated with bodily movement, such as the collective bodily movement required by slaves rowing a boat.⁵² Put differently, words matter less in musematic songs than the sound of the music, which is supposed to coordinate movement, whereas in discursive songs, words and rhythms work together in more complex variations.

The song Truth sang to arrest the attention of the mob at Northampton, a religious hymn, follows a pattern of musematic repetition. I include the song here with a rhythmic notation based loosely on poetic scansion to demonstrate how the rhythms may have sounded⁵³:

/ - / - / - // // / / - / - / - // //

It was | ear-ly | in the | morn- | -ing | - | it was | ear-ly | in the | morn- | -ing,

/ / - / / //

⁵² Lott: 174-75.

⁵³ My notation attempts to approximate musical rhythm through scansion annotation. Here's how to read it: a right slash (/) indicates a stressed syllable, a hyphen (-) indicates a non-stressed syllable, and every foot—separated by vertical lines (|)—receives one beat. A double slash (//) indicates a foot that receives two beats, and a slash above an n-dash indicates a rest beat. The scansion won't look quite right, but I'm only using scansion to approximate rhythm since the song is ultimately not a poem, and a song assigns longer or shorter note values. If you tap the slashes with your foot, you can imagine how the song may have sounded. To arrive at these readings, I borrowed a method from Mary Caton Lingold who uses performance as a way to investigate how historical songs sounded.

Just | at the | break | of | day, | – |
 / - / / - / / - // /
 When he | rose | when he | rose | when he | rose | –
 / / / / - / - //
 And | went | to | hea-ven | on a | cloud.⁵⁴

This one stanza is all Gilbert recorded of this song, but this stanza is likely the whole song since the four lines form a complete narrative (Gilbert never says the song isn't recorded in full).

While we don't know the tune of this song, one can see the musematic repetition in the first and, especially, the third lines. Each repeated phrase—"It was early in the morning" and "When he rose"—elbows listeners, repeating in order to grab their attention and to prod them to move. Rhythmically, stress falls on the first word in each phrase ("It," "it," "Just," "When," "And") and on the first half of each beat of the eight-beat lines—quite unlike the sing-songy iambic feet in much English poetry and more like the swung dotted-eighth/sixteenth beat of a march. As a religious hymn, particularly one about the early morning, the song likely had a quick tempo which singers would clap and sway along with.

Indeed, hearing this song as a martial hymn fits the lyrics, the camp meeting context it came from, and especially Sojourner Truth's goals of getting listeners to move. Lydia Maria Child describes the unique effects of martial music on her body while watching a temperance parade: "Everything about war I loathe and detest, except its music. My heart leaps at the trumpet-call, and marches with the drum" (14). Hearing music, even for a cause she disagrees with, has a bodily and conscious effect on Child: her heart leaps and marches in response to the sounds and rhythms of the instruments. Music is a shortcut to the body. As Lott points out, the same idea of musematic repetition is at play in slaves' work songs: repetition in words and rhythms marks time for listeners' to move their bodies along. The song's musematic repetition supports Truth's purpose of getting the rioters to move. In this scenario, the song's form is

⁵⁴ Recorded in *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* 116; no other texts related to Truth record more of the song, and Fitch and Mandziuk's compilation of Truth's songs pulls this song straight from the *Narrative*.

important to recognize because nothing about the song's lyrics says, "Come over here!" But as the song left Truth's vocal chords and collided with the rioters, the song created the bodily response Child described: the rioters heard, stopped, listened, and then rushed toward Truth.

Layered beneath sonic language and electrical analogy that inform what happens in this scene, Truth also hints that the mob's racial expectations play a part in what happens. While it wasn't unusual for blacks and whites to intermingle at camp meetings or even for black or female preachers to lead songs or preach, Truth reports that she was the only person of color present at Northampton and that her racial identity could have made her the target of the mob's violence (115). Significantly, Northampton was not the average locale for a noisy working-class revival but rather a place where middle-class people experimented with various progressive reforms from utopic communities to water cures.⁵⁵ And contrary to this norm, Truth, a black woman, was being loud in public, using "her most powerful voice" "in the open air," that is, she was breaking social norms. In brief, Truth gave the mob a performance that was too unusual to ignore.

Truth's decision to sing for the mob likely tapped into their racialized assumptions about African singing—sonic performances before sound recording were almost always visual performances. However, it's hard to distinguish how Truth's race registered exactly. The scene that follows could be read as a variation on either a minstrel show or a camp meeting. As the men crowd around Truth with their heavy tobacco smoke and encourage her to sing, preach, and pray for them, they indicate that they want Truth to put on a show for their entertainment, an expectation which inflects the scene with an air of minstrelsy.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Truth sang a loud camp-meeting hymn, and preaching and praying wouldn't be the first thing one would ask

⁵⁵ Painter, ch. 10 "Northampton," 88-95.

⁵⁶ For more on blackface minstrelsy, see Eric Lott *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 20th-anniversary edition (New York: Oxford UP, 2013) and Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997).

a minstrel to perform, so perhaps the mob was finally seeing the kind of camp meeting it had heard interesting things about—one where black and white people intermingled in noisy revivals. Regardless of what the mob thought, Truth’s performance intrigued them: Truth’s visible blackness (and likely her femaleness—“Sing for us, old woman”) traded on the assumptions about Africans’ unique capacity for singing that existed in the contexts of racial science, camp meetings, and blackface, and it amplified the impact of her sonic performance.

Overall, Gilbert and Truth attribute the effects of her performance at Northampton not so much to herself or her visible blackness as to the medium of her voice: “Her speech had operated on the roused passions of the mob like oil on agitated waters; they were, as a whole, entirely subdued, and only clamored when she ceased to speak or sing” (117-18). The description of Truth’s songs and speeches, similar to the electricity analogy, casts them in material terms that separate the sound of Truth’s voice from her body—her voice is “like oil on agitated waters.” By describing the singing as a material thing, Gilbert and Truth imagine Truth’s agency as indirect. Truth’s reason for not taking full credit is that she believes she speaks with divinely sanctioned authority that comes from outside herself. At any rate, by giving credit to the sound of her voice, Truth calls attention to sound’s material status and its potential for being used as an apparatus.

* * *

Truth’s account of her singing performance at the Boston antislavery convention—in which Garrison invites her to speak before Wendell Phillips and she sings “I am Pleading for My People”—differs in several particulars from the Northampton episode, but the Boston story nevertheless sustains Truth’s emphasis on the materiality of her singing. Truth doesn’t sing to a hostile mob at Boston, at least not in the same sense: while her Boston audience likely won’t assault her, her felt need to impress them hints at their condescending racial prejudices. In thinking about what she can do that Wendell Phillips can’t, Truth considers a familiar format which she as a former slave and itinerant preacher can use in an original way. Her choice of

address is strategic, calculated to have a material impact. Truth further emphasizes her songs' materiality when she describes her songs as made objects: "I had some home-made songs—I used to make many songs." Truth emphasizes her status as *maker* of the songs, rather than as author writing or a printer printing; her songs are words conveyed in substantial sound rather than abstracted onto paper. She also marks them as objects made in a particular space—"home-made," like clothes or food that could be carried out of the home and worn on the street or served at a communal gathering.

The song Truth chose to sing at Boston differed considerably from "It was Early in the Morning." "I Am Pleading for My People," Truth's own lyrics set to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne," was the song she performed most often—she even sang it for the Chicago reporter who interviewed her. "I Am Pleading for My People" is a more didactic song than "It was Early in the Morning," and it uses discursive repetition exclusively, which makes it a better fit for audiences who were already sitting down and prepared to listen. The choice of Robert Burns' famous tune is significant: it isn't a slave tune like some listeners might expect; the tune was a Romanticized version of rural Scottish working-class music and one of the most popular ballad tunes in the US in the early nineteenth century. Truth performs the song for the Chicago interviewer the following way, although the third verse here was usually recorded as the first verse:

Whilst I bear upon my body
The scars of many a gash,
I am pleading for my people
Who groan beneath the lash.

I am pleading for the mothers
Who gaze in wild despair
Upon the hated auction-block,
And see their children there.

I am pleading for my people
A poor downtrodden race
Who dwell in freedom's boasted land
With no abiding place.

Yet those oppressors steeped in guilt—
I still would have them live;

For I have learned of Jesus
To suffer and forgive.

The song is a confusing combination of slave voyeurism and white respectability. Nell Irvin Painter argues that, in order to increase her popularity in abolitionist settings, Truth occasionally traded on people's incorrect assumption that she was a southern slave (rather than a slave in New York), often attached (incorrectly) to her style of speech.⁵⁷ In her lyrics, Truth clearly identifies with "my people," slaves and free black people in the United States, who struggled to find the stability white people often enjoyed, even after emancipation. She also lyrically depicts her own scarred body as well as the bodies of other enslaved women and children. In contrast, the tune is respectable and recognizable, perhaps the most well-known tune in the nineteenth century. Garrison had his own version of "Auld Lang Syne," titled "I Am an Abolitionist," which masochistically celebrated the scorn directed at abolitionists and referenced slaves minimally (the tortured syntax of his lyrics and heavy punctuation indicate they were better suited for print).⁵⁸ The overall effect of Truth's lyrics and tune must have been conflicted since the tune connoted respectability while the lyrics represented the horrors of bodily scars and auction blocks.

Aside from the song's tune and lyrics, Truth emphasizes how surprising her song would be to listeners. She narrates her thoughts: "I will sing that to begin with and that will stand a good chance"; singing is the one thing she can do that Wendell Phillips cannot; by singing she can make herself equal in the minds of her audience to Phillips, one of the greatest antislavery orators. Moreover, her story suggests that singing was not what people might have expected her to do since Garrison invites her to speak. She also says, "When my voice was good and strong...I could make that roar." *Roaring* isn't exactly how most nineteenth-century women would describe their public performances. More than usual, Truth portrays herself in this interview as

⁵⁷ Painter, ch. 16 "Ar'n't I a Woman?" 164-78.

⁵⁸ Cf. William Wells Brown, *The Anti-Slavery Harp*.

a rule-breaker: singing when she was supposed to speak, being loud, putting the black female body on display. In one sense, Truth's description of this scene reads similarly to how Daphne Brooks interprets Truth's literal exposure of her body on a different occasion—"it revalues her exploited flesh and instills it with an alternate textual meaning"; however, reading such a performance as a revaluation resulting in alternate *textual* meaning doesn't capture the full sense of the audience's experience of listening and watching, sitting and waiting. What's more, Truth says the audience applauded her performance. The awkwardness of her exposure in Indiana contrasts the approval of her song in Boston, and the difference has to do with more than location. As I've been suggesting, sound and form were more important to the experience of listening than lyrics. What listeners heard more than anything was a black woman's roaring performance of a familiar tune. To use Roland Barthe's terms, they heard "the grain of the voice," which is "the body in the voice as it sings."⁵⁹

In general, to link the performances in Northampton and Boston, Truth used sonic tactics to manipulate listeners' feelings and responses. Her tactics relied on choosing songs—lyrics, tune, repetition, style—that were appropriate for general cultural assumptions about singing as well as contextually specific audience expectations. While I'm suggesting that Truth displays a lot of agency in choosing which song to perform, I don't want to neglect to emphasize that her choice points to the effects unique to different songs. Even though I have pointed out that Truth was often an exceptional actor, by emphasizing the distributed agency that resides in her songs, my methods could be applied to other black sonic performances.

Shadows and Substances: Songs as Performance and as Print

What about textuality, though? What impact did printed forms of Truth's songs have? Olive Gilbert and Truth both attest to the durability of Truth's singing in one's memory. Gilbert

⁵⁹ Roland Barthe, *Image-Music-Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 188.

writes, “All who have ever heard her sing this hymn will probably remember it as long as they remember her” (116), and Truth says regarding her Boston performance, “I’ve CARRIED IT IN MY MEMORY EVER SINCE” (the *Daily Inter-Ocean* put her statement in all caps). Jennifer Stoeever argues that one’s subjectivity is constituted by the things one hears; she thus describes Frederick Douglass as “a subject produced by [the sound of his Aunt Hester’s scream].”⁶⁰ In other words, listening is not simply an appropriative activity in which one absorbs sound and then moves on. Sounds bounce around, sometimes causing trouble, sometimes causing pleasure, and sometimes echoing long after an initial performance in memory, but always provoking a reaction. But there’s more to say than just that people remembered vividly the whole experience of listening to one of Sojourner Truth’s songs. I’ve been arguing in this chapter for increased attention to songs themselves as a way of tracing their impact on listeners; in this section, I argue that the way a song is recorded by an amanuensis also bears a trace of its impact.

Truth never charged money for her performances. Rather, to support herself financially, she accepted people’s donations and sold print materials: her *Narrative*, her cartes-de-visite, and broadsides of her songs which William Lloyd Garrison printed.⁶¹ Before telling the Chicago reporter about her Boston performance, Truth talks about selling songs as physical objects: “I was selling songs; for I always had something to pay my way with”; “Garrison sold a good many of my little songs for me, always.” On many of the cartes-de-visite, Truth included the phrase, “I sell the shadow to support the substance.” Her phrase riffs on the notion of the daguerreotype photograph as a “shadow,” but it also establishes a frame of reference for what media Truth considered to have the highest impact—the in-person performance.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Stoeever-Ackerman, 28.

⁶¹ Margaret Washington writes that Garrison printed the songs for Truth (268).

Because her songs circulated partly through print and partly through serial performance, Truth's singing and printed songs had an interdependent relationship. According to Truth's story in the Chicago *Daily Inter-Ocean*, when Garrison invited Truth to speak at the anti-slavery convention in Boston, he did so because Truth had trouble selling prints of her songs: "I would sell the songs for 5 and 10 cents apiece, and that time some hesitated, asking, 'What tune do you sing it to?' and I didn't know. So Garrison said, 'Now, Sojourner, you go on the platform and make a speech, and you will sell your songs like anything.' Garrison sold a good many of my little songs for me, always."⁶² The first thing this story shows is that Truth facilitated the sale of print by performing her song because her performance demonstrated to people how the song should sound. While they might have been making excuses to avoid a purchase, customers signaled that they didn't want to purchase the songs without knowing how the songs should sound; they understood that they weren't buying poetry, and they weren't merely supporting Truth by purchasing items she was selling regardless of what they were. The songs' sonic features were indispensable to their monetary value. But Truth never gives them the *name* of the tune, like "Auld Lang Syne"; instead, she gives them a *performance* of the tune. As such, she makes sound, rather than print alone, a condition of her songs' circulation. For successful transmission, the songs must be performed over and over, as Truth often did when she spoke publicly and for her amanuenses.⁶³ Additionally, her performances tended to be unsolicited—even in her story of the Boston antislavery convention, Garrison calls for her to make a speech, not to sing; the choice to sing is hers alone, making her song a gift.

⁶² *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, 13 August 1879.

⁶³ Olive Gilbert records Truth's re-performance of "It was early in the morning" in Truth's *Narrative*; Harriet Beecher Stowe records Truth's re-performance of "There is a Holy City" in her sketch of Truth for the *Atlantic Monthly*—"Sojourner Truth—the Libyan Sibyl" (1863); the unnamed interviewer for the *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean* records her re-performance of "I Am Pleading for My People." None of these recordings are about an original performance like many newspaper accounts of conferences where truth sang; rather, they are instances where Truth, in the course of telling about a time when she sang, re-sings the songs.

Truth's decision to prioritize performance over print creates problems for readers of her archive, given that writing was the only technology for recording sound before 1877, but the fact that sound had to pass through the body to enter writing or print has some advantages: rather than listening to context-free recordings, scholars can understand how singers like Truth sounded to the people who heard her, under the socially constructed circumstances of hearing at that time. With this attention to context in mind, unravelling the circumstances of how "I Am Pleading for My People"—Truth's most famous song—was recorded and re-recorded can shed light on how her singing influenced audiences during its performance and afterward in listeners' memories. The only place where the lyrics to "I Am Pleading for My People" were recorded in full was in the New Lisbon *Aurora* on March 3, 1852 (fig. 1). (I say "recorded in full" because the song was frequently excerpted but only once in full, and all others who printed the full song seem to have copied from that version.) The *Aurora* included on its front page a poem (or so it looks in print) titled "A 'Sojourner's' Mirror," which contained the lyrics of Sojourner Truth's most famous song, "I Am Pleading for My People," except that all of the first-person pronouns were changed to third person: "She pleadeth for her people..." and so forth. The song lyrics are dated "New Lisbon, OH, February 27, 1852" and signed "Mary."⁶⁴ On the second page, the newspaper includes a brief paragraph about a speech Truth gave in a local Methodist Episcopal church the previous Friday (February 27), and the paragraph states, "she makes some powerful appeals, which cannot but strike a chord of sympathy in every breast possessing a human heart." In Sojourner Truth's *Book of Life* (1878), Francis Titus recorded under the heading "Meeting in New Lisbon" a slightly altered version of this poem and article: the language of the article—there used as prefatory material to the song—is minimally changed from what the *Aurora* recorded,

⁶⁴ "A 'Sojourner's' Mirror," *Aurora* (New Lisbon, OH), 3 March 1852. "Mary" might be Mary Ann Johnson, wife of prominent printer and abolitionist Oliver Johnson.

but the lyrics are changed back to the first person, as Truth usually sang them and as the song was recorded in every other newspaper account which mentions it.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Titus likely heard Truth sing the song too given that she rendered “restored” in line 6 of Mary’s version in dialect (“astored”) with the standard word in brackets “[restored].” Fitch and Mandziuk record the song according to the version with the strongest claim to temporal originality—the one that appears in the *Aurora*—which means they go against most other representations of Truth’s song.

Vol. XVIII, No. 34

The Aurora
is published weekly, on Wednesdays, by
JOHN FROST,
at the CIRCULAR OFFICE, Walnut street, New-Lisbon, O.
AT THE RATE OF \$1 FOR 52 NUMBERS, 50 CENTS FOR
26 NUMBERS, 25 CENTS FOR 13 NUMBERS, TO BE PAID
ANNUALLY, OR BEFORE DISCONTINUANCE, OR 25 PER
CENT. WILL BE ADDED. — ADVERTISEMENTS INSERTED
AT THE USUAL RATES. — THE PATRONAGE OF THE
PUBLICATION IS RESPECTFULLY SOLICITED.

COMMUNICATED.

A 'SOJOURNER'S' MIRROR.

She pleadeth for her people,
A poor, down-trodden race,
Who dwell in freedom's boasted land,
With no abiding place.

She pleadeth that her people
May have their rights restored,
For they have long been toiling
And have yet had no reward.

They are forced the crops to culture,
But not for them they yield,
Although both late and early
They must labor in the field.

While she bears upon her body
The scars of many a gash,
She pleadeth for her people
That groan beneath the lash.

She is pleading for the mothers
That gaze in wild despair
Upon the hated auction block,
And see their children there.

She feels for those in bondage —
Well may she feel for them,
She knows how fiendish hearts can be
That sell their fellow men.

Yet those oppressors steeped in guilt,
She still would have them live,
For she has learned of Jesus
To suffer and forgive.

She wants no carnal weapons,
No engine of death,
Loveth not to hear the sound
War's tempestuous breath.

She does not ask you to engage
In death and bloody strife,
She does not dare insult her God
By asking for their life.

But while your kindest sympathies
To foreign lands do roam,
She would ask you to remember
Your own oppressed at home.

She pleads with you to sympathize,
With sighs, and groans, and scars,
And note how base the tyranny
Beneath the stripes and stars.

New-Lisbon, February 29, 1852. **MARY.**

Figure 1: "A 'Sojourner's' Mirror." As it appeared on page one of the New-Lisbon *Aurora* on March 3, 1852. The poem appeared near the top of the left-hand column, and the paper's volume and issue number appear at the top of the figure.

While Francis Titus's recording of Truth's song seems to reassert an original text in a straightforward way, the *Aurora's* reprinted poem-song raises questions. Why not record the song correctly? Why make such minor changes? Why title it a "mirror" of Sojourner Truth? From one perspective, the poem's stance on Truth's message is problematically neutral: Mary doesn't identify with Truth's activism but distances herself as a mere reporter—Mary's lyrics say "*She* pleadeth for *her* people" rather than something more active like "*I* am pleading for *her* people." The speaker's position in the poem is neutral: a mirror and not even a copy. Perhaps Mary altered the lyrics and the speaker's position in order to establish her own claim to authorship. However, the label "mirror" signals that Mary's act of recording is superficial in comparison to the actual singing; the poem can only reflect ideas and not register the imprint of the singing. Furthermore, the logic implied by the title "A 'Sojourner's' Mirror," suggests that even with this pronoun transposition, the song will exert an identity shifting force on the recorder. Although the song is now in the third person and in the recorder's possession, the hypothetical singer-recorder is transposed into a "mirror" of Sojourner Truth, losing her own racial identity which is replaced with Sojourner's racial identity.

From a different perspective, though, the label "mirror" carries specific resonances in an antislavery publication aimed at middle-class reform-minded Christian readers. Perhaps the reader is supposed to look into the poem and compare herself with the person described there with the goal of becoming more like what she sees. In this reading, the poem's reference to "Sojourner" would not be lost on readers; Truth is the standard (now in third person) against which white readers are supposed to compare themselves. This interpretation of "mirror" and the mode of reading it evokes had strong precedent in evangelical Christian culture, which often encouraged people to read Christian scriptures in this self-evaluative mode, measuring their lives against the lives of prominent saints. The scriptural source of this kind of thinking, James 1:23-25, captures both the visual act of looking in the *mirror* and the sonic context in which the Word is spoken:

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.⁶⁶

The “glass” in the verse is, of course, a mirror. Thus, the effect of calling the poem a “mirror” is twofold. First, this reading opens up Sojourner Truth’s work and erases racial prejudice; anyone can be like the “sojourner” in the poem, and a good sojourner pleads for *her* people, which includes people of different races. The poem also asks readers to compare their bodies to the scarred body of the sojourner, but given the unpopularity of abolitionism, readers could have easily read this part metaphorically. Second, the reference calls attention to the work of memory required to be a “doer” and not a “hearer” only, terms that resonate with the sonic nature of Truth’s performance. The reader needs to return to this poetic mirror continually so that she won’t forget the necessity of pleading for their poor downtrodden brothers and sisters. As such, the stanzas of the poem become a list of things a sojourner does: “she pleadeth for her people,” for “their rights,” for despairing mothers and children; “she feels for those in bondage”; “she knows how fiendish hearts can be”; “she wants no carnal weapons”; “she has learned... to forgive.” Finally, as an only slightly altered copy, the poem draws its force not from originality but from reader-listeners’ assumed memory of hearing Sojourner Truth sing the song at her recent lecture.

Readers might even carry out the familiar nineteenth-century domestic practice Ellen Gruber Garvey describes of cutting the article out and placing it in her scrapbook, thus

⁶⁶ From the King James Version.

connecting Truth's lyrics to a liminal form of domestic publication.⁶⁷ The article was placed well for such an act—the reverse side wasn't an article, story, or poem but an ad for a journal called the "Ohio Farmer, and Mechanic's Assistant." I'm a little disappointed that the reverse wasn't the ad for "Pianos Tuned" or the "Piano Depot" since such a connection would recall the poem's original life as music, but such ads do signal the middle-class domestic readership of the *Aurora* who would have been most likely to keep scrapbooks. Indeed, the concept of scrapbooking or commonplace book keeping resonates with Olive Gilbert's act of recording "It was Early in the Morning" in Truth's 1850 narrative and with Francis Titus's work of compiling articles about Truth in the *Book of Life* with hardly any original commentary. Truth's songs circulated in formalized versions of informal domestic publication, and they may have recirculated back into the same networks.

Both ways of reading Mary's changes to Truth's songs—identity shifting and ritual memory—help to account for the song's lingering impact on listeners through memory and print circulation practices. The poem calls attention to the lesser status of print as a less subjectively influential medium than performance—print is a mirror of the real.⁶⁸ The poem also calls attention to the importance of ritual memory as a way of extending the impact of the performance—people are supposed to look at themselves in the poetic mirror regularly. Both readings evoke the dispossessive impact of Truth's performance, which even in memory calls for listeners to change how they think and how they construct the boundaries of their own identities. If print loses the powerful presence of Truth's voice, it nevertheless regains a degree of power as a circulate-able object of ritual memory.

⁶⁷ Ellen Gruber Garvey, "Scissoring and Scrapbooking: Nineteenth-Century Reading, Remaking, and Recirculating," ch. 9 in *New Media 1714-1950*, Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, eds. (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2003), 207-227: 214.

⁶⁸ In a way, Truth's statement bears some similarity to Peggy Phelan's presentist ontology of performance: "Performance's only life is in the present" (146). The main difference is that Truth's songs have an afterlife in print. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Ch. 3: “An Immense Chain of Swamps”: Fugitive Networks in *Dred* and *Twelve Years a Slave*

Upon returning from a religious camp meeting to the swamp at the start of the second part of *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856), the self-emancipated title character Dred encounters a fugitive slave. Dred asks, “How did you get into the swamp?” The fugitive responds, “I got away from a soul-driver's camp, that was taking us on through the states.” “O, O!” said Dred. “Camp-meeting and driver's camp right alongside of each other!... Well, come, old man; I'll take you home with me.” The slave then tells Dred his tale of woe:

“I got free once, and got clear up to New York... and then they nabbed me, and sent me back again, and mas'r sold me to the drivers,—and I believe I's 'bout as good's die.”

“Die! No, indeed, you won't,” said Dred; “not if I've got hold of you! Take heart, man, take heart! Before morning I'll put you where the dogs can't find you, nor anything else.”¹

This exchange indexes Stowe's framing of slaves' relationship to swamp space in *Dred*. First, the swamp offers fugitives a relatively safe space of escape, a space that is a challenge to “get into” as Dred's initial question signals. Dred also expresses his confidence in the comparatively greater protection his swamp offers than Northern escape—“where the dogs can't find you, nor anything else.” Second, Dred ironically exposes the close proximity of three types of space which formed a pathway for the fugitive to escape: the linear route of a slave driver, the site of a religious camp meeting, and the interstitial space of the swamp.

This scene responds to nineteenth-century conceptions of space, especially spaces and pathways that were useful for fugitive slaves, in two unusual ways. The first surprising aspect of this scene is that the fugitive's story disparages the “Underground Railroad,” which many

¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, Robert S. Levine, ed. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000), 277.

abolitionists celebrated as a beneficial transportation network that moved fugitive slaves outside the US and beyond the reach of slavery. Most famously, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* described George and Eliza Harris's escape and Cassie and Emmeline's escape on western branches of this network. William Still's 1879 documentary of his Philadelphia-based work, *The Underground Railroad*, has cemented people's understanding of the importance, benevolence, and breadth of the network, with his lists of dozens of "arrivals" from Maryland, DC, Virginia, the Carolinas, and New Orleans.² Beyond fiction and later documentary writing, the Underground Railroad's existence coalesces around the high number of former slaves like Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Harriet Jacobs, who spoke and wrote about escaping slavery (and often the United States) with the help of free blacks and sympathetic whites.³ However, a few abolitionists in the 1850s, such as Stowe, began to write about the drawbacks for black communities of transporting fugitive slaves beyond US borders.⁴ Furthermore, the Underground Railroad posed an enormous risk for the fugitives who travelled it, as Dred's fugitive explains: multiple public networks aided in the recovery of fugitives, including Northern blackbirders who "nabbed" fugitives (and free blacks) and slave traders who transported them deep into the South, while the Underground Railroad had to operate in secret.

² William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (New York: Arno P, 1968).

³ D. W. Meinig writes, "Modern reassessments suggest a smaller volume, much less system, and a limited White role. It was much more an informal folk operation by Blacks, and its success gives further significance to the many small Black communities created in the course of westward migrations across the free states and territories.... There remains much uncertainty about the whole operation, but southeastern Pennsylvania, southwestern Ohio, and southern Indiana were the main passageways out of slave territory, with dispersal routes in the West threading through Quaker and Yankee districts and, for some, on into Canada West" (306); *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 years of History*, Volume 2 Continental America 1800-1867 (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1993). For more on the Underground Railroad, see Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Norton, 2015).

⁴ Robert Levine writes about how Stowe's perspective on colonization changed through correspondence with Frederick Douglass between writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Dred*; "Heap of Witness: The African American Presence in Stowe's *Dred*," ch. 4 of *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1997).

The second surprising aspect of Stowe's scene is that, in response to overly optimistic assumptions about the Underground Railroad, she features a different network slaves used to escape their enslavement: the swamp. Recent historical, archeological, and literary work has begun to draw attention to the ways slaves escaped to swamps and established habitations and communities in them.⁵ Traditionally, scholars describe such enclaves as "maroon communities" to capture the way they were isolated or secreted from a larger nation state. Most historical and contemporary writers describe swamps and maroon communities as if they existed in negative spaces within US political, commercial, and legal space—"loopholes of retreat" in between cities, towns, and homesteads and in between the crisscrossing networks of roads, rivers, and wires.⁶

⁵ Sylviane Diouf's *Slavery's Exiles: the story of the American Maroons* (New York: NYU Press, 2014) discusses in detail instances of "grand and petit marronage" across the South as they are recorded in understudied historical texts. Daniel Sayers's *A desolate place for a defiant people: the archaeology of maroons, indigenous Americans, and enslaved laborers in the Great Dismal Swamp* (Gainesville: Society for Historical Archaeology, 2014) describes his archeological excavations on some of the most remote islands of the Great Dismal Swamp which have remained untouched since the time of slavery. Monique Allewaert also writes about maroon communities of slaves in Caribbean swamps in *Ariel's Ecology* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013).

⁶ Historian Walter Johnson draws on Henri Lefebvre's notion of "produced space"—the idea that "physical space has no 'reality' without the energy deployed within it" (13)—in order to argue that Southern landscape was produced according to the economic and political goals of cotton-growing Southern slaveholders: "Through their own labor, but more often that of their slaves, they repatterned the land according to its stage of development: old-growth forests and cypress swamps were pocked and then checkered with clear-cut fields in the first decades of expansion; later, as the soil wore thin and grew tired, scrubby forests of cedar and loblolly pines and swamp meadows—'oldfield'—took over the wasted land as the fields were pushed into the woods on their margin. From the air, the face of the landscape would have presented a visual image of the whole of nature arrayed in the service of a single plant" (156); *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013).

This isolated negative-space view of swamps fits the way Niklas Luhmann theorizes systems of mass media: users produce knowledge of mass media systems by distinguishing between the media *system* (self-reference) and the system's *environment* (other-reference), which constitutes a kind of negative space. Users recognize a media system by imagining its environment, even though they can move only within the system. Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996): "What we have, therefore, is a system which is capable of distinguishing between self-reference and other-reference.... However, if all knowledge must be acquired on the basis of a distinction between self-reference and other-reference, it is also the case that all knowledge (and therefore all reality) is a construction. *For this distinction between self-reference and other-reference cannot exist in the system's environment..., but rather only within the system itself*" (5).

Twentieth and twenty-first century literary scholars have tended to focus on swamps as haunted spaces or lacunae with few inroads. See, for example, David C. Miller, *Dark Eden: the swamp in Nineteenth Century American Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989); Daphne Brooks, "The Escape Artist: Henry Box Brown, Black Abolitionist Performance, and Moving Panoramas of Slavery," ch. 2 of *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006).

But swamps were not as isolated as the historical record makes them seem. Landscape architect and journalist Frederick Law Olmsted (also *Dred*'s editor) demonstrates the problem with viewing swamps and transportation networks as separate when he describes riding a carriage through South Carolina in the 1850s: "[We] often [rode] through cypress swamps, and long pools of water.... A few miles further on, we were asked to get on the top of the coach, while it was driven through a swamp, in which the water was over the road, for a quarter of a mile, to such a depth that it covered the foot-board" (380-81).⁷ Swamps and waterways often overwhelmed the networks of roads and rails that connected towns and cities. As they flowed across the landscape, swamps formed a network, opening and shifting pathways through an otherwise obstructed environment.

Stowe's realignment of how swamp space fits into national space goes beyond novelistic creativity to point out the artificiality of spatial distinctions in the 1850s US. By picking up on the porous borders between swamps, plantations, and transportation systems, Stowe's *Dred* imagines swamps not as isolated maroon communities but as the connective tissue of what I call a fugitive network—a social network that could facilitate slave travel, communication, and living across the plantation-centric geography of the South, and ultimately a network that is *fugitive*, illegal and of temporary benefit. Indeed, one of Stowe's major contributions to a discussion of swamp space as safe space for fugitives is to point out that swamps were a regular geographical feature of the South and Eastern Seaboard rather than focusing solely on the Great Dismal Swamp on the border of Virginia and North Carolina as an exceptional maroon community.⁸ As

⁷ Cf. Johnson, "At the margins of the fields—whether in the residual frontier spaces of uncleared woods and undrained swamps, or in the exhausted agricultural spaces of post-capitalist fields gone to meadow and piney oldfield—it was clear that the Cotton Kingdom was less an accomplished fact than an ongoing project" (243).

⁸ See Tynes Cowan, "The Slave in the Swamp: Affects of Uncultivated Regions on Plantation Life" in *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African-American Home Ground*, Grey Gundaker, ed. (U of Virginia P, 1998) and Anthony Wilson, *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2005). Cowan goes so far as to claim that the swamp was ubiquitous across the South: "It seems that any plantation would have a swamp of some size within walking distance" (194).

Dred ironically points out to the fugitive he finds in the swamp, escape was possible because the swamp connected the slave driver's route, the camp meeting, and Dred's stronghold.

In this chapter, I use network theory regarding the strength, direction, and scale of social ties to advance a reading of Southern swamps as the medium of a fugitive network.⁹ I argue that this network appears implicitly in slave narratives such as Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1852) and explicitly in Stowe's *Dred*; in both texts, the visibility of fugitive networks directly correlates to the writers' ability to read maps and social ties. By contrasting Dred's swamp network with the other slave network—the Underground Railroad—Stowe emphasizes that the strength of ties and the direction of ties are important factors in establishing a viable black community. The relatively weak ties of the Underground Railroad posed a risk for slaves while further diluting black communities; on the other hand, the strong ties of the swamp communities sheltered slaves while keeping them in touch with black friends and family. The point of this comparison is not to glorify the swamp and vilify the Underground Railroad, which many slaves used to achieve a better life, but to point out how, when national emancipation wasn't an option, all of slaves' remaining options entailed individual and communal hazards, including running away on the Underground Railroad.

At stake in this reading is a more nuanced understanding of the impact of nineteenth-century networks on the lives of fugitive slaves. In a time when mass transit networks grew exponentially in the US, fugitive slaves found their ability to move increasingly proscribed; as such, they exercised relatively more autonomy over the networks they established through swamps than other kinds of space in America. In terms of contemporary historical accounts of slavery and the Underground Railroad, *Twelve Years a Slave* and *Dred* expose problems with assumptions that it was easy or logical for slaves to decide to flee their enslavement and go to

⁹ I draw primarily from Albert-Laszlo Barabasi's *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002), which discusses key terms such as "link," "hub," and "scale," and which offers strategies for visualizing networks.

Canada. From a literary standpoint, these texts invite scholars to think *outside of* the teleology of the escape plot and *into* the narrative space of fugitive networks.

Swamps: Islands, Avenues, or Networks?

Before Northup and Stowe wrote about swamps in the mid-1850s, swamps had already circulated widely through print—through land surveys, poems, newspaper columns, magazine essays, and slave narratives. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, people tended to describe swamps as spaces that were difficult to access and where unknown things lurked.¹⁰ Beyond actual ghost stories, people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were aware that fugitive slaves frequently lived in swamps.¹¹ People had discussed swamps and slaves living in them (especially the Great Dismal) for more than a century, and they tended to view swamps' spatial advantages to slaves in one of two ways: as an isolated place of refuge (island), or as a stop *en route* to escaping slavery in the North and outside the US (avenue).

¹⁰ William Byrd—described the Great Dismal Swamp as empty in his *History of the Dividing Line* (1728): “Since the surveyors had entered the Dismal, they had laid eyes on no living creature: neither bird nor beast, insect nor reptile came in view” (22, DocSouth). Thomas Moore’s ballad “The Lake of the Dismal Swamp” (1806) ascribed a Gothic, haunted atmosphere to the Great Dismal Swamp; the poem popularized a legend about an Indian princess and her lover who were said to haunt Lake Drummond at the heart of the Great Dismal. Exploiting the tropes of the haunted swamp and the opaque swamp, “Porte Crayon” traveled to the Great Dismal for the purpose of glimpsing the ghosts in Moore’s ballad, and he published his findings as a sketch in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in September 1856.

¹¹ William Byrd writes about slaves in the swamp: “It is certain many slaves shelter themselves in this obscure part of the world, nor will any of their righteous neighbours discover them” (17, DocSouth). Similarly, Edmund Jackson, writing about the Great Dismal Swamp for the abolitionist gift book *The Liberty Bell*, claims that fugitives’ white neighbors know about slaves in the swamp but won’t tell: “nor can we readily avail ourselves of the better knowledge undoubtedly existing in the vicinity of this colony, by reason of the decided objections of those best enabled to gratify our curiosity, to some extent at least, to furnish any information whatever, lest it might be used by Abolitionists for their purposes, as one of them frankly said when questioned about the matter” (146-47). Porte Crayon wanted to find in his expedition to the swamp a fugitive slave community, and he claims to have seen a notable fugitive named Osman. Frederick Law Olmsted in his account of his travels through the South imagines the life of fugitives living beyond the opaque borders of the swamp: “There were people in the swamps still, he thought, that were the children of runaways, and who had been runaways themselves all their lives. What a life it must be; born outlaws; educated self-stealers; trained from infancy to be constantly in dread of the approach of a white man as a thing more fearful than wild-cats or serpents, or even starvation” (159-60).

Many writers, particularly abolitionists, thought of the swamp as an isolated “city of refuge” for slaves, adapting the idea of a “city of refuge” from the biblical book of Numbers.¹² William Byrd uses the phrase “city of refuge” to describe how the landscape around the Virginia-North Carolina border afforded secure hiding places for all kinds of fugitives (17). Emily Clemens Pearson’s novel *Plantation Pictures* (1864), published serially in *The Liberator*, contains a chapter on “The Swamp,” which describes an intricate system of codes, watchmen, and waterways that protect a highly developed black community in the Great Dismal Swamp from whites.¹³ Edmund Jackson, in his essay for the annual abolitionist gift book *The Liberty Bell*, praises the Great Dismal as “a city of refuge in the midst of Slavery, which has endured from generation to generation, and is likely to continue until Slavery is abolished throughout the land” (150). Jackson compares American swamps to West Indian mountains in their utility for fugitives trying to hide; although he focuses on the Great Dismal, Jackson claims swamps are a common environmental feature that is useful to fugitive American slaves across the South: “in lieu of almost inaccessible mountainous regions, the Fugitive avails himself of the numerous and extensive swamps and low grounds which abound in the old and many of the newer Slave States” (145). Jackson tends to focus on how the swamps are “inaccessible,” especially the Great Dismal Swamp since it afforded “entire security, in the largest slaveholding State of the South” (150).¹⁴

¹² Cf. Numbers, chapter 35: Hebrews who accidentally killed someone would be safe from those seeking revenge when they fled to a city of refuge; both religious law and the city walls would protect the fugitive as long as they stayed within the city.

¹³ Emily C. Pearson, “The Swamp,” in *Plantation Pictures*, published in *The Liberator* (22 Jan 1864), p. 4. Richard Hildreth’s third version of his novel *The White Slave, or, Memoirs of a Fugitive* (Boston: 1852) also mentions hiding places in swamps but in less detail than Pearson’s novel. Hildreth says swamps are “impenetrable” (169), and he describes an island in the swamp that his fugitive hides on as a “retreat” (208).

¹⁴ Ironically, despite viewing the swamp as an isolated and protected space for slaves, Jackson (and Olmsted) acknowledge that fugitive life depends on illegal trade with slaves working legally in the swamp and in places beyond the swamp. Jackson, 148-49; Olmsted, 160. The Dismal Swamp Canal was opened in 1805 to more easily connect the Chesapeake Bay with cities in coastal North Carolina and to facilitate the shingle trade that took place inside the Great Dismal. The desire for increased profit and decreased transportation time pushed transport

Antebellum writers like Jackson drew on real affordances of swamp ecology. On a topographical level, the swamp's bodies of water and dense foliage set up environmental barriers that were difficult for slave hunters to cross. Walter Johnson describes how slaveholders used horses and dogs to assert their mastery over the landscape and police the movements of slaves. However, "In swamps, horses were useless" (233); "To reassert control of the landscape, slaveholders used dogs.... Where slaveholders' view was occluded and where slaves could use their ears to evade their pursuers, dogs' sense of smell made them the masters of the landscape" (234). Of course, dogs couldn't always follow fugitives through the water of swamps because it would obstruct their ability to smell and because the water was difficult to navigate.¹⁵ Monique Allewaert confirms the advantages of swamps for slaves, writing, "In historical fact and in these Anglo-Europeans' accounts, the Africans who were brutally and problematically allied with tropical terrains used the knowledge they had gained from this ecology in pragmatic and literal ways" (43).

Alternately, writers imagined the swamp as a temporary stopover for slaves who were fleeing slavery on a linear path from the South to the North and on to Canada. Popular slave narratives contributed the most to establishing the idea that swamps were a stop on the Underground Railroad. Henry Bibb and his wife travelled through swamps when trying to escape slavery in Louisiana (ultimately unsuccessfully), and Harriet Jacobs stayed briefly in the Snaky Swamp before travelling to the North.¹⁶ Henry "Box" Brown literally depicted the swamp as a stop on a linear Underground Railroad in his 1850 panorama dramatizing his escape; the

networks into the swamp at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Even so, much of this construction and transportation work was carried on by slaves away from the oversight of whites.

¹⁵ In his dramatic telling of his flight from Tibeats, Northup notes, "The dogs had not gained upon me since I struck the water" (79). Olmsted, too, hints that dogs aren't much use in swamps: "I don't think they are employed in the ordinary driving in the swamp, but only to overtake some particular slave, as soon as possible after it is discovered that he has fled from a plantation" (161).

¹⁶ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, online at *Documenting the American South* (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 121-24; Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Norton, 2001), 124.

swamp is literally one of the frames in the series between bondage and life in the North.

Regarding Brown's panorama, Daphne Brooks argues that the "threateningly perilous opacity of the swamp... simultaneously offers slaves an avenue for fugitive liberation" (106). Brown's representation and Brooks' reading marks the swamp as an avenue to Northern freedom.

Although readers might view *Twelve Years a Slave* and *Dred* as representatives of the avenue side of this dichotomy, close attention to how each text describes space shows that such readings reduce the full complexity of how swamps function in each text.¹⁷ Indeed, unlike other discussions of swamps which treat details cursorily, Northup's and Stowe's texts offer two of the most substantial engagements with swamp space and swamp characteristics.¹⁸ Both describe swamps and their recurrence across the landscape as a network that connects otherwise unconnected people and communities. Swamp space was neither isolated nor connected to other locations in a linear fashion but spread out across the landscape like a web which fugitives strategically navigated in order to achieve movement or communication goals that didn't align with what their masters wanted them to do.

¹⁷ Because of the novel's overarching plot, some readers interpreted *Dred* as another Underground Railroad plot like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The *Liberator* reprinted a poem on 19 June 1857 by Reverend G. Taylor called "The Underground Railroad," dedicated to Mrs. H. B. Stowe, in which one stanza features Dred:

In the 'Dismal Swamp,'
Defying penetration,
Conductor STOWE says 'Dred'
Built a Railway Station.

Taylor's poem, which praises the progress marked by the Underground Railroad, hinges on the isolation in the figure of the swamp. Masters in the poem "furiously rage" because they can't figure out how slaves are escaping:

No one hears the 'whistle,'
Or noises of the cars;
While negroes fly to freedom,
Beyond the STRIPES AND STARS.¹⁷

The poem's only indication of how slaves are escaping without being heard is the stanza on the swamp, which is a space that defies the penetration of master's ears.

¹⁸ A few writers understood the swamp not as island or avenue but as fugitive-managed space with connections to slaves on surrounding plantations. Most notably, Samuel Warner's early report of Nat Turner's revolt hypothesized that Nat Turner had help from fugitives fifty miles east of Southampton in the Great Dismal and that Turner's plan was to retreat there after the initial attack on Southampton.¹⁸ Warner's account recognizes the possibility that slaves living fifty miles from the swamp might have a connection to fugitives living in the swamp. William Wells Brown and Martin Delany also make this connection between Nat Turner and the Great Dismal Swamp in *Clotel* (1853) and *Blake* (1859) respectively.

Northup never explicitly describes a fugitive network in *Twelve Years a Slave*; in fact, he often appears unaware of it.¹⁹ Because of Northup's contradictory status—legally a free Northerner while actually enslaved in the deep South—he possesses a contradictory perspective of the land, viewing the land usually as a Yankee with an eye for utility and sometimes as a slave with an eye for refuge. Although Northup eventually achieves his freedom through his persevering attempts to mail a letter, *Twelve Years a Slave* registers both the rarity of achieving freedom this way and the other networks his fellow slaves used to manage the dire conditions of their enslavement. I read *Twelve Years a Slave* against the grain to trace this latter fugitive network.

Swamps feature frequently in Northup's account of his time in Louisiana, as do other ecological spaces considered useless for agriculture. Compared to Northup's home in New York, Louisiana had a less developed infrastructure, consisting primarily of steamboat routes that traversed gradually smaller waterways.²⁰ The state's infrastructure contained few railroads and usually followed the winding courses of rivers, leaving many spaces that were difficult to access and also many waterlogged plots of land unsuitable for agriculture (see figure 1). One of Northup's major challenges in adapting to slave life starting in 1841 is learning how to read the landscape the way slaves read it, particularly for swamps, bayous, and densely wooded areas that were relatively secluded from white surveillance. Early in his time as a slave, Northup stumbled on a group of borderland maroons hiding in a hole in the ground: "While I belonged to

¹⁹ On the other hand, Trish Loughran argues that Solomon Northup's narrative works to revise *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* portrayal of Southern transportation networks. She writes,

Northup goes to great lengths, for example, to show the edges of the circuit in which Stowe's novel can be said to travel, the impenetrable locations in (and from) which certain kinds of information have yet to be integrated. Sometimes these edges appear material (or geographical), while at other times they appear ideological. He speaks, for instance, of "the remoter depths of Slavery" (63)—which he reached when living on the Red River's Bayou Boeuf, lying, as it does, beyond "the termination of the railroad tracks" (64). (395)

²⁰ D. W. Meinig describes steamboat networks which capitalized on already existing river networks after the invention of the steamboat and gradually expanded to include shallower backwaters off the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers (317-323).

Ford, I was unwittingly the means of disclosing the hiding-place of six or eight, who had taken up their residence in the 'Great Pine Woods'" (143). Being "pinched for food," the maroons wanted a butchered pig Northup carried, and they fought him for it; Northup reported the attack to his overseer, who enlisted a group of displaced Choctaw Indians who had camped in the woods to find the fugitives' hideout, which they did after a painstaking search (144). Only later did Northup realize that the slaves were hiding in the woods and that his secrecy was necessary for their survival.²¹ This compressed account begins to unpack the layers of different kinds of ecological and legal spaces in Northup's vicinity: Ford's plantation lay close to the Great Pine Woods, where displaced Choctaw Indians camped and fugitive slaves hid.

Northup tends to see swamps according to how they were portrayed in popular culture: isolated islands in the landscape. While he was with Epps, a young fugitive slave girl named Celeste came to Northup's hut and asked for help. Smarter at that point about the relationship between fugitives and plantation slaves, Northup shared his allowance of food with Celeste frequently and secretly. He describes the place in the swamp where she hid during the summer:

In the edge of a swamp, not half a mile from Epps' house, was a large space, thousands of acres in extent, thickly covered with palmetto. Tall trees, whose long arms interlocked each other, formed a canopy above them, so dense as to exclude the beams of the sun. It was like twilight always, even in the middle of the brightest day. In the centre of this great space, which nothing but serpents very often explore—a somber and solitary spot—Celeste had erected a rude hut of dead branches that had fallen to the ground and covered it with the leaves of the palmetto. (146)

²¹ Sylviane Diouf discusses the systems of mutual communication for two types of fugitive or maroon communities, which she designates as borderland and hinterland maroons. Much evidence exists to show how slaves on the plantation helped borderland maroons; Diouf hypothesizes that the same kind of aid must have been exchanged with hinterland communities as well, although she acknowledges that there is little historical evidence to prove such transfers explicitly. *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: NYU P, 2014).

Northup describes Celeste's swamp as desolate, "somber and solitary," an isolated space where neither light nor humans enter—only snakes (and dogs, as Northup eventually reveals).

Northup describes the place as if he has been there and seen it himself, despite its being out of bounds for him. The space is near (only half a mile away) yet enormous, "thousands of acres in extent"; Northup, however, doesn't acknowledge the freedom this swamp space could afford or the other places it might connect to. He concludes Celeste's story merely by saying she returned to her master at the end of the summer.

Northup's description of Celeste's swamp mirrors his description of his first major encounter with a swamp, but it contradicts his story about how the swamp connected two distant locations. In this situation, Northup runs away from Tibeats through the "Great Pacoudrie Swamp" (the Cacoudrie Creek and Bayou)²² in order to appeal to his master, Ford (see fig. 1). Northup describes the dangers and discomforts of the swamp in great detail: alligators, moccasin snakes, bears, wildcats, and tigers. Northup also connects the discomfort of the swamp to its desolation and dissonance: "For thirty or forty miles it is without habitants, save wild beasts" (80); later, "The swamp was resonant with the quacking of innumerable ducks! Since the foundation of the earth, in all probability, a human footstep had never before so far penetrated the recesses of the swamp" (81). Northup portrays the swamp as a vast, unpeopled space, and he frames his story of crossing the swamp as a testament to his desperation and will to obtain justice. However, by ignoring the utility of land most people didn't use or travel, Northup's story downplays the swamp's ability to connect a remote worksite to his master's plantation.

²² *New Atlas*, 24.

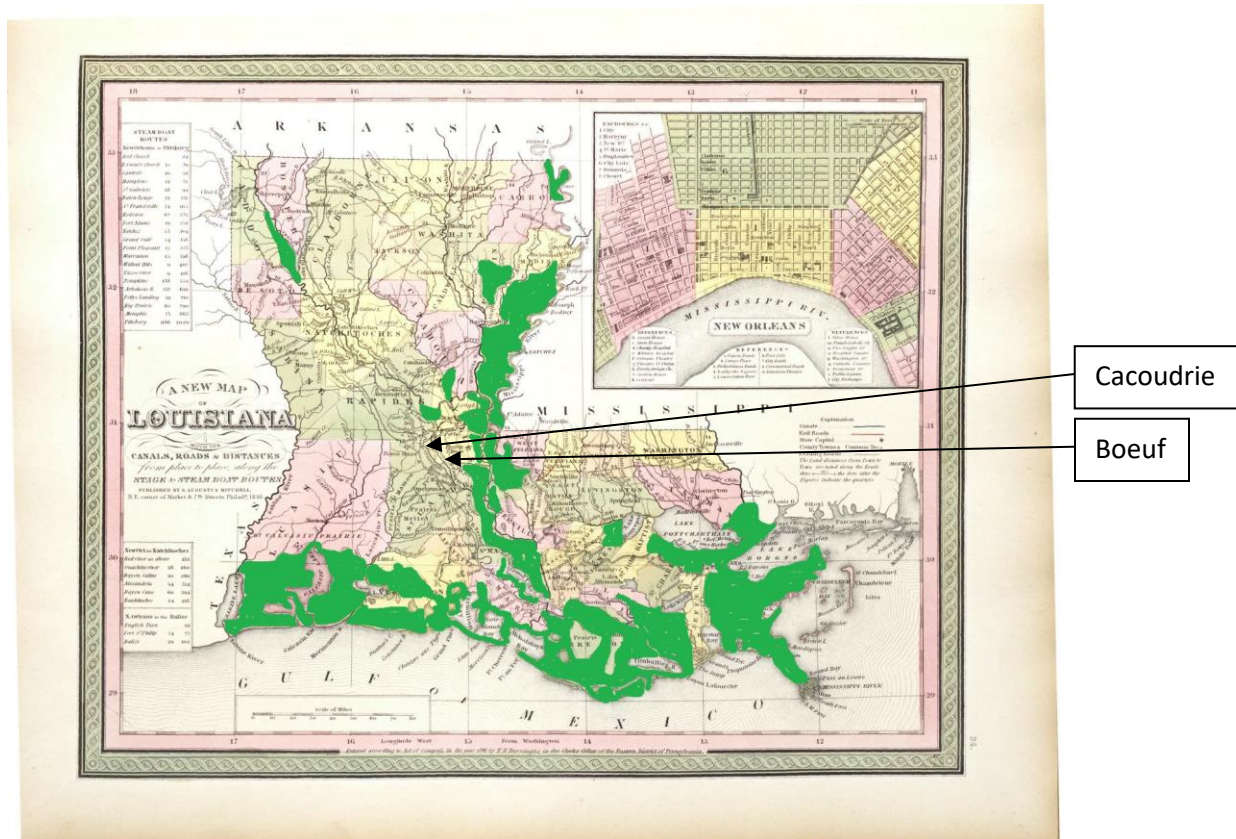


Figure 1: “A New Map of Louisiana,” from *New Universal Atlas*, p. 24. Swamps are labelled in green. The Cacoudrie and Boeuf systems are depicted as parallel minor rivers on this map despite the fact that Northup calls them a swamp and a bayou respectively.

Northup’s navigation of the Cacoudrie Bayou parallels his navigation of Indian Creek, though the language he uses to describe the latter waterway obscures this similarity. Northup navigated Indian Creek with a load of lumber, to the chagrin of his boss and the astonishment of his owner. “Not having forgotten [his] experience years before on the Champlain canal,” Northup calculated the cost of transport by land versus transport by water: the land route was “a few miles less” (54), but the water route was much easier and cheaper. His arrival at the proper destination in a shorter time than even he expected earned him the title “smartest nigger in the Pine Woods”; Northup preferred to think of himself as the “Fulton of Indian Creek,” referencing Robert Fulton, whose invention of the steamboat opened up a vast network of rivers to economic exploitation (54). To accomplish this feat, Northup had figured out that Indian Creek connected to Bayou Boeuf, which connected to Bayou Laramie, which was where he wanted to

go; he also knew that “In some places [the waterway] was not more than twelve feet wide, and much obstructed with trunks of trees.” The narrative purpose of Northup’s story is to contrast Southern inefficiency with Northern efficiency; however, one might rightly wonder how Northup, from upstate New York, figured out this route when his masters and drivers could not. Whether he had travelled in these places or only heard about them from other slaves, Northup’s story indicates that he had access to topographical knowledge that whites didn’t. In this instance, narrative of Yankee innovation elides the knowledge of the land he has gained as a slave.

The Indian Creek episode shows how Northup views the landscape as a northerner with an eye for efficiency rather than with an eye to spaces that could protect him from his master’s gaze and dogs. Trish Loughran calls this scene “the most ironic moment of his enslavement” (402). Indeed, the fact that he opens to his masters a pathway that had previously been outside of their knowledge and surveillance shows that he doesn’t fully register the constraints of slave life. Significantly, Northup names the sluggish waterway he navigated “Indian Creek” and never describes it as a swamp like Celeste’s refuge or Cacoudrie Bayou. However, ecological space in Louisiana often hovers between land and water: a bayou is a river-fed swamp, and names like Bayou Boeuf and Bayou Laramie mark networks of winding sluggish waterways that connected with larger waterways such as the Red River. Northup describes the entire system as a creek with a firmer land-water distinction, despite the fact he had to clear parts of it: “Indian Creek, in its whole length, flows through a magnificent forest. There dwells on its shores a tribe of Indians, a remnant of the Chickasaws or Chickopees, if I remember rightly” (54). Indian Creek was one part of a larger system of bayous and rivers. What’s more, the name “Indian Creek” and Northup’s three-paragraph description of the Choctaw Indians camped there shows that the woods next to the creek was Indian territory outside of plantation space—literally off the map—yet adjacent to plantations and waterways. Northup’s three paragraph description of the Choctaws’ “island” forms a similar island in his ferry story—separate from, yet adjacent to, Northup’s stories about navigation and plantation life. However, because he navigates the

waterway in a way that fits with his knowledge of the Champlain canal in New York, the economics of shipping, and Robert Fulton, Northup sees the waterway as a “creek” with a “magnificent forest” and not a “bayou” or “swamp.” Moreover, he does not see it as a surveillance-free space or a potential pathway to escape.

Northup displays similar skepticism about how the swamp might provide meeting space for larger assemblies when he tells how a slave named Lew Cheney coordinated a plan among “a large number of runaways” (147) at “A remote spot, far within the depths of the swamp, back of Hawkin’s plantation” (146). The location sounds simultaneously remote (“far within the depths”) and nearby (“back of Hawkin’s plantation”). Cheney and his fellows planned initially to escape to Mexico, fighting their way if necessary, but Cheney “became convinced of the ultimate failure of his project” and betrayed them (147).²³ Northup writes that Cheney’s revelation “filled the whole country with terror” (147). Although a newspaper report from the *Niles Register* claims that “a certain meeting house” was the site of the rebels’ hideout, Northup situates the site of his story squarely in the swamp.²⁴ This anecdote leads Northup to reflect on the real frequency of discussions about insurrection: “Such an idea as insurrection, however, is not new among the enslaved population of Bayou Boeuf. More than once I have joined in serious consultation.... I saw such a step would result in certain defeat, disaster and death, and always raised my voice against it” (147). Northup’s response signals once again the distance of his

²³ Many slaves fled to freedom in Mexico, a historical fact which the northern teleology of the Underground Railroad frequently obscures. Paul Ortiz, for example, argues that the US-Mexico border was originally enforced in the 1850s to keep fugitive slaves inside the US; “‘Killed Helping Workers to Organize’: African American and Latina/o Narratives in the Century of Jim Crow/Juan Crow” (public lecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: 16 November 2016).

²⁴ Footnote to the notes in *Twelve Years a Slave* (Oct 28, 1837). Figuring out which account is correct is difficult, although the *Register*’s version of events tells what Northup claims is Cheney’s lie: “The plan of this fellow, it appears, was to raise an insurrection at Alexandria, next at Natchitoches, and then to turn steps to New Orleans and kill all the whites.” Northup’s version seems the more plausible for two reasons. First, slaveholders would have used such a story to support their heavy restrictions on slave movements, as was common across slaveholding territories. Second, while it may have seemed possible to communicate about starting an insurrection sixty miles upriver from Alexandria in Natchitoches, the idea that slaves then planned to march the more than two hundred miles to New Orleans and kill the whites sounds extremely exaggerated. The safer plan of escape to Mexico seems more likely.

perspective as a legally free Northerner from those of slaves who have no hope except in fight, flight, or invisibility.

Regardless of his expressed skepticism and occasional assertions to the contrary, Northup's descriptions of spaces outside of slaveholder control position swampland as key sites for slave gathering and consultation. "Notwithstanding the certainty of being captured, the woods and swamps are, nevertheless, continuously filled with runaways" (143). Northup records his stories of the Great Pine Woods fugitives, Celeste, and Lew Chaney together at the end of one chapter, and although these stories stand as loose strands in Northup's larger narrative (like the isolated narrative about the Choctaw Indians in the Indian Creek episode), when read together they signal the connections between swamp spaces that facilitated slave activity. Extracting these anecdotes here allows me to connect Northup's two successful navigations of the swamp (once in pursuit of justice and once in pursuit of favor with his master) with Lew Cheney's plan to use the swamp to gather a community and migrate south of the US. In a limited way, slaves in the Red River basin moved, communicated, and maintained relationships across a fugitive network mediated by swampland.

The primary reason Northup doesn't see these connections has to do with the keystone of his narrative: his faith in the postal system and the definitive force of law that such a communication network extends to remote backwaters in Louisiana. Indeed, except for his own escape, Northup never tells the story of a slave's successful flight from slavery (only one other slave in his narrative escapes, a slave named Arthur who had been kidnapped like him and is redeemed by a timely letter when they first arrive in New Orleans). Throughout his time as a slave, Northup makes three major attempts to mail a letter to friends in the North. First, a sailor named John Manning helps Northup write a letter while he's being shipped to New Orleans, and Manning mails the letter from there (37). Second, Northup writes a letter by stealing a sheet of foolscap paper, concocting ink, and fabricating a quill; he almost sends it to the post office through a poor white laborer named Armsby, but Armsby betrays his plan to Epps before

receiving the letter (136-38). Finally, using the more trustworthy envoy Bass, Northup succeeds in getting a letter to friends in the North in 1852, at last confirming Northup's faith in the postal system (162-67).

Despite Northup's and his narrative's reliance on the postal service, the primary obstacles his use of the mail faced had to do with geographical problems (reading maps and moving through space). The first letter—Manning's—reached its destination, “but inasmuch as it gave no definite information as to my probable locality, it was not, at that time, deemed advisable to institute measures for my liberation” (37). Without references to definitive locations of sender and receiver as defined on a map, a letter is useless. Bass actually sends three letters on Northup's behalf, and only one reaches its destination. Because Bass doesn't sign his letter but puts only a return address for the nearest town on the map, Marksville, Northup's rescuers have a lot of trouble finding out where either of them are: “Marksville, although occupying a prominent position, and standing out in impressive italics on the map of Louisiana, is, in fact, but a small and insignificant hamlet.... The information in the letter was so vague and indefinite as to render it difficult to conclude upon any specific course of proceeding” (178). Marksville, it turns out, is twenty-three miles from where Northup lived in Bayou Boeuf, not to mention that the name Bayou Boeuf designates “the section of country extending between fifty and a hundred miles, on both sides of that stream.” Whites' knowledge of the land, mediated by maps, was limited in contrast to slaves' greater knowledge of how backwaters connected. Moreover, Marksville slave owners cannot locate Northup through their socially connected slaves as they might usually expect since Northup decided never to tell his real name to fellow slaves. All in all, the lack of information recorded on maps and letters nearly prevents the postal system from connecting Northup to his rescuers.

Reading beneath Northup's overdetermined narrative in which the postal service saves him from slavery, the next best network available to slaves is the swamp because it allows them to escape their enslavement or move with a relatively greater degree of freedom. Even though

swamps and bayous were hazardous spaces, they provided pathways for slave movement and communication that gave slaves a limited degree of agency in an otherwise hegemonic plantation environment. Northup's narrative ultimately fails to draw out how swamps formed a network for slaves to travel, hide in, and communicate with each other.

***Dred* and the Fugitive Swamp Network**

If Northup never fully realizes the potential of networks that exist in swamps, creeks, and bayous, Stowe's character Dred does. While on the surface of the plot Stowe's novel appears to represent the swamp as an isolated island or an avenue to the North, closer attention to the text reveals that the novel ultimately breaks with such tropes and portrays the swamp as a larger social network for slaves and fugitives across the South.²⁵ As she oscillates the novel's perspective between the swamp's regional geography—represented by the generalized view from the map—and its local environmental features, Stowe figures swamps in *Dred* as a series of interlinked fugitive spaces.²⁶ Within this network of fugitive spaces, Stowe dramatizes the strength and multi-directionality of social connections that existed between fugitive slaves in the swamp and plantation slaves living all around the swamps. In this section, I argue that the

²⁵ Contrary to how Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* portrays swamps: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* doesn't believe swamps provide any affordances for slaves at all. Rather than viewing swamps as inaccessible, which assumes they fill a space if one could only get to it, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* treats swamps as a dead end, a wall that has little if anything on the other side. Cassy tells Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Here you are, on a lone plantation, ten miles from any other, in the swamps; not a white person here, who could testify, if you were burned alive" (ch 34). Later, Cassy tells Emmeline, "you couldn't stay in the swamps,—you'd be tracked by the dogs, and brought back, and then—then—" (ch 36). Even though Cassy backtracks on this claim while meditating on maroon communities she's heard of—"We might set them all free, and go somewhere in the swamps, and find an island, and live by ourselves; I've heard of its being done" (ch 38)—her plan of escape collapses beneath her confidence in Legree's ability to penetrate the swamp. Thus, Cassy's and Emmeline's plan, which repurposes slaveholders' expectations that they would flee to the swamp and be caught, constitutes an exceptional example of slaves' escaping from the depths of slavery. Swamps in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* function as a moat around the plantation: they keep slaves in and don't connect to any other geographical features that might help slaves.

²⁶ This oscillation fuses the two perspectives from which Michel de Certeau claims people tend to describe space—the map and the tour—ultimately as a means of representing a fugitive social network: "Either [description] presents a *tableau* ('there are...'), or it organizes *movements* ('you enter, you go across, you turn...')," De Certeau, 119.

Great Dismal Swamp is the hub of a larger swamp network, that Dred is the social hub of a larger fugitive network, and that the local black community valued both networks (spatial and social).²⁷

Borrowing the generalizing perspective of the map, Stowe frames the Great Dismal Swamp as part of an interconnected network of smaller swamps that spans the southeastern coast of the United States. From a regional perspective, swamps often connected to each other through shallow rivers, sluggish streams, and coastal tide plains.²⁸ Within this larger network, the geographical territory of the Great Dismal Swamp functions as a major hub rather than one isolated swamp within the South. When Stowe first introduces the swamp, she writes,

The reader who consults the map will discover that the whole eastern shore of the Southern States, with slight interruptions, is belted by an immense chain of swamps, regions of hopeless disorder, where the abundant growth and vegetation of nature, sucking up its forces from the humid soil, seems to rejoice in a savage exuberance, and bid defiance to all human efforts either to penetrate or subdue.²⁹

Stowe's appeal to the map's authority establishes the grounds of her novel's claim to realism³⁰; her appeal also frames the scale at which one can see the swamp as a network, a scale which travelers on the ground would never have a full view of. Conversely, when Frederick Law Olmsted travels the roads and rails from Virginia to Georgia, he often mentions seeing swamps

²⁷ Barabasi defines a "hub" as "connectors—nodes with an anomalously large number of links" (56).

²⁸ Swamps could be large or small and either stagnant or parallel to various watercourses (as in the case of bayous). Large swamps offered more safety to fugitives than small swamps since they disrupted other forms of transportation and communication across a larger space. When swamps followed watercourses, swamp networks would look more like the network of riverboats. Such swamps were more highly connected, which allowed potential fugitives greater ability to travel but also greater danger since such swamps probably would have been accessible from larger networks such as rivers. When swamps were isolated, they would have tended to be connected to other swamps by weaker ties.

²⁹ Stowe, 209.

³⁰ Mary Kuhn cites Stowe's correspondence with Olmsted (her editor for *Dred*) and her praise for his recent *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* as evidence of Stowe's commitment to botanical and regional realism in her article "Garden Variety: Botany and Multiplicity in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Abolitionism," *American Literature* 87.3 (2015), 489-516.

from his train or stagecoach, but he never considers them as an interconnected network analogous to the railroad he travels on. Although the novel nominally focuses on the Great Dismal Swamp, Stowe expands the novel's swamp setting beyond the Great Dismal. Only the view from 10,000 feet can accomplish this understanding of how a local ecological feature could link together to form a network. Reading from the map, Stowe describes the spaces outside of slave owners' control, namely the coastal swamps of the southern seaboard states: most of them had swamps all along the coast, which Stowe represents as a "chain of swamps" that "belts" the southern coast. "Chain" and "belt" downplay the "slight interruptions" between swamps in this region (often miles in extent and separated by rivers that flowed into the Atlantic), but from the zoomed out perspective of Stowe's map, these interruptions would have looked slight. *A New Universal Atlas*, published by S. Augustus Mitchell in Philadelphia in 1846 and updated in 1853, shows many swamps existing along the coasts of Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina (fig. 2), South Carolina (fig. 3), Georgia, and Florida.³¹

By naming only the Great Dismal Swamp and referring indirectly to the dozens of other coastal swamps, Stowe represents swamps as an interconnected network that extends from the Great Dismal Swamp's northern boundary in Virginia through all of North Carolina, and deep into South Carolina. Olmsted claims the Great Dismal makes up about ten percent of the total area of a string of swamps in this region of Virginia and North Carolina, including "the little Dismal, Aligator [sic.], Catfish, Green, and other smaller swamps, on the shores of the Albemarle and Pamlico" (150). Although it straddles the Virginia-North Carolina border, the Great Dismal Swamp from which the novel's title draws its name extends only about a third of the way into North Carolina, as far as the Albemarle Sound. Dred travels freely through the

³¹ The *New Universal Atlas* labels the following swamps: the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia and North Carolina; in North Carolina also, from north to south, the Alligator, Holly Shelter, and Green Swamps; in South Carolina, the Hell Hole Swamp; in Georgia, the large Okefanokee Swamp. The map of North Carolina in the atlas also contains a profile map of the Dismal Swamp canal, showing the elevation and locks in the stages of its course from Norfolk to Elizabeth City.

South from Virginia to Florida via this larger network of swamps.³² Consequently, Stowe's cartographic extension of the Great Dismal Swamp's territory establishes a geographical link between the two primary settings of *Dred*: Canema, Nina Gordon's plantation in northern North Carolina, and Magnolia Grove, Edward Clayton's plantation in South Carolina. Before Nina and Clayton meet each other (in New York) and fall in love (on Nina's plantation in North Carolina), their plantations and slaves are already distantly linked through a fugitive network.

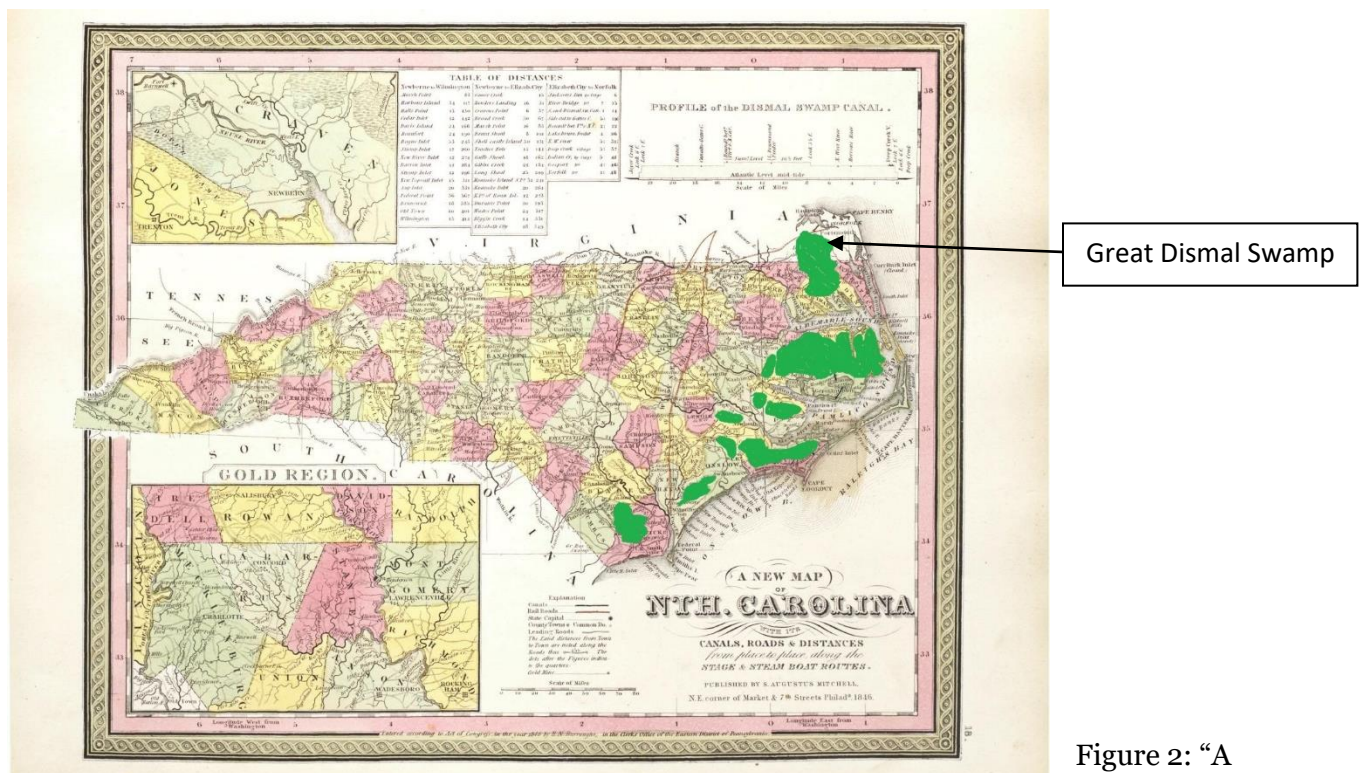


Figure 2: "A New Map of Nth. Carolina," from *New Universal Atlas*, p. 18. Swamps are labelled on the map in green for easier viewing, including parts of the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia.

³² "[H]e had not confined himself to any particular region, but had traversed the whole swampy belt of both the Carolinas, as well as that of Southern Virginia." ³² Again, "He had been a great traveler—a traveler through regions generally held inaccessible to human foot and eye. He had explored not only the vast swamp-girdle of the Atlantic, but the everglades of Florida, with all their strange and tropical luxuriance of growth; he had wandered along the dreary and perilous belt of sand which skirts the southern Atlantic shores" (510).

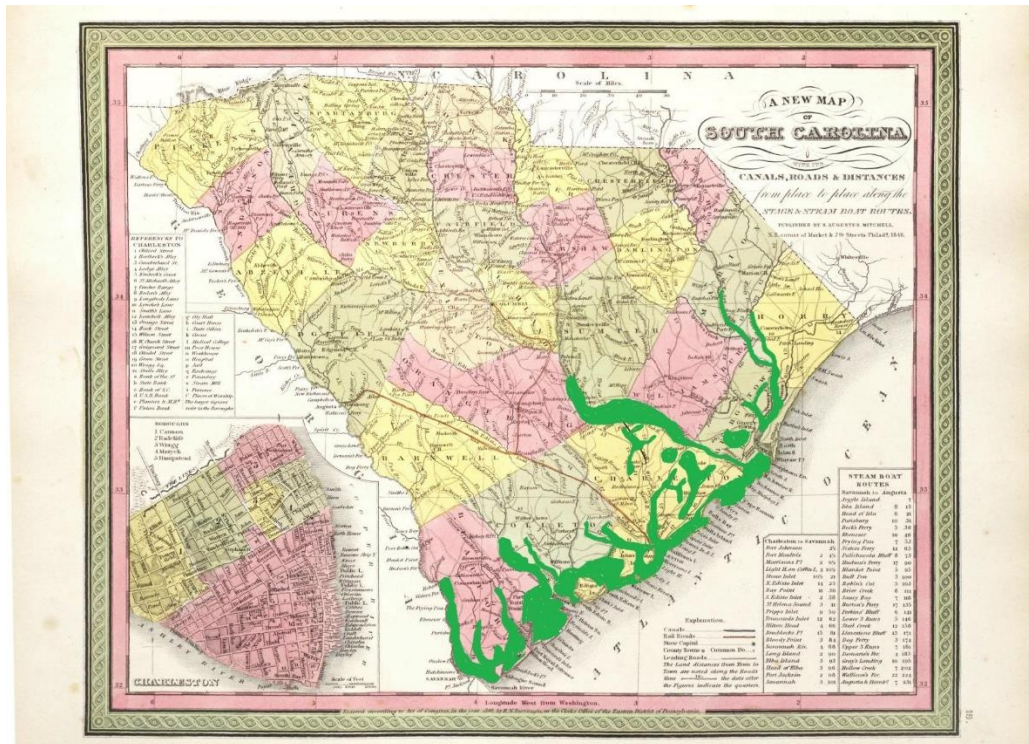


Figure 3: "A

New Map of South Carolina," from *New Universal Atlas*, p. 19. Swamps are labelled in green.

Moreover, Stowe attributes to the swamps a power to impede and restrict white characters' movements. The swamp is uncolonizable non-white space within the text, and the borders of the swamp act as a semi-permeable barrier, allowing in slaves but not whites. *Dred* emphasizes a boundary between the swamp and roads which it immediately borders: even though he can hear Dred clearly as he travels the road, Harry cannot see Dred until he emerges from the "copse of briars" at the edge of the swamp.³³ The only white characters who enter the swamp are Clayton and the Peyton children, and those instances prove the rule: Clayton is unconscious and physically carried into the swamp by Dred, and the Peyton children are led by their slave Tiff.

³³ Ibid., 198.

The novel's map reading is surprising because it doesn't contribute to the work of homogenizing space.³⁴ Stowe moves in the opposite direction: she reads the totalizing view represented on the map and extracts the gaps and dead zones which the state cannot fully account for in order to plot them together into a fugitive network. It is important to note, however, that although her characters travel, Stowe rarely reproduces the itineraries of travel: her characters, including Dred, tend to suddenly appear wherever their next scene takes place. (Stowe tends to downplay Dred's exposure to the dangers of the swamp, claiming that Dred moved through the swamp "with as much ease as a lady treads her Turkey carpet."³⁵) Nevertheless, by reading maps backwards, Stowe imagines within US national space the possibility of fugitive spaces, fugitive communities, and fugitive networks that are autonomous of southern planter geography.³⁶

Because the swamp facilitates black movement and keeps out whites, it also facilitates black life and community formation. As Dred travels throughout the belt of swamps, he doesn't assist fugitives to freedom in the north but establishes them in utopic agrarian communities separated (by the swamp) from white control or surveillance. "Wherever he stopped, he formed a sort of retreat, where he received and harbored fugitives."³⁷ Dred met his wife and built his

³⁴ Michel de Certeau argues that maps "colonize" space and erase the travel narratives that produce maps in order to present a "totalizing stage" of "heterogeneous places." De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven F. Rendall, trans. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 121. Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

³⁵ Ibid., 274.

³⁶ In the British preface to *Dred*, Stowe points to the immediate context of *Dred*: the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the subsequent battles in Kansas and Missouri, and the caning of Charles Sumner by Preston Brooks in the Senate in May 1856. Stowe's preface to the American edition speaks about "the issues presented by the great conflict between liberty and slavery" (3). She states that she returns again to "scenes and incidents of the slaveholding states," because "there is no *ground*, ancient or modern, whose vivid lights, gloomy shadows, and grotesque groupings, afford to the novelist so wide a scope for the exercise of his powers. In the *near vicinity* of modern civilization of the most matter-of-fact kind, exist institutions which carry us back to the twilight of the feudal ages, with all their exciting possibilities of incident" (3, emphasis mine). The way Stowe prioritizes "ground" with its "grotesque groupings" posits the Great Dismal as a key site in a broader political and economic system entangled with slavery. For more on Stowe's knowledge of geography and uses of it in her writing, see Yael Ben-Zvi, "The Racial Geopolitics of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Geography Textbooks," *Legacy* 29.1 (2012), 9-36.

³⁷ Ibid., 212.

home in the swamp under such circumstances. “[T]here are here and there elevated spots in the swampy land, which, by judicious culture, are capable of great productiveness. And many such spots Dred had brought under cultivation, either with his own hands, or from those of other fugitives, whom he had received and protected.”³⁸ The repetition of Dred’s peregrinations establishes not only island communities throughout the swamp but a broader social network. Although Stowe overestimates the Great Dismal’s ability to keep whites out (because a major canal ran through the Great Dismal) she recognizes the potential for swamp space to mediate a social network for slaves.³⁹ This community exists not only within the swamp but is connected to the black community outside the swamp: “The negroes lying out in the swamps are not so wholly cut off from society as might at first be imagined. The slaves of all the adjoining plantations, whatever they may pretend, to secure the good will of their owners, are at heart secretly disposed, from motives both of compassion and policy, to favor the fugitives.” Stowe grounds this solidarity in the precariousness of slaves’ material existence on both sides of the swamp’s environmental boundary: “They very readily perceive that, in the event of any difficulty occurring to themselves, it might be quite necessary to have a friend and protector in the swamp.”⁴⁰

Socially, Dred acts as the mobile hub of the swamp’s social network. At the revolt council, Stowe reveals that Dred is connected to all the surrounding plantations, linking a council of twelve ambassadors in Northern North Carolina to other unmentioned councils throughout the region he traverses from Virginia to Florida.⁴¹ Stowe compares Dred to Moses

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Robert Levine has persuasively demonstrated how the networked world of slaves forms a point of “rupture” for readers of the novel since social connections established prior to the telling of the story come as a complete surprise, particularly when Harry meets Dred on the road that circumnavigates the swamp (“Introduction,” *Dred*). The slaveholders in the text know that this kind of connection between slaves exists, though they don’t fully understand how: Mr. Bradshaw tells Anne, “You know, somehow, everything goes round from one plantation to another” (313).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 211.

⁴¹ For more on hubs, see Barabasi, 55-64.

leading the twelve tribes of Israel out of slavery or Jesus leading the twelve disciples.⁴² Each of Dred's twelve ambassadors cooperate to spread information and plans. One of the ambassadors, a slave named Hark who has no lines in the novel, relays information from the Gordon plantation to Dred and Harry in the swamp. Not knowing about Dred, Tom Gordon assumes Hark is the major agitator, so he kills Hark.⁴³ By executing Hark, Tom effectively cuts off communication between Canama and Dred. (This separation accounts for Harry's intense response to the news of Hark's death and his injunction to "Remember Hark" when he and Dred attack Tom and his gang.⁴⁴) Dred's connections cross borders both between different swamps and between swamps and plantations.

Dred is the major hub of the network because he has an exponentially greater number of strong links to other people and locations than anyone else in the network.⁴⁵ Stowe uses the metaphor of a misshapen tree to represent the swamp's spatial network and Dred's social network:

In those desolate regions which [Dred] made his habitation, it is said that trees often, from the singularly unnatural and wildly stimulating properties of the slimy depths from which they spring, assume a goblin growth, entirely different from their normal habit. All sorts of vegetable monsters stretch their weird, fantastic forms among its shadows. There is no principle so awful through all nature as the principle of *growth*. It is a mysterious and dread condition of existence, which, place it under what impediment or disadvantage you will, is

⁴² This information network of twelve ambassadors carries out work even after the undecided council at Jegar Sahadutha: "Meanwhile, his associates were to be preparing the minds of the people, and he was traversing the swamps in different directions, holding nightly meetings, in which he read and expounded the prophecies to excited ears" (499).

⁴³ Tom says, "Hark was a desperately-resolute fellow, and it's well enough he is dead, because he was getting sullen, and making the others rebellious" (474).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 493.

⁴⁵ To borrow terms from Barabasi, the slave community organized in and around the Great Dismal Swamp is a scale-free network that exhibits a high degree of clustering around Dred (51, 71).

constantly forcing on; and when unnatural pressure hinders it, develops in forms portentous and astonishing.⁴⁶

Although Stowe is indirectly (and problematically) describing Dred, I read this passage as also a description of network growth under extreme circumstances.⁴⁷ Stowe figures the fugitive social network *not* as Booker T. Washington's notion of a "grape-vine telegraph" in which information is passed linearly from one point to another but rather as a tree of "goblin growth" with many branches spreading out from a centralized trunk.⁴⁸ Many branches of the network—like Harry or Hark—have weak connections to other ambassadors but strong connections with Dred and all of the slaves on their respective plantations. The trunk of the network—Dred—has an exponentially greater number of strong connections. In such a network, news travels quickly: since Dred is so highly connected, once information reaches him, it can jump to multiple points in the network at once without having to travel linearly. On the other hand, the network is highly unstable—eliminating Dred effectively shuts it down.⁴⁹

Not all characters neatly fit into Dred's highly organization. Other major characters such as Tiff and Milly fit into this broader network but in a way that productively decentralizes the unified structure of Dred's information network.⁵⁰ Milly in particular opposes Dred because she wants to preserve the fugitive network. At the meeting of would-be insurrectionaries, she suddenly arrives, demonstrating her knowledge of the secret meeting spot, her ability to

⁴⁶ Stowe, 496.

⁴⁷ Mary Kuhn provides a helpful reading of botany and racial discourse in Stowe's novels in "Garden Variety." Indeed, as Russ Castronovo and Dana Nelson point out, the tone of this passage disparages the "goblin" shape of the fugitive network and democratic action; Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, "'Action, Action, Action: Nineteenth-Century Literature for Twenty-First-Century Citizenship?'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Russ Castronovo, ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2012).

⁴⁸ Booker T. Washington, *An Autobiography. The Story of My Life and Work*, online at *Documenting the American South* (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 19.

⁴⁹ For more on strong and weak ties, see Barabasi, 41-44; I use "links" as an equivalent of "ties."

⁵⁰ Tiff isn't one of Dred's ambassadors or an agitator; he's a source of information and supplies. However, when Tiff's situation deteriorates, he seeks refuge with the fugitives in the swamp. Tiff's relationship to Dred shows that Dred's network extends through weaker links to people who do not share his politics.

navigate the swamp, her relationship to Dred, her knowledge of their plans for insurrection, and her authority to speak to the black community. And this isn't the first time Milly shows up suddenly near the swamps. Levine points out that Milly opposes Dred's politics when she "suddenly" meets Harry on the road immediately after Dred leaves Harry. Her apparently benign explanation to Harry for her sudden presence on the edge of the swamp warrants a second glance: "Dey wanted to get up de wagon for me; but, bless you, says I, what you s'pose the Lord gin us legs for? I never wants no critturs to tug me round, when I can walk myself. And, den, honey, it's so pleasant like, to be a walking along in de bush here, in de morning; 'pears like de voice of de Lord is walking among the trees."⁵¹ Milly's desire to walk appears to be servile—not taking a break if doing so would inconvenience her master—but the location she selects to walk (beside the swamp) suggests ulterior motives. She calls the "bush" on the edge of the swamp "pleasant," and "the voice of the Lord" is undoubtedly Dred's, who has just left, singing a "wild camp-meeting hymn" with martial themes.⁵² Of course, Milly explicitly warns Harry to stay clear of Dred—"He's in de wilderness of Sinai"—but I read her dispute with Dred as a different perspective over the future of the fugitive social network.

Milly and Dred's debate over how to respond to slave owners is not only about whether or not to use violence but also about the future of the swamp network. Many readers see Milly's position as merely the negative of Dred's: Dred wants to attack the white slaveholders while Milly advocates for passive Christian pacifism.⁵³ Although Stowe consistently has Milly speak this kind of benign Christian stance, Milly's statements, actions, and movements through space signal that more is at stake in her position than what she explicitly says. Milly's sudden appearances show that she has a vested interest in the future of the network-enabling swamp,

⁵¹ Ibid., 201.

⁵² Ibid., 200.

⁵³ See for example, Lisa Whitney, "In the Shadow of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Stowe's View of Slavery from the Great Dismal Swamp," *New England Quarterly* 66.4 (1993), 552-569.

which she sees as being put at risk by a slave revolt. Milly's religious language at the council of "Jegar Sahadutha" indicates she understands the inevitable negative outcome of attacking slaveholders: "If dere must come a day of vengeance, pray not to be in it!... Didn't He hang bleeding three hours, when dey mocked Him, and gave Him vinegar? Didn't He sweat great drops o' blood in de garden?" Milly then sings a song that juxtaposes Jesus' pain in the Garden of Gethsemane with his execution: "*Agonizing in the garden, / On the Ground your Maker lies; / On the bloody tree behold Him, / Hear Him cry, before He dies*" (461).⁵⁴ Milly advocates, "O, brethren, pray de Lord to give 'em repentance! Leave the vengeance to him."⁵⁵ Much of what Milly says registers as Protestant theology of substitutionary atonement—a passive response to the cruelties of slavery. But *where*, one might ask, is this passive response supposed to take place? Milly's song calls the space where Jesus had hoped to escape violence "the garden," and as Stowe describes it, Engedi (Dred's stronghold) is a garden. Milly's exhortation to Christlikeness entails avoiding aggression and staying in the garden until a large scale revolution occurs through divine agency. Although her plan has an element of passivity, Milly's entreaty recognizes that an attack on whites will likely involve the deaths of many slaves and draw conspicuous attention to the swamp, which will result in slaveholders working more vigorously to extinguish slaves' social networks. "Pray not to be *in* it," rather than "Pray not to be *part of* it," assumes that a revolutionary change in the social structure will come from another agency and to a specific location—the plantation.

In sum, if the swamp mediates a network through which the slave community can exercise autonomy, then this relation to space reorients the debates occurring between slaves in the novel. The swamp is highly connected space outside of white surveillance and available to slaves. Dred's network is also highly connected and productive for slaves hoping to maintain

⁵⁴ Stowe, 461.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 462.

social connections across the fragmentary social landscape of Southern slavery. As such, slaves like Milly want to hold onto the only medium for black community they have.

The Fate of the Other (Underground) Network

If the swamps provided a beneficial network that supported a degree of fugitive autonomy, one might expect that the Underground Railroad was a more beneficial network. Indeed, in the contemporary popular imagination the term “Underground Railroad” signifies the savior network of enslaved people in the South: “underground” signals how it was operating against the force of unjust laws; “railroad” connotes how it functioned as a transportation pathway but also, since it wasn’t a railroad at all, the social progress associated with the social changes railroads brought—in short, social progress through technological progress.⁵⁶ However, *Dred* suggests that the Underground Railroad was less beneficial to black communities than to slave owners and whites. Many readers of *Dred* believe the novel reinforces the idea that the swamp was an Underground Railroad station for slaves traveling to freedom in the North.⁵⁷ Beyond the fact that this reading oversimplifies the discussion of the Underground Railroad in *Dred*, more is at stake in the moment when an Underground Railroad narrative interrupts the story of Dred’s fugitive network. By the end of *Dred*, the slave community appears to face an either/or situation of fight or flight, ultimately resorting to the Underground Railroad, escaping to the benevolent North and founding a utopian agrarian community in Canada. Paying attention to how the swamp undergoes significant changes, on

⁵⁶ The idea of social progress animates Reverend G. Taylor’s poem in the *Liberator* (masters are “Cursing the inventions / Of this knowing age”) even as the slaves are being transported “Beyond the STRIPES AND STARS.” *Liberator* (19 June 1857). For more on the narrative of technological progress, particularly as manifested in discussions of the steam engine and railroads, see Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*.

⁵⁷ Obviously, Rev. G. Taylor’s poem in the *Liberator* reads *Dred* this way. Also, both Robert Levine and John Carlos Rowe work against this interpretation to argue for the significance of the revolt plot and the swamp space respectively. See Levine’s chapter on *Dred* in *Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass* and John Carlos Rowe, “Stowe’s Rainbow Sign: Violence and Community in *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1850),” *Arizona Quarterly* 58.1 (2002), 37-55.

the other hand, suggests the text is not another antislavery romance but the tragedy of the loss of one of the few black networks in the United States.

After Dred's death, which marks a fatal blow to the slave community's social network, the novel *appears* to shift to plan B: flight on the Underground Railroad. Flight enters the plot when Tom Gordon's network waxes and Dred's network wanes. First, Tom kills Hark because he assumes that Harry was still able to communicate with the slaves at Canema through him. Tom proceeds to eliminate people he assumes are minor nodes that support the fugitive network, such as Abijah Skinflint, a poor white trader. Then, Tom mounts a full-scale assault on the swamp: "We shall make it hot for them, if we catch them; and we are going to catch them. There are no two ways about it. This old swamp is like Davy's coon—it's got *to come down!*"⁵⁸ Dred, the mobile hub of the fugitive network, is killed in this assault: "The death of Dred fell like a night of despair on the hearts of the little fugitive circle in the swamps—on the hearts of multitudes in the surrounding plantations, who had regarded him as a prophet and a deliverer."⁵⁹ Finally, Tom follows his suspicions to Clayton's neighborhood in South Carolina: "his suspicions had connected Clayton with the disappearance of his slaves, and he followed upon his track with the sagacity of a bloodhound."⁶⁰ Tom's network invades and supplants Dred's network, from North Carolina to South Carolina.

Only at this point of network collapse, does the novel's plot shift. First, the Underground Railroad enters the text through the suggestion of Clayton, the sympathetic but ultimately misguided white slaveholder: "The day after the funeral, [Clayton] talked with Harry,... opening to him and his associates a prospect of a safer way by flight to the Free States."⁶¹ Second, the Great Dismal Swamp's representation in the text shifts from a series of interconnected fugitive

⁵⁸ Stowe, 507.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 514.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 519.

spaces that don't overlap with national networks to a space that links major points in national shipping infrastructure: "It is well known that there are... lumberers engaged in the cutting and making of shingles, who have extensive camps in the swamp.... In the same manner roads are constructed into distant parts of the swamp, by means of which transportation is carried on. There is also a canal cut through the middle of the swamp, on which small sailing craft pass backwards and forwards with shingles and produce."⁶² The presence of these lumberers was known to people in the North, as was the fact that they were usually slaves.⁶³ Also, many people knew that the Great Dismal Swamp Canal was an important link between Norfolk, Virginia, and Elizabeth City, North Carolina, a route many canal boats travelled to transport their goods. But prior to this point of the novel, the canal and the slave workers receive no mention. The moment when escape becomes a possibility for the characters is the moment when Stowe brings up the Great Dismal's connection to a major canal, both of which follow the entry of a white slaveholder into black space. This placement in the plot marks flight on the Underground Railroad not as plan B (with fighting slave owners as Plan A) but as the last resort for the fugitives because black space is disappearing.

Clayton suggests escape because of his slave owner mindset. Clayton considers the advice he should give Harry in the wake of Dred's death—that is, when faced with the even higher likelihood of a slave insurrection: "It is true that [Clayton] knew not the whole depth of the affair; but Harry's letter and his own observations had led him, without explanation, to feel that there was a perilous degree of excitement in some of the actors in the scene before him, which, unless some escape-valve were opened, might lead to most fatal results."⁶⁴ Clayton believes that "nothing but the removal of some of these minds from the oppressions which were

⁶² Ibid., 519.

⁶³ Olmsted writes about them at length in his chapter on Virginia in *Journey Through the Southern Seaboard States*.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 519.

goaded them could prevent a development of bloody insurrection.”⁶⁵ As such, Clayton—not Milly—stands as the explicit opponent of violent action because he wants to protect slave owners and the status quo. Milly’s plan of holding the fugitives’ ground doesn’t receive any attention in the wake of Tom’s encroachments. Reluctantly, Milly goes along with Clayton’s plan, initially planning not to leave but then capitulating when she sees that her last family member—her grandson, Tomtit—is being absorbed into Tom Gordon’s network as his favorite slave, thus being estranged from his grandmother and the black community. Moreover, Stowe’s narrator responds to Clayton’s suggestion with a commentary on how the Underground Railroad is primarily a benefit to slaveholders and a hazard to slaves:

It is probable that nothing has awakened more bitterly the animosity of the slaveholding community than the existence in the Northern States of an indefinite yet very energetic institution, known as the underground railroad; and yet, would they but reflect wisely on the things that belong to their peace, they would know that this has removed many a danger from their dwellings. One has only to become well acquainted with some of those fearless and energetic men who have found their way to freedom by its means, to feel certain that such minds and hearts would have proved, in time, an incendiary magazine under the scorching reign of slavery. But, by means of this, men of that class who cannot be kept in slavery have found a road to liberty which endangered the shedding of no blood but their own.⁶⁶

Stowe and Clayton agree that the Underground Railroad is an “escape-valve” that ensures the safety of the metaphorical engine of slavery.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 519.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 520.

Stowe's discussion of the Underground Railroad as an "escape valve" matches a broader metaphor her text draws between the nation and a steam engine. An escape valve was the part of a steam engine that prevented too much steam from building up in the boiler, which would result in a deadly explosion if pressure grew too high. The escape-valve metaphor occurs repeatedly throughout *Dred*, and whether it compares black labor to steam power, the national economy to a steam engine, the territorial size of the nation to engine volume, or white citizens to passengers on a train, the logic of the metaphor repeatedly reminds readers of the instrumental value of black bodies. When Anne Clayton argues with her neighbor Mr. Bradshaw over educating slaves at Magnolia Grove, both slaveholders imagine slavery as a work-producing engine and slaves as the driving force:

"I admit, Mr. Bradshaw, it's a very dangerous thing to get up steam, if you don't intend to let the boat go. But when the steam is high enough, let her go, say I."

"Yes, but, Miss Anne, other people don't want to say so. The fact is, we are not all of us ready to let the boat go. It's got all our property in it—all we have to live on. If you are willing yourself, so far as your people are concerned, they'll inevitably want liberty, and you say you'll be ready to give it to them; but your fires will raise a steam on our plantations, and we must shut down these escape-valves."⁶⁷

In this extended metaphor, fire represents the education Anne provides to her slaves, the steam stands for the feelings that will be produced in slaves' minds and bodies as a result of the education, and the boat stands for the southern economy, figured as individual plantations. Although this ambiguous metaphor allows both of them to come to different conclusions about what filling the boiler with steam will result in (Anne believes that educating slaves will lead to a more productive and efficient plantation; Mr. Bradshaw believes education will lead to the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 316.

explosion of the southern economy in the literal violence of a slave revolt), both agree that slave labor powers the Southern economy. Even Mr. Bradshaw's nonsensical final statement that "we must shut down these escape-valves" extends the logic of the metaphor, pointing to a common and dangerous practice of sealing off escape valves to get more power out of an engine, which resulted in countless deaths from blown boilers.⁶⁸

Stowe's metaphor mutates throughout the novel, but it always casts steam engines and railroads as negative towards blacks. Judge Oliver's statement to Clayton after his house is burned extends the engine metaphor so that it compares the entire nation, North and South, to a passenger train:

The mouth of the North is stuffed with cotton, and will be kept full as long as it suits us. Good, easy gentlemen, they are so satisfied with their pillows, and other accommodations inside of the car, that they don't trouble themselves to reflect that we are the engineers, nor to ask where we are going. And, when any one does wake up and pipe out in melancholy inquiry, we slam the door in his face, and tell him "Mind your own business, sir," and he leans back on his cotton pillow, and goes to sleep again, only whimpering a little, that "we might be more polite."⁶⁹

In this instance, Southern slaveholders are the engine drivers (slave drivers) of the national steam train, carrying American citizens involuntarily toward economic advances. Once again, although Stowe doesn't mention slaves, slavery is the power source of the metaphorical engine. Clayton's friend Frank Russel—who agrees that Clayton must expatriate his slaves as a safety measure—connects the steam engine and escape valve metaphors to the problem of space for black people in the US: "From the very day that they began to open up new territories to slavery,

⁶⁸ Meinig notes that "thousands of lives were lost in steamboat boiler explosions before an 1852 act improved standards and inspections" (337). Cf. Walter Johnson: "Competition in the steamboat business spurred technological degradation rather than technological innovation. Danger was built into the boats" (122).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 537-38

the value of this kind of property mounted up, so as to make emancipation a moral impossibility.”⁷⁰ Since slaves are instrumental property whose value is directly linked to the land they work on, then territorial expansion and technological advances that made such territories accessible fueled the persistence and growth of black slavery in the US.⁷¹ Stowe’s use of the escape valve metaphor extends her novel’s critique of the Underground Railroad, indicating that it was a logical extension of the system of slavery: although Stowe would not have said so, her novel suggests that the Underground Railroad perpetuated rather than alleviated large-scale black oppression by preventing large scale insurrections.

The ending of *Dred* gives an unsatisfactory answer to a question which the novel as a whole considers: Is there any room for black networks in the US? The novel answers a definitive “no.” Its ending in escape on the Underground Railroad is an unpleasant compromise for the former slaves who have lost their home ground and cannot find space to live in the US because of the Fugitive Slave Laws and anti-black laws across the western free states. All along, Dred had promised that the swamp would remove slaves from their pursuers better than the Underground Railroad, as in the excerpt I began this chapter with. Although this loss of swamp space does not resonate in the language of the novel’s ending, it does echo in the brevity with

⁷⁰ Ibid., 537.

⁷¹ As Walter Johnson explains, the language of “diffusing” blacks across an expanded US territory as a way to avoid a slave rebellion—similar to gas leaving an escape valve—originated with Thomas Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana Territory and returned in successive debates about Missouri, Texas, and Kansas and Nebraska. Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013): 31-32.

Mississippi senator Robert Walker first used the metaphor of slave power as a steam engine in his argument supporting the annexation of Texas in 1844. He proposed annexing Texas as a way of “diffusing” the black population into a large new space and gradually letting out their supposed pressure through Mexico: “There is but one way in which the North can escape these evils; and that is the reannexation of Texas, which is the only safety-valve for the whole Union, and the only practicable outlet for the African population, through Texas, into Mexico and Central and Southern America” (14).

David Grant also reads Stowe’s steam engine metaphors in “Stowe’s *Dred* and the Narrative Logic of Slavery’s Extension,” *Studies in American Fiction* 28.2 (2000), 151-178. He, however, focuses on the contradictory imagery in *Dred* to argue that while slavery is dependent on its own expansion, what it actually spreads is not progress but destruction and backwardness; I’m more interested in how Stowe’s imagery comments on the Underground Railroad specifically.

which characters' outcomes are discussed. Although the Claytons, Harry, and the rest of the slaves who travel to Canada seem to live happily ever after, Harry and Hannibal—the close associates of Dred—receive only one sentence of attention each, notably for their voracious appetites for space. Harry “is rapidly acquiring property” and Hannibal “is great in felling trees and clearing forests.”⁷² Milly and Tiff, Dred’s other two associates, choose to stay in the US illegally and at risk of being returned to their masters since they’re still in slave territory. Milly lives “in a neat little tenement in one of the outer streets of New York”⁷³—one might view her orphanage on “the outer streets” of a city known for blackbirding as an attempt to rebuild the social dynamics of the swamp. Tiff, somewhat unsatisfactorily, continues to search for a token of his homeland, from which he is now an exile, as one can see in his final comment that his master’s child is “de very sperit of de Peytons.”⁷⁴ His enigmatic comment makes sense only as nostalgia for the past and its patriarchal conception of space.

Twelve Years a Slave and *Dred* feature the relationships between black people and national space—how the enslaved used swampland to form communication and transportation networks that would enrich their communities. The slaves Northup observed used swamps to hide out and potentially coordinate a revolt or escape to Mexico. *Dred*, in particular, indirectly stages one of the most revolutionary claims that could be made in the US in the antebellum period: black people should be allowed to have their own spaces and communities inside the regions of the US where they already live, spaces over which they exercise complete autonomy. There’s more to Milly’s rhetorical triumph over Dred’s arguments for insurrection than critics have noticed: what she wants and even expects is precisely the space for a black community and the equality with whites that was impossible for whites to think about.

⁷² Stowe, 544.

⁷³ Ibid., 546.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 549.

Contemporary modes of interpreting slave narratives and the Underground Railroad often miss these stories that don't lead north because of the penchant for linear narratives like Henry Box Brown's panorama in which the swamp is just one stop on the line towards northern freedom. Indeed, the antebellum print market favored the romantic structure of slave narratives in which the slaves escape their bondage; even the idea of the swamp as an isolated refuge with all its Gothic trappings in Moore's poem fit into this desire for a romantic emplotment of slavery. Neither Northup nor Stowe fully evades the teleological tug of the escape plot and the progress narrative—Northup because his story ultimately follows that trajectory and Stowe because not rescuing her likable characters would have hurt sales. But aside from their tendencies toward romance, both texts help to recover and sketch the shape of fugitive networks in the South.

Ch. 4: Incendiary Media: Antislavery Print's Material-Ephemeral Impact

In a recent *New York Times* article titled “Was Abolitionism a Failure?” Jon Grinspan attempts to measure the impact of the antislavery movement: “It's hard to accept just how unpopular abolitionism was before the Civil War.... In 1860 the premier antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, had a circulation of under 3,000, in a nation of 31 million.”¹ By showing that *The Liberator* was reaching less than .01% of the United States, Grinspan's quantitative argument deflates the idea that abolitionism was an important antebellum movement. For his argument to have its full impact, Grinspan relies heavily on the popular historical legibility of *The Liberator* (1831-1865) as a stand-in for all abolitionist publishing: if the *premier* newspaper circulated only .01%, then certainly no other newspaper could have a greater impact on individual beliefs and public sentiment.² Of course, he omits other later-established abolitionist newspapers that had greater circulation, such as the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (1840-1870) or the *National Era* (1847-1860). Most surprisingly considering his quantitative argument, Grinspan neglects to mention the numbers for the touchstone of antislavery print, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851), which sold 300,000 copies sold in its first year as a book. Regardless of his chosen examples, the quantitative terms of Grinspan's critique encapsulate a more trenchant set of assumptions that have surrounded histories of the antislavery movement and literary studies more broadly from the nineteenth century to the present—the assumption that quantitative circulation of print directly corresponds to social impact.

¹ Jon Grinspan, “Was Abolitionism a Failure?” *New York Times* (1 Feb 2015).

² I borrow the term “public sentiment” from Glenn Hendler's *Public Sentiment: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: UNC P, 2001). Hendler's concept encapsulates the idea of rational sentimentality, the blurring of public sphere rationalism and the supposedly irrational culture of sentiment. He points to Stowe's use of the phrase in the last chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as one of the most famous instances of the concept.

But quantity is an oversimplified measure of print's social impact because numbers cannot register ephemeral aspects of print, such as the way a text's reputation carries the emotional response to that text further than a print object itself. In "Resistance to Civil Government" Henry David Thoreau famously scaled down the number of men who could abolish slavery by refusing to participate in its financial networks from one thousand men to "one HONEST man"; while his statement takes the rhetoric of quantity to a logical extreme, it is also an important call to rethink the connection between numbers and social impact. Thoreau argues that, in the socially networked worlds of finance, government institutions, or print, a single action resonates beyond its immediate locale along the physical or social links of a network.³

A letter printed in the last issue of *The Liberator* on December 29, 1865, makes a similar claim about the influence of *The Liberator*. The editor of the *Bellows Falls Times* writes,

The influence of the *Liberator* has always been far beyond its mere circulation—more than some papers with thirty times its circulation. In fact, its influence never could be measured by that standard. It has been read by hundreds of earnest, honest, thoughtful people scattered about the country, who would proclaim its truths to their neighbors while at labor on the farm, or in the shop, lyceum or social circle, and thus its influence was felt by thousands who never saw a copy of it in their lives.⁴

The writer pushes back against the assumption that quantity is a complete measure of print's influence. Complicating quantitative measures, this writer points to the attitude of readers, their quality of reading, and the ephemeral conversations sparked by their reading as three

³ Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," printed as "Civil Disobedience" in *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings* (New York: Norton, 2008), 227-46; 235.

⁴ "William Lloyd Garrison and the Liberator," *The Liberator* (29 Dec 1865), 2, reprinted from *Bellows Falls Times* (Bellows Falls, VT).

additional factors to consider regarding print's influence. Garrison's favorite epigraph for the work of *The Liberator* takes the aspects of print's ephemeral impact even further: he often called the paper "a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well."⁵ The paper influences not only "earnest, honest, thoughtful people" but also "evildoers," a group encompassing both pro-slavery Southerners and apathetic Northerners. Garrison's epigraph invites the question, How exactly does a print object circulate terror?

Capturing the more ephemeral impacts of any print object presents a challenge. Measures of impact appear to be gridlocked somewhere between data and narrative. Indeed, part of the challenge is embedded in the rhetorical force of numbers and narratives. Economist Bruce Wydick points out that even though most economists lament "impact narratives"—dramatic success stories used to solicit donations—"narrative will consistently outperform data in its ability to influence human thinking and motivate human action."⁶ Numbers pack rhetorical appeal too, and literary scholar Theresa Goddu points out that the "discourse of numeracy" rose in its rhetorical influence starting in the 1830s in the US because of the antislavery movement's frequent use of data.⁷ The title of Theodore Dwight Weld's famous antislavery book *American Slavery as It Is: The Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1838) indexes the quantitative appeals of antislavery rhetoric.

A more nuanced approach to print's social impact needs to connect the abstract claims made through narrative to material forms of print. Ironically, the medium itself has gotten lost

⁵ Garrison used this phrase to describe *The Liberator* from as early as July 16, 1831 up through the last *Liberator* on December 29, 1865; often, Garrison used the phrase in pleas for financial support of the *Liberator*. For example, "Still may it [*The Liberator*] live, 'the terror of evil doers, and a praise to them that do well'" in a speech to black populations in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia printed March 8, 1834, and "Are its friends as resolutely determined that it shall be sustained, a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well?" in a notice following one of the great schisms in the antislavery ranks published December 11, 1840.

⁶ Bruce Wydick, "Impact as Narrative: Guest Post by Bruce Wydick," *Impact Evaluations*, World Bank (7 Jan 2015). Wydick advocates for a more careful hybrid of data and impact narratives framed by their relation to the average.

⁷ Teresa A. Goddu, "The Antislavery Almanac and the Discourse of Numeracy," *Book History* 12 (2009), 129-55; 130.

in subscription numbers and narratives of print's impact. By grounding inquiry in the material medium, abstract numbers and narratives begin to take shape: When did specific institutions or groups of people respond to print as an object versus as information? One of the most famous epithets used against antislavery print—"incendiary pamphlets"—asks us to consider not only print's content but its status as something burnable. Also, how did the layout of print structure certain modes of reading rather than simply arguing a position? Some readers of *The Liberator* compared it to the Christian bible, a comparison which many evangelicals found particularly threatening. As it confronts groups of people and institutions, print generates dramatic and unquantifiable responses within public sentiment.

I begin this chapter by returning to one of the most discussed moments of mass print circulation in the antislavery movement, the 1835 Postal Campaign, which came to represent the importance of advances in mass printing technology for the antislavery movement. My goal in this first section is to recover both the importance of right readership for the Postal Campaign and the way print registered an emotional response that had to do with the physical presence of print. From there, I turn to *The Liberator* as a print object which maintained a reputation much larger than its actual subscription list, investigating how its layout and reprinting practices supported a more controversial mode of critical reading than pamphlets in the Postal Campaign and helped subscribers imagine *The Liberator* as a surrogate for the religious communities their antislavery convictions estranged them from. Both sections show how antislavery print circulated its influence farther than its print objects, first through the content which upset pro-slavery Southerners who never read it but also through the modes of reading which, by changing readers' perspective, unnerved pro- and anti-slavery evangelicals across the North. In this way, this final chapter traces one of my dissertation's central ideas—that narratives about how media function amplify their impact on users.

Impact Narratives of Antislavery Print: Quantity, Materiality, and Right Reading

Abolitionist writers and publishers frequently measured their successes according to quantitative measures. The most significant examples of this measure occurred in narratives around the American Anti-Slaver Society's 1835 Postal Campaign (sometimes known as "the Postal Crisis of 1835"); these narratives have continued to inform scholarship on print's impact even in the present. Returning to this moment illustrates how two other significant aspects of the campaign—materiality and right reading—have received less emphasis in historical accounts while the narrative of quantitative impact takes center stage, especially federal restrictions on that quantitative impact, construed as infringements on freedom of speech and freedom of the press.⁸

Abolitionists had long believed in the ability of print circulation to contribute to ending slavery by persuading distant readers to oppose slavery. Optimism about print's impact surged in 1831 as Garrison started *The Liberator*, as the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) formed, and as steam-presses increased the speed of bulk printing while decreasing the cost. At the annual meeting of the AASS in New York in May 1835, the assembly resolved to take advantage of print's increasingly easy production and set aside \$30,000 for printing abolitionist publications. They planned to use the US Post Office's reduced rates for periodicals to send them to Southern addresses which their members sent to Lewis Tappan via his newspaper, *The Emancipator*.⁹ Tappan and his colleagues at the AASS carried out their plan, mailing tens of thousands of publications through the South, where citizens removed them from post offices in

⁸ Trish Loughran writes that the 1835 Postal Campaign ironically became "the special scapegoat of the decade," not for its emphasis on slavery but for the way it put freedom of speech and of the press in the national spotlight (348); Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print* (New York: Columbia UP: 2006).

⁹ Tappan printed his plan in an extra to the June 16, 1835 *Emancipator*:

All these publications will be distributed GRATUITOUSLY by the aid of the auxiliaries, *to those who are not abolitionists*, or will be SOLD at the office, to friends of the cause at a very low rate....Where it may be deemed preferable that the publications should be forwarded to individuals, by mail, from this office, each auxiliary or friend to whom this is addressed is requested to furnish a *list of names* of persons to whom they should be sent, carefully giving the post-office address, and denoting what publications should be sent to each (1, emphasis in the *Emancipator*).

cities like Charleston, South Carolina, and publicly burned them. Public outcry against the mass mailing resulted in at least two new limitations on print circulation: first, the introduction of the Gag Rule in Congress in December 1835, restricting discussion of slavery, and second, Postmaster General Amos Kendall's condoning the failure to deliver publications understood as "incendiary"; that is, Southern postmasters weren't required to deliver antislavery print materials considered capable of inciting a slave revolt.

Surprisingly, abolitionists didn't interpret their campaign as a failure, at least not on their part; rather, they focused on the outcomes they saw as unfair. In the first part of Elizur Wright's annual report for the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1836, he celebrates the AASS's increased ability to print in large quantities; Wright's statement has become a popular refrain in scholarly arguments about the increased ability to produce print in the 1830s: "the issues of publication, this year have been nine times as great as those of last year, at only about five times the expense."¹⁰ Despite Wright's celebration of the cost effectiveness of new printing technologies, his third annual address laments Southerners' and the government's responses to the AASS's print campaign as a series of unjust attacks. Wright criticizes what he labels "The Violation of the Mail": after recounting the public burnings that took place in Charleston, Wright denounces the postal service and their response to the mail crisis. He calls the American Postal Service "the most vital department of our government" even while he excoriates it for "exercising power over the press." He refers to the AASS's freedom of speech and press as "the broadest and highest bulwark of our liberties."¹¹ Significantly, Wright reframes the stakes of the campaign: he is less concerned that non-abolitionists aren't getting their mail and being persuaded that slavery is evil; he's more concerned that abolitionists' freedom of speech is being limited,

¹⁰ Elizur Wright, "Third Annual Address," in American Anti-Slavery Society, *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society; with the speeches delivered at the anniversary meeting, held in the city of New-York, on the 10th of May, 1836* (New York: William S. Dorr, 1836) WHS Rare Book Collection, 35.

¹¹ Wright, 44-47.

regardless of what people do with the print they receive. But Wright's address implies that if only the Postal Service would deliver antislavery print, then the antislavery movement would advance through annually increased printing outputs. Wright's frustration and his move to see the backlash as a limit on his freedoms of speech and the press obscures the full communication circuit and prioritizes numbers.

William Lloyd Garrison also celebrated the campaign despite the new restrictions on antislavery print circulation, and his rhetoric adds complexity to the narrative of quantitative circulation. In the first issue of *The Liberator* in January 1836, Garrison puts a positive spin on the previous year's mass mailing: "Look at the flood of our publications sweeping through the land, and carrying joy, and hope, and life, and fertility, wherever they go!"¹² Garrison doesn't say who experiences joy, hope, life, and fertility. Indeed, Southerners experienced rage that led to mob action. Garrison might mean slaves, who might understand from the conversation surrounding public burnings that the issue of slavery was being discussed. On the other hand, it seems more likely, given the context, that Garrison is thinking of abolitionists trying to get a fledgling movement off the ground. In general, Garrison reads the quantity of publications and the territory they covered as a great success, and he foregoes the numbers in favor of soaring rhetoric. His claim that a *flood* of publications *swept through the land* signals the impact narrative of print circulation, but it also points to the materiality behind the quantity as his language takes on biblical resonances—"flood," and "the stream of sympathy... must ere long sweep away the pollutions of slavery": his language alludes to Noah's flood which killed all the unrighteous people in the world. Unlike Wright, Garrison prioritizes the physical force of print rather than its relative amount.

Along with quantity and the material presence of circulated print, right reading practices (i.e. ones that were open-minded towards persuasive arguments) were a central concern of the

¹² Garrison, "OUR SIXTH VOLUME," *The Liberator* (2 Jan 1836), 3.

AASS's campaign. Wright discussed the importance of reading in the original 1835 plan in a letter to Theodore Dwight Weld on June 10, 1835: "We are now making arrangements with all possible expedition to use the press on a larger scale—shall issue gratuitously from 20,000 to 50,000 of some publication or other every week. What seems now the greatest difficulty is to get the *names* of the right persons to whom we may send them. We want names of *inquiring, candid, reading* men who are not abolitionists" (emphasis Wright's).¹³ It's difficult to look past the numbers Wright mentions: the AASS would mail on a biweekly basis between 20,000 and 50,000 publications! Book historians' fascination with the quantitative narrative of print circulation's impact is warranted because these figures were unprecedented. In 1835, increased press capacity hadn't fully found increased demand, and the most popular daily papers such as the *New York Sun* (1833), *New York Herald* (1835), and *New York Tribune* (1841) were just getting started. However, Wright's instructions acknowledge a challenge greater than funding or printing the publications: they need the right readership, "*inquiring, candid, reading* men who are not abolitionists." Wright's statement indicates the importance of open-minded reading for the campaign.¹⁴

¹³ Elizur Wright to Theodore Dwight Weld, June 10, 1835, *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844*, vol 1, Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds. (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1965), 225.

¹⁴ Tappan and Wright's plan to mass circulate print follows the mass distribution ideals of the American Bible Society (ABS) and American Tract Society (ATS), which the Tappan brothers had supported for many years before becoming interested in abolition. The ABS and ATS aimed to circulate the Christian Bible and conversion-driven Christian pamphlets respectively to every household in the United States (by which they *de facto* meant every *white* household). David Paul Nord documents the ABS's and ATS's struggles to distribute print widely and to make their organizations financially sustainable: they had to make sure their materials were distributed evenly and not only among easily travelled routes, and they had to manage "free-riders," people who would accept a Bible or tract for free even when they could pay. To deal with these challenges, the ABS and ATS strategically dispatched salaried travelling agents who managed a structure of differential pricing to eliminate the problem of free riders. Nord argues that this high degree of administrative oversight was necessary to ensure that recipients of Christian print were doing what the ABS and ATS intended and that financial resources were being used most efficiently. Despite the publicity the ABS and ATS gave to positive stories of encounters with their print materials, universal circulation was an enormous struggle that didn't always pay off.

In the process of developing the AASS's plan, Tappan and Wright adopted the mass distribution ideals of evangelical organizations like the American Bible Society and American Tract Society, but with one very great cost-saving measure—using the post office to distribute the materials to the right people rather than paying agents to distribute them. In light of this decision, Wright points out to Weld the increased need to mail materials to “*inquiring, candid, reading* men who are not abolitionists”; he and Tappan likely hoped that the AASS could activate both the social connections people in the AASS had to Southern friends or relatives. Simultaneously, Wright downplays the importance of carefully crafted content of the gratuitously distributed print: he refers to them as “some publication or other.” Anything will do, in Wright's opinion, as long as the readers do their job correctly.

The print campaign of 1835 and the focus on its quantity remained many abolitionists' most significant touchstone for the narrative of antislavery print's impact for decades. Many abolitionists, including Garrison's friend and biographer Oliver Johnson writing in the 1870s, continued to view this event as a major turning point in abolitionist print production.¹⁵ In 1864, Theodore Dwight Weld erroneously used the narrative of the 1835 campaign when he wrote a retrospective on the circulation of his own antislavery pamphlet “The Bible Against Slavery,” first published in 1837. Weld tells an incredible story in which his pamphlet escaped the 1835 public burnings in Charleston and results in the conversion of a Southern slaveholder:

¹⁵ Johnson writes, “From the time of the organization of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, to the end of the following year, the anti-slavery agitation grew more and more intense, until at last it arrested the attention of the whole country. ‘The Liberator in Boston, and ‘The Emancipator’ in New York, had each enlarged its circulation.... The American Society was sending out its agents and scattering its tracts and other publications broadcast through the land” (182); “The American Anti-Slavery Society, soon after its formation, adopted the practice of sending its most important publications—those especially which explained its principles and designs—to leading citizens at the South” (191); “This they did openly, availing themselves of the postal service of the United States.... In the summer of 1835, large quantities of anti-slavery publications were sent through the mails to citizens of the South, from the anti-slavery office in New York.... If, indeed, the Society had furnished every slave with a bowie-knife, and advised him to cut his master's through therewith at the earliest possible moment, the rage of the South could hardly have been greater than it was” (192). Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times, or, Sketches of the anti-slavery movement in America, and of the man who was its founder and moral leader* (Boston: B. B. Russell & Co. 1880).

The argument was published twenty-seven years ago, in the *Anti-Slavery Quarterly Magazine*. It was afterward stereotyped and passed through four editions, the last in 1838. Soon after that the plates were destroyed, and for twenty years it has been out of print.

When first published, many copies were sent through the post-office into the Slave States. Most of these were publicly burned at their places of delivery.

A copy that escaped the flames in Charleston, South Carolina, fell into the hands of Rev. Wm. H. Brisbane, a slaveholding Baptist clergyman and editor in that city. He sat down to confute the argument, but before his first number was ready for the types, he found that the faith he scouted had become his own. He left his native state, made his slaves free, settled them in Ohio, and published an able work, vindicating the Bible from pro-slavery perversions.¹⁶

This account gets several details correct, such as the fact that the original pamphlet was published in 1837 in the *Anti-Slavery Quarterly*, that it went through several editions in *The Anti-Slavery Examiner*, that Brisbane received the pamphlet and later became an abolitionist.¹⁷ However, he neglects saying anything explicit about William Brisbane *reading* the pamphlet—only that the pamphlet “fell into [his] hands” and that he “sat down to confute the argument,” presumably an argument Brisbane already knew. Weld’s story makes Brisbane an ideal passive recipient of antislavery print. Here, the quantitative narrative of print’s impact and Weld’s focus on freedom of the press elides the importance of reading.

Brisbane’s own version of his story adds much needed texture to Weld’s. William Brisbane’s personal narrative provided a good model for how Weld and other abolitionists

¹⁶ Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery, or, An inquiry into the genius of the Mosaic system, and the teachings of the Old Testament on the subject of human rights* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864), iii-iv.

¹⁷ Weld’s preface fails to mention that the public burning of pamphlets took place in 1835, too early to have involved his pamphlet, which was published after the AASS stopped mass mailings to the South.

wanted people to read because Brisbane's story foregrounds the materiality of print and the importance of a reading mode that carefully considered persuasive arguments. Brisbane recounts his personal history to the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1840, and his speech was later published as a pamphlet. He states that he was a strong advocate of slavery early in his life. As a Methodist minister, he published an argument that the Bible supported slavery in the *Charleston Mercury*, and he ran his own religious anti-abolition newspaper in Charleston, South Carolina. He was repulsed by abolitionist publications at first and wouldn't allow them in his house, but he condescended to read one anti-slavery pamphlet and eventually started to have doubts. When he started treating his slaves differently, his community began to censure him by avoiding his sermons and putting him in jail. Encountering financial trouble, Brisbane eventually leased the majority of his slaves to his brother. Weld's "The Bible Against Slavery" comes into his story after all of these events:

...[A]nd retaining three of my slaves, I came to this state [Ohio]. I came, with my prejudices strong against the Abolition Society, and these prejudices were increased by the movements of a few unwise members of the Society.... But, I determined to give the abolitionists a hearing.... I accordingly subscribed to the *Philanthropist*,¹⁸ although I almost felt like polluting my fingers whenever I touched it. Weld's Bible Argument I examined; it vexed me because its style seemed to be the language of bitter passions; I lost the argument in my anger with the author. I seized my pen with the hope I could reply to it, and wrote six pages of objections to the author's introduction, but when I came to dispose his arguments, oh! my conscience! I found myself already convinced that he had the

¹⁸ A Cincinnati-based abolitionist newspaper published by James Birney.

truth on his side, that slavery was wrong, however I might be scorched by the burning eloquence of the writer.¹⁹

Brisbane's narrative highlights the importance of careful reading. He "examined" Weld's pamphlet, studied it closely in order to refute its claims, and even began to write a refutation. Despite detesting the "style" of Weld's pamphlet and its "language of bitter passions," Brisbane says the argument convinced him slavery was wrong. He implies that his act of critical reading for the purpose of refutation exposed the limits of his own pro-slavery arguments.

Equally important, Brisbane speaks about the material impact of antislavery print. He wouldn't allow antislavery print in his house, and he "felt like polluting [his] fingers" whenever he touched the *Philanthropist*; he describes Weld's rhetoric as "burning," saying it "scorched" him. David Zimmerman argues that people perceived text as spreading moral taint and implicating them in broader conspiracy; similarly, even when Brisbane wasn't reading them but only touching them, antislavery publications tainted him.²⁰ Brisbane's narrative, thus, expands on the material power of print Garrison talks about when he describes print as a cleansing flood. Part of print's impact comes from the fact that the material circulation of print means something, even if people don't read the print. Similar to my argument about singing in chapter two, Brisbane imagines print having an impact on his body that has little to do with receiving information.

Brisbane's fear shows that antislavery print's reputation—it's imprint on public sentiment—had formed his opinion of it long before a physical pamphlet reached his threshold. Garrison was more than a little responsible for Brisbane's attitude; the coincidence of his first year publishing *The Liberator* and Nat Turner's revolt led many Southerners to hypothesize that the two events were causally connected, causing them to pass laws prohibiting the circulation of

¹⁹ "Speech of the Rev. Wm. H. Brisbane, lately a slaveholder in South Carolina, containing an account of the change in his views on the subject of slavery," (Hartford, CT: S. S. Cowles, 1840), 6.

²⁰ For more on text and moral taint, see David Zimmerman, "Infectious Designs" (book ms.), np.

“incendiary pamphlets” and creating an intensely negative reputation for future abolitionist print entering the South.²¹ Nevertheless, circulation without reading is not the full-circle account of print’s impact that Garrison hoped in 1836 and Weld claims in 1864. Brisbane’s narrative of struggling with ideas through intense reading and responsive writing shows just how much work print needed to do to persuade its audience the way the AASS hoped.

In spite of the complexity required for persuasive print’s mechanisms to work, scholarship on the use of print in the antislavery movement tends to follow the quantitative logic of the impact narrative and overlook the importance of reading. For example, Trish Loughran’s *The Republic in Print* explores how the American Anti-Slavery Society used new printing technologies to reach an increasingly connected nation, particularly the Postal Campaign of 1835 and Weld’s *American Slavery As It Is* (which compiled evidence against slavery simply by reading Southern newspapers that circulated to New York City). Her selection of both incidents foregrounds the logics of circulation and quantity in order to advance her argument about the simultaneous growth of a sense of simultaneity and sectionalism.²² Loughran and other print historians quote Elizur Wright’s figures in the AASS’s annual report as proof positive of the increasing impact of print in the 1830s and beyond: “nine times as great as those of last year, at only about five times the expense.”²³ The same quantitative logic holds for Loughran’s discussion of Weld’s *American Slavery As It Is*, which she calls “the only real bestseller the AASS ever produced.”²⁴ The assumption behind these ways of looking at the print archive—both

²¹ Several contemporary scholars have also made the case for coincidence: Louis Masur’s *1831*; Robert Fanuzzi in the introduction to *Abolition’s Public Sphere* (xx). Peter P. Hinks in *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren* extends this coincidence to the publication of David Walker’s *Appeal*.

²² Loughran, 345. Loughran emphasizes the growth in the AASS’s print productivity compared to gradualist abolitionists who preceded them, qualifying her emphasis by saying, “even if the AASS was still mastering the art of distribution” (339).

²³ Loughran, 346. Theresa Goddu also quotes this line in her opening paragraph of “The Antislavery Almanac and the Discourse of Numeracy,” 129.

²⁴ Loughran, 357. Loughran includes the numbers for *American Slavery As It Is*—“22,000 copies sold in four months, and more than 100,000 sold within a year.” She also emphasizes quantity when she quotes Weld’s

when they were first told and in contemporary scholarship—is that the changes print underwent starting in the 1830s could be best measured and demonstrated quantitatively.²⁵

Loughran argues that the major goal of the 1835 campaign was the “phenomenological sensation” of a print event that overtly performed Benedict Anderson’s notion of simultaneity (347). I agree with her assessment, although I notice it makes its argument by pointing to quantity. One of my goals here is to show that the AASS’s original plan had more components than large quantity and the phenomenon of simultaneous distribution. We better understand the significance of simultaneity when we realize that most Southerners thought touching even one antislavery publication would harm them in some way. Moreover, it is important to realize that the AASS’s circulation plan relied heavily on open-minded reading. This broader understanding also helps to understand Southerners’ response: while the AASS may have thought it possible that their pamphlets would be ignored, they probably didn’t expect Southerners to burn them. As Nord frequently reminds his readers, the American Bible Society believed that a Bible was still useful as a potentially persuasive object, even if its original recipient ignored it. But people rarely burned Bibles, and they did burn antislavery print, effectively destroying both its rhetorical and material value for any future readers.

Editing *The Liberator*, Mediating Terror

William Lloyd Garrison’s newspaper *The Liberator* provides a productive example of print’s ephemeral impact on public sentiment because its fame (or rather, infamy) had little to do with mass circulation. As Grinspan claims, *The Liberator*’s circulation likely never rose

estimate of how many Southern newspapers he and Angelina and Sarah Grimke sifted through to produce the pamphlet—nearly 20,000.

²⁵ This assumption also occurs in the narratives of other early nineteenth-century social movements which relied heavily on print. E.g. the American Bible Society’s and American Tract Society’s efforts to circulate the Bible and religious pamphlets universally to people of every class all across the US, except of course for black populations (cf. Nord, *Faith in Reading*).

above 3,000, and at many points, it was probably lower.²⁶ Compared to most rural antislavery papers, these numbers were large, and Garrison was always proud that his paper circulated widely, to the upper western states and Great Britain. However, compared to the distribution numbers of other papers published in urban centers, *The Liberator's* numbers were small. Horace Greely's *New York Daily Tribune*, a moderate antislavery newspaper, published up to 200,000 copies each day. The *National Era*, a gradualist antislavery paper in Washington DC, became a financial success as it serially published entertaining moral fiction, namely *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.²⁷ *The Liberator* even had fewer subscribers than the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the New York City-based flagship paper of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In reality, *The Liberator* was a financial failure. In almost every annual report in the first issue of *The Liberator* in January from 1835 to 1865, Garrison pleaded for more subscriptions to the *Liberator*; frequently, he pointed out that the paper would stay afloat financially if each subscriber would find just one more person to subscribe—that is, if the subscription list doubled. Despite *The Liberator's* constant trouble to increase its income, abolitionists across the spectrum believed *The Liberator* held a unique position at the forefront of the abolitionist print sphere.

Part of *The Liberator's* position in that sphere came from Southerners' fear of it, stemming from the coincidence of its first year of publication and Nat Turner's revolt in 1831. But many Northerners feared it too. Their fear may have come from the paper's radical abolitionism, but it also stemmed from the paper's claim to operate from within another sphere of print culture—evangelical print, which emphasized four main principles: Jesus' death, the bible, converting others, and right behavior. More than simply being an evangelical insider, *The*

²⁶ When Robert F. Walcutt, the *Liberator's* last general agent, wrote his farewell address in the last issue of the *Liberator*, he mentions offhand the paper's having about two thousand readers. Robert F. Walcutt, "A parting word from the honored and faithful General Agent of the *Liberator*," *The Liberator* (29 Dec 1865), 3.

²⁷ Cf. Jarad Krywicki, "'The Soft Answer': The *National Era's* Network of Understanding," *American Periodicals* 23.2 (2013), 125-141.

Liberator used evangelical principles to critique established clergy and Protestant denominations. As such, it operated as an idiosyncratic organ of evangelical print culture, attempting to win converts to abolition, admonishing current abolitionists to maintain their commitment to the cause, and looking towards a millennium when slavery would be abolished.²⁸

The papers threat to evangelicals (like its threat to pro-slavery groups) was conveyed through its layout. Most print historians interpret Garrison's editorial principles through what they view as his democratic rhetoric—the fact that he prints and reprints articles from a wide range of perspectives, including those he doesn't agree with.²⁹ A few print historians and biographers have examined Garrison's evangelical rhetoric, and some have connected the content of his paper with his perfectionist and nonresistant beliefs—the ideas that moral perfection is possible for Christians and that Christians should not resort to violence, both connected to Garrison's interpretation of the Christian bible.³⁰ Hardly any scholars examine the

²⁸ Mark Noll explains this evangelical concern: "At the time of the Civil War, the party of abolitionists, for whom nothing matched the imperatives of personal freedom, was much more worrisome to traditional believers. Foremost in this group was William Lloyd Garrison.... his willingness to jettison [sic] the Bible if the Bible was construed as legitimating slavery was too radical for most of his fellow Americans" (31-32). Although Noll acknowledges that Garrison maintained certain Christian beliefs, he implicitly criticizes Garrison for abandoning the doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture in favor of belief in personal freedom and abolitionism. Garrison, however, wouldn't have viewed personal freedom and Christianity in this either/or manner but as intricately connected. Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²⁹ For example, in "Tocqueville, Garrison and the Perfection of Journalism," Nord takes *The Liberator* as a straightforward example of the democratic press Tocqueville idealizes; Fanuzzi takes a more complex position in "'The Organ of an Individual': William Lloyd Garrison and the *Liberator*," attempting to account for how the "organ of an individual," through the print marketplace, recreated its editor in the image of its public.

³⁰ See Henry Mayer's biography *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1998) and Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1969). My argument makes a significant departure from what Robert Fanuzzi claims in *Abolition's Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003). Fanuzzi argues that abolitionists such as Garrison engaged in a "politics of anachronism" intended "to mediate between distinct historical eras so that successive versions of the American republic could be brought to bear on each other" (xvi); thus, Fanuzzi claims Garrison intended "to present the abolitionist movement itself as discordant with its own time" (xvii). Fanuzzi is right that Garrison often talks this way about his approach. However, Fanuzzi neglects Garrison's significant borrowing from popular Christian evangelical culture, especially evangelical print periodicals which many religious groups started in the 1830s. Augusta Rohrbach takes a somewhat unusual stance in "'Truth Stronger and Stranger than Fiction': Reexamining William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*," *American Literature* 73.4 (2001): 727-55; Rohrbach accepts as uncontroversial that *The Liberator* took part in a growing and successful marketplace of evangelical buying, selling, and advertising.

connection between Garrison's evangelicalism and the layout of his paper or the mode of reading it fostered. The paper's layout, however, encouraged critical reading modes that fed fears about *The Liberator* among Northern evangelicals, who both discouraged the paper's circulation and, consequently, increased its reputation.

At stake in viewing *The Liberator* as an organ of evangelical print is a deeper understanding of its ability to garner an infamous reputation despite its relatively meager circulation. As Michael Warner argues, Enlightenment and evangelical thinking were not as separate in people's minds as many historians have imagined.³¹ If *The Liberator* propagated the opinion of a rational atheist or even a nominal Christian thinker, many religious and slavery-apathetic people across the country might have been able to dismiss it as misguided or unlikely to gather a following because it wasn't rooted in what they perceived as absolute truth. However, since *The Liberator* acted from the position of an insider, claiming Christian scriptures as the source of all its views and attacking Christian clergy throughout the country for their immoral actions, both pro-slavery and broadly abolitionist Christians became upset.

The Liberator's status as an idiosyncratically evangelical abolitionist weekly comes across in the rhetoric Garrison, his supporters, and some detractors used to discuss the paper. I begin with rhetoric to capture people's attitudes about the paper and then move to the paper's layout. Garrison believed that the material form of his paper was offensive to many people. In the farewell address in the last issue of *The Liberator* in 1865, Garrison acknowledges his paper's unpopularity:

[I]t always required rare moral courage or singular personal independence to be among its patrons.... To this day... there are multitudes who cannot be induced to

³¹ Michael Warner, "Evangelical Public Sphere," (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Libraries A.S.W. Rosenbach Lectures in Bibliography 2009).

read a single number of it, even on the score of curiosity, though their views on the slavery question are now precisely those which it has uniformly advocated.³²

Garrison inverts the direct correlation of circulation to social impact, pointing out how the paper's physical repugnance to many readers increased its influence.³³ To justify the paper's potential offensiveness, he reiterates his favorite scripturally-derived epigraph for the tone the *Liberator* struck: "It has ever been 'a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well.'" This phrase came from Matthew Henry's commentary on Psalm 101:8—"I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord" (KJV). Henry, a nonconformist minister in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, writes, "It instructs all that are in any sphere of power, whether larger or narrower, to use their power so as to make it a terror to evil-doers, but a praise to those that do well."³⁴ Henry's commentary allowed Garrison to conceptualize unpopularity as a sign of Christian success. For Garrison, the notion that his paper was "a terror to evil-doers" operates on two levels: *The Liberator* as a material object circulating in the world caused nonreaders to feel terror (such as slaveholders) because it represented radical antislavery ideas, and *The Liberator* as print caused readers to feel terror because it destabilized their beliefs about abolition. As such, Garrison reframes success not around positive or negative responses but around magnitude of response: an intensely negative response is still preferable to being ignored.

³² William Lloyd Garrison, "VALEDICTORY," *The Liberator* (29 Dec 1865), 2. Robert F. Walcutt, the *Liberator's* general agent, makes a similar claim in his preface to *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison* in 1852: so many people criticized Garrison who "have yet to read the first sentence he has ever written." Robert F. Walcutt, ed., "Preface," *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston: R. F. Walcutt, 1852), vi-vii.

³³ Frederick Douglass elaborates on this claim in *Life and Times*: "It was supposed that any man who had the courage to take and read the *Liberator*... would gladly receive and give food and shelter to any colored brother laboring in the cause of the slave. As a general rule this was very true." Douglass, however, shows where this assumption broke down.

³⁴ *Matthew Henry's Commentary On the Whole Bible*, Vol. 3, "Job to Song of Solomon" (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 502.

Being able to conceptualize unpopularity as success had a secondary importance for Garrison since *The Liberator* was never a financial success. The challenge of an evangelical antislavery paper involved managing the tension between appealing to readers and exhorting them in moral behavior. As Jerome Tharaud explains, writers like Stowe and weeklies like the *New-York Evangelist* cultivated content and writing styles that garnered broad appeal among middle-class audiences.³⁵ But Garrison thought his paper was not performing moral work on public sentiment if it was too appealing, so in contrast with most evangelical publications, Garrison readily pushed *The Liberator* into offensive territory, alienating readers and not cultivating a broad appeal. Since his definition of success was terrorizing evil-doers, he interpreted readers' alienation as success.

More than Garrison's rhetoric alone, the responses from two of the most famous readers of *The Liberator* help to demonstrate its reputation as an evangelical print object. In all three of his autobiographies—*Narrative of the Life* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times* (1888)—Frederick Douglass wrote of *The Liberator* as a distinctly religious influence:

His paper took its place with me next to the bible.

The Liberator was a paper after my own heart. It detested slavery—exposed hypocrisy and wickedness in high places—made no truce with the traffickers in the bodies and souls of men; it preached human brotherhood, denounced oppression, and, with all the solemnity of God's word, demanded the complete emancipation of my race. (*My Bondage*, 362)³⁶

³⁵ Jerome Tharaud, "The Evangelical Press, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Human Medium," *Arizona Quarterly* 69.2 (2013): 26, 31.

³⁶ All Douglass quotes are from Frederick Douglass, *Douglass, Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994).

To say that a text is “next to” the Bible risks sounding blasphemous to many readers because it elevates *The Liberator* to the level of scripture. More than a text which simply quotes the Bible as a source of authority, Douglass scripturalizes *The Liberator* saying it exhibited “the solemnity of God’s word.”³⁷ Emphasizing the weekly ritual of reading, Douglass writes in *My Bondage*, “Every week the Liberator came, and every week I made myself master of its contents” (363). In *My Bondage*, Douglass positions the paper as a true Christian community because his story of becoming a subscriber to the paper follows and contrasts his story of how New Bedford churches “proscribed” him “on account of my color” (360).³⁸

Similarly, Harriet Beecher Stowe exhibited strong feelings about *The Liberator*’s religious tone, although less positively than Douglass. In a somewhat anxious letter to Garrison written in 1853, Stowe wrote the following about *The Liberator*:

I am a constant reader of your paper, and an admirer of much that is in it. I like its frankness, fearlessness, truthfulness, and independence. At the same time I regard with apprehension and sorrow much that is in it. Were it circulated only among intelligent, well-balanced minds, able to discriminate between good and evil, I should not feel so much apprehension. To *me* the paper is decidedly valuable as a fresh and able exposé of the ultra progressive element in our times. What I fear is, that it will take from poor Uncle Tom his Bible, and give him nothing in its place. You understand me—do you not?³⁹

Stowe’s cryptic second-to-last sentence indicates the tenor of her comments. Although some might read the statement as Stowe’s concern that *The Liberator* was fomenting revolt among

³⁷ *Life and Times* more explicitly emphasizes the divine authority of *The Liberator* where Douglass writes that the paper “with all the solemnity of ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ demanded the complete emancipation of my race” (658).

³⁸ Douglass summarizes his emotional relationship to *The Liberator* in *Narrative of the Life* this way: “The paper came, and I read it from week to week with such feelings as it would be quite idle for me to describe. The paper became my meat and my drink. My soul was set all on fire” (96).

³⁹ Qtd. in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 4, Walter McIntosh Merrill and Louis Ruchames, eds. (Cambridge: Belknap P, 1971-1981), 286.

slaves, Stowe's mention of Tom's bible in the context of "ultra progressive exposé" more likely shows that Stowe is worried about theology. She fears that reading *The Liberator* will turn black slaves into agnostics. Significantly, Stowe displaces her fears about who was most susceptible to the paper's persuasive techniques onto black people, perhaps because they were not educated in the same traditional schools as most whites.

In both cases, Douglass and Stowe see *The Liberator's* intervention in contemporary public discourse as profoundly religious, whether for good or not. In a culture where Christianity was the most common measure of public morality, these claims help to frame the magnitude at which *The Liberator's* content and editorial style registered. To claim that *The Liberator* is next to the bible puts the newspaper on a level with popular millennial newspapers such as Joshua Himes' *Signs of the Times* (1840-41) and *The Midnight Cry* (1842-44), which promised to show readers when Christ's second coming would occur by helping them to be better readers of scripture. The popularity of a movement like Second Adventism, with which Himes was associated, attests not only to the persuasiveness of preachers but especially to the cultural authority granted to the Bible as a book object that very well might predict the end of the world. Similarly, *The Liberator* promised to change how people viewed slavery and Christianity.

When a text like *The Liberator* claimed to use the bible to interpret the human history in a new way, it encountered evangelical gatekeepers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, who (at least in this moment in 1853) worked to maintain control over biblical interpretation. As Stowe says, *The Liberator* is harmless and potentially informative if readers can understand its function as an exposé, a text that reveals or unmasks ultra-progressive forms of Christianity without endorsing them. But for readers who cannot distinguish between different types of print (scripture or newspaper) or who cannot critically examine an argument that claims to have a scriptural basis, *The Liberator* is the worst kind of spiritual danger. The ideal evangelical mode of reading, coming out of Puritan traditions, was supposed to encourage first conversion and

then greater personal piety through unmediated contact with a text, but this immersed reading depended heavily on moral content carefully curated by religious leaders.⁴⁰ Weld's *The Bible Against Slavery* is a good example of this kind of textual argumentation and curation: it starts by parsing Greek words for slaves and explaining Hebrew slave culture, and then it systematically interprets bible passages about slavery, implicitly promising a less-mediated encounter with the original language and culture of the bible than a potentially misleading translation into English. In contrast to Weld's method which preserves religious authority for educated ministers, establishment evangelicals like Stowe feared texts like *The Liberator* could lead to the mass unsettling of clerical and denominational authority for lay readers. Stowe's statement—coming from an abolitionist whose views on clerical authority were closer to those of her father Lyman Beecher in 1853 than Garrison's⁴¹—shows how *The Liberator* received such an infamous reputation among predominantly evangelical abolitionists.

How, then, did *The Liberator*'s layout spread terror given that the paper didn't, for example, directly advocate slave rebellion? At a basic level, a paper spreads terror by saying shocking things, but *The Liberator* went further: it printed views about slavery and Christianity that many found shocking, and it embedded shocking content in a print environment that destabilized readers. As Michael Millner argues, texts project certain modes of reading onto readers, cueing them how to read from texts' content and form.⁴² To borrow Stowe's term, the

⁴⁰ Michael Warner describes this mode in the introductory chapter of *Letters of the Republic*, 19-21; Matthew P. Brown also describes this mode of reading and the "heart piety" it fosters in *The Pilgrim and the Bee: Reading Rituals and Book Culture in Early New England* (Philadelphia, U of Pennsylvania P, 2007), 24; Michael Warner also talks about this mode in *Letters of the Republic*, 19; Michael Millner traces the long history of reading ideologies, and he claims that while the public sphere model of reading was seen as the norm in the nineteenth century, other modes of reading including absorbed religious reading continued to persist as "bad" modes of reading, from the perspective of the public sphere.

⁴¹ Lyman Beecher had been outspoken in the 1830s against abolitionists whom he believed were subverting orthodox Christianity to their social views on emancipation and had persuaded religious leaders to keep abolitionists out of their pulpits (Mayer, 226).

⁴² Millner identifies four ways to understand how texts project certain modes of reading: 1) by providing an explicit theory of reading, 2) by modeling the practice through scenes of reading, 3) through texts' formal attributes, and

paper functioned as an exposé, exposing readers to surprising new ideas and also—like shocking stories from the penny press—performing the generic work of breaking down readers’ sense that certain acts or ideologies were distant from them. To put my argument in terms of literary genres, *The Liberator* is closer to a novel like George Lippard’s *The Quaker City* than to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* because it spends more time pushing the boundaries of readers’ beliefs than in persuading them to take moral action.

Central to the work of structuring a terror-to-evildoers reading practice was *The Liberator*’s “Refuge of Oppression” column, which was one of the longest-running features of the paper. The column’s ironic title calls attention to itself as a record of the places where oppression finds safe harbor. Even before he established this column, Garrison published what current internet users might call “troll comments” in a column titled “Panegyrics,” once again displaying his inverse measure of success. Commenting on the value of the “Refuge of Oppression” as a persuasive device in 1847, Garrison claims, “We are satisfied that, while no part of the *Liberator* is more carefully perused than this novel one, it has done more to shame our assailants, to demonstrate the righteousness of our course, and to secure for us the co-operation of thoughtful and reflecting minds, than the most able articles that have been written in our defense.”⁴³ Although he rarely explains how “The Refuge of Oppression” works, Garrison prioritizes its work above rational argumentation, pointing out its potential to generate strong emotions as what we might interpret as a “wall of shame.”

4) through texts’ material forms (22-23); *Fever Reading: Affect and Reading Badly in the Early American Public Sphere* (Durham, NH: U of New Hampshire P, 2012).

⁴³ Garrison, “The ‘Refuge of Oppression,’” *The Liberator* (8 Jan 1847), 2.

[illegible]

REFUGE OF OPPRESSION.

THE NEGRO SLAVE.

In Slaves have come and passed, and we
of the American among the negro
people are going to name, with the af-
flict their place generally in the South
of the nation. Everything is peaceful and or-
derly everywhere.

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

By a vote of 10-9, the House tried to suppress the most intense of the hostile feeling against the South. It was to produce against the House the following document, namely, that of a would-be leader to the "leaders of the South":

"You, gentlemen, there, large profits are made from the sale of slaves. It is in your interest to keep the slave trade open. Now, Virginia is particular; she has the largest slave market in the world. The slave trade is well adapted to the soil and the climate of this empire. Do you have more transportation. Our country is a market and sink of slaves. It is a source of revenue to the State. It is not to be wondered at that the slave trade is so popular in this State. It is not to the public, while on duty it is not to the State, but to the slave South."

It was in the course of the Assembly which met in 1837.

SELECTIONS.

From the London Anti-Slavery Advocate.

**MUST WE ALLOWED TO CHOOSE
OUR COMPANY?**

means, my dear sir. Nothing can be more
true. We have all heard that 'People are
choosing the company they keep,' and that 'first
class corrupts good manners.' The divine
and rational; no words can be more

[illegible]

stantly flatter ourselves that if we had
the days of the patriarchal ages, con-
formers of other times, we should not
differ among those who feed the stable,
and those who feed the eagle, or contend
against them. But we have something
more and intelligent spirit which animated
Benner, and Gosselin, and the patri-
archs of the days of Charles the Second,
never, though indebted in its forms of
it. If any one religious sect had now
power among us which those possessed
in the days of Queen Mary, or the
Church in those of Elizabeth, the pres-
ent would be enlivened and the dangerous as
pects of the present would be diminished.
It is not these Nations or children of

[illegible]

the prestige from institutions throughout the world. What can be hoped from the Ribb Society which points to the bible as infallible? Is it not a case of applying scripture to that nation of robbers, and, worse, called slavery? What from the poster, pulled by a hand whose right a nation is, and upheld by the whole power of Government?

The soldiers had been accessible to the influence of party, to the threats of punishment, to acts of force, to the elements of that world, the love of one or the other, they were never could have proceeded in such opposition. It was well said by the bibliographer, Isaac T. Hopper, of New York, that the fish to swim against the tide, each fish are the abolitionists in pursuit of duty. The time, the self-interest, the world-wisdom, are here no longer amongst them. In substance of the

[illegible][illegible]

not involve before they find themselves; and most do more on the star's behalf than his best friend, for so much reliance is placed on the warmth of their sympathy.

It is not enough that most of these gentle ladies "who live at home at ease," not only do not mix with the abolitionists, but are hard to make understand the meaning of their supposed doctrinal errors, and are therefore apt to caricature the worst among the rabble (part of Christendom). They explain the scriptures, remember an earlier administration than parts of scripture are unchangeable, and have no conversation upon many most important and vital questions, and are content with a flat contradiction to nine hundred and thirty out of every thousand professing Christians, and a few Protestant abolition and fellow who has

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

Stennis' presence, those there who were concerned about the welfare of the boy being sold, and received \$200,000 on the back of his still, to ensure that he knew nothing about the situation. Not yet understood, those who were involved in it were by his blood they had allowed, provided to him up to a slave, and evident intention of burning him. When he was next to be burned, the screams of the witnesses were indeed terrific and heart-rending. Despite his entreaties and cries, a pile of dry sticks was heaped around him, and again he was bound not to confess, he would be burned to death. Still he refused, when the pile was lighted, he was bound to confess, he would be burned to death. A witness said that the crowd was so large that he could not see the faces of the witnesses, but he made an effort to get some of them to turn the tables around. But, when the

my own brethren." I learned elsewhere that negroes would not know that he did not say this until after his death. I have no doubt that I have loved, but the men negroes steadily refused to love me. I have seen many negroes of whom I have known for years, and who have been the cause of bleeding the human race, and I have, yours truly,
JOHN KINGSLEY
From the New York Tribune.

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

Southern slave life. This is no indication as to whether he for us to select incidents from the outskirts of society in New York, characters in the most miserable dens of the Points," and represent them as types of life in the Northern States.

One of the books is exceedingly objectionable; and with the English abolitionists that have ever been known to read the concentrated fustian of Garrison, Beecher, Phillips, and Gaskell, but the story itself is full of original and active force. It is the production of a poet. It abounds in beautiful and highly poetic expressions. Considered as a literary production, independent of its representations, false theories, and most discreditable anti-slavery aspirations, it evinces a

[illegible]

from blood of the author." It evinces an affinity with Southern life and manners which is not to be explained by the most sympathetic for the slave, if it alone could be the cause. The author is a man with negro character, manners, and, at times, we judge, from the ease with which he writes, a man with a knowledge of negro character. Whichever faculty is of art or experience, it has some of the qualities of genius. The author is not vitally guilty as he has too well maintained a reader that thoroughly begins, ceases to read, when the end is reached. He is content to tell the truth, and he has not the skill to manage all the subtleties of passion and of power. Accordingly, his style is not so brilliant as that of some of those great ages of tenderness which we call the treacheries of reality, which, being as such, are life; but readable, too, there are, what is more, interesting, within whose actual, simple

[illegible][illegible]

unfettered. When hope and banality
 when the land and the nations—
 isolated homes and broken hearts shall be the
 of books which men shall admire,
 and shall glory—when the song shall be of
 down the river—when the ballad shall be of
 "Ugry Glee," among rival clans of the
 also, but of "Cusby Glee," by rival towns—
 with their blood-bonds—when cloquence
 in showing that the love of liberty is not an
 to impose, an eternal right, but the legacy
 of the past, and the repository of the strong,
 a Southern literature, and a Southern dream will
 be dead in mind and men: then will
 Charleston heights be an old wife's dream
 the Dinker Hill monument leap from its
 a, and down itself in the waters of the

FROM THE LONDON TIMES OF DECEMBER 11.
REVIEW OF THE SLAVE'S TRADE.
 Based upon the policy of reviving the
 commerce of the West Indies, it is the
 United States is a false step upon the
 Southern States. It is not we about to
 question the right of the United States
 in words upon plain facts. As long as the
 United States is not a slave, it is beyond the jurisdiction of others.
 We have, properly speaking, nothing to
 do with the United States, and the
 of our public officers and by the sense
 of wisdom, we send our agents to the
 of our mankind, and we are to the
 that we have no more right to interfere
 in the United States than we have to
 to bid us to reach our own shores or beyond.
 The question of slavery, in its stand, is plain
 and we have no direct concern with
 the United States of a friendly, or lacked
 of the power of a friendly, or lacked
 of the power. The power, the power,
 is changed the present one we have
 of the power, the power, the power, the
 as soon as that is attempted, it is the
 the presence of a host of treaties which
 and the character of which will soon be
 and, which certainly will not be violated
 be the consequence of a general war. Nettle-
 to be made of it, and it will be more than
 of a threat, for we will now have

denies: we are speaking merely of facts, earnest wish that what we have written makes as a friendly warning. We are not the loudest of the southern States upon sale in course. We believe them, and treatment of the negroes, and offered utter from congregation and calumnies, moreover, in the following a position, and those who rail the Lord against suggest any fraud, and the Lord's word. We have never yet heard the word 'compensation' pronounced by the South, and the abolitionists, and the better of their abhorrence when we proposing a federal tax for raising the money for buying up the negroes at their actual value, and the South, and in any unfriendly spirit to the southern Let them, however, take care that their denial does not become necessary could

Figure 4: *The Liberator*, Jan. 23, 1857, p. 1.

In most issues, the “Refuge of Oppression” was the first column at the top left of the front page, right under the notice of the paper’s terms (see figs. 1-3). The “Refuge of Oppression” published articles from other newspapers that were openly pro-slavery, pro-colonization, anti-Garrison, and anti-black, and it also published articles that were nominally antislavery but which advocated action that Garrison believed would harm slaves in the long run. “Selections” or “Communications” usually came next and rounded out the first page, sometimes running into the first left-hand column of the second page. “Selections” was the most ambiguous section, containing reprints of important abolitionist speeches and articles taken from other newspapers, usually antislavery or evangelical publications, but also articles from papers that might occasionally appear in the “Refuge of Oppression.” Next and usually on page two was the “The Liberator” column, representing the authorial voice of Garrison and his fellow abolitionists to speak about political topics and in-house items such as upcoming antislavery fairs or disputes among abolitionists.⁴⁴ This column’s material, which included editorials and letters from favored correspondents, often ran onto page three, which carried advertisements in its far right column and, starting in 1839, brief notices of national and international news in the middle. Page four contained poetry in the far-left column, selections in the middle columns—usually uplifting nonfiction pieces or additional letters from subscribers Garrison didn’t have room for elsewhere—and more advertisements in the far-right column.

The logic of this arrangement suggested that readers should find different things when reading the different columns but always things that challenge their thinking. Despite Garrison’s frequent claim that he published without comment hundreds of articles that criticized him, his paper’s organization and column headings—particularly the “Refuge of Oppression” and “The Liberator”—suggested to readers how such neutral reprinting should be interpreted. The headings were closer to suggestions than instructions, though, and readers had to read carefully

⁴⁴ After May 13, 1842, this column always included under its heading some longer or shorter version of the maxim “No Union with Slaveholders.”

in order to understand an article's placement. Occasionally, seasoned readers became confused about the layout or when they read the sources of certain articles: "B." writes in the last *Liberator*, "The dullest reader was compelled to think when running over its editorials."⁴⁵ (As I read *The Liberator*, I experienced the same challenge, particularly when Garrison reprinted an article from the *Emancipator*, another antislavery newspaper, in the "Refuge of Oppression" column; I had to read closely to figure out why it was incorrect in Garrison's view.) In this way, the contrast created by the structure of the newspaper functioned as a pedagogical tool for white readers—not telling them what to think but challenging them to see pro-slavery and colorphobia in spaces they had supposed were free from such views, both on the page and in towns and cities across the North, as the articles' bylines traced their locations.⁴⁶ Each new issue of the paper that ran the "Refuge of Oppression" column announced that there were still places in the United States where oppression found a home—especially in free states because the material in the "Refuge of Oppression" column didn't come exclusively or primarily from Southern newspapers. Garrison often reprinted material from the *Southern Christian Advocate* or *Charleston Mercury*, but more frequently, he reprinted articles from mainstream papers in northern cities, including papers from cities like Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia and in states ranging from Maine to Wisconsin. The "Refuge of Oppression" was a puzzle that required reflective reading, and it also provoked shame in northern readers who assumed their Christian morality and their distance from slavery insulated them from complicity in oppression.

⁴⁵ B. continues to complicate the act of reading:

Every reader must, at some time, have been shocked or angered at the temerity of some fierce critic or daring advocate, contradicting, as it would seem, all experience and sanity of conviction; and there is something comical in the thought, that while I am burning with indignation at the absurdity of A's or B's article, my neighbor over the way glows with admiration of its truth.

B., "The Future," *The Liberator* (29 Dec 1865), 3.

⁴⁶ Readers affirmed this function of the paper: in the last issue of the *Liberator* in 1865, Samuel J. May writes, "I feel as if I were going to lose my mentor." When Wendell Phillips filled in for Garrison on the 1843 annual update (Garrison was ill), he wrote, "We have always thought there was one test, tried by which the paper deserved, as they phrase it in the East, to live forever. Foster says, 'Judge of a book by the mood of mind in which you rise from it.'" Wendell Phillips, "To the Friends of the Liberator," *The Liberator* (30 Dec 1842), 2.

To read the paper linearly, from left to right and top to bottom, would literally guide the reader through the “Refuge of Oppression,” then through a more neutral territory of evangelical re-publication in “Selections” and, after opening the paper, to the heart of the *Liberator* on pages two and three. While most readers probably didn’t read linearly, the visual structure of the pages and the underlying editorial decisions drew a sharp contrast between material in the “Refuge of Oppression” and “The Liberator” columns. Like the formal arrangement of *The Liberator*’s articles, its mastheads visually portrayed the paper’s conversion narrative. The first masthead portrayed only a negative scene of slavery, and this masthead was first used on April 23, 1831 (before the “Refuge of Oppression” column was officially instituted, fig 1.). The second and third mastheads portray a scene of conversion. The second masthead, adopted March 2, 1838, shows a slave auction on the left (the same side as the “Refuge of Oppression” articles) and slaves obtaining freedom on the right (usually above “Selections,” fig. 2). The third masthead, adopted on May 31, 1850, is even more explicit: the slave auction on the left and the year of jubilee on the right are separated by a figure of Jesus Christ in the middle, with the phrase, “I come to break the bonds of the oppressors.” The third masthead makes even more visible the idea that individual conversion and mass jubilee—represented by the image of Jesus—would be the outcome of reading from left to right (fig. 3). The image thus depicts Messianic time intervening in American history as the paper intervenes in the individual reader’s consciousness. *The Liberator*’s layout and iconography did not foster the kind of rational reading valued in the public sphere in which people respond to carefully laid out rhetorical appeals as they see or hear them; rather, it created an emotional environment where readers had to triangulate both the article writer’s and the editor’s viewpoints before understanding why articles appeared in specific columns on the page.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Jurgen Habermas famously posited the rational public sphere. Michael Warner describes the rational public sphere as “appeals to a neutral and rational ground of public representation, where citizens were called on to exercise civic virtue by placing the common good over personal interest” and which Michael Millner claims was assumed to be the norm in the nineteenth century. Several scholars including Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner

In *The Liberator*, any newspaper, location, or person could come under scrutiny in the “Refuge of Oppression” column and readers worked to figure out the editor’s intent. This kind of reading environment pushed participants in the paper’s intellectual life to challenge popular beliefs about other fundamental texts of American Christianity: the Constitution and the Bible. Some attributed the development of Garrison’s disunionist stance to this reading posture: Oliver Johnson describes in his biography of Garrison how Garrison crafted the AASS’s official position on slavery in 1833 and only realized after ten years of re-reading it that it was an argument for non-slaveholding states to secede from an unholy union (335). Henry C. Wright, who like Garrison was openly critical of established clergy and their theological views while nonetheless professing Christian belief, frequently contributed articles which criticized clergy and challenged conservative evangelical beliefs, such as the belief in the inerrancy of scripture. For example, in September 1850, he wrote an article arguing for abolishing Sabbath observance laws. On September 20, 1850, Garrison responded to a letter-writer who had complained that Garrison shouldn’t publish Wright’s articles: “Those who do not want, or cannot tolerate such a paper, have a very simple remedy at hand, so far as they are concerned—either not to subscribe for it, or, if they are subscribers, to discontinue it whenever they think proper.”⁴⁸ (Garrison responded less harshly to Stowe.) Stowe’s anxious letter, although milder in tone, performs the same gatekeeping function. In this response and many others, Garrison rejects readers’ assumption that his decision to print a letter from Wright supporting a nontraditional religious stance constitutes an endorsement; instead, he claims the “exposé function Stowe mentions—that

have challenged Habermas’ construction as idealized, since women, non-whites, and men without property were excluded from the public sphere; to account for excluded groups, they posit counterpublics. Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990), 76; Millner, 68. David Anthony gives a good overview of Fraser’s response to Habermas in *Paper Money Men: Commerce, Manhood, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum America* (Columbus: OSU P, 2009), 22. Glenn Hendler usefully posits the idea of “public sentiment” to describe works like Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which were supposed to influence domestic audiences to “feel right,” but which did so through a public medium (1-3).

⁴⁸ Garrison, “Remarks,” *The Liberator* (20 Sept 1850), 2.

printing does not equal endorsement, extending the critical reading mode needed in the “Refuge of Oppression” to all parts of his paper.

While Garrison claimed that printing does not equal endorsement, his readers were correct that Wright’s letters were printed in later sections of the paper meant to promote their progressive content. Garrison’s goal in the sections that came after “The Liberator” was still to challenge his readers’ beliefs by expanding their thinking rather than undercutting it like in the “Refuge of Oppression.” Regardless of whether Garrison was actually endorsing Wright’s views or not, he recognized that conservative readers ultimately wanted him to censor radical writers like Wright. It didn’t matter if he wanted readers to read Wright’s articles critically, established evangelicals didn’t want such ideas to receive any attention, particularly in a paper known for challenging popular beliefs about social reform from a strict evangelical perspective.

Garrison, on the other hand, believed that evangelical censorship, even in the North, was one of the primary reasons slavery persisted. His response to Stowe’s anxious letter included a cluster of different arguments that he frequently made about his editorial practice. To Stowe’s concern that the paper should reach only well-trained readers, Garrison responds, “So says the Romish Church in regard to the indiscriminate circulation of the Bible among the laity. So says Absolutism, respecting the diffusion of the intelligence among the masses. I am surprised at the narrowness of your limitation. Are the people not to be trusted?” To Stowe’s question about Uncle Tom losing his Bible “You understand me—do you not?” Garrison obtusely responds, “Frankly, I do not.” This exchange receives Garrison’s lengthiest response and his strongest effort to justify his evangelical credentials: The AASS does not endorse the view that the Bible supports slavery, although “nine-tenths of the evangelical clergy in the United States” do, and although such clergy believe that everyone must view the Bible as sacred, they prevent three and a half million people from reading it. By contrast, Garrison cites the AASS’s mass-circulation of Weld’s “The Bible Against Slavery,” attempting to justify the AASS’s and his own evangelical credentials to the writer who had become an international representative of evangelical

antislavery.⁴⁹ Garrison condemns evangelical clergy for their censorship, classing them with one of their oldest opponents, Catholics. As such, he suggests that censorship is more than simply a conciliation Northerners have made to the demands of slaveholders but rather a fundamental way in which clergy maintain their religious authority.

Stowe's anxiety about the kind of reading *The Liberator* encouraged contrasts the mode of reading modeled by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, particularly the reading modeled by the devout slave. She fears that the content of *The Liberator* would lead an unintelligent but pious reader like Uncle Tom towards atheism. How does Uncle Tom read, though? Stowe's wink and Garrison's blank reply only emphasize the importance of this insinuation as something obvious but potentially distasteful to write out. Uncle Tom reads intently and believes firmly in the sacredness of scripture more than any other character in the novel (with the possible exception of Eva). "Having learned late in life, Tom was but a slow reader, and passed on laboriously from verse to verse. Fortunate for him was it that the book he was intent on was one which slow reading cannot injure,—nay, one whose words, like ingots of gold, seem often to need to be weighed separately, that the mind may take in their priceless value."⁵⁰ The narrator's commentary on Tom's reading in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* encourages the kind of reading Stowe's ideal readers should exhibit: slow, meditative, and devout.

Indeed, this image of Tom reading, to borrow Millner's term, projects the proper modes of reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* hopes to receive.⁵¹ Like other abolitionist publications, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* encourages readers to internalize, appreciate, and reflect carefully on its story. However, this scene is also an example of how Stowe's narrator frequently intrudes in the story

⁴⁹ Garrison, "The Liberator—Free Discussion—The Bible Question," *The Liberator* (23 Dec 1853).

⁵⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 131. Tom's mode of devout reading reaches a parody in Tiff at the very end of Stowe's second antislavery novel *Dred*: when asked if he has learned to read the Bible, Tiff says, "I 's larn'd all de best words, like Christ, Lord, and God, and dem ar; and whar dey 's pretty thick, I makes out quite comfortable." Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000), 549.

⁵¹ Millner, 22.

not with narration that advances the plot but with commentary that takes the reader by the hand and tells them what to think, here stopping for a mini-sermon about the “priceless value” of each word in the Bible. Significantly, the bible never tells Tom or anyone else that slavery is wrong as a social institution; instead, the bible’s function in the text is to promote individual morality. Her narrator addresses readers constantly from the first chapter to the last. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is hyperconscious of the reader and anxious to make sure the reader is paying attention and getting the right message. The novel famously closes with the plea for readers to make sure they “feel right.” It also closes with Stowe’s plea for readers to be better evangelicals—to pray and to educate escaped slaves in the right (i.e. evangelical) way of living. Her closing pleas are more than sentimentality; by referring to the practices of evangelicalism, Stowe invokes a moral imperative. Stowe collapses different reading modes: Uncle Tom’s mode of reading scripture is similar to the way readers should read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and similar to the way Stowe fears readers like Tom would read *The Liberator*. Stowe ignores the fact that scripture rarely projects how it should be read or interpreted. Whereas *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* works to control how its own content signifies, the Bible requires a large apparatus of religious institutions to control its signification, an apparatus which *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Stowe’s letter elide, even as they play a part in the larger apparatus.

In this sense, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s reading mode has a drastically different purpose than *The Liberator*’s, despite their shared evangelical roots and antislavery purpose. Regarding Harriet Beecher Stowe’s first antislavery novel, James Baldwin famously wrote, “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, then, is activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation” (535).⁵² Like *The Liberator*, a “terror to evildoers,” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was motivated by a sense of evangelical terror—a combination of assumed theological correctness, which is what Baldwin most directly refers to, and also a drive to mass circulate one’s message. Overall, the important

⁵² James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Elizabeth Ammons, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 532-39.

difference between the modes of reading *The Liberator* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* encourage has to do with the relationship to authority different reading modes encourage. The reading mode *Uncle Tom's Cabin* encouraged assumed belief in centralized sources of authority—divine authority and biblical authority but especially clerical authority—and imagined participation in a conservative evangelical community. In contrast, the reading practices *The Liberator* encouraged destabilized authority centralized in printed texts such as the Constitution and the Bible.

Consequently, many readers like Frederick Douglass considered *The Liberator* a weekly religious rite experienced among a dispersed progressive Christian community.⁵³ By fostering an unsettling reading experience aimed at terror, shame, and conversion, *The Liberator's* editorial structure imagined a public that differed from the rational, sentimental, and evangelical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readerships scholars have described. In the last issue of *The Liberator*, Henry C. Wright writes, “through its columns I have... held communion with my fellow beings.... In the truest and highest sense, the *Liberator* has been a religious paper.” Wright describes his weekly practice of reading the paper as “communion,” both in the sense of imagined community but also in the sense of a sacrament since reading the *Liberator* was like taking holy communion. For Garrison, the letters Henry C. Wright and others wrote debating mainstream Christianity were not disconnected from the issue of slavery; Garrison, Douglass, Wright, and others frequently criticized religious leaders of Christian sects for condoning slavery and allowing slaveholders into their churches to receive their tithes. This dissonance over theology fits *The Liberator's* unique place in the nineteenth-century print sphere: it advocated evangelical beliefs (most visibly in every masthead), and it did so by guiding

⁵³ Henry Mayer traces in his biography of Garrison differences between orthodox (Calvinist) evangelicalism, revivalist evangelicalism, and emerging rationalist Christianity (Unitarianism) in the early nineteenth century—represented by Lyman Beecher, Charles Grandison Finney, and William Ellery Channing respectively; he notes that while Garrison investigated each camp and held a few similar views to each, he joined none (47-49). Garrison's outsider status to these larger movements mirrors *The Liberator's* marginal status in the evangelical print sphere.

readers toward its own idea of progressive evangelicalism by exposing them to nontraditional ideas, but this method was unacceptable to conservative evangelicals.

In light of its destabilizing reading mode and its exposure of subtle anti-abolitionism, the magnitude of *The Liberator's* unpopularity in the North becomes visible. From 1831 to 1865, it garnered a reputation for stirring up controversy; more than a reputation, people worried about the impact of *The Liberator*: that the paper was eroding core social values of evangelicalism and white superiority. They wrote letters to try to censor it, from the letters of Governor Floyd of Virginia following Nat Turner's revolt to the letters of conservative figureheads like Stowe.

Together, the examples I collect in this chapter show that print's impact registers across different levels of engagement and not just when someone purchases a book or reads it. The pamphlets mailed in the 1835 Postal Campaign caused Southerners to fear simply by moving into Southern space. Abolitionist newspapers and Weld's *Bible Against Slavery* made Brisbane feel tainted simply by touching them. Moreover, reading has a differential relationship to print's impact. Sometimes reading is less important than circulation: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* promoted a style of reading consolidated evangelical authority while challenging belief in slavery, making its circulation more threatening than its content. Sometimes reading is more important than circulation: *The Liberator* promoted a style of reading through its layout that challenged readers' belief in social conventions, further promoting concern about the paper among Northerners who didn't want to see how their religious communities supported slavery. Ephemeral emotional responses and ephemeral reading practices formed a key part of print's social impact, one we miss if we use quantitative circulation as a measure or index for print's impact.

The Ephemerality of Print

I've been arguing that *The Liberator* performed a unique and significant role in the larger constellation of antislavery print; in conclusion, I consider why Garrison's newspaper is

so often eclipsed in histories of antislavery print by Stowe's novel. Elizabeth Ammons writes in her preface to the Norton Critical Edition the following about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "[I]t became a phenomenon almost overnight. The novel kept printing presses running day and night, outsold every book in the nineteenth century except the Bible, rapidly appeared in translation in many languages, and spurred President Abraham Lincoln to greet Stowe at the White House, so the story goes, with the words, 'So you are the little woman who started the great war.'" ⁵⁴ Such grand narratives assume that *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the greatest bestseller of the pre-Civil War era, had a direct impact on the coming of the Civil War and, consequently, the end of slavery. ⁵⁵ Even Garrison's colleague and first biographer Oliver Johnson had to justify his decision not to give more room to the significance of Stowe's first antislavery novel in his history of the abolition movement, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times* (1871). ⁵⁶ *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* primacy in the history of antislavery print has to do with its physical form. While it started as a serial publication, it circulated even more broadly as a book—a discrete and portable object.

My dissertation considers ephemeral media which tend to be overlooked in the print record. Ironically, *The Liberator's* massive materiality has also relegated it to an ephemeral position in the archive of antislavery material. As an object, *The Liberator* consists of about 1,820 four-page issues ranging in size from the small sheet it began as in 1831 to the full folio it ended as in 1865. By comparison, facsimile copies of another weekly antislavery newspaper, the *National Antislavery Standard*, which cover the years it ran from 1840 to 1870 consist of fifteen folio-sized bound volumes, each weighing about ten pounds each. Interacting with a print object that is barely portable and that contains content to fill more than fifteen nineteenth-

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Ammons, "Preface," in *Uncle Tom's Cabin, A Norton Critical Edition* 2nd ed., Elizabeth Ammons, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), ix.

⁵⁵ Cf. Daniel R. Vollaro, "Lincoln, Stowe, and the 'Little Woman/Great War' Story: The Making, and Breaking, of a Great American Anecdote," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 30.1 (2009), 18-34.

⁵⁶ Johnson quotes one review which complains that his account says "nothing respecting the influence exerted by Mrs. Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'" (405); Johnson retorts, "Mrs. Stowe herself charmed an audience that [Garrison] gathered for her" (462).

century novels poses a challenge for literary scholars. Several scholars have read *The Liberator's* corpus and have published selected excerpts—often focused on Garrison's editorials. These collections miss subtle details such as an article's position on the page or the relatively less important material which was reprinted from other newspapers.

Recent efforts to digitize nineteenth-century newspapers have helped significantly to make newspapers like *The Liberator* accessible to contemporary scholars. The ability to search at the level of the word in such papers offers a powerful tool for examining this new archive. However, interacting with a text through an online database changes the experience, especially the ability to search the newspaper. Figuring out how readers understood the paper is difficult because the default mode for interacting with an online paper is so different than a physical paper. For me to understand how *The Liberator* worked, it was important to experience the paper on microfilm, a medium which still isn't quite the same as a printed facsimile, but which is closer to recreating the experience of reading than a digital archive.

The ironic result of *The Liberator's* massive materiality is that while its content remains accessible in various formats, its physical form has become more ephemeral over time. Moreover, abstract circulation numbers stand as one of the most concrete ways to register the distribution and relative importance of media like novels and newspapers. I don't mean to suggest that circulation numbers aren't important or that one print medium was more important than another. The point is that scholars need to pay even more attention to the media through which they encounter historical archives and the ways they measure print's historical significance if they're going to perform historically contextual work.

Bibliography

Primary

Adams, John Quincy. *An Oration Delivered Before the Cincinnati Astronomical Society, on the Occasion of Laying the Corner Stone of an Astronomical Observatory, on the 10th of November, 1843*. Cincinnati: Shepard & Co., 1843.

Allen, William Francis, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison. *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867). New York: Dover, 1995.

American almanac and repository of useful knowledge for the year 1831: comprising a calendar for the year; astronomical information; miscellaneous directions, hints, and remarks; and statistical and other particulars respecting foreign countries and the United States, Vol. 2. Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1831.

American almanac and repository of useful knowledge for the year 1834: comprising a calendar for the year; astronomical information; miscellaneous directions, hints, and remarks; and statistical and other particulars respecting foreign countries and the United States, Vol. 2. Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1834.

American Anti-Slavery Society. *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society; with the speeches delivered at the anniversary meeting, held in the city of New-York, on the 10th of May, 1836*. New York: William S. Dorr, 1836. WHS Rare Book Collection.

Anglo-African Magazine. Thomas Hamilton and Richard Hamilton, eds. New York: 1859-1865. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968.

Aurora [newspaper] (New Lisbon, OH). Inter-library loan.

Baltimore Gazette [newspaper] (Baltimore, MD). *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Bibb, Henry. *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*. New York: the author, 1849. *Sabin Americana*.

Brisbane, William Henry. "Speech of the Rev. Wm. H. Brisbane, lately a slaveholder in South Carolina, containing an account of the change in his views on the subject of slavery."

Hartford, CT: S. S. Cowles, 1840.

Byrd, William. *History of the Dividing Line* (1728). Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, *DocSouth*. *Charleston Courier* [newspaper] (Charleston, SC). *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Child, Lydia Maria. *Letters from New-York*. *Letters from New-York*. Bruce Mills, ed. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1998.

Crayon, Porte. "The Great Dismal Swamp." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (Sept. 1856). *Daily National Intelligencer* [newspaper] (Washington, DC). *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Delany, Martin. *Blake, or the Huts of America* (1859-62). Floyd J. Miller, ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.

----. "The Attraction of Planets." *Anglo-African Magazine* (Jan. 1859). New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968.

Devens, R. M. *Our First Century: being a popular descriptive portraiture of the one hundred great and memorable events of perpetual interest in the history of our country, political, military, mechanical, social, scientific and commercial: embracing also delineations of all the great historic characters celebrated in the annals of the republic, men of heroism, statesmanship, genius, oratory, adventure and philanthropy*. Springfield, MA: C. A. Nichols & Co., 1876.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*. In *Autobiographies*. New York: Library of America, 1994.

----. *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). In *Autobiographies*. New York: Library of America, 1994.

----. *Life and Times* (1881). In *Autobiographies*. New York: Library of America, 1994.

Emancipator [newspaper]. Lewis Tappan, ed. (New York, NY).

- Garrison, William Lloyd. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 4. Walter McIntosh Merrill and Louis Ruchames, eds. Cambridge: Belknap P, 1971-1981.
- . *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison*. Robert F. Walcutt, ed. Boston: R. F. Walcutt, 1852.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary On the Whole Bible*, Vol. 3, "Job to Song of Solomon." Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.
- Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. *Army life in a Black regiment*. Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1870. *Sabin Americana*.
- . "Nat Turner's Insurrection." *Travelers and Outlaws: Episodes in American History*. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1889. 276-326. *HathiTrust*. Hildreth, Richard. *The White Slave, or, Memoirs of a Fugitive*. Boston: 1852.
- Himes, Joshua. *Signs of the Times* [newspaper] (Boston, MA).
- . *The Midnight Cry* [newspaper] (New York, NY).
- Hitchcock, Edward. "On the Meteors of Nov. 13, 1833." *American Journal of Science and Arts* 25.2 (1834): 354. *American Periodicals*.
- Jackson, Edmund. "The Virginia Maroons." *The Liberty Bell* (1852). 143-51.
- Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Boston: Boston Stereotype Foundry, 1861. *Sabin Americana*.
- Johnson, Oliver. *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times, or, Sketches of the anti-slavery movement in America, and of the man who was its founder and moral leader*. Boston: B. B. Russell & Co., 1880.
- The Liberator* [newspaper]. William Lloyd Garrison, ed. Boston: 1831-1865. *19th Century U. S. Newspapers*.
- Massachusetts Spy* [newspaper] (Boston, MA). *America's Historical Newspapers*.
- Melville, Herman. "The Portent." *The Battle Pieces of Herman Melville*. Hennig Cohen, ed. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964.

A New Universal Atlas. Philadelphia: S. Augustus Mitchell, 1853.

New York Commercial Advertiser [newspaper] (New York, NY). *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave: narrative of Solomon Northup, a citizen of New-York*. Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853. *Sabin Americana*.

Olmsted, Denison. "Observations on the Meteors of November 13th." *American Journal of Science and Arts* 25.2 (1834): 363; 26.1 (1834): 132. *American Periodicals*.

Olmsted, Frederick Law. *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with remarks on their economy* (1859). New York: Mason Brothers, 1859.

Pearson, Emily C. *Plantation Pictures*. Published serially in *The Liberator* (22 Jan 1864). *Richmond Enquirer* [newspaper] (Richmond, VA).

"Sojourner Truth. An Interesting Talk with this Famous Colored Woman." *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean* (13 August 1879).

Still, William. *The Underground Railroad*. New York: Arno P, 1968.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852). New York: W. W. Norton, 2010.

----. *Dred, A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856). Robert S. Levine, ed. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000.

----. *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1854). New York: Arno Press, 1968.

----. "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl." In *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from her "Book of Life"*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Last Days of John Brown." *The Essays of Henry David Thoreau*. Lewis Hyde, ed. New York: North Point Press, 2002.

----. "A Plea for Captain John Brown." *The Essays of Henry David Thoreau*. Lewis Hyde, ed. New York: North Point Press, 2002.

- . "Resistance to Civil Government." Printed as "Civil Disobedience" in *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*. New York: Norton, 2008. 227-46.
- Truth, Sojourner. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from her "Book of Life."* New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Turner, Nat and Thomas Gray. *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the leader of the late insurrection in Southampton, VA*. Baltimore: Thomas R. Gray and Lucas & Deaver, 1831. *Sabin Americana*.
- Walker, David. *Walker's Appeal in Four Articles: together with a preamble to the colored citizens of the world*. Boston: David Walker, 1830. *Sabin Americana*.
- Washington, Booker T. *An Autobiography. The Story of My Life and Work*, online at *Documenting the American South* (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
- Weld, Theodore Dwight. *American Slavery As It Is: testimony of a thousand witnesses*. New York: Anti-Slavery Society, 1839. *Sabin Americana*.
- . *The Bible Against Slavery, or, An inquiry into the genius of the Mosaic system, and the teachings of the Old Testament on the subject of human rights*. Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864.
- Wells Brown, William. *The Anti-Slavery Harp: a collection of songs for anti-slavery meetings*. Boston: B. Marsh, 1884.
- White, William S. *The African Preacher: An Authentic Narrative* (1849). New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972.
- Whitman, Walt. "Year of Meteors." *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. Michael Moon, ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.
- Wright, Elizur. "Third Annual Address." In American Anti-Slavery Society, *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society; with the speeches delivered at the anniversary*

meeting, held in the city of New-York, on the 10th of May, 1836. New York: William S. Dorr, 1836. WHS Rare Book Collection.

----. "Elizur Wright to Theodore Dwight Weld, June 10, 1835." *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844*, vol 1. Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds. Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1965.

Secondary

Abanes, Richard. "Miller's Millennial Madness," *End Time Visions: The Road to Armageddon?* New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998.

Allewaert, Monique. *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013. EBL.

Allmendinger, David F. "The Construction of *The Confessions of Nat Turner*" in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.

Anthony, David. *Paper Money Men: Commerce, Manhood, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum America*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2009.

Aptheker, Herbert. *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York: International Publishers, 1963.

----. "Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States." In *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Richard Price, ed. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973. 151-68.

Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1963.

Aristotle. *Aristotle's On the Soul (De Anima)*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle. Grinnell, IA: Peripatetic P, 1981.

Armstrong, Tim. *The logic of slavery: debt, technology, and pain in American literature*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012.

Aubin, David, Charlotte Bigg, and H. Otto Sibum, eds. *The Heavens on Earth: Observatories and Astronomy in Nineteenth-Century Science and Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke, 2010.

Auerbach, Jonathan and Russ Castronovo. "Introduction: Thirteen Propositions about Propaganda." In *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013.

- Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.
- . "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere." In *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*. Black Public Sphere Collective, eds. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. 7-37.
- Baldwin, James. "Everybody's Protest Novel." *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Elizabeth Ammons, ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010. 532-39.
- Barabasi, Albert-Laszlo. *Linked: The New Science of Networks*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002.
- Barthe, Roland. "The Grain of the Voice." In *Image-Music-Text*. Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005.
- Bechtold, Rebecca. "'She Sings a Stamp of Originality': Sentimental Mimicry in Jenny Lind's American Tour." *ESQ* 58.4 (2012): 493-528.
- Beck, Roger. *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
- Bennett, Michael. "Anti-Pastoralism, Frederick Douglass, and the Nature of Slavery." In *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds. Charlottesville: U Press of Virginia, 2001. 195-210.
- Ben-Zvi, Yael. "The Racial Geopolitics of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Geography Textbooks." *Legacy* 29.1 (2012), 9-36.
- Bergland, Renee. *Maria Mitchell and the Sexing of Science: An Astronomer among the American Romantics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2008.
- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: the First Two Centuries of Slavery in America*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1998.
- Bertucci, Paola. "Revealing Sparks: John Wesley and the Religious Utility of Electrical Healing." *The British Journal for the History of Science* 39.3 (2006): 341-62.

- Black, Alex W. "Abolitionism's Resonant Bodies: The Realization of African American Performance." *American Quarterly* 63.3 (2011): 619-39.
- Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community: plantation life in the Antebellum South*, rev. and enl. ed. New York: OUP, 1979.
- Breen, Patrick. "A Prophet in his own Land: Support for Nat Turner's Rebellion in Southampton's Black Community" in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Blesh, Rudi. *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz*. 1975.
- Brooks, Daphne A. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006.
- Brooks, Joanna. "What the Life Spans of Early Black Books Tell Us about Book History" (2012).
- Brown, Candy Gunther. *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004.
- Brown, Matt Pentland. *The Pilgrim and the Bee: reading rituals and book culture in Early New England*. Philadelphia: U Penn P, 2007.
- Brown, Vincent. *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008. *ACLS Humanities*.
- . *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness* [video]. San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel, 2009.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "Hegel and Haiti" *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (2000): 821-65.
- Castronovo, Russ. *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001.
- Castronovo, Russ and Dana D. Nelson. "'Action, Action, Action:' Nineteenth-Century Literature for Twenty-First-Century Citizenship?" In *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Russ Castronovo, ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

- Chaney, Michael A. "The Concatenate Poetics of Slavery and the Articulate Material of Dave the Potter." *African American Review* 44.4 (2011): 607-18.
- . *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative*. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 2009.
- Chapman, John Jay. *William Lloyd Garrison*. New York: Beekman Publishers Inc., 1974.
- Clarke, Bruce. "Information." In *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Steven F. Rendall, trans. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.
- Cobbs, Nicholas Hamner. "The Night the Stars Fell on Alabama." *Alabama Review* 22.2 (1969): 147-57.
- Cockrell, Dale. *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Cohen, Matt. *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009.
- Cowan, Tynes. "The Slave in the Swamp: Affects of Uncultivated Regions on Plantation Life." In *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground*. Grey Gundaker, ed. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998. 193-207.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2000. *CogNet*.
- Cruz, Jon. *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.
- Davidson, Cathy. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, expanded edition. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Delbourgo, James. *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006.

- Dinius, Marcy J. *The Camera and the Press : American visual and print culture in the age of the daguerreotype*. Philadelphia: U Penn P, 2012.
- Diouf, Sylviane A. *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. New York: New York U P, 2014.
- Dowling, David. *The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Drexler, Michael J. and Ed White. *Beyond Douglass: New Perspectives on Early African-American Literature*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University P, 2008.
- Epstein, Dena. *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 2003.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Fanuzzi, Robert. *Abolition's Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003.
- Finger, Stanley. *Doctor Franklin's Medicine*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006.
- Fitch, Suzanne Pullon and Roseann M. Mandziuk. *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.
- Fliegelman, Jay. *Declaring independence : Jefferson, natural language & the culture of performance*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
- Foner, Eric. *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Norton, 2015.
- Foucault, Michel et al. *Technologies of the Self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton, eds. Amherst: UMass P, 1988.
- Foys, Martin K. "Media." Ch. 9 of *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*. Jacqueline Stodnick and Renee R. Trilling, eds. Malden, MA: Blackwood, 2012.
- Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971.
- Gac, Scott. *Singing for Freedom: The Hutchinson Family Singers and the Nineteenth-Century Culture of Reform*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007.

- Garfield, Deborah M. "Earwitness: Female Abolitionism, Sexuality, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*." In *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*. Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar, eds. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996. 100-30.
- Garvey, Ellen Gruber. "Scissoring and Scrapbooking: Nineteenth-Century Reading, Remaking, and Recirculating." Ch. 9 in *New Media 1714-1950*. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, eds. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2003. 207-227.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*. Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1979.
- . *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2006.
- Gitelman, Lisa and Geoffrey B. Pingree. *New Media, 1740-1915*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2003.
- Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. J. Michael Dash, trans. Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 1992.
- Gniadek, Melissa. "Seriality and Settlement: Southworth, Lippard, and *The Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*." *American Literature* 86.1 (2014).
- Goddu, Teresa A. "The Antislavery Almanac and the Discourse of Numeracy." *Book History* 12 (2009), 129-55.
- Goodman, Kevis. *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2004.

- Gouk, Penelope. "Raising Spirits and Restoring Souls: Early Modern Medical Explanations for Music's Effects." In *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, Veit Erlmann, ed. New York: Berg, 2004.
- Grant, David. "Stowe's *Dred* and the Narrative Logic of Slavery's Extension." *Studies in American Fiction* 28.2 (2000), 151-178.
- Greenberg, Kenneth S. *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Grinspan, Jon. "Was Abolitionism a Failure?" *New York Times* (1 Feb 2015).
- Gujtahr, Paul C. *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
- Gustafson, Sandra. *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2000.
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, Trans. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.
- . "The Public Sphere, an Encyclopedia Article" (1964). Peter Uwe Hohendahl, ed.; Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox, trans. From *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2012. 1571-76.
- Hager, Christopher. *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1989.
- Harding, Vincent. *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: OUP, 1997.

- Hayles, Katherine N. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999. EBL.
- Hendler, Glenn. *Public Sentiment: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Chapel Hill: UNC P, 2001.
- Henkin, David M. *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006.
- Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. New York: Harper, 1941.
- Hinks, Peter P. *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the problem of antebellum slave resistance*. University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 1997.
- Hinks, Peter P. and Stephen Kantrowitz, eds. *All Men Free and Brethren: essays on the history of African American freemasonry*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2013.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Praeger, 1963.
- Jahn, Janheinz. *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed (1963). New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Jaudon, Toni Wall. "Obeah's Sensation: Rethinking Religion at the Transnational Turn." *American Literature* 84.4 (2012): 715-41.
- Johnson, Paul and Sean Wilentz. *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Johnson, Walter. *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2013.
- . *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Jones, Caroline. "Senses." In *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010.

- Jones, LeRoi (Amiri Baraka). *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: HarperCollins Perrenial, 2002.
- Jordan, Anne Devereaux. *The Seventh Day Adventists: A History*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988.
- Kazanjian, David. *The Brink of Freedom: Improvising Life in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Durham: Duke UP, 2016.
- Kennaway, James. "Stimulating Music: The Pleasures and Dangers of 'Electric Music,' 1750-1900." *Configurations* 19.2 (2011): 191-211.
- . "Musical Hypnosis: Sound and Selfhood from Mesmerism to Brainwashing." *Social History of Medicine* 25.2 (2001): 271-89.
- Kirschenbaum, Matthew. *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.
- Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, trans. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
- Kraditor, Aileen S. *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850*. New York: Pantheon, 1969.
- Krywicki, Jarad. "'The Soft Answer': The *National Era*'s Network of Understanding." *American Periodicals* 23.2 (2013), 125-141.
- Kuhn, Mary. "Garden Variety: Botany and Multiplicity in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Abolitionism." *American Literature* 87.3 (2015), 489-516.
- Kwas, Mary L. "The Spectacular 1833 Leonid Meteor Storm: The View from Arkansas." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 58.3 (1999): 314-24. *JSTOR*. 19 Feb. 2014.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991.

- Levine, Lawrence. *Black Culture and Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Levine, Robert S. *Dislocating Race and Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century African Literary Nationalism*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2008.
- . *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1997.
- Littmann, Mark. *The Heavens on Fire: The Great Leonid Meteor Storms*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Ljungquist, Kent. "Meteor of the War': Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman Respond to John Brown." *American Literature* 61.4 (1989): 674-80. JSTOR.
- Looby, Christopher. *Voicing America: language, literary form, and the origins of the United States*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996.
- Lott, Eric. "Back Door Man: Howlin' Wolf and the Sound of Jim Crow." *American Quarterly*, 63.3 (2011): 697-710.
- . *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Loughran, Trish. *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007.
- Lubken, Deborah. "Remembering the Straw Man: The Travels and Adventures of *Hypodermic*." Ch. 1 of *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*. David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley, eds. New York: Peter Lang, 2008. 19-42.
- Luhmann, Niklas. *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Kathleen Cross, trans. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000.
- Mabee, Carleton and Susan Mabee Newhouse. *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend*. New York: New York UP, 1993.

- Madera, Judith. *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2015.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2001.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden*.
- Masur, Louis P. *1831: Year of Eclipse*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001.
- Mayer, Henry. *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1998.
- McGill, Meredith. *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003.
- McKenzie, D. F. *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. London: British Library, 1986.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011.
- . *Understanding Media*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1964.
- Meinig, D. W. *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 years of History*, Volume 2 Continental America 1800-1867. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1993.
- Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: literacy, territoriality, and colonization*. Ann Arbor: U of Mich P, 2003.
- Miller, David C. *Dark Eden: the swamp in Nineteenth Century American Culture*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Millner, Michael. *Fever Reading: Affect and Reading Badly in the Early American Public Sphere*. Durham, NH: U of New Hampshire Press, 2012
- Mitchell, W. J. T. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005.
- Mitchell, W. J. T., and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds. *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010.

- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003.
- Neal, Mark Anthony. *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Neary, Janet. "Behind the Scenes and Inside Out: Elizabeth Keckly's Revision of the Slave Narrative Form." *African American Review* 47.4 (2014): 555-573.
- Nicholls, Michael L. *Whispers of Rebellion: Narrating Gabriel's Conspiracy*. Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 2012.
- Noll, Mark. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Nord, David Paul. *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.
- . "Tocqueville, Garrison and the Perfection of Journalism." *Journalism History* 32.2 (1986).
- Nudelman, Franny. *John Brown's Body: Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2004.
- Nunley, Vorris L. *Keepin' It Hushed: The Barbershop and African American Hush Harbor Rhetoric*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2011.
- Oates, Stephen B. *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Oliver, Paul. *Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues*. 1970.
- Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (1982). New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.
- Parramore, Thomas C. "Covenant in Jerusalem." In *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: a comparative study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982.

Pawley, Emily. "Reading the Man of Signs, or, Farming in the Moon." *Common-Place* 14.4 (Summer 2014).

Perkins, Maureen. *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time, and Cultural Change 1775-1870*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Peterson, Carla L. *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: the "invisible institution" of the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford UP, 1980.

Radano, Ronald. *Laying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003.

Rao, Joe. "The Return of the Leonid Meteors." *Sky & Telescope* 96.5 (1998).

Rasmussen, Birgit Brander. *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2012.

Rath, Richard Cullen. *How Early America Sounded*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003.

Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.

Rohrbach, Augusta. *Thinking Outside the Book*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2014.

----. "'Truth Stronger and Stranger than Fiction': Reexamining William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*." *American Literature* 73.4 (2001): 727-55.

Rowe, John Carlos. "Stowe's Rainbow Sign: Violence and Community in *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*." *Arizona Quarterly* 58.1 (2002), 37-55.

Rucker, Walter C. *The River flows on: Black resistance, culture, and identity formation in early America*. Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2006.

- Rusert, Britt. "Delany's Comet: Fugitive Science and the Speculative Imaginary of Emancipation." *American Quarterly* 65.4 (2013): 799-829.
- Sacks, Oliver. *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. New York: Knopf, 2007.
- Sanderson, Richard. "The Night of Raining Fire." *Sky & Telescope* 96.5 (1998).
- Santamarina, Xiomara. *Belabored Professions: Narratives of African American Working Womanhood*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2005.
- Sayers, Daniel O. "Scission communities and social defiance: Marronage in the Diasporic Great Dismal Swamp, 1660-1860." In *The limits of tyranny: archaeological perspectives on the struggle against new world slavery*. James A. Delle, ed. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2015.
- Scales, Laura Thiemann. "Narrative Revolutions in Nat Turner and Joseph Smith." *American Literary History* 24.2 (2012): 205-33.
- Schmidt, Eric Leigh. *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Schoolman, Martha. *Abolitionist Geographies*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2014.
- Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.
- Sidbury, James. *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. 1971 (1983).
- Spillers, Hortense J. *Fabrics of History: Essays on the Black Sermon*. Brandeis U PhD, 1974.
- . "Mama's baby, Papa's maybe." *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 64-81.
- . "Moving On Down the Line: Variations on the African-American Sermon." In *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*. Dominick LaCapra, ed. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991. 39-71.

- Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers*. New York: Walker and Co., 1998.
- Stepan, Nancy Lays. "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science." *Isis* 77.2 (1986): 261-77.
- Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.
- Stoever-Ackerman, Jennifer. "The Word and the Sound: Listening to the Sonic Colour-Line in Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative*." *SoundEffects* 1.1 (2011), 19-36.
- Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. 1987.
- Sundquist, Eric. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Tharaud, Jerome. "The Evangelical Press, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Human Medium." *Arizona Quarterly* 69.2 (2013).
- Tragle, Henry Irving. *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material*. Amherst: U Mass P, 1971.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Turner, Patricia A. *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Vollaro, Daniel R. "Lincoln, Stowe, and the 'Little Woman/Great War' Story: The Making, and Breaking, of a Great American Anecdote." *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 30.1 (2009), 18-34.
- Wallis, Brian. "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes." *American Art* (1995): 39-61.

- Warner, Michael. "Evangelical Public Sphere." Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Libraries A.S.W. Rosenbach Lectures in Bibliography, 2009.
- . *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990.
- . *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone, 2002.
- Washington, Margaret. *Sojourner Truth's America*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2009.
- Wegenstein, Bernadette. "Body." In *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010.
- White, Shane and Graham White. *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech*. Boston: Beacon P, 2005.
- Whitney, Lisa. "In the Shadow of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Stowe's View of Slavery from the Great Dismal Swamp." *New England Quarterly* 66.4 (1993), 552-569.
- Williams, Eric. *Capitalism & Slavery* (1944). Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1994.
- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition. New York: Oxford UP, 1983.
- . *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Wilson, Anthony. *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2006.
- Wilson, Ivy. *Specters of Democracy: Blackness and the Aesthetics of Politics in the Antebellum U.S.* New York: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Woodson, C. G. *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*. New York: Arno Press, 1968.
- Wydick, Bruce. "Impact as Narrative: Guest Post by Bruce Wydick." *Impact Evaluations*, World Bank (7 Jan 2015).
- Yellin, Jean Fagan. *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863*. New York: NYU P, 1972.

Zielinski, Siegfried. *Deep Time of Media: toward an archeology of seeing and hearing by technical means*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2006.

Zimmerman, David. "Infectious Designs." (book ms.).