"‘TO GIVE A FAITHFUL ACCOUNT OF THE RACE’: HISTORY AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, 1827-1915"

DISSERTATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of African-American history and historical consciousness in black communities up to the professionalization of African-American history in 1915. Although history as an area of scholarly inquiry was not professionalized prior to 1884 among white Americans and not until 1915 among African Americans, early on, black people used history to create a discursive space to critique the most pressing issues of the era such as slavery, colonization, disfranchisement, and racial degradation in general. This study begins with the years prior to the founding of Freedom's Journal (1827) and ends with the establishment of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) in 1915. As the first viable organ of public opinion in the black community, Freedom's Journal occupies a central place in the creation of an historical discourse. And the formation of the ASNLH signaled the formal move toward professionalization within the ranks of African-American historians.

This study uses primarily traditional historical methods, but it also relies heavily on textual analysis, an approach to reading texts which is widely used in literary criticism, especially the work of Henry Lewis Gates, (most notably in Figures in Black: Words, Signs and The "Racial" Self, (1987). The "Black Atlantic" model, a paradigm that places emphasis on the interaction of diasporic cultures and transcendence of national boundaries, detailed in Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity (1993) is used implicitly in the study as a means of establishing the connections between African-American writers and their diasporic concerns. This is important because from the
inception of black historical writing, Africa and the diaspora were always subjects of investigation and analysis.

My study is the first to offer a complete history of the emergence of African-American history as a viable subspecialty of American history. It is a significant departure from earlier studies because it locates the beginnings of African-American historical writing in the antebellum period. More important, this study examines the internal logic (methodology, argumentation, and sources), and the construction and dissemination of history in the African-American community.
Dedicated to my children, Marcus, Marton, and Morgan
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Introduction

Although history as an area of scholarly inquiry was not professionalized prior to 1884 among white Americans and not until 1915 among African Americans, early on, black people used history to create a discursive space to critique the most pressing issues of the era such as slavery, colonization, disfranchisement, and racial degradation in general. Indeed, from the inauguration of the Republic, African Americans used history as a tool to contravene negative perceptions of their intellectual capacity and their general humanity. This study, which examines the development of African-American history and historical writing, begins with the institutional origins of black historical writing during the Early Republic and ends with the professionalization of African American history, symbolized by the establishment of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) in 1915.¹

African-American history is now a major subspecialty of American history. It has developed as a potent force in the academy beginning with the institutionalization of African-American studies at major colleges and universities in the 1960’s. Increased

¹ The periodization for his chapter is also influenced by the work of the literary scholar Dorothy Porter, ed., Early Negro Writing. 1. Wesley ends her examination of early African-American literary production in 1837, due to the fact that Africans were engaged locally and nationally in efforts to improve their condition. She also notes that the 1840’s witnessed the rise of more capable writers. For information on the critical turn in the 1850’s, see Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Bruce C. Levine, Half Slave, Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); William Freehling, The Road to Disunion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Tyler Gregory Ambinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and Politics of the 1850’s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
awareness of the history and culture of African Americans burgeoned as a result of the intense contestation over civil, political, economic rights as well as cultural recognition with the civil rights movement and the subsequent black power movements between 1954 and 1972. While African-American history received long deserved recognition, its institutionalization subsequently obscured a much deeper and richer history within the academy.²

The process of obscuring the meanings and memory of earlier African American historical projects was not necessarily part of a conspiracy or intentional process of marginalization as some Afrocentricists argue. Rather it is a function of the politics of presentism in African-American history and historical methodology. Since the civil rights movement is viewed as the apex of the black experience in the twentieth century, its resultant—the institutionalization of black studies in the academy— is viewed as a natural outgrowth, almost a teleological outcome of this propitious event. The contemporary African-American historical project, at least in present understandings, has expanded and grown in ways that earlier projects could not. Largely unfettered by de jure and de facto legal institutional barriers, African Americanists have charted new courses in a wide variety of disciplinary sites. Naturally, when comparing contemporary historical projects to older work historians are generally dismissive of what they view as more limited and constrained projects in earlier periods. The earlier period indeed had its constraints, but despite these difficulties, intellectuals were able to negotiate this contested terrain. Discussions of the negotiation and creation of viable intellectual sites within the contested

intellectual terrain of nineteenth century America is an important component of this study.\textsuperscript{3}

This study represents the first scholarly attempt to write a disciplinary history of the development of African-American history before, and including, all of the nineteenth century. In order to understand the development of African-American history, one must begin with an assessment of the discipline's beginnings in the Early Republic and Antebellum periods. A central contention of this study is that antebellum intellectual and historical formations played a seminal role in the development of the discipline in subsequent periods. With this idea in mind, this study examines the sites of black historical consciousness--newspapers and magazines, oratory, conventions and historical writing. The somewhat fragmentary emergence of the African-American historical project in the Early Republic, showed some maturation with the work of Hosea Easton. Easton's \textit{A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States} (1837) established one of the earliest linkages between African-American history and racial characteristics and until the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation served as a catalyst for the production of numerous treatises on the black experience up until the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. During these periods, African-American intellectuals were influenced by the dominant intellectual currents in European and American Enlightenments, Puritanism, especially the jeremiad, and Romanticism. Additionally, black intellectuals were also heavily influenced by the various forms that abolitionist discourse took between 1789 and 1860.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{3} For examinations of the Afrocentric position, see Molefi Asante, \textit{Afrocentricity} (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988) and \textit{The Afrocentric Idea} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

\textsuperscript{4} My thinking on the question of the importance of antebellum historical discourse in shaping subsequent discourse has been influenced by the work of several traditional
While African-American intellectuals were deeply influenced by Euro-American intellectual currents, they did not appropriate these ideas in a wholesale fashion. Rather, they selectively applied them to various aspects of the African-American historical situation. This selective appropriation is demonstrated in the use of the Enlightenment, European and American Romanticism, and the jeremiad by African American historians. The European and American Enlightenments offered American and African-American intellectuals historical techniques to create discursive spaces for historical engagement such as essence history, an attempt to define forces which defined human society, history as progress, and the use of literary devices in historical writing. European Romanticism.

offered the concept of historicism, which meant that change could be explained by examining history rather than the philosophy of science. And religion was important as well, with God as an operative force in human affairs. Black intellectuals were also influenced by the Puritan jeremiad, a form that black writers continued to use, albeit in modified form, even as its explanatory power waned in mainstream American thought. Another important influence was American Romanticism, which challenged the strictly rationalistic approach to human life and activity by positing a greater appreciation of nature and led to the widespread use of the concept of Representative men and women.  

Intellectual issues in the antebellum period were closely connected to the public sphere. Therefore, as this study argues, the African-American historical project was informed by an active engagement with what Thomas Bender termed “civic professionalism.” “Civic professionalism” refers to the organization of intellectual life around the institutional structures of major urban centers such as Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia. These sites, in addition to being important locations for abolitionist activity, also served as cultural and intellectual centers where African Americans accessed what Elizabeth McHenry has termed “technologies of power”—newspapers, books, pamphlets, and other reading materials. From Freedom’s Journal (1827) to the Anglo-African Magazine (1858), antebellum newspapers and magazines played an important role in disseminating historical information within the black community. They also provided a viable outlet for the articulation and discussion of a wide variety of social, political, economic, and most important, intellectual ideas.6

One of the best examples of the connection between the intellectual and public spheres in the antebellum period is the image of Africa promoted by Euro-Americans and

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African-Americans. Consequently, this study addresses the crucial issue of Afrocentricism among nineteenth century African American thinkers. Some recent works take a dismissive or uncritical approach to this issue, which is explicit in Mary Lefkowitz’s Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentricism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History (1996) and Steven Howe’s Afrocentricism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Heroes (1998). Both works suffer from presentism. Both writers examine the most extreme manifestations of Afrocentricism and posit these musings as representative of the movement. As a result of this approach, these writers mistakenly graft contemporary understandings of these issues on to the past. As both August Meier and Wilson Jeremiah Moses have noted in the case of Lefkowitz’s work, the approach of these scholars not only ahistorical but demonstrates a lack of understanding of African-American intellectual life in the nineteenth century.

Unlike our current understanding of the term, Afrocentricism in the nineteenth century was closely linked to concepts of nation and nationality borrowed from British and German historiography. It consisted of a loose combination of redemptionism, Egyptocentric thought, and millenarism. As this study will show, most black writers of the nineteenth century used African achievement in the broadest and most general ways. Rather than focusing exclusively on the issue of race, especially when citing Representative men and women, writers were more concerned to correct the idea that Africa was simply *tabula rasa* with respect to making tangible social, political, economic and most important, intellectual contributions to the rise of Western civilization. While some writers attempted to claim that various writers and philosophers were black or of Negroid origin, for the most part, African achievement rather than simply race was the underlying rationale for these statements. In order to discuss this issue in this more complex ways, I have also interrogated the ways in which race and racial theory impacted discussions of Africa and African Americans in the nineteenth century.  

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7 See Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of Popular African American*
Rather than a reductionist approach to Afrocentricism, this study follows the lead of Wilson Jeremiah Moses. Moses's recent study, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (1998), skillfully situates Afrocentricism with the internal and external dynamics of African-American and Euro-American social, political and intellectual thought. Moses persuasively argues that Afrocentricism must be distinguished from Egyptocentric thought. Egyptocentric thought tends to focus on the notion of Egypt as the apex of African civilization to the exclusion of other Northern African and sub-Saharan civilizations.  

The presentist orientation of some anti-Afrocentric scholars must also consider that, as many historians have argued quite persuasively, black intellectuals were also strongly influenced by the image promoted by proslavery elements of their ancestral homeland, Africa. When coupled with essentialist constructions of race occasioned by the shift from the conception of race as lineage to its construction as type by the early

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Moses also points out that there are a variety of historicisms within African-American thought: sentimental Afrocentricism which posits an essentialist African character and focuses on the racial affinity of persons of African descent, vindicationism and contributionism which focuses on attempts to provide educational experiences which address the deficiencies of the American educational system in providing adequate information about the African and African-American experience and contributionism which highlights the contributions of African and African Americans to American society. Heroic monumentalism: The Egyptocentric mode focuses on the role Africans played in Egyptian civilization and presents Egypt as a black and African civilization as opposed to a Semitic and Mediterranean one; African Redemptionism is the historical tradition which calls for the ultimate redemption of Africa by persons of African descent often expressed in the language of Ethiopianism based on the biblical verse, ‘Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God.’ (Psalms 68:31) and Romantic racialism is the idea that the victims of racial oppression are superior to those who oppress them. See Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of Popular African-American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), introduction
nineteenth century, blacks understood the crucial need to reconstruct the benighted image of Africa. Many writers used redemptionist historicism in an effort to rehabilitate the image of Africa, which played an important role in the promotion of Afrocentricism among African-American thinkers. African Americans were convinced that their more positive images of Africa would assist in elevating the status of persons of African descent in the Atlantic World.9

The antebellum period for African Americans was not intellectually static nor framed exclusively by intellectual events. In this study, I seek to balance intellectual contributions and the impact of the social milieu on the development of African-American history. The dynamism and fluidity of the African-American social condition accounted for the shifting priorities of African-American intellectuals by the 1850’s. While historical writing was initially dominated by an abolitionist clerical elite, by the 1850’s, the momentum generated by the demise of Northern slavery and the growth of black institutions such as the church, fraternal organizations, and the press began to wane. The passage of the Compromise of 1850 with its infamous fugitive slave provision deflated integrationist possibilities and pitted this philosophy against diasporic notions of black identity. The rise of a secular group of free blacks who were closely associated with the

abolitionist community, but had limited experience with slavery, emerged in the forefront of historical production.\textsuperscript{10}

Another crucial component of this study is the shifting meanings of history in the aftermath of the Civil War. Black abolitionists, who were leaders in the antislavery war, played an important role in producing historical writing in the years during and after the Civil War. These writers such as William Wells Brown, William Still, and Martin Delany used history as means of looking backward into the slavery era and forward into the possibilities of freedom. Their writing was Janus-like and served as an important, but neglected part of the origins of race history by the 1880’s.\textsuperscript{11}

The second half of this study focuses on the evolution of African-American history in the postbellum period. Here, this study examines the ways in which the antebellum period shaped the historical understandings of the early postbellum period and ultimately

\textsuperscript{10} My thinking on the themes of African American history in the 1850’s has been influenced by the work of literary historian Eric Sundquist. Sundquist views the literature of the period as enacting the disequilibrium between slavery and freedom in the Western hemisphere. This is certainly true in the United States, where free states outpaced slave states and gave rise to expansionist plans to annex Cuba. Moreover, given the ongoing contestation over slavery’s role in America life, the literature, most notably Herman Melville’s \textit{Benito Cereno}, and Martin Delany’s \textit{Blake or Huts of America}, highlight the unfinished work of the American Revolution to extend the benefits of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all. Although the Civil War settled questions of annexation and expansionism, the volatility and uncertainty of the period is reflected in the literature. See Eric Sundquist, \textit{To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature} (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993), 135-139; and Martin R. Delany, \textit{Blake or The Huts of America} (serialized in the \textit{Weekly Anglo-African}, 1861-1862; rpt Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).

\textsuperscript{11} David Blight explores the idea of historical memory as it relates to Frederick Douglass’ attempt to keep the memory of the Civil War and abolitionism alive to agitate for better treatment of African Americans in the postbellum period, see David Blight, \textit{Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 148-188.
prepared the intellectual terrain for a more reflective meditation on Emancipation in the form of race history which emerged with the publication of George Washington Williams' *History of the Negro Race* (1883). With the coming of the Civil War and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, intellectualism began to shift from “civic professionalism” to “disciplinary professionalism,” professionalism framed around the university. In addition to a greater number of works on the African-American experience, historical production among African Americans increased and began to diversify. Emancipation narratives, race textbooks, and biographical catalogs were important historical forms during this period. Moreover, African American women, encouraged by the active organization of prominent groups such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), challenged the masculinist focus of what Kevin Kelley Gaines terms uplift philosophy. Focusing on the historical writing of Anna Julia Cooper, Pauline Hopkins, Gertrude Mossell, and Lelia Amos Pendleton, this study adds another dimension to and compliments the work of scholars such as Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Cynthia Neverdon Morton, and Stephanie Shaw who have examined the contributions of African American women to various forms of institutional and intellectual endeavor through examinations of their roles in the suffrage movement, black colleges and universities, and in various institutional spaces.12

Perhaps the most important aspect of the development of African-American history in the late-nineteenth century is the growth of avocational sites for historical understanding such as literary and historical societies. In addition to historical writing, black intellectuals were also active in a number of literary and historical societies and involved in the collection and preservation of important artifacts of African-American history. Societies such as the Bethel Literary and Historical Society in Washington, D.C. (1881), the American Negro Academy (1897) in Washington D.C., and the Afro-American Historical Society (1897) in Philadelphia played an important role in continuing the antebellum interest in African-American history while also serving as the catalyst for the professionalization of the field. Bibliophilies, who were active members of these groups, such as Robert Adger, a member of the Afro-American Historical Society; Arthur Alonso Schomburg, a prominent Puerto-Rican bibliophile who also contributed to Alain Locke's seminal Harlem Renaissance work, The New Negro, and lectured widely on the importance of including the study of black history in colleges and universities; and John Cromwell, an active member of the American Negro Academy, close friend of Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life an History, and occasional historical speaker at Howard University, all worked closely with the public school systems and with the nascent black academy to promote the study of African-American history.  

This study also establishes connections between the emergence of race history and the subsequent professionalization of the discipline. Just as the study views antebellum historical discourse as the catalyst for the postbellum vision of history, it also posits a tangible connection between race history and the subsequent professionalization of the discipline. I contend that the growth of historical interest among African Americans cannot be studied in isolation from the growth of the black academy. Despite the limited historical training of many black bibliophiles, lay and amateur historians, and members of literary and historical societies, it is from among their ranks that the first sustained interest in history emerged. These individuals were also poised, once the black academy began, to offer their services in tangible ways. Joseph Wilson published his book, *Emancipation: Its Course and Progress* with the Normal Steam Printing Press at Hampton University; William Henry Crogman, author of *The Progress of the Negro or Remarkable Achievements of the Negro Race*, enlisted Booker T. Washington to write the book’s introduction. Edward Johnson, author of a *School History of the Negro Race*, encouraged Booker T. Washington to use his study for courses at Tuskegee University. Arthur Alonso Schomburg lectured extensively on the importance of incorporating history into college courses. John Cromwell, amateur historian and author, was an active member of the American Negro Academy and his book, *The Negro in American History* was

incorporated into history courses at Tuskegee University, the first post-secondary school to offer African-American history systematically.

While a number of scholars have discussed some aspects of the rise of race history or documented the existence of literary and historical societies, few have discussed the process of professionalization within the nascent black academy. This study, then, is a significant departure from earlier studies which discuss the growth of race history in isolation from the rise of departments of history. With the exception of Howard University, the history and the history departments are usually discussed within the context of a specific institution. Here, I view the professionalization of history as an important outgrowth of the rise of race history. These colleges, universities, and seminaries such as Howard and Atlanta Universities, Hampton and Tuskegee Normal and Industrial schools, and Gammon Theological Seminary played an important role in incorporating African-American history in their respective curriculums in the early twentieth century. They not only constructed courses, but most sponsored conferences and symposia on various aspects of the “Negro” question. These professionalized sites played an important role in aiding and abetting the subsequent institutionalization of black history.\footnote{Julie A. Reuben, The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and The Marginalization of Morality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)}

Underlying the rationale for this study are certain theoretical and historiographical issues which it confronts in order to critically analyze the rise of African-American historical discourse in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. For example, in order to account for the development of African-American history, it is necessary to think critically about the meanings of social ideology and the rise of historical writing in the black community. The link between black social ideology and historical writing during the
antebellum and postbellum periods developed as black intellectuals began to construct a particular historical consciousness within Northern and Southern African-American communities.

Historians have not adequately interrogated the origins of nineteenth century historical consciousness in the African-American community. More detailed work has been done on the motivations underlying the construction of institutions and community formation among free blacks. Moreover, since the 1970's, a debate has also raged among scholars working on free black populations and the purposes and intent of social ideology. Examining the historiography of this debate is essential to understanding the social ideology of black historians, especially in the antebellum period and this is an important component of the present study.

Influenced by the work of August Meier, William and Jane Pease, and William Cooper, scholars initially argued that social ideology in the free black community was reducible to two dominant strategies, assimilation or separation. August Meier’s *Negro Thought in America: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington, 1880-1915* (1963) viewed the assimilationist and separatist discourse of the late nineteenth century as having its origins in the antebellum period. Meier’s work set the stage for an intensive debate regarding the direction, purposes, and aims of free blacks during the antebellum period.

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16 One of the few texts to interrogate black historical consciousness in the 19th century is Leonard Sweet’s, *Black Images of White America, 1784-1870* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976).
William Cooper continued this debate with his article “Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827-50,” (1972). Cooper reduced all ideology in the black community to the quest for “self elevation and moral improvement.” The rationale ran that free blacks were less concerned with abolition and more concerned with assimilating into white society. This concern led them to establish institutions such as the church and press to agitate to attain this reality. In this analysis, historical consciousness was reducible to a simple manifestation of race pride to obtain entry into white society. William and Jane Pease in their study, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks Search for Freedom, 1830-1861*, (1974) viewed the black struggle for freedom as largely fostered by white prejudice, minority status, and urban constraints. These constraints led to black overemphasis with white perceptions of them. Moreover, this obsession led to a fatalistic attempt to enter white society by any means necessary and at any cost. This is illustrated in the Pease’s assessment of Hosea Easton’s *Treatise on the Intellectual and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States*. According to them, beset by alienation from the American dream, the only action Easton offered for blacks was a “powerless appeal to whites to give up their murderous ways.”

Dissenting voices appeared in studies such as Benjamin Quarles’s *Black Abolitionists* (1969) and James and Lois Horton’s *Black Bostonians* (1979). In *Black Abolitionists*, Quarles identified the black abolitionists as an integral part of the abolition

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movement. Rather than passive objects who simply responded to the white initiated call for opposition to slavery, Quarles recreated a multifaceted black leadership which searched for a wide variety of ways to challenge white supremacy. This search began in the Early Republic, a historical milieu of organizational endeavor to define black identity, and continued until the Civil War. The Hortons, in their assessment of Boston, brought the same complexity to studies of free blacks in that city. Although it was one of the smallest antebellum communities, its leadership exerted great influence over antebellum discourse. Influenced by the quantitative study of Philadelphia by Theodore Hershberg, the Hortons attempted to capture the flavor of antebellum Boston by focusing not on a leadership elite, but on the common people.  

The appearance of George Levesque’s pathbreaking article “Interpreting Early Black Ideology: A Reappraisal of Historical Consensus,” (1981), challenged the reductionist and essentialist arguments regarding the construction of social ideology among free blacks and built upon the work of Quarles and the Hortons. Instead of a dualistic conceptualization of the development of black ideology during the antebellum period, Levesque called for a recognition of the complexity of social ideology and social uplift and betterment strategies among free blacks in the antebellum period. Rather than a monolithic focus on integration or separation, Levesque pointed to black thinkers such as John S. Rock and Henry Highland Garnet whose lives demonstrate the fallacious nature of exclusive devotion to moral self-elevation and self elevation. Levesque also noted that

black social ideology developed during the period characterized by historian Ira Berlin as the “transitional period.” During this historical moment, blacks began to develop varied approaches to questions of identity, community formation, and responses to slavery and racism. The development of positions was fluid, not static, and certainly not reducible to binary ideologies. Subsequent works by Gary Nash, Julie Winch, James Oliver Horton, Carla Petersen, Peter Hinks and the most recent study James and Lois Horton, In Hope of Liberty (1997), have built upon earlier quantitative studies as well as social history and intersections between race, class and gender to offer a more complex understanding of social ideology. This study seeks to expand on these understandings by interrogating the underlying motivations for writing African-American history and by viewing it as complex and nuanced with influences ranging from European and American intellectual movements to the fluid internal dynamics of African American communities in the nineteenth century rather than simply racial vindicationism. Because all of the writers between 1827 and 1860 were involved in some aspect of antislavery, abolitionist, temperance, or convention movement work, it is important to flesh out the complexities of their social ideology and its linkage to the creation of discursive spaces for the articulation of a historical vision.20

20 See George A. Levesque, “Interpreting Early Black Ideology: A Reappraisal of Historical Consensus,” Journal of the Early Republic 1 (Fall 1981): 269-287 and “Boston’s Black Brahmin: Dr. John S. Rock,” Civil War History 26 (December 1980): 326-346; Ira Berlin, “Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society in British Mainland North America,” American Historical Review 85 (Feb 1980): 53. For information on the development of black culture in the North, see William Pierson, Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth Century New England (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). Another individual that demonstrates the complexity of black social ideology and black leadership is Rev. Jeremiah Loguen. A fugitive slave from Tennessee who worked in Central New York between 1837 and 1872. Loguen was an active abolitionist, maintained active interracial and cross-class political relationships and utilized a variety of strategies to effect change in the African American community. His political ideology also seems un reducible to either integration or separatism in all aspects of his fight to end slavery. For information on Jeremiah Loguen, see Carol M. Hunter, To Set the Captives: Reverend Jeremiah Wesley
Considerations of social ideology lead naturally into an interrogation of the meanings of historical writing. Like the historiography of social ideology, the initial discussions of historical writing can be found among scholars who belonged to the first generation of professional black historians (or, The Woodson school). Not unlike the scholarly treatment of the development of social ideology, the emergence of historical writing was framed within the context of racial vindicationism and contributionism, the guiding ideological constructs in African-American historical production from 1915-1950. Black scholars such as Helen Boardman and Charles Wesley viewed the antebellum and postbellum periods as dynamic moments of historical consciousness. Boardman, however, in her article “The Rise of the Negro Historian,” (1945) and Wesley, in his articles “Racial Historical Societies and the American Heritage” (1952) and “Creating and Maintaining an Historical Tradition,” (1964) while affirming the importance of African-American historical production, nevertheless viewed it as a byproduct of white racism in Boardman’s case and a uniquely American quest for a historical tradition in Wesley’s case.21


Subsequent studies such as Earl Thorpe’s *Negro Historians in the United States* (1958) offered a more sophisticated interpretation of African-American history and a necessary corrective to the contributionist model posited by Boardman and Wesley. Thorpe’s division of the development of black historiography into four schools: the Beginning School: Justifiers of Emancipation, 1800-1896; the Middle Group, 1896-1930; Negro Historical Societies, and Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Historians; and the New School, 1930-1955, offered one of the first scholarly paradigms for the study of African-American historiography. Unfortunately, Thorpe downplayed the importance of what he termed the Beginning School, 1800-1896 because this group lacked historical training, documented poorly, and did superficial research. Although presentist in orientation, Thorpe’s work provides a useful periodization scheme for the antebellum period and an analytical framework for the historical production of early writers.\(^{22}\)

Very little additional work was done on historical writing until the publication of Benjamin Quarles’ “Black History’s Antebellum Origins” (1979). Quarles not only established the importance of the antebellum period as a formative moment of historical discourse, but also noted that antebellum historians established the parameters for the African-American historical enterprise. Those issues included linking African-American history to its antebellum origins, focusing on the emancipation struggles of persons of African descent—namely the Haitian revolution (1791-1804), as well as a contributionist discourse centered on black participation America’s wars and discussing African-American efforts to eradicate slavery.\(^{23}\)


\(^{23}\) See Benjamin Quarles, “Black History’s Antebellum Origins,” 109-134.
Quaries's article was followed by the work of Robert L. Harris, "Coming of Age: The Transformation of Afro-American Ideology." (1982). Although useful in tracing the evolution of African-American history, Harris is less willing to accord antebellum historical discourse its rightful place. Harris focused only on perceived leaders in historical production such as James W.C. Pennington and William Wells Brown and dismissed their historical production in two paragraphs, noting that "their historiography was limited by selection of sources and by the frameworks in which they studied them."

This statement was not accompanied by a discussion of nineteenth-century historiography or the complexity of African-American history in this period in terms of form, content, and style. Harris's argument for a more modernist focus for the evolution of African-American historiography was aided and abetted by the appearance of scholars who supported the institutional view of black history, a view which places more emphasis on the professionalized (post-1915) than the preprofessional era (pre-1915) of African-American history. Most important in this regard was the work of John Hope Franklin and August Meier and Elliot Rudwick. Franklin's "On the Evolution of Afro-American History" (1986) totally ignored the antebellum historical production period in favor of a more modernist periodization beginning in the 1880's. Franklin used a generational approach to African American history, which, while useful for the postbellum period, provides few insights into preprofessional nature of the profession. Meier and Rudwick's Black History and the Historical Profession (1986) give more credence to historical production in the institutional period, but fails to adequately offer linkage between the pre- and post-1915 period.24

While many of the previously discussed works failed to link the antebellum period to subsequent productions of historical writing, in the 1980’s and early 1990’s historians began more fruitful examinations of the African-American historical project in the postbellum period. Studies which examined the development of black literary and historical societies and the lives and contributions of black historians in the postbellum period brought renewed vigor to studies of black history. These studies established a tangible connection between the lay and avocational interest of black bibliophiles and collectors and the rise of a professionalized historical enterprise within the black community.²⁵ Two of the most influential studies include Alfred Moss’s The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth (1981) and Sinette, Coates, and Martin’s Black Bibliophiles and Collectors (1990). Both of these works discuss the critical role played by black intellectuals in collecting and preserving various artifacts of black history. Located primarily along the eastern seaboard in Philadelphia, Washington, New York and Boston, these individuals, such as Arthur Alonso Schomburg, John Bruce, John Cromwell, Alexander Crummell, and W.E.B. Du Bois took the lead in promoting the study of black history.²⁶

Additionally, during the 1980’s, historians produced seminal studies of two important figures in the development of the postbellum African-American historical vision,

George Washington Williams and Monroe Nathan Work. John Hope Franklin's *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (1985) was a pathbreaking study. Not only was it an important example of historical detective work, but the book's publication gave coherence to the postbellum African-American historical project prior to 1915, which had heretofore been relegated to the fringes of academic and historiographical debates. Williams' rediscovery and then reemergence as the progenitor of African-American history brought needed attention to his classic work, *The History of the Negro Race* (1883), and offered historians a means of rethinking the contributionist race histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Williams's use of numerous primary sources and his consultation with prominent nineteenth century historians such as George Bancroft and Justin Winsor problematized more simplistic understandings of this type of historical production.

Another important work was Linda O. McMurry's *Recorder of the Black Experience: A Biography of Monroe Nathan Work*. Work was a much more marginal figure than Williams. Work's biography sheds much needed light on the role of black academics, influenced by the burgeoning social sciences and the subsequent professionalization of colleges and universities at the national level as well as within the black community, to actively apply knowledge and methods utilized in the social sciences to establish research institutes, conferences, and yearbooks to provide more accurate and reliable statistics on black achievement in the aftermath of slavery.27

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While useful, these works leave us "truncated and blunted" in our view of the development of African-American historical discourse from the Early Republic up to 1915. Rather than endorsing binaries in black social ideology of integration versus separation, or in historical consciousness of premodernist versus modernist, or examining historical and literary societies in isolation from the "Negro history" movement as a whole, this study seeks to offer a more complex way of viewing African-American historical discourse between 1827 and 1915. Earl Thorpe, shortly before his death, called for a rethinking of the contours of African-American historiography. As Quarles and others had before him, Thorpe called for examinations of the motivations of black historians in writing history. This study seeks to heed Thorpe's call by locating black historical production within the context of the development of both black social ideology and historical consciousness. Here, the antebellum historical enterprise is viewed as an integral part of African-American consciousness during the antebellum period and as a catalyst for subsequent historical production in the postbellum period.28

In selecting the works and writers to consider in my study, I have largely followed the lead of literary historians such as Dorothy Wesley, Vernon Loggin, and Blyden Jackson, and historians such as Earl Thorpe, John Hope Franklin, August Meier, Elliott Rudwick, and Robert Harris. I have, however, added works in order to provide a more holistic portrait of the period under discussion. Ironically, while there is a fairly strong consensus on the intellectuals and works which comprise the nineteenth century historical canon, few historians have discussed the ways in which this tradition serves as a catalyst

for subsequent historical production and the ultimate professionalization of the field. This is an omission which this study seeks to correct.\textsuperscript{29}

I have designed a periodization scheme that allows us to adequately account for the intensification of social and historical consciousness in the African-American community during the nineteenth century while maintaining an appreciation of the shifting intellectual terrain of the period. Therefore, for the first period, I have used the traditional starting date for the Early Republic, 1789, and end in 1836, one year before the publication of Hosea Easton’s treatise. This period is recognized by American and African-American scholars as a period during which the new nation began to take shape socially, politically, and most important, intellectually. For African-Americans, this period witnessed the construction of various institutions within the black community such as the church, schools, literary and historical societies, and the black press. These developments set the stage for a more developed tradition of historical writing between 1837, the year Easton’s work appeared, and 1850, the year in which the Compromise of 1850 was passed. This period also witnessed the publication of important treatises on the black experience by James W.C. Pennington, Robert Benjamin Lewis, Ann Plato, and Henry Highland Garnet. This period is also marked by domination of historical writing by a clerical elite.\textsuperscript{30}


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The periodization for the remainder of the study follows the chronology generally agreed upon for African-American and American history. The Compromise of 1850, and 1863, the year the publication of William Wells Brown’s The Black Man form the boundaries of the next period. For African Americans and Americans, 1863 also represents a crucial turning point in the war effort. The fact that the Emancipation

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War's tide in favor of the Union. Both had an important impact on the nature of black life and historical production. The period between 1863 and 1882 was largely transitional. It facilitated the transformation in African-American historical writing from antebellum to postbellum modes and laid the groundwork for the rise of race history. The final period, 1883-1915, is generally viewed as one in which history, in general, and black history, in particular, became more professionalized. I see the process of professionalization as informed by changes in historical writing as well as the growth of historical interest in the black academy.31

My study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, "Troubling the Pages of Historians": The Uses of History in the African-American Community, 1789-1837," examines the intellectual and rhetorical uses of history among African Americans from the founding of Freedom's Journal to the publication of Hosea Easton's Treatise on the Intellectual, Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States (1837). This chapter also examines the primary sites of early black historical production: black historical writing, the Convention movement, and historical and literary societies. Chapter 2, "To Present a Just View of Our Origin": Creating an African-American Historical Discourse, 1838-1850," discusses the creation of a historical discourse in the antebellum period focusing on the work of abolitionists such as Hosea Easton, James W.C. Pennington, Ann Plato, James McCune Smith, Christopher Rush, Robert Benjamin Lewis, and Henry Highland Garnet. Antebellum black newspapers such as The Liberator (Boston), The Weekly Advocate (New York), The Colored American (New York), The National Anti-Slavery Standard.

(Philadelphia), The Pennsylvania Freeman (Philadelphia), and the Impartial Citizen (New York) are also used to trace the development of historical consciousness.

Chapter 3, "The Destiny of the Colored People": African-American Historical Discourse Between Compromise and Jubilee, 1850-1863," examines the evolution of African-American history from the Compromise of 1850 to the Emancipation Proclamation (1863). These years featured ongoing discussions among African Americans regarding the ultimate destiny of black people. This chapter examines the work of Martin Delany, William C. Nell, George Boyer Vashon, William Wells Brown, James Theodore Helly, and William J. Wilson. Chapter 4, "The Historical Mind of Emancipation": Writing African-American History at the Dawn of Freedom, 1863-1882," examines the transition period of African-American history. This period begins with the publication of William Wells Brown’s The Black Man (1863) and ends with the publication of Joseph Wilson's Emancipation: Its Course and Progress (1882). During this period, African-American writing began to shift from a few focused studies to a plethora of race histories by the 1880s.

Chapter 5, "Story of a Rising Race": Race History and the Uplifting of the Race, 1883-1915," examines the development of race history from the publication of George Washington William’s History of the Negro Race (1883) to the founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) in 1915. Although women are included throughout this study, period witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of histories written by and about blacks. Long dominated by men, black history also saw the increasing influence of several notable female writers such as Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Barrier Williams, Francis Watkins Harper, Lelia Amos Pendleton, and N.F. Mossell. The establishment of several black magazines such as The A.M.E. Church Review, The Colored American, Alexander’s Magazine, Voice of
the Negro, and Crisis also heightened historical awareness in the African-American community. The thematic, topical, and gender dynamics of African-American history are explored in this chapter. Chapter 6, “To Smite the Rock of Knowledge: The Development of Historical Studies in the Black Academy,” moves from the chronological/thematic examination of the field and its works to a synthesized examination of the development of history curricula in the leading normal and liberal arts colleges of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, including Howard University, Atlanta University, Gammon Theological Seminary, Clark University, Morris Brown College, Tuskegee Institute, and Hampton Institute. These institutions were most active in training black professionals. An examination of the course offerings and publications supported by these institutions reveals another aspect of intense interest in history, the development of historical studies over time, and the emergence of a fully trained professional class of historians by 1915.

In an effort to broaden our understanding of how African-American history emerged as an historical specialty, this study of the development of African-American history and historical writing prior to 1915 will make a significant contribution to the field of African-American intellectual history and will significantly update older works. And in addition to augmenting these important works, this study is also heavily indebted to a host of younger scholars whose work on black intellectual thought, race and literary and history writing as well as historical memory have shaped the contours of this work. More recent studies such as Elizabeth Raul Bethel’s The Roots of African-American Identity (1996), which explores the construction of the antebellum historical project, and the Journal of Negro History, volume 81, which is devoted exclusive to African-American intellectual history, were also extremely helpful.  

The findings of this study are based on extensive interrogation of primary and secondary sources—traditional historical methods. Because the study is divided into two parts—the antebellum and postbellum periods—the sources utilized vary according to the period. The most important primary sources for the antebellum period include the actual historical writing of the black historians under consideration, which serves as evidence of a black historical tradition, and newspapers and magazines of the period, which provide the context for the study and provide a sense of how historical writing was perceived in both the white and black communities. For the postbellum period, this study relies equally upon the archival collections of historically black colleges and universities and the personal papers of notable black intellectuals.

Two additional major collections of abolitionist papers, the Black Abolitionist Papers (1830-1865), and the American Negro Historical Society Collection (1790-1905) have also been critical to this study as well. The former collection is the definitive record of abolitionist activities in the United States and Canada from 1830-1865. Drawn from newspapers, the personal papers of prominent abolitionists, and the proceedings of various antislavery conventions, these records help to reconstruct the educational, institutional, organizational, and activist affiliations of the

writers under consideration. The latter collection is useful for the entire study. It focuses on the activities of various literary and historical societies in the African-American community from the Early Republic through the early-twentieth century. This collection helps to reveal the origins of historical thought and its tangible dissemination in the African-American community. A large portion of the sources include the catalogues and annual reports of a number of African-American colleges and institutes as well as the manuscript collections of their chief executive and administrative officers. These sources provide insight into African-American history’s role in the nascent black academy. It also gives us a sense of how the emerging professional class of African Americans trained future race leaders, and the importance of history and the humanities, in general, in this process.

In addition to traditional methodological approaches, this study also relies heavily on textual analysis, an approach to reading texts which is widely used in literary criticism, especially the work of Henry Lewis Gates, (most notably in Figures in Black: Words, Signs and The “Racial” Self, (1987). The “Black Atlantic” model, a paradigm that places emphasis on the interaction of diasporic cultures and transcendence of national boundaries, detailed in Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity (1993) is used implicitly in the study as a means of establishing the connections between African-American writers and their diasporic concerns. This is important because from the inception of black historical writing, Africa and the diaspora were always subjects of investigation and analysis. Moreover, in addition to writing about the diaspora, some writers were born in the Caribbean or Africa, and many were interested visitors these regions. This model has very tangible implications for understanding the development of African-American historical writing.
My study is the first to offer a complete history of the emergence of African-American history as a viable subspecialty of American history. It assumes that African-American intellectual history can shed significant light on all facets of African-American history. It is a significant departure from earlier studies because it locates the beginnings of African-American historical writing in the antebellum period. And rather than focusing solely on racial vindication as the primary determinant of antebellum discourse, this study examines the internal logic (methodology, argumentation, and sources), as well as the construction and dissemination of history in the African-American community. With this in mind, considerable attention is given not only to interpretative assessments of historical writing, but also to establishing the intellectual and ideological underpinnings of black historical scholarship.

Even before the inception of the Republic, history was an important component of the nation’s intellectual life, for it provided the initial narratives of American origins, progress, and exceptionalism. Initially conceptualized as a part of God’s divine mission for his chosen people, historical understandings in colonial America revolved around the Puritan concept of an “errand into the wilderness,” Divine Providence, and the jeremiad, a pre-enlightenment intellectual formation. All of these concepts, especially the jeremiad, emphasized the central covenant made between God and his people, criticized the declension and retrogression from the covenant, and presented a resolving philosophy allowing society to complete its mission and redeem the convenant. But as the country expanded beyond the confines of New England, regional stresses and strains fostered conditions that challenged this theologically based approach to historical understanding.

The successful completion of the American Revolution (1776-1783) fostered exceptionalism and encouraged a number of historical publications on the revolution’s meanings not only for the United States but for the world.¹ Black and white intellectuals,

however, viewed and constructed historical discourse in both decidedly different and remarkably similar ways. For white Americans, history and historical writing entailed a nationalistic reading and rendering of the nascent national narrative trumpeting the core values of “liberty, democracy and individualism.” Early historical writers drew from Enlightenment concepts such as essence history, an attempt to identify the forces which defined human society, history as progress, and the use of literary devices in historical writing. From European Romanticism they borrowed the concept of historicism, which meant that change could be explained by examining history rather than the philosophy of science, and privileged religion and God as an operative force in human affairs. This unique blend of philosophical and literary elements would come to define the writing of history in the Early Republic. Although the thematic content of historical discourse differed for the majority and minority communities, the method was strikingly similar and reflective of their grounding in Euro-American modes of thought. Both black and white writers were interested in the past, whether in the form of presenting a more complete portrait of black contributions in classical antiquity or, for white writers, promoting classical Republicanism, a celebration and Roman and Greek social, cultural, and governing structures. Both traditions also emphasized spirituality as operative forces in history, and both promoted progress and were intensely nationalistic—convinced of their place in the grand scheme of universal developments—in presenting what were deemed as historical truths. Since a line of clear demarcation between literature and history did not

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exist, black and white intellectuals, orators, conventioneers, and columnists, used literary devices extensively in their historical production.3

In addition to thematic and methodological concerns, the intellectual terrain of the Early Republic was as contentious and contested as it was fertile and fruitful ground for planting the seeds of historical discourse. The terrain’s contestation, for blacks, emanated from the prevalence of racism and prejudice against African Americans which led to their enslavement in the South and nominally free status in the North. The intellectual terrain’s fertile nature emanated from the fact that for blacks and whites, the Early Republic witnessed what Lewis Perry has termed the “reorganization of intellectual life.” Concomitant to the quest for and expansion of literacy represented by the oft-quoted adage, “knowledge is power,” changing technologies in the modes of knowledge acquisition led to the explosion of print media such as newspapers, the penny press, and chapbooks—inexpensively bound pamphlets that were literally “read to shreds.” Literacy, moreso than other ideas in American life and thought, was trumpeted as the key to social, political, and economic power.4


As a result of this "reorganization of intellectual life," blacks, who were largely cut off from the founts of intellectual knowledge and circumscribed in their access to public education, managed to train a ministerial and intellectual class by relying on private liberal arts colleges and seminaries, by taking advantage of educational opportunities abroad, and by promoting self-help and communal initiatives. These efforts allowed African Americans to construct a viable intellectual infrastructure consisting of newspapers, conventions, literary and historical societies, black oratory, and historical writing.5

In an atmosphere of change, black intellectuals, like their white counterparts, understood that the creation of a historical tradition was essential to their viability in America and the world; history among blacks served precisely the same purpose as it did among whites: to elucidate the past, present, and future condition of the group. History, then, for African Americans, was not simply an intellectual tool but it had communal resonance, the ability to explicate the essence of African-American existence in the United States. Thus, history's communal resonance made it more than an exercise in antiquarianism, but a collective set of stories, symbols, and understandings which free black communities could draw upon for inspiration, courage and guidance for the

protracted battle against slavery in the South and proscription and charges of intellectual inferiority in the North.

This chapter, then, examines the development of history and historical consciousness in the African-American community from the Early Republic up to 1836. This was a period defined by a shift from the historical focus on Providence to a nationalist teleology as the dominant rationale for historical production, and a period which witnessed the creation of a discernible intellectual apparatus among African Americans. The periodization for the chapter concretely links the creation of the American narrative of progress and exceptionalism with the rise of a counternarrative based on these concepts although differing in thematic emphasis. Issues such as the black role in classical antiquity, the slave trade, slavery, and the achievements of African Americans in the Early Republic, took precedence in the writings and speeches of black intellectuals, themes that were largely ignored in the national narrative, which, at best, relegated African-Americans to the periphery of the nation’s social and intellectual life. At worst, mainstream constructions rendered African Americans devoid of history; Africa, the ancestral home of African Americans, became “the dark continent”; and slavery was a necessary evil to be tolerated in order to lift Africans out of their barbarism and into the light of Christian civilization. My designation counternarrative, then, speaks to the oppositional and transformative possibilities of African-American historical discourse, but is not offered at the expense of African-American history’s deep connection to Euro-American historical

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discourse. The African-American "counternarrative" subverted and expanded, but at the same time, affirmed the national narrative by linking true progress and exceptionalism to the Republic's ability to guarantee its benefits to all citizens.  

To delineate the contours of the African-American historical narrative, this chapter examines the sites in which historical discourse appeared in the Early Republic, beginning with black institutions—the press, the convention movement, and literary and historical societies. It examines the rich rhetorical and oratorical tradition developed by blacks in the early Republic, and concludes with an analysis of these themes in African-American historical writing using the work of David Walker. Each of these areas of intellectual activity and production provide myriad insights into the creation of an African-American historical discourse while also sketching the vistas of an historical tradition which would animate black intellectual life in untold ways in the Early Republic and the antebellum periods.

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Black Institutional Spaces and Historical Consciousness

As numerous historians have shown, institutional formation in various African-American communities between 1789 and 1830 was one of the most important developments of this period. Beginning with the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1789, fraternal organizations such as the Prince Hall Masons, the black press, numerous self-help and benevolent societies designed to provide mutual aid and assistance to fledgling black communities in Northern cities, African Americans were posited to take advantage of the myriad opportunities for social, economic and intellectual advancement in the Early Republic and antebellum period.

In more instances than not, institutional formation was linked to antislavery agitation and often contained an intellectual, especially historical, component. Black newspapers, the convention movement, black oratory, and literary and historical societies often appealed to history to make specific points about the black predicament in the United States, especially to appeal for justice, a classic use of the jeremiad. The interrogation of these institutional sites for their historical meanings takes us beyond simply the superficial meanings of these realities and forces us to concretely link institutional and intellectual sites of production. In doing so, we are better positioned to understand the importance of institutional sites for the production of historical understanding among African Americans.

Prior to the inauguration of the black press in 1827, a number of newspapers existed which presented a wealth of assessments of the black condition in world history prior to the advent of the European Age of Discovery in the fifteenth century. Newspapers such as Benjamin Lundy’s Genius of Universal Emancipation, founded in 1825, headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, and the African Repository, the official journal of
the American Colonization Society, presented Africa in a fairly positive light. The Genius of Universal Emancipation reprinted articles from the African Repository. The African Repository, ostensibly a colonization newspaper, was caught in a double-bind. On one hand, the paper sought to promote emigration from the United States to West Africa, a sinister scheme whose underlying rationale was to rid the country of free blacks. But on the other hand, in order to accomplish the goal of encouraging immigration, Africa, the benighted continent, was presented in a positive light. These early depictions demonstrated the complexity of the debate over African-American citizenship.  

Despite the ambivalence of the early abolitionist and colonizationist press on African history and the proper presentation of the continent’s relationship with the United States, the early black press utilized history as an important component in the struggle for civil and political rights. Freedom’s Journal, founded in 1827 by Samuel Cornish, a Presbyterian minister, and John Russwurm, the first African American to graduate from Bowdoin College, took the lead in this important endeavor. Drawing on a wealth of black experience as contributors to the social, political, and intellectual life of the New Republic, Freedom’s Journal provided the first glimpse of the contours of historical discourse. The early issues of Freedom’s Journal and to a lesser extent its successor, The Rights of All, featured articles on a wide variety of historical topics. The coverage included assessments of the development of Haiti in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution in 1791 (discussed at length in Chapter 3), excerpts from travel literature on African history, and articles extolling the importance of education, literacy, and literary attainment among African Americans.

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8 For an assessment of the role of the African Repository on historical presentations of Africa, see Peter Hinks, To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Slave Resistance in the Antebellum South (State College: Penn State University Press, 1996), 181-195.

9 For information on various themes and issues discussed in antebellum newspapers,
Featured articles also counteracted the negative characterizations of Africa by white Americans. These articles presented a history of origins. Origins history used ancient history and classical lore to explain or justify certain events. The liberal excerpting and re-publication of large portions of works, and the use of theological sources such as the Bible as the most important basis for factual information, were common in Euro-American as well as African-American historical production. This is not surprising given the nonexistence of copyright laws and the focus in higher education on ancient rather than modern history. Moreover, origins history was also influenced by the rise of classical Republicanism—a desire on the part of many adherents of Republicanism to revive classical culture and history.10


The black press utilized the study of classical culture and history in rectifying stereotypes and misperceptions concerning Africa. An excerpt in Freedom’s Journal, drawn from the work of the Haitian scholar Baron De Vastey entitled “Africa,” challenged the persistent myth of African inferiority. “The enemies of Africa wish to persuade the world that for five out of the six thousand years that the world has existed, Africa has been long sunk in barbarism. Have they forgotten that Africa was the cradle of the arts and sciences. If they pretend to forget this, it becomes our duty to remind them of it.” The author also asserted that “everybody knows that the Greeks, so celebrated for the polish of their manners, and the refinement of their taste were in a state of the grossest ignorance and barbarity, living like the beasts upon herbs and acorns until civilized by Egypt.” The article concluded with a comparison of origins designed to equalize the relationship between African Americans and whites. “These unworthy descendants of Japeth forgetful of their own history calumniate their brethren and reproach them with that very state of ignorance and barbarity in which they were plunged upwards of five thousand years.”

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Another article entitled, “Observations of the History of the Negro Race,” excerpted from the African Repository, praised the achievements of Africans in antiquity. The author boldly asserted that the ancient Egyptians were black, and this fact should controvert the idea that Africa offered nothing to modern civilization. The author also lamented that descendants of a people “to whom the Greeks were indebted for their arts, their learning and even their religion, should have been at that time in a dark and prostrate condition in the bosom of a country calling itself Christian.” This sentiment was seconded by Count Volney whose Ruins of Empires offered an assessment of ancient empires. Volney voiced his moral indignation regarding the treatment of African Americans, claiming they had bequeathed to the world, language.12

When Freedom’s Journal ceased publication in 1829, its successor Rights of All continued to emphasize the importance of intellectual and historical pursuits among African Americans. The paper featured a regular column entitled the “Literary

433-470, and David Swift, Black Prophets of Justice, Activist Clergy Before the Civil War (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 47-112. Also see Frankie Hutton, The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 6-9. Several early issues of Freedom’s Journal, featured historical overviews of the life of the Haitian Revolution’s leader Toussaint L’Ouverture. These articles were copied from the British Quarterly Review. The newspaper sought to present L’Ouverture not only as a capable general and diplomat, but as a model for all African Americans. “The subsequent transactions in that Island have presented the most incontrovertible proofs, that the negro is not, in general wanting in the higher qualifications of the mind.” Moreover, as the anonymous author suggests, “the race would not be found deficient in hearts pregnant with heroic energies, and hands capable of wielding the sword of war, or swaying the rod of empire. We cannot better exemplify these remarks than by copying into our paper the following sketch of Toussaint L’Ouverture. biographical sketches of Toussaint L’Ouverture appeared in Freedom’s Journal, May 4, 11, and 14, 1827. Also see “Hayti,” North American Review 12 “Observations on the History of the Negro Race,” Freedom’s Journal, December 12, 1828. Most of this article was actually excerpted from The African Repository entitled “Observations,” January 1825.
Department.” In an 1829 installment, the column’s purpose was outlined: “It is much desired that the colored population of our country should become more acquainted with men and things, some knowledge of the history of nations, the geography of countries and their moral and physical resources is necessary in exciting in any people principles of enterprise and virtuous ambition.” Another installment boasted “a few years ago our most privileged men were but babes in learning. We now can boast our classical scholars. To such this paper offers a field of exhibition and usefulness.”

The concrete manifestation of interest in classicism, the study and veneration of classical antiquity, which was an integral part of historical discourse was manifested through the publication of information about biblical cities or sacred antiquities and geography. For black intellectuals the classical and biblical worlds, already overlapping, were merged in ways beneficial to the fullest explication of the African past and the American present. In 1829, in its Literary and Scientific Department, Rights of All

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featured a column on Babylon, a feature common in subsequent publications by Samuel Cornish. Information on cities from the Bible or classical antiquity heightened reader interest in historical names and places. It also served as a practical companion in augmenting understanding of the Bible. For nineteenth-century intellectuals, knowledge of ancient history was deemed essential. It not only demonstrated the refinement of African-American scholars, but served to provide African Americans with a history anterior to slavery.¹⁵

Another institutional center of history was the Negro Convention movement. Largely black controlled and directed, these conventions met between 1830 and 1864 to discuss a wide range of issues which affected African Americans. A substantial component of the early convention agenda between 1830 and 1836 was devoted to issues of citizenship and to generating support for community institutions such as the press and schools. In short, conventioneers coupled political progress with educational attainment, and history played an important role. Expressing a firm belief in the United States Constitution and in the pronouncements of the Declaration of Independence, namely the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, African Americans staked their citizenship rights on such declarations. This point is demonstrated by the recommendation that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution be read at the opening of each convention. For black conventioneers, these two documents made explicit what ought to have been the status of blacks in America. Richard Allen, Founder and Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, stated the case succinctly: “Viewing these as incontrovertible facts, we have been led to the following conclusions; that our forlorn and

¹⁵ See Rights of All, October 19, 1829. For information on American interest in classical antiquity, especially Egyptian antiquities, see John T. Irwin, American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
deplorable situation earnestly and loudly demand of us to devise and pursue all legal means for the speedy elevation of ourselves and brethren to the scale and standing of men." 16

Citizenship rights were meaningless without a viable press and the presence of educational institutions. Therefore, the convention movement encouraged the active support of abolitionist newspapers such as Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation* and William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*. A lack of educational opportunities was cited as one of the reasons African Americans were viewed with disdain by white Americans. As John Bowers, President of the First Annual Convention of the Free People of Color, noted, blacks have been “kept at a distance from those sources of knowledge which abound in civilized and enlightened communities.” Attempts to rectify this situation led to a proposal for the establishment of a black college in New Haven, Connecticut in 1831. New Haven was chosen as a potential site for the new college because of the beauty of the site and its extensive involvement in the West Indian sugar trade which might prompt wealthy Afro-Caribbean planters to send their sons to the college for education. The Convention made plans to raise $20,000 and to appoint an interracial trustee board consisting of four blacks and three whites. By 1832, as opposition mounted from New Haven's white community, the plan to establish a college there was abandoned. The delegates were, however, determined to find another location. “We are determined to present to another portion of the country not far distant, and at no very remote period,

the opportunity of gaining for them the character of a truly philantrophic spirit, and of retrieving the character of the country, by the disreputable proceedings of New Haven.”

The New Haven debacle not only demonstrated the intransigence of whites in blocking black efforts to elevate themselves, but it also shows black determination to take an active role in changing the educational status of the community and to promote classical education among blacks in this period. While manual and training schools could instruct blacks in the “arts of life,” a classical education was more suited to the loftier attainments of life. It was believed that a classical education “promote[d] geniuses and cause[d] man to soar up to those high intellectual enjoyments and acquirements which places them in a situation to shed upon a country and a people, that scientific grandeur which is imperishable by time, and drowsins in oblivion’s cup their moral degradation.” Blacks were also encouraged to be diligent, and to promote educational attainment throughout the North. This support and encouragement also extended to whites who supported the work of the convention movement. In 1832 and 1833, the convention delegates commended the work of Simon S. Jocelyn (a white minister in New Haven and delegate to the convention), to establish schools, encourage recitations, and sponsor mental competitions in New Haven and in other parts of New England.

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17 For the original proposal to fund a college in New Haven, Connecticut, see Minutes of the First Annual Convention of the People of Color, Held By Adjournments in the City of Philadelphia, From the Sixth to the Eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831. Philadelphia, 1831), 6-7.

18 According to the convention notes for the afternoon of June 11, 1832, the “Rev Simon Jocelyn of New Haven, then gave an elaborate history of the number of colored schools, the number of scholars, and a general description of the state of improvement among them. He read compositions of young men from New York, remarkable for their chasteness of conception and expression. He spoke fervently and affectionately to be derived by us, from learning, temperance, industry and frugality, and seriously admonished us, to recommend to our brethren, by precept and example, to the extent in our power, their advancement in the above virtues, and to particularly inculcate the early education of our children. He also adverted to the various proceedings in relation to the
Interest in history was a natural outgrowth of the political, educational, and intellectual concerns of the convention delegates. History’s role in the black convention movement was two-pronged: first, it allowed the delegates some means of critiquing the failings of the Republic, and, second, it instilled pride, bolstered self-esteem, and ratified the work of the convention movement. One of the earliest references to history appeared in the 1832 Conventional Address to the attendees. In addition to stressing the importance of morality and temperance, the words of the address also reminded African Americans that “moral and intellectual strength” were the only ways to garner the respect of civilized nations. For possessing these qualities would demonstrate to the world, “all that illustrious worth, which was once possessed by the Egyptians, and slept for ages, has now arisen in their descendants, the inhabitants of the new world.”

Perhaps the most telling demonstration of the importance of history in the early convention movement was the proposal of John M. Vashon, a delegate from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and father of George B. Vashon, newspaper correspondent, lawyer, and poet, to print 3000 copies of “Andrew Jackson Speech to the Black Citizens of Louisiana the War of 1812,” and the proclamation of Jackson’s aide-de-camp Thomas Butler. While Vashon was not successful in persuading the convention to subsidize the printing of 3000 copies of the proclamations, probably due to limited funds, he printed 300 copies instead and the committee thanked him. Vashon’s interest in the proclamations sparked others’ contemplation.
interest in the speeches as an indicator of African-American contributions to the nation. The 1832 Conventional Address noted that African Americans served the United States in every capacity from “the menial to the soldier.” Not only did their forefathers shed blood in the war of independence, they also bore arms in the War of 1812; the proclamations served as testaments to their valorous services.\(^\text{20}\)

Andrew Jackson’s “Address to the Black Citizens of Louisiana” was an attempt to recruit black soldiers to participate in the War of 1812. At several points in the speech Jackson refers to these men as “sons of freedom” and “as Americans.” He also accorded them equal status with white soldiers by offering them the same pay of one-hundred-sixty-four dollars and one-hundred-sixty acres of land. Butler’s proclamation to the free people of color offered the same laudatory assessment of the performance of black troops in battle. Both of these documents, not only reified black claims to citizenship, but they also provided a historical framework by which to assess black contributions to the nation\(^\text{21}\)

By 1834, it was clear that the convention recognized the importance of the proclamations of Jackson and Butler, and the committee on publication was authorized to print them in the convention’s minutes. Thereafter, they were widely reprinted in speeches, public orations, and subsequent historical studies. It was probably the most widely reprinted set of proclamations in the antebellum period. Hosea Easton, one of the

\(^{20}\) For information on the 1832 Conventional address, see Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in These United States, Held By Adjournments in the City of Philadelphia, From the 4th to the 13th of June Inclusive, 1832. (Philadelphia, 1832), 35.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 30-31. Both Andrew Jackson’s and Thomas Butler’s Proclamation to the Free People of Color were printed in the Minutes of the Negro Convention in 1834. See, Minutes of the fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in the United States Held By Adjournments in the Asbury Church, New York From the 2d to the 12th of June Inclusive, 1834, 21-24.
most prominent participants, between 1830 and 1837, reprinted both proclamations in his landmark study, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and the Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People* (1837).22

Also in 1834, the delegates adopted a "Declaration of Sentiment" that aimed to provide a comprehensive and coherent overview of the principles underlying the Negro Convention movement. It appeared as a preamble to the convention's proceedings in 1834 and 1835 and was an important statement of African-American determination and perseverance in the face of adversity. While it sought to clarify the position of blacks in the convention movement, it also referenced sacred and secular history to authorize its claims. The primary author of the document was William Whipper, businessman,abolitionist, and a prominent member of the convention movement. He was the only man to attend every convention from 1831 to 1835. According to the *Colored American*, Whipper, a longtime advocate for the rights of African Americans, was deeply distraught over their plight when he arrived in Philadelphia from Columbia, South Carolina in 1834. Unwilling to participate in the festive celebrations of the other delegates, Whipper singlemindedly devoted himself to writing the "Declaration of Sentiment." The author of the report noted:

"Never," said he to the writer, "did I have such views of the condition of my people--never did I feel as I did then. In this mood I began my work; I would write till oppressed with my feelings--I could write no more. Then, after a short interval, I would try again; and in this way I went on till I completed it. I did not leave my task until it was done and if," he added, modestly, "there is any merit in what I wrote, it is rather owing to the excited state of mind I was in at the time, than to any other cause. Often in the progress of his labors, the sheet was wet with his tears."23

22 The proclamations were also reprinted in the *Colored American*. See Gen Jackson's First and Second Address to the People of Color,"*Colored American*, March 4, 1837.
The centrality of history's importance in black activism is evident in the preamble's opening declaration: "That this convention earnestly deplores the depressed condition of the colored population of the United States, and they have in vain searched the history of nations to find a parallel." Furthermore, this declaration also utilized conventional nineteenth-century methodological approaches to historical presentation. These included juxtaposing the African past with the African-American present—an appeal to origins history and the teleological approach to history. For these writers, African Americans could lay claim to an illustrious past for their "excellence of attainment in the arts, literature and science stood before the world unrivaled." Consequently, the then current condition of African Americans was due less to inferiority, or a lack of capability than to slavery and prejudice. The committee as a whole found it deplorable that "the descendants of an ancestry once enrolled in the history of fame, whose glittering monuments stood forth as beacons, disseminating light and knowledge to the utmost parts of the world,

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23 For the correspondent's comments and a reprint of the "Declaration of Sentiment," see "A Noble Document," The Colored American, June 9, 1838. Whipper also reprinted the "Declaration" and the program of the 1834 meeting in the National Reformer. See "Declaration of Sentiment," National Reformer, September 1838. Whipper's allusions to Africa may have been directly linked to his eulogy of the British abolitionist William Wilberforce. In the eulogy, Whipper noted the mournful state of the African continent using it to teach an important lesson about divine providence and redemption: "The most pleasing history that can command our attention is that which depicts the ancient splendour of Africa, when the sunbeams of science and civilization were illumining that vast continent, and imparting their benign influence to the then dark and barbarous regions of the world. The most horrible, that which exhibits her downfall, carrying with it such heart-rending consequences that human nature sickens at the recital, and a Christian world might well exhibit her lamentations in mourning and regret that she could point either to the history of nations, or to that quarter of the globe that would prove that she once existed." See William Whipper, Eulogy of William Wilberforce, Esq. Delivered at the Request of the People of Color of Philadelphia in the Second African Presbyterian Church on the Eighth Day of December, 1833 (1833) in BAP, Reel 1.
[are] reduced to such degrading servitude as that under which we labour from the effect of American slavery and American prejudice.”

The “Declaration of Sentiment” not only lamented the change in African status as compared with classical antiquity, but also promoted African-American exceptionalism as a viable explanation for the problem of American slavery and prejudice. Given the fact that African Americans were a people whose “country had been pillaged, parents stolen, nine generations of which have been wasted by the oppressive cruelty of the nation,” it necessarily followed that they, like no other ethnic or racial group, deserved Divine intervention. This divine intervention would “aid them in removing the unqualified system of tyranny and oppression under which human beings ever groaned.” Exceptionalism characterized America, positively. Despite the inequities in American life, the authors celebrated America’s favorable climate, and the freedom of press and speech.

The convention received Whipper’s war against tyranny favorably. The “Declaration of Sentiment,” noted that despite the “downfall of Africa from her ancient pride and splendour” the descendants of Africans could play an important redemptive role in American life. Echoing the rhetoric of David Walker, the “Declaration of Sentiment” also posited the importance of the African American role in promoting “the redemption of the world.” The duty of “redeeming of the world” included “raising a moral flag,”

“promoting sound morality,” and encouraging education, temperance, and economy. African Americans could play substantial roles in laying a firm foundation for the establishment of true Christianity in the United States. The moral war that these convention delegates proposed was not for the faint-hearted or wayward, but for those who understood that “whether we live to witness its completion, or die in anticipation of its glorious results, that it has already committed to the friends of liberty and Christianity throughout the world, and to them we look for final consummation.” The “Declaration of Sentiment,” summarized the major goals of the convention movement: the quest for expanded citizenship rights, the growth and long term maintenance of communal organizations such as the press and schools, and the importance of history as an arbiter of the past, present, and future.

A Clarion Call: Black Oratory and History

In similar ways to the convention movement, black oratory facilitated African-American access to the public sphere. Oratory, a staple of intellectual performance in the early republic, provided demonstrable proof of African-American intellectual prowess. Rather than the more restrained and pontifical air of the conventions, oratory relied on a dignified and eloquent yet emotional and engaged interaction with wider Euro-American and African-American publics. This emotional engagement, then, cast history in a much more cosmopolitan and catholic light. The fact that these activities occurred in major Northern cities already home to numerous black institutions made their impact even more compelling.

26 “Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the People of Color in the United States,” (1835), 28.
27 Ibid., 28.
In April 1817, four months after the establishment of the American Colonization Society, and three months after the eventful meeting of Philadelphia’s black community at Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to denounce the objects and aims of the colonization scheme, Jacob Oson, “a descendant of Africa,” addressed the free African populations of New Haven and New York. His address, “A Search for Truth or An Inquiry for the Origin of the African Nation,” much like the intense debates over colonization, was an attempt to clarify the relationship between the descendants of Africa and American society and, more importantly, to the evolution of Western civilization. Not only did Oson delineate the relationship between Africa and the West, but he also produced one of the earliest examples of African-American historical oratory. “My thoughts run on my people and nation,” said Oson. “I wish to inquire, who was our common Father, and from whom we sprang. And whether our ancestors were such a vile ignorant race of beings, as we, their descendants, are considered to be.” Searching for answers to these questions was a difficult task, let alone presenting evidence which refuted the endemic belief that Africans were a separate branch of the human family, were barbarous and uncivilized, and, due to their present position in slavery, were not worthy of the benefits of citizenship. Oson did not entertain wishful or fanciful notions regarding the difficulties of his inquiry. He wrote instead: “I well know that the task is arduous to inquire into this subject, on account of our opposers; but ought I to give up the inquiry after Truth on this account? Certainly not.”

Oson’s means of challenging his “opposers” was to present a rational, commonsense overview of African accomplishments based on sacred and secular history.

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28 Jacob Oson, A Descendant of Africa, A Search for Truth; or, An Inquiry for the Origin of the African Nation: An Address Delivered at New Haven in March, and at New York in April, 1817 (New York: Published for, and by the request of Christopher Rush, a descendant of Africa, 1817), 4
Oson, like most orators and writers of his day, was familiar with a number of classical works including Herodotus's *Histories* and Flavius Josephus’s *Antiquities*, and In addition to examinations of history, Oson incorporated analogies and Divine Providence into his address. He found that “every Christianized nation on earth is indebted to Africa for science, both religious and moral?” Not only were Africans associated with all of the Christian Patriarchs and matriarchs from Abraham to Jesus Christ, but Africa was also their a place of refuge. According to Oson, the Bible “speaks more of our nation and land, than of any other land or people, except the Israelites who wrote it.”

In profane (secular) history, Oson found numerous references to African contributions to the growth and expansion of Western civilization. Quoting Josephus and Herodotus, Oson showed that the “race of Ham was not so barbarous and ignorant as they have been represented.” The work of these authorities demonstrated that Egypt and Nubia were the earliest seats of the arts and sciences, and that Africa also boasted a number of distinguished writers, poets, church officials, and military leaders such as Divinius, Turtulian, Cyprian, Scipio Africanius, St. Augustine, and Hannibal. Based on the historical record, Oson concluded that the charge that “the descendants of Africans” were vile and vulgar was “a false representation.”

Using the literary technique of analogy, Oson compared the plight of African Americans with the characteristics and features of gardens and enclosures, gold and silver, and animals such as the lion and tiger. One can surmise that each of these analogies had some relationship to either American slavery or the African landscape. In terms of gardens and enclosures, their radiance and beauty are dependent on proper care. This is a


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lesson that was understood in the South where thousands of slaves were forced to perform
dehumanizing labor. If Africans are suited to cultivate the cotton field than why shouldn’t
they cultivate their minds also? As a garden grows to weeds without care, so to “can a
nation being enslaved in America for three hundred years--trodden under foot and
considered as the offscouring of the earth-- and taught nothing except submission and hard
labour....” Gold and silver, the economic basis of the slave trade, was also related to
Africans. Oson uses the gold and silver analogy to point out the conflictual roles of the
church--on one hand, an arbiter of good and evil, but on the other hand, a major financier
of the slave trade. “Had the Christian nations been as ambitious to train up our minds to
religion and piety as they were to enslave and live upon their ill-gotten wealth by injustice
and cruelty, our minds would never have been degraded as they are represented to be.”31

The use of the Lion and the Tiger, two important symbols in African cosmology,
indicated a belief that Africans had some of their qualities and characteristics. The Lion
was characterized as majestic while the tiger was strong and fast. Oson spoke with
certainty in ascribing the majesty of the Lion to African Americans. “Let his majesty the
Lion be unbound, and he will presume his former prerogative: so let us be emancipated
from our encumbrances, and then, where ignorance and darkness reigns, religion and true
science would abound.” As Oson noted, the cage was not a suitable place to test the
strength and the agility of the tiger.32

Despite the abuses and mistreatment suffered by African Americans, there was
hope. Oson praised the abolition of slavery in New England. He hoped that the spirit of
abolition would spread into the slaveholding South. While human beings did control some

31 Ibid., 7-8
32 Ibid., 7-8.
aspects of their environment, in Oson’s mind, God or Divine Providence was a more potent force in directing African-American destiny. Referring to the hardships of African Americans, Oson stated that, “All this God hath permitted, but he hath said that he would heal us.” Despite “tarnish and neglect,” his belief that Africans possessed an inner strength coupled with the same spirit that caused their ancestors to make contributions to the evolution of Western civilization, make his statements even more poignant. Oson, relying on biblical prophecy, was so sure of African-American redemption that he predicted that God would restore Africa to its former state before restoring Israel:

My opinion is that Africa must be restored before the Jews, for in the day shall Israel be the third with us, and God shall say blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria, the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance; for they shall cry unto the Lord on account of the oppressors, and he will send us a Saviour, and a great one; and he shall deliver us. He has smitten us, but we shall return unto the Lord. He will be entreated of us, and will heal us.33

Oson’s “Search for Truth or Inquiry for the Origin of the African Nation,” displayed all the qualities and characteristics of subsequent historical discourse in the African-American community. The address was given in two abolitionist strongholds, New York and New Haven; it utilized the Bible and classical works as the primary sources for information regarding the contributions of Africans in the ancient world; it featured the use of analogies and Divine Providence as an operative agent in determining the future prospects of African Americans; it was subsidized by Christopher Rush, a young African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister, who would later play a prominent role in building the church; and most important, it affirmed that African Americans understood the role history could play in demonstrating their fitness as participants in the Republic.34

33 Ibid., 11
34 An excellent study of the development of the historiography of decline appears in Wilson Jeremiah Moses’s Afrotopia: The Roots of Popular African American History, 44-95.
Despite the lack of defined black presence in abolitionism until the late 1830s, African-American intellectuals continued to utilize history to instill pride and confront racism. Most often, these intellectuals used significant celebrations, and addresses before literary and historical societies to remind their audiences of the importance of history and its multifaceted uses in the struggle for full citizenship rights. In 1831, in the first annual celebration of the fourth anniversary of the abolition of slavery in New York state, Owen Nickens, a minister and educator from Virginia who settled in Cincinnati, Ohio and started a school for black youth, spoke before a crowd of 70 persons in a tavern four miles from the city. Nickens trumpeted the joys of freedom and liberty, and he pointed out that while the United States had fought hard to preserve its liberties against a tyrannical mother country, England, and the “sons of Columbia are exulting in their strength and vigor of their political liberties,” this was not the case for the “sons of Ethiopia” who were feeling “all the sad evils of slavery and oppression.”

Nickens pointed out that the denial of basic freedoms to African Americans had gone on too long. “How long” queried Nickens, “has the Stygean monster been ploughing the watery deep, to touch on the darkened shores of Africa, like some beast of prey, murdering and slaughtering the sable sons of Africa of the torrid zone?” For Nickens, the ultimate hypocrisy of this situation was that Christians sold Africans in the ports of a Christian land: “O cruel injustice! How long shall thy sons, O Africa be sold in the market like the beasts of the stall.” This “accumulated contempt and disdain of pride,”

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placed the African American community in a wretched state.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite the recitation of a litany of abuses that were heaped upon blacks in America, Nickens exhorted blacks to challenge their present condition and elevate themselves. To accomplish this task, Nickens invoked the historical exploits of persons of African descent, and those who had a significant impact on the course of western civilization. In addition to the oft-quoted phrase that Africa was the birthplace of the arts and sciences, Nickens noted that the idea of government had emerged among the Egyptians. “From our royal fathers in the land of Egypt, the nations of the earth have learned the policy and rules of political government, which render life and people happy.” African notables such as Hamilcar, Hannibal, and Cleopatra were cited as examples of African greatness. Blacks in the ancient world not only built the pyramids, but the fact that their tips pointed towards heaven attested to “the royal grandeur of their founders.”\textsuperscript{37}

Featured prominently in Nickens’ speech was the concept of Divine Providence. He prophesied the redemption of Africa and noted that the fact that “light, science and civilization and glory,” were returning boded well for the continent. These developments, in Nickens mind, meant that “Ethiopia was stretching forth its hand to God.” Through God’s presence, peace and good would transplant weeping and destruction. The world would be filled with light and glory. Nickens was not alone in using history to establish and validate claims of African American redemption and ultimate uplift, other orators shared this perspective.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} See “Celebration in Cincinnati,” \textit{Liberator}, July 30, 1831.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., \textit{Liberator}, July 30, 1831.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., July 30, 1831
In 1833, Maria Stewart, self-taught orator, exhorter and preacher, in “An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall in Boston,” encouraged African-American men to agitate for “African rights and liberty.” Acclaimed as the first African-American woman to speak in public, Stewart linked the attainment of manhood rights and history: “When I cast my eyes on the long list of illustrious names that are enrolled on the bright annals of fame among the whites, I turn my eyes within, and ask my thoughts. “Where are the names of our illustrious ones?” For Stewart, awareness of history was an important step in changing the condition of the race. By examining history, African Americans would see that “History informs us that we sprung from one of the most learned nations of the whole earth--from the seat, if not the parent of science; yes, poor despised Africa was once the resort of sages and legislators of other nations, was esteemed the school of learning, and the most illustrious men in Greece and Rome flocked thither for instruction.” By focusing on secular history rather than innate inferiority, or the lack of illustrious origins, Stewart attributed the present condition of blacks to historical circumstances of “gross sins and abominations that provoked the Almighty to frown heavily upon us and give glory to others.” The notion of biblical transgressions rather than biological inferiority as a reason for slavery is another constant theme of this period. Viewing the Bible as literal, biblical transgressions play an important role in African-American discourse, and in the utilization of history. As a result of these influences, history was also teleological--offering a predestined outcome that affirmed the relative power of Africa. Stewart noted that “a promise is left us, Ethiopia shall again stretch forth her hands unto God.”

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39 See Maria Stewart, “An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall in Boston, February 27, 1833,” The Liberator, April 27 and May 4, 1833. For information on the role of women in combating stereotypes and constructing public and private discourse, see Hazel Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 40-61.
The juxtaposition of modern and biblical cities was another important component of antebellum history. Blending a biblical and jeremiad approach, Stewart skillfully utilized both ancient and biblical imagery to make a case for African manhood rights. For example, she compared America with the ancient city of Babylon for "she is indeed a seller of slaves and the souls of men; she has put them completely beneath her feet and she means to keep them there." By linking America to Babylon, Stewart affirmed a jeremiad vision of ultimate African redemption. It placed America within cyclical conceptions of history prevalent in the 18th-century. The logic followed that if Babylon was once great, yet transgressed the will of God, could America escape this fate? Given the omnipresent and omniscient conceptualization of God and the literal interpretation of the Bible, it followed that America would share Babylon's fate. Stewart affirmed her teleological outlook by stating: "Powerful sons and daughters of Africa will shortly arise, who will put down vice and immortality amongst us and declare by Him that sitteth upon the throne, that they will have their rights." In this statement, Stewart saw uplift as both an internal and external process. It emanated from the efforts of African Americans to endorse spirituality and righteousness, but was also dependent on the amelioration of white prejudice and racism. Through its structure and prescriptive plan for African Americans, Stewart's speech affirmed the centrality of history and particular uses of history within black activism during the antebellum period.  

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40 See Maria Stewart, "An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall." For biographical information on Stewart, see Gerda Lerner, ed., Black Women in White America: A Documentary History (New York: Random House, 1973), 83. For a complete reprint of her speeches, see Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Presented to the First African Baptist Church & Society (Boston: Published by the Friends of Virtue and Freedom, 1835). For an assessment of Stewart's work in abolitionism, see Carla L. Peterson, "Doers of the Word:" African American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880), 56-76. Also see Dorothy Sterling, ed., We Are Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984). Wilson Jeremiah Moses also acknowledges that Stewart's work has certain jeremiad qualities in it but is quite selective and he opens his second chapter in the 1850's. See Moses, Black Messiahs and Uncle
“Dreaded Eloquence;” African-American Literary and Historical Societies

The cumulative effect of efforts for the redemption, uplift, and the spread of literacy among African Americans found its greatest expression in the formation of literary and historical societies. According to the foremost historian of these early societies, Dorothy Porter Wesley, the reasons these societies were organized related to the “stimulation of reading and spreading of useful knowledge by providing libraries and reading rooms, the encouragement of expressed literary efforts by providing audiences as critics and channels for publication for their literary productions and the training of future orators and leaders by means of debates.” Porter-Wesley noted, these societies played an important role in the promotion of literacy and culture among African Americans.41

The sheer number and achievements of black literary and historical societies led Elizabeth McHenry to characterize African-American success in acquiring literacy in the face of white antipathy and racism as “dreaded eloquence.” In an historical moment characterized by chattel slavery in the South and only nominal freedom in the North, acquisition of literacy was a difficult achievement. Among free African Americans, the quest for literacy influenced both class formation and the nature of activism. In northeastern cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, black intellectuals organized literary and historical societies, augment educational opportunities, and promote the study of classical authors and history. In most cases, these societies served as appendages of the intellectual apparatus in the black community.42

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Of all free black communities, Philadelphia had the largest proportion of literary and historical societies. The city, with one of the largest concentrations of free blacks besides New York, was the center of the nation's political--during the Revolutionary period--artistic and cultural life as well as a bastion of antislavery agitation. According to the chronicler Joseph Wilson, "among no people, in proportion to their means and advantages, is the pursuit of knowledge more honored than among the colored people of Philadelphia. The exalted standard in the world of letters, which characterizes the favored class, is by then seconded to the utmost extent in their power." Some of the most prominent literary and historical societies in Philadelphia included the Reading Room society (1828), the Female Literary Association of Philadelphia (1832), and the Minerva Literary Association (1834). Each of these societies served as a repository for a collection of books on a wide variety of philosophical and historical themes.43

The earliest of these societies, The Reading Room Society, stressed both mental and moral qualifications as a condition of admittance to the society. All monies beyond expenses were used for the purchase of books procured by the society's librarian. The Colored Reading Society of Pennsylvania was formed in 1833 with a total membership of nine. By 1836, the membership had increased so dramatically that the group applied for an act of incorporation from the Pennsylvania legislature. The society's object was the establishment of a library useful to the society's members as well as the larger community. A reading program and debate schedule were also provided by the group. By 1838, the library contained 600 books and the congregation had 150 members.44

43 See Joseph Wilson, Sketches of the higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia by a Southerner (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Thompson Printers, 1841), 91.
44 For information on the Philadelphia Library of Colored Persons, see Joseph Wilson, Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia (Philadelphia:
The Female Literary Association of Philadelphia founded in 1832 was also in the forefront of promoting literary and historical pursuits which its Constitution’s preamble affirmed. The Constitution’s preamble also affirmed the organization’s interest in promoting the unity of humankind, the cultivation of talents, and agitation for political and civil rights. The organization also made provisions for a librarian and support of a library. The importance of the society was immediately recognized by prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison, in a letter to Sarah M. Douglass, a prominent black Philadelphian and the secretary of the society, praised the society’s high objects and lofty aims. He commended the society’s formation because it promoted educational attainment among women and in turn paved the way for female participation in other literary and historical societies. More important, for Garrison, the society put “a new weapon” into his hands “to use against Southern oppressors.” Garrison used this weapon by instituting a Ladies Department in the Liberator to print information about the society.45

The Minerva Literary Association was organized in 1834 with a membership of thirty women. Its programs included readings and recitations of classical literature. The society met on a monthly basis and sought to improve the mental and moral standing of African Americans. It also strove to promote piety, truth and justice. In an address before the society in 1834, “a colored female,” praised the society’s interest in uplifting the race,

Merrihew and Thompson, 1841), 96-100.
45 For a copy of the constitution of the Female Literary Association of Philadelphia, see “Female Literary Association of Philadelphia,” Genius of Universal Emancipation, December 1832. For a copy of the letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Sarah M. Douglass, March 5, 1832 in Black Abolitionist Papers1830-1865, Reel 1. For an assessment of the society’s impact on the antebellum black community, see Julie Winch, “‘You Have Talents Only Cultivate Them’ Philadelphia’s Black Female Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade,” in Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America, 105-107
but was deeply concerned about the plight of the race in the south. “The cruel manner in which they are chained, driven, and sold like beasts of the field, should excite in us feelings of sympathy.” In addition to Divine Providence, the supporters of antislavery organizations and activists within the race could play an important role in diffusing “light and knowledge throughout the world.”⁴⁶

Other cities such as New York also boasted well established literary and historical societies. The most prominent was the New York Philomethan Society, organized in 1830. At the society’s first anniversary officiated by the society’s president James Fields, an occasion for which “many of our influential colored brethen were present,” during which he read the society’s constitution. He also presented the collar of distinction, to Mr. J.G. deGrasse, a local physician. This presentation was immediately followed by a recitation of Dryden’s “Ode on Alexander’s Feast,” by Mr. R.F. Wake, a society member. J.G. deGrasse also presented the anniversary address to the society. He stressed the importance of literary and historical societies, praised the society’s efforts to build a library, and encouraged them in their respective efforts to improve and expand educational opportunities in the black community.⁴⁷

In 1833, the Philomethan society announced the engagement of a Professor Cleveland to deliver a course of lectures on Grammar. The effort was headed by Philip Bell, later the publisher and editor of the Colored American and Thomas Jennings, an active member of the Negro Convention movement who worked with the lecture committee. By 1837, this society, whose purpose was the improvement of literature and

⁴⁶ See “An Address by a Colored Female Delivered Before the Members of the Female Minerva Association,” Liberator, February 7, 1834.
⁴⁷ For a complete overview of the first anniversary celebration, see Spectator, “Philomethan Society,” Liberator, December 10, 1831.
useful knowledge, housed more than 600 books in its library. Bell placed a call for donations in the Colored American for the society which was "desirous of increasing their Library, (which now consists of between five and six hundred vols) and thereby extending that information which ever attends a well-regulated and widely circulated Library, if the number and usefulness of its volumes are in proportion to its circulation."48

The Philomethean Society also developed one of the best lectures series among nineteenth century literary and historical societies. The lectures range from examinations of history to decision of character and featured some of the most notable black New Yorkers. The cost of seasonal tickets was $2.50, and individual lectures were 12 cents. Subscriptions were sold at the offices of the Colored American and at the personal or professional addresses of each lecturer. The programs offered by the society coupled with patronage from the most prominent black New Yorkers allowed the society to flourish and continue to meet regularly for ten years after its founding.49

Another important group was the Phoneix Society formed in 1833. The society’s membership consisted of prominent New Yorkers such as the Reverend Christopher Rush, a Bishop in the African Methodis Episcopal Zion Church; the Reverend Theodore Wright, a prominent Presbyterian minister and graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary; David Ruggles, a former slave and leader in the New York Community; Charles B. Ray, a minister and managing editor of the Colored American in the 1840’s; and Samuel Cornish, Presbyterian minister and founder of three black newspapers—Freedom’s

48 For a copy of the solicitation for books, see "To the Public," Colored American, April 29, 1837
Journal, Rights of All and the Colored American. Cornish also established a reading room
and library for the organization. His lecture series was also very popular drawing more
than five-hundred attendees during the course of the year. 50

In 1834, the society was described as one that readily cooperated with white
abolitionists. It also allowed whites to serve on its governing board. However, the
practical affairs of the group were controlled by its black members. Its membership was
closely intertwined with that of the American Anti-Slavery Society and included prominent
abolitionists such as Arthur Tappan and Simon S. Jocelyn. Tappan, who was treasurer of
the Society, paid the agent Samuel Cornish and also underwrote a large portion of the
society’s expenses. 51

The society’s most ambitious project was the establishment of a day and evening
school for young African Americans in 1836. The school was housed at Society’s Hall, on
West Broadway. In the male and female departments, there were a total of sixty scholars,
In order to sustain the school’s expenses, it was necessary for supporters to raise five- to
eight-hundred dollars among themselves and solicit one-thousand dollars from friends.
Initially the school flourished, but within two years it was forced to close due to an
inability to meet its financial costs. 52

50 For information on the intellectual activities of the New York Literary and
historical societies, see Freeman, The Free Negro in New York in the Era Before the Civil
War, 317-324 and Dorothy Porter, Dorothy Porter, “The Organized Educational
Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846.,” 564-566. For biographical information
on Charles Ray and Theodore Wright, see David Swift, Black Prophets of Justice, 47-112
51 For a brief assessment of white involvement in the Phoneix Society, see the First
Annual Report of the American Antislavery Society, May 6, 1834 in BAP, Reel 1, and
Rhoda Freeman, The Free Negro in New York in the Era Before the Civil War, 320
52 For information on the Phoenix Society, see “Editorial: The New York Phoenix
Society,” Weekly Advocate, January 14, 1837.
Historical societies also flourished in Boston. One of the most important was the Boston Philomethan Society, patterned after the New York group. It was formed in 1836. Following the direction of the New York and Philadelphia societies, its members formed a library which they deemed indispensable for their purposes of moral and intellectual uplift. The group also appeared for donations of books and maps. Meetings of the Society occurred on a monthly basis at the Centre Street Chapel on Monday evenings.\(^{53}\)

'Troubling the Pages of Historians': David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*.

During the years of the Early Republic history's tangible connection to sociopolitical issues was also important to the African-American community. This point is clearly demonstrated in the volatile debates that were generated in the African-American community by the formation and goals of the American Colonization Society (ACS). Founded in 1816, the ACS favored the repatriation of the African-American population to Africa as a viable means of resolving racial antipathies in the United States. Although some African Americans, such as Paul Cuffee, sailor, trader, and a prominent member of the Boston African-American community, and John Russwurm, co-founder of *Freedom's Journal*, supported colonization, many African Americans were vehemently opposed to this idea. Given the volatility of these issues, it is not surprising that one of most well known African-American responses, David Walker’s *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), aroused strong feelings among both whites and blacks.\(^{54}\)


David Walker’s *Appeal*, one of the few notable examples of historical writing in this period, effectively connected African-American interests in sacred and secular history with what Herbert Aptheker has termed, “one continual cry” against the cruelties and injustices of slavery. Born free in North Carolina in 1795, Walker traveled extensively throughout the South and acquired basic literacy. In the late 1820’s, he journeyed North where he associated with several prominent members of the northern free black community including Samuel Cornish and Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In New York, Walker met and associated with Henry Highland Garnet. From New York, Walker proceeded to Boston, Massachusetts where he met several prominent African-American abolitionists including Maria Stewart and Hosea Easton. In each of these major urban centers, Walker was exposed not only to an organized network of highly able free blacks agitating against slavery, but became acquainted with the intellectual strategies and formations used in this struggle. Moreover, as historians Sterling Stuckey and, more recently, Peter Hinks have demonstrated, these interactions had a significant impact on Walker when he served as an agent for *Freedom’s Journal* and later opened a used clothing shop. As a community businessman, Walker was afforded the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of African Americans, especially seamen who facilitated networks for the eventual distribution of the *Appeal*. Consistent with his activist agenda, Walker addressed a meeting of the General Colored Association of Boston urging its membership to oppose slavery by any means. Walker, however, felt that opposition should be kept within rational bounds and should not violate the U.S. Constitution.\(^55\)

David Walker’s *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* is a complex treatise that defies easy categorization. Although historians have characterized the text as antislavery or nationalist, both of these characterizations narrow what Walker envisioned for persons of African descent, and more specifically African Americans, and what he demonstrated through multifaceted messages, universal concerns, and implications. For the purposes of this chapter, *The Appeal* is viewed as a historical work which mediated on the Enlightenment project privileging rationality and reason. The Enlightenment, a historical moment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which featured the liberatory triumph of reason over doubt, objectivity over subjectivity, and science over alchemy, played an important role in setting the tone of American intellectual thought. While few would argue that the Enlightenment was not beneficial to the social, political and economic life of Europe and, in varied manifestaations and incarnations, to the United States, it is clear that its theoretical constructs often fell short when applied to the various minority groups in America. Therefore, throughout the *Appeal*, rationality, a key component of the Enlightenment, is juxtaposed with the realities of African-American life in the nineteenth century.\(^{56}\)

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Walker’s text also refuted Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Given Jefferson’s stature as the premier American intellectual of the early nineteenth century, it is not surprising that Walker’s *Appeal* responded to Jefferson’s intellectual pronouncements. While critical of Jefferson’s opinions of black intellectual capacity, Walker also affirmed the importance of his work in the pantheon of American letters: “Do you know that Mr. Jefferson was one of the great characters as ever lived among the whites? See his writings for the world, and his public labours for the United States of America. Do you believe that the assertions of such a man will pass into oblivion unobserved by this people and the world?”

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Americans, women and Native Americans is Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge: University of Massachusetts, 1997), 150-191. For an account of the Enlightenment’s relationship to contemporary historiographies, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 15-128. And there are several reasons why Walker’s text draws so heavily on the Enlightenment tradition. Peter Hinks viewed Walker’s rhetorical strategies in the *Appeal* as an attempt to subvert the Enlightenment theme of rationality by offering a more emotive style of oratory. By introducing emotions, Walker connected the plight of African Americans to tangible feelings of mistreatment and abuse, and demonstrated that the race had not become brutal as a result of slavery. Hinks has set up a traditional binary, whereas Walker’s text seems to support Enlightenment rationality, but calls its applications to blacks hypocritical and nonrational. A more compelling explanation of Walker’s use of Enlightenment thought may be that offered by Paul Gilroy. Gilroy argues that: “The distinctive historical experiences of this diaspora’s population have included a unique body of reflections on modernity and its discontents which is an enduring presence in the cultural and political struggles of their descendants today. I want to bring to the fore elements of this alternative sequence of enquiries into the politics of the West.” According to Gilroy, this introduction of black voices is necessitated by the fact that European and American intellectuals have dominated cultural production, and have therefore overlooked the historical work of African American intellectuals. Consequently, the centering of black writing will reorient our thinking about issues of race, class and gender. Amplifying “alternative sequences of enquiries into the politics of the West,” one might argue, was the sole purpose of Walker’s *Appeal*. See Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 211; and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44-45.

Walker's argument concerning the harshness of American slavery was in direct contradistinction to Thomas Jefferson's presentation of slavery in Virginia. Jefferson's popular *Notes on the State of Virginia* (hereafter *Notes*) was regarded as one of the most definitive and far-reaching assessments of African-American intellectual capacity during the Early Republic. *Notes*, which established Jefferson as the foremost American intellectual of the early 19th century, was a hodgepodge of observations on a wide variety of topics ranging from the boundaries of Virginia to the history of the state's development. By writing *Notes*, Jefferson hoped to inaugurate a tradition of distinctively American writing. His comments on the mental ability of African Americans, however, would occasion critique from a number of black writers throughout the antebellum period and serve to reduce the overall credibility of the work as an objective assessment of American life.\(^58\)

Jefferson's assessment of African Americans drew upon the same material utilized by Walker. An avid reader trained in the classical tradition at the College of William and Mary, Jefferson was conversant on the classical authors as well as European Enlightenment thinkers such as Rosseau, Locke, and Montesquieu. As numerous African American and American historians have noted, Jefferson allowed his prejudicial views and doubt of the environmentalist argument to color his views on the intellectual capacity of blacks. Throughout *Notes*, he staked out a problematic position on race. Using a set of ideas that he later admitted were highly subjective, Jefferson concluded that the position of

blacks in American society was fixed by nature not condition. This position became
evident in his assessment of the biological composition of African Americans. While he
regarded slaves of pure African stock as inferior, Jefferson suggested that slaves of mixed
racial stock were more intelligent. 59

Citing numerous examples from classical antiquity to support his point, Jefferson
went to great lengths in demonstrating that ancient slavery was harsher than American
slavery. Appealing to enlightenment concepts of rationality and empiricism, Jefferson,
using the work of Cato to prove his point, noted that in Africa the sexes were separated to
reduce fertility and lower costs. This was not the case in America where the “slaves
multiply as fast as the free inhabitants.” Jefferson also argued that slave economy in
classical antiquity compared less favorably to nineteenth-century America. 60 In the ancient
world, it was common practice to sell all assets that were not useful including old tools,
wagons, and slaves. Moreover, he claimed that punishment was also more severe. Not
only were slaves executed for minor transgressions such as accidentally breaking a bottle
or glass, but also Romans often resorted to torture as a means of obtaining evidence.
According to Jefferson: “Here it has been thought better never to resort to their
evidence.” Jefferson also demonstrated the severity of slavery by suggesting that when a
master is murdered, the entire household was murdered. In America, however, only the
guilty were punished. 61

59 See Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 141.
60 Ibid., 141. Also see George A. Levesque, “Slavery in the Ideology and Politics of
the Revolutionary Generation,” Canadian Review of American Studies, 18 (Fall 1987):
367-381.
61 See Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 141. The relationship
between Walker’s text and that of Jefferson’s is well established, but a lengthy discussion
of the historical import of the text is missing in most treatments of Walker’s work, except
Peter Hinks. For a discussion of Walker’s Appeal, that fleshes out its jeremiad qualities,
see Moses, Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms, 38-39.
Reading Walker’s *Appeal* as a refutation of Jefferson’s treatise reveals its almost singular reliance on history to validate and authorize its claims. Walker’s text enacted an alternative reading of the classical tradition and offered proofs of black intellectual capacity. Rather than a rationality reserved exclusively for whites, as Jefferson had posited in *Notes*, Walker’s *Appeal* called for an extension of Enlightenment principles to African Americans. Therefore, this work not only enacted African-American agency, but used history as a means to justify an end to slavery in the Western hemisphere. Throughout the text, Walker illustrated what he termed “the wretchedness of the colored people.” In repeating this statement throughout the work, Walker also established a tradition of African-American exceptionalism. Walker’s idea of exceptionalism substantially differed from the version utilized by American nationalists. Exceptionalism in Walker’s lexicon situated African Americans as unique historical agents because of the unprecedented level of brutality perpetrated against them by the practice of racialized slavery in the United States. To dramatize the concept of exceptionalism, Walker used a number of literary strategies to convey his message. Some of these included raising rhetorical questions which dramatized the African-American condition, examining sacred and secular history, and using dramatic, almost hyperbolic language, to make various points regarding opposition to colonization and slavery. Walker’s work also drew very heavily on an established tradition of black oratory in the Early Republic which accenuated the importance of Haiti and Egypt as sites of black achievement and accomplishment in ancient and modern times.\(^2\)

Divided into four articles encompassing examinations of slavery, ignorance, Christianity, and colonization, The Appeal illuminated the connection between the degraded state of African Americans, and the denial, by rational beings, of the benefits of enlightenment thought to blacks. It also stressed the importance of reason, literacy, and empirical examination of nature in assessing the African-American situation. For Walker, inquiry and enlightenment were essential to African-American liberation, and history becomes the validating tool and the mechanism by which the intellectual claims of African Americans could be sustained. These ideas not only sustained the quest for literacy among African Americans but also promoted them as important contributors to and participants in American society.63

Walker’s employment of Enlightenment modes of rationalization was evident in the document’s preamble. Walker began the document by suggesting that his critique of slavery was based on empirical observation, an important component of Enlightenment thought. Travel or empirical investigation, or as Walker suggested, “accurate observations of things as they exist,” rendered his argument more rational, thus more believable. His statement that African Americans are the most degraded and abject slave population since the beginning of time rested on these empirical observations. Walker understood that empirical observation is only one component of rational thought, and it had to be

Radical Discourse in the United States.” Slavery and Abolition 14 (December 1993): 140-161. Intellectual historian Dorothy Ross has noted that the American exceptionalist tradition is marked by a strategy of looking forward rather than looking back. It stressed the millennial newness of America. In the same way that African Americans made use of the jeremiad, they also appropriated the American exceptionalist tradition. See Dorothy Ross, The Origins of American Social Science (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

supplemented by examinations of history and, as an educated African American, Walker also referenced the historical record. In this record, and in contradistinction to Jefferson’s conclusion, Walker noted that ancient slavery, which was nonracialized, was relatively mild when juxtaposed with African-American enslavement. Walker concluded that “heathen nations of antiquity, had but little among them than the name and form of slavery; while wretchedness and endless miseries were reserved apparently in a phial, to be poured out upon our fathers, ourselves, and our children, by Christian Americans!”

Given Walker’s critique of the Enlightenment project, it is not surprising that he invoked the names of two prominent historians of the Western tradition, Josephus and Plutarch. Josephus and Plutarch were praised for the comprehensive coverage of their historical writing and for their ability to illuminate the heroic deeds of various historical figures. By invoking their names, Walker skillfully situated the contemporary history of African Americans as a subject worthy of historical investigation: “The causes my brethren, which produce our wretchedness and miseries, are so very numerous and aggravating that I believe that only the pen of a Josephus or Plutarch, can well enumerate and explain them.” Walker added further that the subjects under consideration were of such “incomprehensible magnitude, so impenetrable and so notorious” he was forced to provide a treatise rather than a full dissertation on the topic.

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64 See David Walker, Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, 1.
65 See David Walker, Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, 1-2. Walker’s Appeal is a more sophisticated take on Robert Alexander Young’s “Ethiopian Manifesto,” also published in 1829. See Robert Alexander Young’s Ethiopian Manifesto, in Sterling Stuckey, The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 30-38. The most recent scholarship on David Walker has placed the Appeal within the context of a larger discourse on history and slavery in the 19th century, see Peter Hinks, To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance, 173-195. Examples of an earlier discourse that referenced the slave trade, slavery in the ancient world, Egypt or Haiti include William Hamilton, “An Address to the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, Delivered in the Universalist Church,
From the document's inception, Walker established rationality and history as the twin poles of enlightened discourse on the plight of African Americans. Even when issuing a warning that predicted God's wrath against whites for the abuses of slavery, Walker constantly referenced the historical record: "I will not speak of the destruction which the Lord brought upon Egypt, in consequence of the oppression and consequent groans of the oppressed--hundreds of thousands of Egyptians whom God hurled into the Red Sea for afflicting his people in their land." In another instance, when appealing to the primacy of God as the sole master in heaven and earth as opposed to slaveholders, Walker again appealed to the historical record, both sacred and profane.

All persons who are acquainted with history, and particularly the Bible, who are not blinded by the God of this world, and are not actuated solely by avarice--who are able to lay aside prejudice long enough to view candidly and impartially, things as they are and probably will be--who are willing to admit that God made man to serve him alone, and that man should have no other Lord or Lords but himself--that God is the sole proprietor or master of the whole human family, and will not on any consideration admit of a colleague being unwilling to divide his glory with another--and who can dispense with prejudice long enough to admit that we are men, notwithstanding our improminent noses and woolly heads, and believe that we feel for our fathers, mothers, wives and children, as well as the whites do for theirs....

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66 See David Walker, Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, 4 For an examination of the spiritual components of the Appeal, Peter Hinks, To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren, 196-237.
Rationality and history served as the superstructure for the Appeal. They allowed Walker “to penetrate, search out, and lay open for inspection” the wretchedness of African Americans. The Appeal’s explicit use of history as an organizing structure heightened its importance as an element in the fight to end slavery. Walker also viewed his remarks in the preamble as the “suburbs” or the outer boundaries of his treatise. The “interior” or inner boundaries of his study “of this system of cruelty and oppression” are explained, explicated, and validated by the outer boundaries or “suburbs.” In this way, rationality and history are situated in close proximity and are indispensable in fleshing out the dynamics of slavery.  

As an antislavery and historical treatise, Walker began his Appeal by examining slavery as one of four causal factors conditions among black people. On the question of slavery, Walker employed biblical and ancient history to demonstrate that African Americans received worse treatment than other historical groups. This portion of the Appeal expanded on Walker’s concerns in the preamble. Not only was his central claim reinforced that the “coloured people of the United States are the most wretched, degraded and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began,” but to prove this claim, Walker pointed to the historical record: “These affirmations are so well confirmed in the minds of all unprejudiced men who have taken the time to read histories, that they need no elucidation from me.” From this statement, the reader can infer that Walker believed that the historical record was clear, thus validating his claims.

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In case doubt persisted about the harshness of American slavery when compared with the ancient world, Walker inverted Jefferson’s conclusions and cited the cases of Joseph and Moses as two examples of slaves ascending to positions of honor and respect. He expanded this discussion by noting that Africans in antiquity treated slaves more humanely than nineteenth-century whites. To prove his point, Walker dispelled the idea that the Egyptians were not a black or African people. In Walker’s estimation this misunderstanding among blacks resulted from a misreading of the sacred text. Not only were Egyptians black or African, but they also treated the Israelites humanely. This is not the case among white Americans. Walker maintained that whites denied the humanity of slaves. In making this argument, Walker invoked history: “I call upon the professing Christian, I call upon the philanthropist, I call upon the very tyrant himself, to show me a page of history, either sacred or profane, on which a verse can be found, which maintains that the Egyptians heaped the insupportable insult upon the children of Israel by telling them they were not part of the human family.”

Constructing an historical genealogy of the development of racialized slavery, Walker moved from the realm of sacred history to secular history by examining the treatment of slaves under the Romans. Although slavery existed among the Romans, it was “no more than a cypher when compared to ours under the Americans.” Moreover, Roman slaves had greater upward mobility than African-American slaves: “Everybody who has read history, knows that as soon as the slave among the Romans obtained his freedom, he could rise to the greatest eminence in the State and there was no law instituted to hinder a slave from buying his freedom.” For African Americans, however, whites denied their humanity and prevented them from obtaining respectable positions in

the state. For Walker, these differences in treatment are consistent with the historical record, especially those events related to the social and moral development of European civilization.70

Examining the origins of racialized slavery by determining its foundation in European history, Walker noted that: “The whites have always been unjust, jealous, unmerciful and avaricious and blood-thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority.” In supporting this claim, Walker assessed the conduct of Europeans in Greece. According to Walker, “we see them there, cutting each other’s throats—trying to subject each other to wretchedness and misery.” Throughout European history, from Greece to Britain, violence characterized the civilization. Christianity, as practiced by white Americans, however, did not correct or ameliorate the treatment of African Americans, rather it increased in cruelty and violence. In fact, “take them as a body, they are ten times more cruel, avaricious and unmerciful than ever they were before.” Walker felt that ultimate redemption would come when the world is Christianized under the God of the blacks, since they possessed true knowledge of God’s will and faithfully followed his commands.71

Walker also associated black wretchedness with ignorance. In Walker’s estimation, ignorance among black people emanated from a lack of exposure to the facts of history, and the inability of whites to offer a truthful account of black achievements in the ancient world. By making this statement Walker demonstrated the importance of classical learning and history’s role in constructing the a more valid image of African

70 Ibid., 14-15.
71 Ibid., 16. For information on the sources and uses of millennial thought in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, see Ruth Bloch, Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3-118.
Americans. According to Walker, and contrary to public opinion, when one takes a "retrospective view of the arts and sciences—the wise legislators—the turning of the channel of the river Nile, by the sons of Africa or of Ham, among them learning originated and was carried thence into Greece, where it was improved upon and refined." This statement, or some variety thereof, appeared countless times in the historical writing of the period. Its usage demonstrated the importance of identifying black achievement in the ancient world as proof that African Americans had a glorious and ancient history.72

Not only was ancient history important, but the history of modern or emerging nations also provided important indicators of black progress and self-worth. Walker used national history or the history of nations as a predictor of future events. In the nineteenth-century, history served a dual function: first, as an indicator of national progress, and second, as a recorder of the faults and shortcomings of a particular nation. Walker used the contemporary example of Haiti to demonstrate both claims: "But what need have I to refer to antiquity, when Hayti, the glory of the blacks and the terror of the tyrants, is enough to convince the most avaricious and stupid of wretches" Not surprisingly, Haiti is the basis of a warning to the slaveocracy: "Read the history of Hayti particularly, and see how they were butchered by the whites, and do you take warning."73

72 See David Walker, Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, 19-20. In this passage Walker echoes the sentiments of an earlier address by Prince Saunders at Bethel Church in Philadelphia in 1818. Saunders made the following comments. "If by investigating the historic page of antiquity, we take a retrospective view of the numerous votaries of literature and the useful arts who flourished at those early periods when the improving influences of knowledge and civilization were wholly confided to the oriental regions, we shall then discover some traces of their views of the instrinsic utility of mutually associating, to aid the progress of those who were aspiring to taste the Castillian spring, while ascending the towering heights of Parnassus, that there they might behold the magnificent temple of the Ruler of the Muses and hear its venerated oracle." See Prince Saunders, An Address Delivered at the Bethel Church, Philadelphia, on the 30th of September 1818 in Porter's Early Negro Writing, 89.

73 See David Walker, An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, 20. For
In addition to slavery and ignorance, religion also played an important role in Walker’s formation of African-American wretchedness. Here, as in other parts of the Appeal, Walker focused on the gulf between the original tenets of Christianity and the practice of the religion by white Americans. Biblical genealogy played an important role in this assessment. God’s instructions for “pure and undefiled religion” can be traced back to the inception of the Christian-Judeo ethic. God transmitted these laws through what Walker termed, “dispensations,” handed down from Moses through successive generations. The last dispensation was handed down from Christ to Europeans. Instead of heeding the laws of Christ, the Europeans, like the Israelites, disobeyed God and used “this very dispensation to aid them in their infernal depredations upon us.” These “infernal depredations” violated the original promise. Here, the jeremiad comes into bold relief. In order to be redeemed, white Americans must correct their attitudes towards African Americans.  

Walker extended the idea of the historical misuse of God’s law to oppress African Americans in his discussion of the contributions of “professed Christians” to the wretched state of Africans Americans. In this discussion, he focused on the historiography of slavery in the Western world. The historiography began with Bartholome de las Casas, the 16th century Franciscan priest who opposed Indian slavery. Las Casas’s proposal to the Spanish monarch, Charles V, that African labor be substituted for Indian labor, became the basis for importation of Africans into the Americas after 1503. With Charles V’s granting of the Asiento to the Portuguese in 1511, the number of African slaves in the Americas


74 See David Walker, Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, 33.
rose precipitously. Mindful of these facts, Walker concluded that “through the instrumentality of a pretended preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, our common master, our wretchedness first commenced in America—where it has continued from 1503 to this day, 1829.” For Walker, the Christian preacher was central to black enslavement and exploitation in the new world. The historical actions of Christians, not Christianity is the focal point of Walker’s indignation. Walker viewed Christianity as a rational religion and referred to those whom it had not enlightened as “heathens.” He also viewed those who misrepresented the true value of Christianity in a similar way. This discussion is also significant because Walker cited the Bible and historical works such as Butler’s History of the United States to support his assertions.75

In addition to slavery, ignorance and religion, the last article of Walker’s Appeal focused on one of the most explosive issues confronting the African-American community of his day, colonization. Walker reiterated several earlier points. The cruelty of slavery would not and could not be ameliorated by colonization: “Now I solemnly appeal to the

75 Ibid., 35-36. For Las Casas’s description of the Spanish conquest, see Bartholome de Las Casas, The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account (1552, rpt Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); For information on Bartholome De Las Casas and Spanish conquest of the New World, see Lewis Hanke, The Political Theories of Bartholome de Las Casas (Buenos Aires: University of Buenos Aires, 1935); Charles Gibson, Spain in America (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1966); and ed., The Spanish Tradition in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); and Mark Burkholder and Lyman Johnson, Colonial Latin America 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 30-125. Although an acceptable source for the 19th century, Butler’s work was criticized for its excessive references to Divine Providence and spirituality. This mode of presentation had an impact on Walker’s historical style. “We have, however, a more serious charge against it; it is the impertinent allusions to the divine providence of God, appeals far too frequent to his name and councils, and unauthorized reference to his immediate interference. It is not in this way that his glory is promoted or his ways to man vindicated.” See Review of A Complete History of the United States of America, embracing the whole period from the discovery of North America down to the year 1820, by Frederick Butler, In the North American Review 16 (January 1823): 156-163.
most skillful historians in the world, and all who are mostly acquainted with the histories of the Antediluvians and of Sodom and Gomorrah, to show me a parallel of barbarity. 

*Christians!!! Christians!!!*. I dare you to show me a parallel of cruelties in the annals of Heathens or Devils, with those of Ohio, Virginia and Georgia.” In dramatizing black opposition to colonization, Walker reprinted a letter to *Freedom’s Journal* by Richard Allen, a friend and confidant whom Walker met while in Philadelphia. Allen’s diatribe against colonization was sanctioned by his long standing service to the free black community of Philadelphia. Emphasizing his role as an institution builder and a true Christian, Walker heaped lavish praises upon Allen: “Oh my God!! the bare recollection of the labors of this man, and his ministers among the deplorably wicked brethren (rendered so by the whites) to bring them a knowledge of the God of Heaven fills my soul with all those high emotions which would take the pen of an Addison to portray.” For Walker, Allen was an exemplar of black achievement. As an institution builder and accomplished free black, Allen was truly a representative man whose life was a model of Christian charity and service to the race.  

Walker also implied that he could not adequately chronicle Allen’s life. Instead he longed for the day when God “shall raise up colored historians in succeeding generations, to present the crimes of the nation, to the then gazing world.” Walker’s prediction that “colored historians” will rise in succeeding generations is particularly instructive. He hoped that his singular broadside against slavery would be complemented by other similar works, especially historical works. But it also furthered his own vision of a wider range of African-American works which would call the European project of rationality into question and provide more substantial proof of African-American intellectual capabilities. Consistent with the historical understandings of the period, rather than rationality or 

reason, Walker opined that “the holy Ghost will make them do justice to the name of Bishop Allen of Philadelphia.” Therefore, Walker envisioned the historical project as ordained by metaphysical forces. This point is clearly demonstrated when he envisioned a linkage between Allen’s historical posterity and that of African Americans. Whereas Allen and African Americans were “now in obscurity and degradation,” in time they will be “preeminent.” 77

The notion of an imminent rise by African Americans from a state of oppression and cruelty informed Walker’s Appeal. For assistance in the process of ascension, Walker called upon a number of historical witnesses. Drawn from sacred and profane history, these witnesses, “the Antediluvians, together with the whole heathen world of antiquity”, despite limited knowledge of God’s will, would “rise up in judgment against Christian Americans and condemn them.” Condemnation of the actions of white Christians was located in an understanding of history. Despite their heathen status, this is a point Walker made throughout the work, ancient civilizations have more moral authority than white Christians and could be enlisted as historical witnesses in overturning the American slave system. 78

Walker also used the last section of the Appeal to clarify the differences and tensions between whites and blacks. Throughout the document, Walker referred to whites as the natural enemies of blacks. His reference here is not a literal one. For in the biblical record, Noah and his wife as well as his sons, Shem, Ham and Japeth were not enemies when the ark landed on Mount Arrarat. Contestation between whites and blacks ensued in the centuries following the flood. In an inversion of the biblical record, popular myth had

77 Ibid., 57-58.
78 Ibid., 59.
made African Americans the progeny of Cain and whites the progeny of Abel. Distinctions such as these served as a justification for slavery. Walker contested this fallacious argument by pointing to sacred history. Rhetorically, Walker asked where did they receive this information? He is unable to declare, but asks: “Did it come from the Bible? I searched the whole Bible as well as they, if I am not as well trained as they, and have never seen a verse which testifies whether we are the seed of Cain or Abel?” Yet, whites have misrepresented this fact. Walker retorted by asking which race acts more like the seed of Cain, whites or blacks. The Appeal closed where it began, by appealing to the power of history, historical witnesses, empirical observation and rationality:

In conclusion, I ask the candid and unprejudiced of the whole world, to search the pages of historians diligently, and to see if the Antediluvians—the Sodomites—the Egyptians—the Babylonians—the Ninevites—the Carthaginians—the Persians—the Macedonians—the Greeks—the Romans—the Mahometans—the Jews—or devils, ever treated a set of beings, as the white Christians of America do us, the blacks, or Africans.79

Walker’s Appeal offered African Americans a unique way to read history. On one hand it affirmed the millennial and teleological speculations of Protestantism present in the culture since the colonial period. In another and possibly more important sense, Walker’s treatise marshaled historical facts to deliver an indictment of American slavery and the practice of Christianity. In offering this indictment, Walker also called into question the rational basis of Western society by juxtaposing Western assumptions with the realities of sociopolitical relations. In Walker’s narrative, African Americans were viewed as America’s only hope for redemption. As the initiators of civilization, Walker’s examination of the historical record revealed a long and distinguished genealogy for African Americans in sacred and profane history, yet this history had been ignored, neglected, or

79 Ibid., 74.
misinterpreted by whites. Despite these problems, Walker was hopeful that African Americans would eventually assume their rightful place in the social, political and economic life of the nation. Moreover, consistent with the emphasis of African-American ministers and leaders, Walker predicted the rise of African American historians who would produce a venerable tradition of scholarship to challenge the anti-black intellectual hegemony of white scholars. 80

Institutional structures including black newspapers such as Freedom’s Journal, and Rights of All, and historical writing such as David Walker’s Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, were not the only examples of early African American historical discourse. In the 1830’s, the rise of the abolitionist movement provided yet another site for the utilization of history. Led by the orator and radical opponent of slavery, William Lloyd Garrison, former supporter of the American Colonization Society, and founder of the Liberator, abolitionists, unlike their anti-slavery predecessors, called for the immediate rather than the gradual abolition of slavery. Garrison’s agenda of immediatism, however, was still shrouded in veils of moral suasion, and it was largely white-controlled and directed. Despite the formation of numerous abolitionist organizations in the 1830’s such as the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS, 1830), the New England Anti-Slavery Society (1832), and the American Moral Reform Society (1835), few of these societies actually used blacks on the lecture circuit. It was not until 1838 when Charles Lenox Redmond began to “tell a free story.” 81

80 For information on the intellectual context of the Appeal, see Peter Hinks, To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren, 173-195.
As the first period of African-American historical production ended, a viable structure for African-American history had emerged. A knowledge and understanding of history emboldened many early leaders such as David Walker, Samuel Cornish, Maria Stewart, William Whipper, and Owen Nickens to ground their call for African-American rights, dignity, and uplift firmly in the historical narratives of the past and in the present. By appealing to the records of sacred and secular history, blacks could establish a genealogy that transcended the narrow confines of the plantation house and the field in the South, and the marginality and tenuous position of free black life throughout the North. Black historians constructed a genealogy that featured the ancestors of African Americans as the architects of the Western tradition. Not lowly or subjugated, these “sons and daughters of Ham” bequeathed knowledge and wisdom to the civilizations of antiquity, and they were transmitted to modern nations. These writers also utilized millenarian and apocalyptic phraseology in conveying their messages. The ultimate goal of history, as

used by African-American historians was the establishment of a more just and humane society.

The use of the jeremiad is also another important component of African-American history during this period. Its continued resonance in African American thought had much to do with the theologically and classically based education of African American elites. As the jeremiad invoked a special or unique relationship between the Puritans and God, African Americans also posited a type of exceptionalism which ordained them as God’s chosen people, destined to right the evils of slavery and establish a more just and humane society—a type of African-American millenarism. David Walker’s call for an end to slavery, Maria Stewart’s agitation for African manhood rights, William Whipper’s “Declaration of Sentiment” attempted to force white Americans, to acknowledge, however reluctantly, the evils of slavery. They also exposed the gulf between the teleological promise of American greatness and the degrading institution of slavery. In the work of both Walker and Stewart, the jeremiad stands in bold relief against the backdrop of broken promises and misused dispensations, suggesting that God’s wrath would be visited on America just as it had been on the civilizations of antiquity. Walker’s warning encompassed the Christianization of the nation under the “God of the blacks.” Also, in an acknowledgment of the history’s power to change or redirect the actions of men, Walker predicted the rise of African-American historians to offer a critique of American institutions.

The constant appeal to history informed African-American writing in the late years of the Early Republic and the early antebellum periods. The appeal was strong, crisp, and clear. It hearkened back to a wide range of historical witnesses, recalled a wide variety of black achievements, and offered present proofs of black citizenship, order, and rational behavior—namely the Republic of Haiti. Far more than a mass of indistinguishable and
undefinable ideas and thoughts, African-American history was vibrant, engaged, multi-faceted and infused with the liberatory discourse of intellectual attainment through education and activism, without compromise, to overturn the “peculiar institution” in the South, and integrate African Americans more fully into the civic responsibilities of the nation.

Writers of the period 1837 to 1850 built upon the edifice erected by these early writers. Activist participation in the Negro Convention movement, black newspapers, the abolitionist movement, and the shifting social, political, and economic formations of the 1840's, allowed later writers to reaffirm the rhetoric of an earlier period while strengthening and expanding the uses of African-American history in the fight to end slavery. By the late 1830's, African-American history had begun to take shape as an activist and engaged discourse, replete with various rhetorical and thematic formations, informed by the abolitionist activism of the period with its communal concerns and preoccupations as well as the quest for bourgeois respectability occasioned by classical education and ministerial training.
Chapter 2: "To Present a Just View of Our Origin:" Creating an African-American Historical Discourse, 1837-1850

Every close observer must have seen that we suffer much from the want of a collection of historical facts so arranged as to present a just view of our origin.

--James W.C. Pennington

In the textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People, James W.C. Pennington, fugitive slave, Congregational minister, and prominent abolitionist, issued a clarion call for a reassessment of the origins of African Americans. In doing so, he no doubt was responding to the deteriorating condition of African-American people during the "Age of the Common Man"—the intensified persecution of slaves and free blacks alike in the aftermath of the Nat Turner revolt, the states’ rights crisis, and the rising power of slaveowners that engineered the infamous Gag Rule which led the cessation of debate on slavery in the United States Congress and to the censorship of antislavery literature throughout the South and the murder of prominent abolitionist and newspaper editor Elijah Lovejoy outside of his printing press in Alton, Illinois.

With these events in mind, Pennington challenged the nation’s intellectual discourse on African Americans, especially on their origins. With the rising popularity of the polygenetic theory to explain racial difference, and the growth of an increasing nationalistic American literature trumpeting progress and later manifest destiny, black intellectuals, like never before, realized the importance of history in answering charges of inferiority. Pennington’s use of the words, “every close observer” and “we suffer much from the want of...” meant something tangible to his generation of abolitionists, activists, and fighters for justice. Intellectuals—thinking men and women—knew that antislavery and proslavery whites were examining the scientific, literary and historical data on African Americans in order to make decisions about their parity and worth. For proslavery forces, negative findings in these areas confirmed the doctrine of biblically ordained slavery for the “sons and daughters of Ham.” For antislavery forces, as they were crafting and perfecting a more radical approach to abolition, proof that blacks possessed the same social and intellectual skills as other human beings legitimated their cause.\(^3\)

The intellectual sphere, the realm of ideas, then, was an important battleground for African Americans. Black writers were not content to leave this task solely to white abolitionists, but rather took the matter into their own hands. Doing so required using history and historical writing as a means of battling injustice, proving black worth, and

demonstrating the intellectual capabilities of the race. As Pennington boldly stated, using historical writing, “Prejudices are to be uprooted, false views corrected and truth must be unveiled and permitted to walk forth with her olive branch.4

This chapter will explore the development of historical discourse focused around writing and among African-American intellectuals between 1837, the year in which African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister Hosea Easton published a Treatise on the Civil, Political and Intellectual Character of the Colored People, a historical tract which offered the most thoroughgoing assessment of African American history from classical antiquity to the 1830’s, and 1850. This period which witnessed the advent of a more nationalistic reading of black possibility as a result of the passage of the Compromise of 1850 which included the infamous Fugitive Slave Law. The Fugitive Slave Law allowed for the recapture of slaves and the capture of free blacks as well. In addressing popular perceptions of African-American capacity, black intellectuals sought to address the dual objectives of history in the nineteenth century to provide a viable weapon in the antislavery movement to counter charges of black inferiority and to demonstrate black intellectual parity with the larger community. Both of these objectives suggested that black

4 See Pennington, A Textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People, 6-7. Writers in the Colored American offered a number of remedies to change the condition of African Americans. One writer suggested that “before our young men can rank in intelligence with their pale faced brethren, they must acquaint themselves with natural and moral philosophy, church philosophy, with ancient and modern history, with chemistry, mineralogy, geology, botany, natural history, church history, physiology, rhetoric, astronomy, composition—mathematics, in all its branches and with the ancient and modern languages and the arts generally.” “Education of Youth,” The Colored American November 11, 1837. Another writer opined: “We must avail ourselves of private education—husband our resources and expend a far greater proportion of them in the establishment of libraries, reading rooms, useful lectures and all the machinery of useful practical knowledge and refinement.” “The Means of Elevation,” The Colored American, February 1839. Also see “Peculiarly Oppressive,” The Colored American, May 1839, and “Education,” Northern Star and Freemen’s Advocate January 2, 1843.
intellectuals possessed the skills and determination to challenge the prevailing ideologies of nineteenth century America.⁵

Addressing history's dual objectives—a tool for advocacy and the means to establish intellectual parity and worth—required African-American writers to offer complex accounts of the multifaceted meanings of race and nation. It also required them to utilize the methodological and thematic approaches of majoritarian histories and intellectual movements fusing them with a critical rereading of the national narratives of progress. Consequently, this chapter will begin by examining the communal wellspring from which historical interest and writing emanated in the antebellum period. It will also address the question of how African-American intellectuals utilized historical sources in their construction of vindicationist historical literature and explore the use of intellectual movements such as Romanticism. African-American writers viewed their social, political, intellectual and historical contributions to the growth of Western civilization as a means of promoting the abolitionist crusade and demonstrating intellectual parity with whites.⁶

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⁵ The periodization for this chapter is based on the work of Dorothy Porter. Porter in Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 suggests that after 1837 black writing changed significantly. According to Porter, by 1837, blacks were engaged locally and nationally in efforts toward emancipation of the slaves, the improvement of living conditions for free blacks and in debates over colonization. The following decade saw the emergence of more able black writers as articulate and forceful leaders—the men who helped to shape the struggle for freedom and the advancement of black people.” See Dorothy Porter., ed Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), introduction. Philosopher Broadus Butler has suggested that the “main Black American writers have contributed profound insights into what America ought to be.” This point is clearly demonstrated in the growth and solidification of African American historical writing as a tool within abolitionism. See Broadus N. Butler, “Frederick Douglass: The Black Philosopher in the United States: A Commentary in Leonard Harris, ed., Philosophy Born of Struggle: An Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917 (Iowa: Kendall Hunt, 1983), 1-10.

The Communal Ethos: History and African American Intellectuals

The construction of historical literature by African Americans in nineteenth century was related as much to the rise of a national tradition of “history as progress” as it was to the communal needs of African Americans to abolish slavery and demonstrate self-worth and parity in a social and intellectual atmosphere fraught with highly contested understandings of black possibility. Black intellectuals, however, could not integrate themselves or their history into a narrative of uncritical or nationalistic historical progress, common in the Romantic construction of history in the nineteenth century, until slavery was officially abolished. This does not mean that African-American writers viewed their race as outside of these patterns, rather they constructed the race as progressive, not susceptible to decline and extinction, but unable to obtain its greatest heights because of the existence of slavery. Therefore, African-American thinkers viewed and utilized history as a means of vindicating, and establishing parity with the dominant race in America. This sense of the contested and conflicted self played an important role in galvanizing intellectual momentum among black thinkers to protect the race against unwarranted attacks and present themselves in the best possible light.7

Because historical writing in the late 1830’s and 1840’s built upon the groundwork laid by ministers and intellectuals between 1789 and 1836, this second period of African-American historical production, 1837-1850, unlike the first period, was characterized by a more clearly defined and homogenous group of writers. I have labeled this group abolitionist clerical elites because of their ties to the abolitionist movement and

their close association with various Christian denominations. These writers benefited from better organized free communities in the North, more extensive independent abolitionist activism, and the solidification of the ties between educational attainment and intellectual respectability. Understanding the education, occupation, and communal affiliations of each of these writers is an important first step in providing a holistic portrait of the intellectual and communal impact of their historical production.\(^8\)

The writers of the late 1830's as and 1840's and the works they produced including Hosea Easton's Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People (1837), James W.C. Pennington's Textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People (1841), Ann Plato's Poems and Miscellaneous Essays (1841), Robert Benjamin Lewis's Light and Truth (1836, 1845, and 1854), and Henry Highland Garnet's Past, Present and Destiny of the Colored Race (1848), sought to vindicate African Americans by interrogating the complexities and nuances of African-American history. These writers used history to make intellectual arguments for establishing a firmer social and political basis for African-American civil and political claims.\(^9\)

\(^8\) For an overview of the communal; concerns of African Americans in the antebellum period, see Harry Reed, Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865 (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1994)

The intellectual worldview of these writers was informed by their struggle for education and their extensive involvement in diverse affairs within the African-American community. Education, already perceived within the African-American community as an empowering mechanism, informed the intellectual efforts of these writers. Therefore, it is not surprising that each of these writers recognized the importance of education and struggled to attain it. Hosea Easton’s mistreatment at several local churches in Boston prompted him to seek employment as a minister of the gospel. Born into slavery, James W.C. Pennington was denied even the basic rudiments of education. His successful escape and exposure to the Bible satisfied his thirst for knowledge of the “Patriarchs and the Lord Jesus Christ.” He eventually settled on Long Island in 1828, and pursued a formal education in Brooklyn’s Woolman Benevolent Society studying English, Logic, Rhetoric, and the Greek New Testament. In 1835, he moved to New Haven, Connecticut, where he taught classes and pursued additional religious studies at Yale University.¹⁰

Following the example of his father, who lead the family out of slavery in a daring escape in 1824, Henry Highland Garnet, born a slave in Maryland in 1815, prized education. While pursuing his education at the African Free School on Mulberry Street, Garnet’s family was dispersed as the result of an attempted recapture. He was spirited away, and lived with Thomas Hodges, a Quaker, in Rhode Island. Garnet eventually

returned to the African Free School in 1831, where he continued to pursue a classical education. On the suggestion of Theodore Wright, a Princeton educated Presbyterian minister, Garnet enrolled in the Noyes Academy in Canaan, New York. Opposition from the local white community led to the school's destruction. Afterwards, Garnet matriculated at Beriah Green's Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, New York. Each of these schools was representative of the effort by white clerics to contribute to the education of African Americans in the antebellum period.  

In addition to the quest for education, all of the writers were actively involved in various facets of African-American community life. The most visible sites for the incubation of historical writers were the abolitionist circles, the black church, and the press movement. When the Antislavery Society of Boston was formed in 1830, Hosea Easton and several prominent blacks formed the Massachusetts General Colored Association which later became an auxiliary member of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society. In 1831, he attended the first meeting of the National Convention Movement at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, and he attended several meetings thereafter. After ordination as a deacon and elder by Bishop Christopher Rush in the New York Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Easton was sent to Hartford, Connecticut where he established the first black Methodist Church in the city, Metropolitan AME Zion Church, incorporated in 1841.  


For information on Hosea Easton's activism in Massachusetts and Connecticut, see Hosea Easton, An Appeal to the Christian Public on Behalf of the Methodist Episcopal
James Pennington was also active in the Negro Convention movement as a delegate from Connecticut. He also worked as an instructor at the African School in Newton, Long Island. In addition to his ministerial duties at the Temple Street Congregational Church, he was an active participant in the temperance movement. He was also involved in the events surrounding the Amistad Mutiny in 1839. The mutiny of fifty-three slaves on the Amistad, a slave schooner en route to Havana from Guanaja in Cuba, electrified the antislavery community when the ship, instead of being returned to Africa, was piloted into a Connecticut port. Prominent antislavery luminaries such as Arthur Tappan and Simon Jocelyn immediately established a committee to assist the Mendians. With the support and assistance of the Union Missionary Society, the Mendians secured legal representation by John Quincy Adams and were allowed to return to Africa. In 1838, Pennington accepted his calling and was ordained becoming the pastor of the Fifth Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut in 1840. He was also associated with Charles Ray, a Congregational minister, and Ray’s paper The Colored American, serving as an agent and columnist.13


13 For information on the contextual sites of Pennington’s activism, see Robert Austin Warner, New Haven Negroes: A Social History (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 36-97. For information on Pennington’s involvement in the Negro Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in the United States Held by Adjournments in the City of Philadelphia from the 4th to the 13th Inclusive, 1832, 21-31 and Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People in These United States Held by Adjournments in the City of Philadelphia from the 3rd to the 13th Inclusive, 1833, 13. During 1840 and 1841, Pennington also published a regular column in the Colored American entitled “Common School Review.” See the following issues: July 4, 1840; August 22, 1840; October 24,
Ann Plato was a teacher and a member of the Colored Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut pastored by James W.C. Pennington. Plato's importance as a writer is demonstrated in Pennington's brief introduction to her book: "My authoress has followed the example of Phillis Wheatley, and of Terrence and Captien, and Francis Williams and her compatriots. These all served in adversity, and afterwards found that nature had no objection, at least, to their serving the world in high repute as poets. She, like Phillis Wheatly was, is passionately fond of reading and delights in searching the Holy Scriptures; and is now rapidly improving in knowledge." 14

Robert Benjamin Lewis's educational and occupational background was also deeply rooted in the activism of black communities in the North, especially Boston's black community. Lewis was born in Gardiner, Maine in 1802. He married May F. Henston of East Brunswick, Maine in 1834. The couple settled in Hallowell, Maine and then moved to Bath, Maine. Lewis traveled throughout Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York. He later published Light and Truth in four parts and eventually

1840, April 10, 1841, and May 8, 1841. For information on the Amistad Mutiny and Pennington's role, see Blackett, Beating Against the Barriers, 22-26. For information on Pennington's involvement in the crisis and the debate over whether Pennington should Africa to assist in missionary efforts on behalf of Africans, see James W.C. Pennington to Lewis Tappan, 9 October 1841 in American Missionary Society Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter AMA Papers). James W.C. Pennington to A.F. Williams, 1 November 1841; and Pennington to Tappan, 5 November 1841, AMA Papers. Also see "The Amistad Captives," The Colored American, November 14, 1840, "The Amistad Case," The Colored American, December 26, 1840; "Amistad Captives--Victory--Triumphant," The Colored American, March 13, 1841."

14 For biographical information on Ann Plato and James W.C. Pennington's comments, see Plato, Essays Including Biographies and Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Poetry (Hartford: self published, 1841), introduction. Also see Katherine Clay Bassard, "Spiritual Interrogations: Conversion, Community and Authorship in the Writings of Phillis Wheatley, Ann Plato, Jarena Lee, and Rebecca Cox Jackson," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1992), 92-93.
compiled the material in one book. While in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in the 1850's, Lewis sold his books and was held in high regard by the Haitian people. Unfortunately, he contracted yellow fever and left the island in 1857 and he died in 1858. Although we do not have precise sales data for Light and Truth, the book, published in several additions was important to Boston's African American community and promoted by them. The 1836 version of the text was only 176 pages in length. The expanded version of the text, more than 400 pages, was republished in 1844, by a committee of distinguished colored men including Thomas Dalton, head of the Massachusetts General Colored Association, and James Scott, abolitionist and clothier. The text was reprinted again in 1851. In the introduction to the second edition, the publishing committee indicated that the author spent considerable time collecting information for the study.15

The maturation of the historical thought of Henry Highland Garnet occurred within the context of his abolitionist affiliations and the increasing politicization of the movement

in the 1840’s. Not only was Garnet a forceful orator, but he was actively involved in a number of associations for black uplift in Troy, New York. At the national level, Garnet was an active member of the Negro Convention Movement and one of the first abolitionists to endorse the Liberty Party’s political platform. Intent on pursuing the abolition of slavery through political means caused serious divisions in abolitionist ranks. Many abolitionists who were long committed to Garrisonism, which favored moral suasion over political activity were reluctant to follow Garnet’s lead. In the 1840’s, as a resident of New York State, the contestation over extending suffrage to African Americans in New York left little doubt in Garnet’s mind that politics offered the most viable solutions for the race.16

From an examination of the educational, occupational and activist affiliations of these writers there emerges a fairly clear collective portrait. These patterns both converged and diverged from the general makeup of intellectuals who wrote history in nineteenth century America. According to historian George Callcott, nineteenth-century intellectual writers of history were a fairly uniform group; most were men, New Englanders by birth, well-educated, and primarily wrote history as a hobby. A highly visible and well-connected group, white writers of history used history to further the nationalistic and expansionist sentiments in American life. While black historians were primarily men, members of the clergy, actively involved in the communities in which they lived, and in many instances associates or colleagues, this is where the similarities ceased.

between the two groups. Black writers of history were a relatively small group and were either former slaves or descendants of slaves. While clearly an addendum to their major occupational and activist affiliations rather than a hobby or leisure activity, historical writing was an important intellectual and communal activity.17

Sources and Methodologies in African-American Historical Writing in the Early Antebellum Period

Countering essentialist constructions of race (racial thought premised on reducing race to a set of predetermined biological criteria) was foremost in the minds of black intellectuals. Conversant with nineteenth-century historical literature and sources, black writers relied on the Bible and the works of various writers from classical antiquity. Classical works such as Flavius Josephus’s Antiquities, Herodotus’s Histories, Plutarch’s Notable Lives, and eighteenth and nineteenth century histories such as Count Volney’s Ruin of Empires (1795), Lord Alexander Fraser Tytler Woodhouslee’s Tytler’s Elements of General History (1823), Charles Rollin’s History of the Ancient World (1829), and Noah Webster’s History of the United States (1841), were widely used. In addition to these works, African American writers also used the work of European author Henri Gregorie. Gregorie’s An Inquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties and Literature of Negroes was published in 1810 and Lydia Maria Child’s An Appeal in Favor

of That Class of Americans called Africans (1833) were widely viewed as pivotal sources for vindicating the intellectual capacity of African Americans. 18

The observations of writers in classical antiquity were an important component of nineteenth-century historiography. This was due to the fact that the dominant form of education remained the classical model, emphasizing a knowledge of Greek and Latin and a thorough understanding of the social, political, and cultural and intellectual institutions of classical antiquity. Sweeping changes, however, wrought by the expansionist and nationalist sentiments of this period eroded interest in the classical model of education. Many critics of classical education decried the slavish adherence of the intellectual community to Greek and Latin literature and argued for the development of an American literature or, at least, a focus on more contemporary European literature. Despite the disagreements over the importance of classical learning, Americans were particularly

18 For information on the diffusion of classical literature in the 18th and 19th century, see Meyer Reinhold, Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 250-261. For information on the various sources used by nineteenth century historians, see Lord Alexander Fraser Tytler Woodhouselee, Tytler’s Elements of General History, Ancient and Modern from the British 7th ed., The Whole Work Revised and Continued to the General Peace in Europe in 1815 and the Chronological Table Improved by Thomas Ruffin; and to Which is now added A View of the State of Arts, Sciences, Religion and Government by Edward Nares with Questions Adapted to the Use of Schools and Academics (Hartford: Huntington, 1823); Charles Rollin, The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Grecians and Macedonians 8 vols (Philadelphia: Brown & Peters, 1829); and Noah Webster, History of the United States to which is Prefixed a Brief Account of our English Ancestors, from the Dispersion at Babel, to their Migration to America and the Conquest of South America, By the Spaniards (Columbus: J.N. Whiting, 1841), and Henri Abbe Gregoire, An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral faculties and Literature of Negroes Followed with an Account of the Life and Works of Fifteen Mulattoes Distinguished in Science, Literature and the Arts (New York: Thomas Kirk, 1810) and Lydia Maria Child, An Appeal in Favour of that Class Called Africans (1833). For a review of Childs work, see Review of an Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans, By Lydia Maria Child, in North America Review 41 (July 1835): 170-193,
attracted to classical antiquity because it served as the fountainehead of Western civilization. More important, the study and veneration of the ancient world offered America an ancient past that it did not possess. It is also important to note that many classical works were reprinted throughout the nineteenth century and widely available to educated persons, both black and white. Moreover, because many African-American writers were ministers their training required rudimentary knowledge, if not mastery of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. All of the African-American writers of this period were conversant in the works of classical antiquity, and directly cited or alluded to them in their studies. Their use of these sources demonstrates a facility with classical literature and an intense interest in using this knowledge to forward particular knowledge claims to benefit the race.  

Despite the extensive use of classical writings in their work, for African-American writers, the Bible remained the central work in accurately reconstructing the past and served as the cornerstone for sacred history. The Bible’s authority as a historical source was well established in the literature of the day. Not only were these sentiments expressed among the white intellectual class, but they were widely printed in leading black newspapers during the antebellum period. A column in the Pennsylvania Freeman, “The Literature of the Bible,” cited the observations of Lyman Beecher Stowe, D.D., noted minister and father of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, on the subject. Beecher viewed “the Bible as the great storehouse of classical beauty and excellence. “It is an encyclopedia of imagination, taste and beauty.” In terms of its historical accuracy, we can only say that the history contained in it, is the only well authenticated history, which

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reaches beyond the fabulous ages and carries back a beam of light to the creation.”

Beecher also felt similarly about the Bible’s biography. “The biography of the Bible in
individuality and exactness of delineation, stands unrivaled in the development of passions,
both the powerful and the tender, the malignant and the gentle, touching every chord of
tenderness.”

African-American writers, who were primarily ministers or associated with various
denominations, had specific cultural reasons for using the Bible as a source to present
historical information. According to historian Mark Noll, the use of the Bible in the
nineteenth century as a historical source and as a defining element of a Christian nation
represented a union between biblical typology and American nationalism. African
Americans, however, utilized the scriptures to subvert the nationalist typology of whites.
This usage and reading of the Bible was consistent with what historian Vincent Winbush
has termed a third “reading” of the Bible entailing the establishment of a canon and
hermeneutical principle (the beginning of independent church movements in the nineteenth
century). As Winbush noted, African Americans, like other groups, read the Bible
selectively or freely. They endorsed certain parts and ignored others.

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20 See Lyman Beecher, “The Literature of the Bible,” Pennsylvania Freeman, April 4,
1838. For biographical information on Lyman Ward Beecher, see Charles Beecher, ed.,
Autobiography, Correspondence, etc. of Lyman Beecher, D.D. 2 vols (New York: Harper
& Brothers Publishers, 1865). Other discussions of the Bible that appeared in antebellum
black newspapers include “The Conversion of the World,” Colored American, April 8,
Colored American, July 20, 1839; “The Bible,” The Northern Star and Freeman Advocate,
February 10, 1842; “The Cultivation of the Mind,” The Northern Star and Freeman
Advocate, March 10, 1843.

21 For information on the United States as a biblical nation, see Mark Noll, The
Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776-1865 (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1982), in Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, ed., The Bible in America:
Motivated by the creation of independent churches, and being active members of churches or moral reform organizations with a significant church membership, these writers “wax[ed] biblical” regarding the social and political plight of African Americans. They appealed to biblical ideas regarding the sovereignty of God, the evil of slavery, and the ultimate vengeance of God against those who violated his commandments. African Americans used this reading of the Bible to reorient the debate on slavery, juxtaposing themselves with the ancient Israelites who were destined to reach the Promised Land or Canaan. For African Americans, Canaan was freedom, and the Bible served as the divine mandate to make this idea a reality.22

The use of the Bible as the divine mandate for social and political change was best expressed through the use of the jeremiad. The jeremiad, while a staple in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century American thought generally, was, by the antebellum period, eclipsed by the idea of “history as progress.” Among African Americans, however, as David Howard Pitney and Wilson Jeremiah Moses have shown, the jeremiad was used as an extension of messianic black nationalism, which emphasized notions of African-American destiny, and served as “the key mode of antebellum African-American rhetoric.” African-American writers utilized the jeremiad to remind America of its democratic promises and as a means of admonishing blacks to accept their responsibilities and work actively to uplift the race.23

22 Vincent Winbush views the Bible as a language world which African Americans could “retreat, a “world” they could identify with, draw strength from, and in fact manipulate for self-affirmation.” Winbush also views the readings of the Bible as public or communal, manifested in a wide variety of sources including songs, sermons and testimonies and I would add historical production and each reading contributes toward the construction of a canon. See Vincent Winbush, “The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of Interpretative History,” in Cain Felder, Stony the Road we Trod, 81-84 and 89-93.

In his Treatise of the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the People of Color, Hosea Easton, when discussing Africa’s ultimate fate, rejected colonization, armed force, and coercion as remedies for improving the plight of the race. Rather at the end of his volume he invoked the jeremiad, a millennial vision of a new age in which the descendants of Africa understood the importance of trade and commerce, and the continent had emerged from barbarism into the marvelous light of Christianity:

Africa will never rise herself, neither will she be raised by others, by warlike implements, or ardent spirits; nor yet by a hypocritical religious crusade. But when she rises, other nations will have learned to deal with her from principle. When that time shall arrive, the lapse of a few generations will show the world that her sons will again take the lead in the field of virtuous enterprise, filling the front ranks of the church, when she marches into the millennial era.  

James W.C. Pennington’s Textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People criticized Northern and Southern church leaders who sanctioned slavery. Since slavery, according to Pennington, was an outgrowth of the “Romanish church,” or Catholic church, those who advocated it were actually promoting a return to the “dark age,” a period in which a large percentage of classical knowledge was lost to the rest of the world. This approach was surely inconsistent with Protestant church doctrine and demonstrated the church’s regressive rather than progressive tendencies. Pennington called for a return to the true tenets of Christianity within the church. In another instance, when discussing the origins of African enslavement, Pennington noted that idolatry and polytheism played an important role. “Hence our venerable ancestors provoked God to give them up to the influence of their folly,” and to “recover from this degradation from

Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms.

which we have sunk we shall need to rely eminently upon God.” While Africans practiced different forms of religion including Coptic Christianity, Pennington utilized the jeremiad to admonish nineteenth-century blacks to acknowledge the folly of their ancestors rather than to be embarrassed about it and to return to the true calling of God. This admission was an important step in redeeming the race and moving them closer to a restoration to their former status. Historian Wilson Jeremiah Moses labeled this idea that Africans fell from God’s favor, but were not irredeemable and would ultimately benefit from it, the fortunate fall.25

Pennington placed African redemption in a historical context three years prior to the publication of The Textbook of the History and Origin of the Colored People. In “An Address at the First Anniversary of West Indian Emancipation,” (1839) Pennington characterized history as a “school of politics.” “On its pages we behold the bloody and mournful pathway of tyrants who have met their doom and gone. Let the powers that be

25 Editorials in the Colored American commented favorably on the role of blacks in the early church. One writer noted that the “pinnacle of earthly glory with all its shining attractions is before them. That Cyrian, Augustine, Tertullian and others in the church were colored men and may be again. What Hannibal of old was in honor and military prowess, some of our sons may be, and as Hanno and Terrence excelled in the literary annals of the world, so may we, at least in our posterity. Take courage then brethren. The God of benevolence, the bountiful benefactor of all mankind has given to us as much physical strength and intellectual power, as to any other men. “Editorial: Facts for Colored Americans,” The Colored American, May 6, 1837. Another editorial pointed out the failings of the church and God’s vengeance for the church’s involvement in sanctioning slavery. “We feel deeply humbled before God’s vengeance for the church’s involvement in sanctioning slavery. “We seek deeply humbled before God and tremble in view of his avenging rod, when we consider the connection of the church with the great national sin, slavery, for God will someday make inquisition for blood.” “Our Claims on the Church,” The Colored American, May 6, 1837. Also see “Africa Has Claims Upon Us,” The Colored American, April 29, 1837. Wilson Jeremiah Moses discusses the concept of the “fortunate fall” in “African Redemption and the Decline of the Fortunate Fall Doctrine,” in Wilson Jeremiah Moses, The Wings of Ethiopia: Studies in African American Life and Letters (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 141-158.
read of the powers that have been and be wise.” Pennington’s pronouncements
demonstrate a strong correlation between African redemption and history in the nineteenth
century.26

Other writers were more explicit in their invocation of the jeremiad. Henry
Highland Garnet, a Presbyterian minister, delivered an incendiary “Address to the Slaves
of the United States,” at the National Negro Convention at Buffalo, New York. This
speech was later published and widely distributed. Garnet’s speech is unique in that he
actively linked the plight of free blacks and slaves. He also used history to a limited degree
to castigate the nation for the mistreatment of African Americans. He noted the hypocrisy
of Christians in dealing with slaves, and the damaging effect of slavery on the development
of intellect. He also cited examples of slave rebellions and noted the substantial powers of
historical discourse in preserving the heroic deeds of slaves. After discussing the failure of
Denmark Vesey’s unsuccessful slave revolt, Garnet noted that despite the revolt’s failures,
“History, faithful to her high trust will transcribe his name on the same monument with
Moses, Hampden, Tell, Bruce, Wallace, Toussaint L’ Ouvrtuer [sic], Lafayette and
Washington.” In comparing Denmark Vesey’s rebellion to other leaders of national
importance, Garnet affirmed the contributions of African Americans in stirring the national
conscience to promote freedom.27

In his use of the jeremiad, Garnet also pointed out the declension or retrogression
from the original promise—a retrogression fostered by white prejudice in the modern
world: “By an almost common consent, the modern world seems determined to pilfer

26 Pennington’s remarks were made at the First Anniversary of West Indian
Independence, see An Address Delivered at Newark, NJ at the First Anniversary of West
Indian, August 1, 1839 (Aaron & Guest Printers, 1839).
27 See Stuckey, Slave Culture, 154-155 and Henry Highland Garnet, “An Address to
the Slaves of the United States of America,” 6.
Africa of her glory. It were [sic] not enough that her children have scattered over the globe, clothed in the garments of shame—humiliated and oppressed—but her merciless foes weary themselves in the plundering the tombs of our renowned sires, and in obliterating their worthy deeds, which were inscribed by fame on the pages of ancient history.” Here, Garnet is referring to the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1799. The occupation lasted less than three years and the French were driven out by an Anglo-Ottoman force in 1802.28

Juxtaposing the history of African Americans with that of the ancient Israelites, Garnet urged days of “bitter bread and tabernacle in the wilderness,” to hear the voices of African-American slave[s] crying from the “dark holds of slave ships, rice swamps, plantations of cotton and tabacco [sic].” He also warned of God’s wrath against a slaveholding nation. Garnet’s comments invoked the jeremiad, while prophesying the ultimate destruction of white Americans: “You have slain us all the day long—you have no mercy. Legions of haggard ghosts stalk through the land. Behold! see, they come: Oh what myriad’s Hark hear their broken bones as they clatter together! With deep unearthly voices they cry “We come, we come! for vengeance we come! Tremble guilty nation for the God of Justice lives and reigns.”29

Another defining aspect in the methodological arena of African-American historical discourse was its intersections with Romanticism. Romanticism was influenced by the development of transcendentalism in the 1830’s. This intellectual movement


See Garnet, The Past, and the Present Condition and Destiny of the Colored Race, 21
transformed the narrow Enlightenment-driven idea of privileging reason and rationality as the preeminent task of the human mind and offered instead "an organic interpretation of nature, the cosmos, and humanity." This organic interpretation drew its potency from the belief in defining knowledge in symbolic ways and metaphysically rather than simply in concrete ways. The man of feeling, the artist, the poet as opposed to the analytic thinker was privileged in the Romantic outlook of the world.30

For historians, the use of Romantic devices such as the epic hero and the representative man offered a means of interjecting human passion and emotion into their historical narratives. Emulating the model of classical scholars such as Herodotus, Plutarch and Thucydides, romantic historians wrote history to generate interest. These works accentuated history's epic aura. Romantic historians believed it was not sufficient for a work to be well-written, but it must also reflect the values and standards of nineteenth-century America. Similar to the classics, Romantic historians used history as a means of conveying a story concerning human progress and morality.31

31 See Levin, History as Romantic Art, 3-23

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Romanticism, in keeping with its focus on symbols, nature and human possibility, also fostered an interest in local distinctiveness and other human qualities and attributes thought to be uniquely American such as ruggedness, thrift and patriotism. These qualities were accentuated and amplified in the works of numerous Romantic historians who elevated history to what historian David Levin terms “romantic art.” George Bancroft and William Prescott are two such examples of this approach. Black historians also made use of Romantic ideas but, unlike their white counterparts, significantly altered their meaning. Instead of celebrating American virtues, African-American historians noted America’s vices by challenging the providential myth and arguing for more parity with other groups in American society.32

32 Many of the romantic historian such as Richard Hildreth, George Bancroft, and William Prescott were trained in European universities and were collectively known as gentleman scholars or Boston Brahmns and most were graduates of Harvard University. Richard Hildreth was trained as a lawyer, but was more interested in journalism. A staunch opponent of Republican sentiments, Hildreth was a federalist. He also bears the distinction of having written the first novel published in the United States on antislavery, The Slave or Memoirs of Archy Moore (1835). Due to the unpopularity of this theme, Hildreth published the volume using a pseudonym. He later published another antislavery text entitled Despotism in America (1840). George Bancroft earned a Ph.D. from Gottingen University and spent a considerable amount of time living aboard. He is best known for his multivolume History of the United States, first published in 1834 and appearing in a number of editions until 1895. Bancroft later served as Secretary of the Navy under President Polk and as Minister to Prussia under President Ulysses S. Grant. William Prescott is best known for his depiction’s of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru, History of the Conquest of Mexico (1843) and History of the Conquest of Peru (1847). For biographical information on Hildreth and Prescott, Martha M. Pingel, An American Unitarian: Richard Hildreth as Philosopher (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948). Susan L. Mizuchi offers an alternative reading of the Romantic historians. She, unlike Levin, argues for more diversity and difference of opinion among them on issues of class, race and slavery. Mizuchi stresses the political nature of intellectual disagreements between historians such as Bancroft and Hildreth. In fact, she sees Hildreth as a critic of Romantic historiography. His attempt to write a more “objective”--that is to say, less romantic and less political influenced study--informs her assessment of him. Parkman is also viewed as an individuals whose focus on Native American history offered a alternative to the Euro-American centered narrative of Bancroft and others. See Susan Mizuchi, The Power of Historical Knowledge: Narrating the Past in Hawthorne, James and Dresier (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 45-56.
One of the most commonly used Romantic devices was the concept of Representative Men. This device was utilized in many historical writings of the period, and African Americans made ample use of it. Nineteenth-century historians believed an individual’s life should represent the ideals to which the race or nation should strive. In most instances, the individual possessed the ideal traits of self-denial, a moderate amount of passion, a certain loftiness, constancy, and endurance. To prove the claims of sacred and secular texts which showed that “the first general fact is that arts and sciences had their origins with our ancestors, and from them have flown forth to the world. They gave them to Greece, Greece to Rome, and Rome to others,” James Pennington included biographical sketches which dramatized the achievements of various African-American notables. By including biographical sketches in his text, Pennington hoped to vindicate the intellectual capacity of Africans. Among African-American and antislavery writers, the most popular representative men included Anthony Amo, a recipient of a Ph.D. from the University of Wittenberg, Thomas Fuller, the African calculator, and Jacobus Eliza-Captien, a recipient of the Ph.D. from the University of Leyden, as a contemporary example of African achievement. Anthony Amo was singularly important, not only because he achieved stature as a philosopher in Europe, but because he was born in Guinea. Thomas Fuller was a slave who did not possess the ability to read and write, yet was known to perform sophisticated feats of mathematical calculation. J.E. Capitien was also a native-born African who excelled in ancient languages and eventually published a dissertation in Latin on the calling of the Gentiles. Each of these men’s lives demonstrated the capacity of Africans to achieve outstanding intellectual feats.33

Pennington’s discussion of Representative men was also a means of offering a critique of the intellectual commentary on the intellectual capacity of African Americans. Pennington criticized Jefferson, as severely as David Walker did twelve years earlier. Additionally, he attributed Jefferson’s pronouncements on the inferiority of blacks to the fact that slavery had produced an adverse effect on Jefferson’s philosophical and ideological thought. According to Pennington, in his haste to relegate blacks to the lower orders of mankind, Jefferson failed to realize that his opinions would later be challenged by African Americans with classical and theological training who had benefited from the humanitarian spirit of the age: “O that he reflected for a moment that his opinions were destined to undergo a rigid scrutiny by an improved state of intellect assisted by the rising power of an unbiased spirit of benevolence. Had he done this, he would, as a wise man [have] modified that ill judged part of his work which relates to the colored people.” In some ways, Pennington’s critique and treatise is a fulfillment of David Walker’s desire to see a generation of black scholars who would challenge the pronouncements of white scholars on race. In Pennington’s estimation, intellect is not gradated or different among human beings, it was created by God and its means of improvement were the same. Using the example of the public school system, in which he was actively involved, Pennington pointed out that the common school system is the first site in starting an intellectual foundation.34

Ann Plato took a different tack. Citing the achievements of John Milton, a poet, Issac Newton, a scientist, and Sir Walter Scott, author, Ann Plato did not substitute black representative men for white ones; she instead used these men to shed light on the black

34 See Pennington, A Textbook of the History and Origin of the Colored People, 54-74
predicament. Representative men, she argued, acquired genius through mental discipline not through natural endowment. Milton’s _Paradise Lost_, the story of Satan’s fall from heaven, Newton’s explanation of the laws of gravity, and Scott’s epic adventure _Ivanhoe_, which skillfully combined epic and history, offered some of the most revered examples of European achievement in the secular world. Plato used them to further her discussion of African-American intellect. Given the example of these men, the development of intellectual genius was not innate, but it emanated from mental discipline and hard work. According to Plato, anyone, regardless of race, could cultivate the intellectual capacity of the mind to the fullest. Education was not only central to a good life, but also essential for racial advancement.35

Among modern historians, Robert Benjamin Lewis cited traditional representative men such as John Captien, Anthony Amo, and Paul Cuffee, the emigrationist representative men, but whereas Pennington confided himself to men traditionally identified as representative men, Lewis incorporated several notable African-American historians into his discussion of representative men. The most important of these was David Walker whom Lewis considered “an African and distinguished Friend, a good writer and a warm advocate for the miserable condition of his brethren in slavery.” He went further to say that Walker’s “celebrated _Appeal_ in behalf of his afflicted brethren is highly esteemed by wise men.” He also included Hosea Easton whose _Treatise on the Civil and Political Condition of the Colored Population_ he said is “a profound production and gives a true sketch of the condition for this class of people.”36

35  Ibid., 29-33.
36  See Robert Benjamin Lewis, _Light and Truth_, 304-335
Lewis, unlike many of his contemporaries, also attributed representative qualities such as constancy, endurance, and learning to women. He cited two well-known Alexandrian poetesses, Cornelia, who devoted herself to culture and learning, and Hypatia, who also distinguished herself in mathematics, astronomy and philosophy, as exemplars of the achievements of African women in antiquity. Lewis also devoted a considerable portion of the chapter to the accomplishments of Phillis Wheatley, a distinguished African-American female poet. Lewis spoke favorably of her scholarly work and printed excerpts from several of her poems assuring the reader that they would be "favorable to African genius." He closed the chapter with a tribute to Maria Stewart for her appeal on behalf of oppressed blacks, and her steadfast manner in promoting African rights.37

The discussion of African fame in antiquity also evoked usage of the Romantic device of Representative men and women. Garnet referenced the "beautiful Cleopatra, who swayed and captivated the heart of Anthony." He also cited Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who during the Punic Wars crossed the Alps and threatened Rome. Garnet also included Terrence, as known as Terrence the Afer, Euclid, Cyrian, Origen and Augustine, the African Bishop at Hippo, as Africans who distinguished themselves in

the ancient world. All of these men had some relationship to Africa either through birth or through service.\textsuperscript{38}

Black writers in the antebellum period were deeply influenced by the Western canon as well as European and American writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They used these works to bolster their claims for African-American social, political, economic and intellectual parity. Moreover, these writers also used selective readings of the Bible to authorize the validity and veracity of various knowledge claims about African and African-American history. This point becomes particularly poignant when one examines the continued use of the jeremiad as a means of dramatizing not only what Wilson Jeremiah Moses terms a "historiography of decline," but as the rationale for the ultimate redemption of Africa and persons of African descent throughout the world. Coupled to the jeremiad, but with more wordly as opposed to metaphysical possibilities, was Romanticism. Romanticism which in all cases transcended essentialist racial theory grounded in biologically determinist constructions of race offered a means to appropriate the best, grandest, and noblest human qualities and characteristics, and apply them liberally to a wide range of individuals who were either associated with Africa, Africans, or African Americans. This philosophy, then, prompted individuals to rethink the condition of African Americans in the larger society.

**European Antiquities and African Genealogies: Race and Selective Memories of the Past.**

An important component of historical writing in the antebellum period was its attempt to come to terms with the African past, beginning with the African experience during classical antiquity and progressing through the European Age of Discovery and

\textsuperscript{38} See Garnet, *The Past, Present Condition and Destiny of the Colored Race*, 10-12
modern history and American history in the nineteenth century. Coming to terms with the past required an engagement with antiquities, artifacts from the past, racial theory and an assessment of the African presence in classical antiquity and its meaning for persons of African descent in the Atlantic world, a world created by the European Age of Exploration beginning in the sixteenth century. One of the overarching concerns of this project was the interest in antiquities. Interest in history was fueled by a number of occurrences in Europe and America. One of the most important issues was the fascination of Europeans and Americans with Egyptian Antiquities between 1800 and 1850. As John T. Irwin has noted this interest was fueled by Napoleon’s brief occupation of Egypt from 1798-1801. As part of the expedition, Napoleon was accompanied by more than 150 artists and scientists from the Academe des Inscriptions. These individuals were responsible for investigating the occupied territory. As a result of the expedition, Jean-Francois Champollion deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphic writing using a bilingual text of the Rosetta Stone. This discovery not only became the basis for modern Egyptology, but also led to the creation of a virtual cottage industry in the presentation and exhibition of Egyptian Antiquities in private collections, public museums, and popular public shows.  

Black writers were also affected by European and American interests in Antiquities. Among black writers, this interest took two forms: historical writing in newspapers which focused on the Antiquities of the Near East and an intense interest in the African role in classical antiquity. The latter concern can also be connected with messianic black nationalism and cyclical understandings of historical development common in the nineteenth century which were closely connected with Christianity. The black press,  

especially the Colored American, the most influential black owned and operated newspaper since Freedom's Journal, played a leading role in promoting the study of antiquities. The paper, with its wide circulation in New York and Philadelphia, also featured some of the most prominent abolitionists as either editors or featured writers. This distinguished list included William Cooper Nell, a Boston abolitionist and confidant of William Lloyd Garrison, James W.C. Pennington, and James McCune Smith, a medical doctor and an active participant in civic causes in New York City.40

Founded in 1837 by Philip Bell and Samuel Cornish as The Weekly Advocate, the paper’s name was changed to The Colored American in the first year of operation. The paper sought to promote race pride and to expand the traditional discourse on education and history. From its inception, The Weekly Advocate featured a wide range of articles on historical subjects in a column entitled “Useful Knowledge.” This column included information on various topics including the admission of states to the union, the usefulness of the Bible as a historical source, principal features of the various nations of the earth, explanations of ancient names and places, the importance of knowledge, and assessments of the free black population.41

In 1840, The Colored American featured a series titled “Sacred Geography and Antiquities.” The series highlighted the paper’s interest in both biblical antiquity and history. It featured descriptions of ancient empires and their demise during the four historical epochs: the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek and Roman periods. Additionally, in 1841, The Colored American published a series of articles and etchings of various biblical cities in each issue. The paper’s interest in history and antiquities is not only an indicator of their importance in the black community, but also a reflection of its influence on James W.C. Pennington and James McCune Smith, who were associated as a contributor and co-editor, respectively.\(^{42}\)

The first installment in the antiquities series appeared in May 1840, one year before the publication of Pennington’s Textbook of the Origin and History of Colored People. It featured a discussion of the Chaldean city of Babylon. According to the writer, although

of Colored Men,” Colored American, August 23, 1837; “Education,” Colored American, September 30, 1837; “Pay Your Minister and Teacher,” The Colored American, September 2, 1837. “Mr. Buckingham’s Lectures,” The Colored American, January 13, 1838; and “The Colored Race,” The Colored American, July 7, 1838. The Colored American also supported literary and intellectual pursuits. “Then brethren, if such be the influence of institutions of knowledge and refinement of all people, we should avail ourselves of every chance of procuring them. We need all the moral character and the mental resources we possibly husband. We are barbarously oppressed by a refined and Christian people, and we need more than common intelligence and grace to sustain us--and we know of no better way of procuring these blessings for ourselves and our posterity than by establishing moral and literary institutions.” The Elevation of Our People,” The Colored American, December 7, 1839. Also see “Characteristics of the People of Color,” The Colored American, May 16, 1840.

highly revered as a magnificent city whose inhabitants wielded great political and economic influence, “its pride, idolatry and abominable wickedness provoked the almighty.” The paper’s assessment of Assyria is similar to that of Babylon. Much, if not practically all, of the historical information on the kingdom was found in the writings of various ancient historians such as Diodorus Siculus, Tragus, Justin, Castor, and Eusebius. Despite a history of more than 500 years, that Assyria’s government and social organization was insufficient to escape the wrath of God is also mentioned. The rapid expansion of the kingdom was occasioned by corruption and murder. According to biblical history, the city of Nineveh was spared due to the preaching of the prophet Jonah.43

Both of these historical empires, Babylon and Assyria, had similar characteristics: the historical documentation of their existence was based on Greek and Roman sources; each empire experienced unchecked expansion which caused social, political, and economic decline; and each, according to the authors, was eventually destroyed as the result of religious systems based on polytheism. These articles served a dual purpose: one, they display an engagement with historical and biblical Antiquities; and two, given the nineteenth century focus on nations, they offer a veiled means of commenting on the present state of the United States. It is highly probable that these writers were implicitly

comparing the history of ancient empires with the United States, in an attempt to caution American policymakers. Rapid expansion and the worship of slavery as the nation’s idol occasioned God’s wrath in the form of intellectual and physical assaults of the slave regime.44

In addition to an intense interest in antiquities, African-American writers used their treatises to document the achievements and accomplishments of Africans or individuals associated with Africa in classical antiquity. An interest in the contributions of Africans to classical antiquity was paramount in validating and authorizing claims of black inclusion in the body politic. In a society obsessed with identifying models to build a new society, Americans drew first on Roman and later on Greek models of culture, education and politics to buttress American institutions. Recognizing the importance of rehabilitating the image of Africa, African Americans drew upon this same tradition to vindicate the race. Therefore the idea of an African antiquity corresponded with the African-American fight for inclusion in the antebellum period.45

The question of origins and black realities in the present were inextricably linked to racial theories developed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Racial theory evolved from incomplete understandings of internal human biology and were also

44 See Pictorial Illustrations of the bible and Views in Palestine,” The Colored American, June 12, 1841 and “Two Hundred Pictorial Illustrations of the Bible, Consisting of Views of the Holy Land by Robert Sears,” The Colored American, October 17, 1840. 45 Wilson Jeremiah Moses argues that African American interests in rehabilitating the role of the race in antiquity was similar to the work of European and American writers. Black intellectuals drew from intellectual currents in German, English and American literature and history to construct a similar tradition. While these traditions have a mythic element, antimodern and presentist implications, they also include a strong response to counter the effects of slavery and segregation. While this argument can be applied to both the antebellum and postbellum periods, I am specifically relating it to the former period. See Moses, Afrotopia, 18-43.
informed by biblical accounts of human creation. Using racial classifications posited by European scientists such as Carolus Linneaus, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, G.L. Buffon, Immanuel Kant, and Johann Gottfried von Herder, race theory was informed by ideas of degeneration, monogenesis, and later, polygenesis. Degeneration, a popular theory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sought to explain changes in physical type from generation to generation. This theory was also designed to buttress the contention that climate and environment determined racial characteristics. It followed from the logic of this theory that certain races would automatically decline if removed from their natural environment. Monogenesis, a racial theory which promoted the idea of one creation and the unity of the human race, was steeped in the belief that race was primarily determined by lineage. The scientific community’s construction of race as lineage demonstrated the continued influence of religion on the scientific establishment. This view was promoted in the late-eighteenth century by Samuel Stanhope Smith, president of Princeton University, in An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species, To Which Are Added Strictures on Lord Kaim’s Discourse, on the Original Diversity of Mankind (1787). Smith sought to reconcile earlier racial theories with the biblical accounts of creation. For Smith, environment, not inherent physical qualities, determined both the condition and potential of African Americans.46

According to Michael Banton, the monogenetic approach to explanations of human differences faced opposition from competing theories. The sea-change in racial

thought occurred with the shift from the idea of race as lineage to the notion of race as type in the early nineteenth century. This change was first expressed in the work of George Cuvier. Cuvier, a French scientist, who conducted an expedition in the Pacific to examine the anatomical differences among various races sought to expand upon the biblical story of creation and explain different varieties or types of human beings. Cuvier’s work had several important implications for racial theory. As Banton suggests Cuvier conflated race and type. In doing so, Cuvier opened the door for scientists to link race and type in essentialist ways. He accomplished this by setting up a racial hierarchy with whites at the top and blacks on the bottom. Moreover, his work also suggested that differences in culture and mental capacity were linked to physique. These ideas led to the construction of broadly constructed racial typologies which avoided the question of discussing with specificity at what level (genus, species, or variety) natural differences occurred.\textsuperscript{47}

In mid-nineteenth century America, the conflation of race and type led to the rise of essentialist constructions of racial capacity based on measurements of various aspects of the human physique. One of the early pioneers in this project was Samuel George Morton. Morton, a Philadelphia doctor, was best known for his book, \textit{Crania Americana} (1839). In the concluding remarks of the text, Morton attempted to demonstrate the correlation between skull size and the capacity for civilization. He argued that since blacks possessed the smallest brains (whites possessed the biggest and browns were somewhere in between), they possessed the least capacity for civilization. Morton extended this position in \textit{Crania Aegyptica} (1844). Based on his examinations of Egyptian skulls, Morton concluded that although blacks were numerous in ancient Egypt, they possessed lowly

\textsuperscript{47} See Michael Banton, \textit{Racial Theories}, 44-80.
stations such as servants and slaves. In short, their position changed little between classical antiquity and the present.\textsuperscript{48}

By focusing on what seemed to be inherent physical differences between races, it was not long before racial typology began to seriously undermine the monogenetic theory of race. To replace monogenesis, scientists and anthropologists posited polygenesis, multiple and separate creation of races, as a more plausible explanation of racial difference. Promoted by prominent scientists such as Josiah Nott, Samuel Gliddon, and Louis Aggasiz, essentialist constructions of race became more prevalent than ever. \textsuperscript{49}

In this new climate of racial classification, black intellectuals turned to alternative racial theories such as self-regeneration, which posited the view that black exposure to normative Christian values would rectify discrepancies in behavior and status. These writers also believed, as they had in the past, that history could be used to counter essentialist constructions of racial capacity, which included mental and moral capabilities. “History, then, became a viable tool wherein these writers could disprove the fallacy of racial theories such as polygenesis which were designed to separate persons of African descent from the Great Chain of Being.” Moreover, by documenting the achievements of blacks in classical antiquity, it would be difficult to argue that blacks were inferior and would hasten their full inclusion in the body politic. \textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 50-62. \\
\textsuperscript{49} Additional information on the American School of Anthropology can be found in Lee D. Baker, \textit{From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954}. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 14-17. Also see Josiah C. Nott, “Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Race,” in Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., \textit{The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860}. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1981), 206-238. \\
\textsuperscript{50} Mia Bay argues that black writers throughout the antebellum and postbellum period argued in favor of the biblical story of creation. They also countered racist discourse in three ways: one, they argued for the biological similarity of all human beings;
Given the concerns about the nature of racial classification and the need for racial vindication, it is not surprising that the majority of writers focused on the roles Africans played in antiquity, the historical development of racial ideology, and the vindication of African-American intellectual capacity. One of the initial writers of this era, Hosea Easton, was not only a proponent of the self-regeneration theory of race, but his work focused on vindicating African-American intellect. For Easton, race was not the sum of physical characteristics but rather the sum of culture, temperament, and especially intellect. Intellect served as the foundational issue of the manuscript because of the propensity of environmentalists to argue that African Americans possessed limited intellectual capacity. Although he identified certain similarities in nature and intellect, Easton viewed the development of intellect as following a different set of laws not necessarily proscribed by physical characteristics. 51

For Easton, intellect was not biologically predetermined, but influenced by public sentiment. Public sentiment was an important factor in shaping, not only the mind, but the progress of nations. Intellectual capacity, as was demonstrated by the work of earlier intellectuals such as David Walker and Maria Stewart, was one of the most important components for establishing the fitness of African Americans as participants in American life. Given the direct correlation between the customs and general beliefs of Americans, and the development of intellect and national character, intellectual advancement was two, cited the authority of the scriptures and three, invoked the accomplishments of the ancient Egyptians. See Mia Bay, "The White Image in the Black Mind," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University Press, 1993), 67, 81-82. The connection between race and nation is also discussed in Patrick Joseph Rael, "The Lion’s Painting: African-American Thought in the Antebellum North," (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1995), 154-288. 51 See Hosea Easton, A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States, 6-7.
wholly dependent on the nature of public sentiment. Easton was not content simply to voice the importance of intellect and national character, intellectual advancement was wholly dependent on the nature of public sentiment, but he used history to demonstrate it. He utilized a comparative analysis of the history of Africa and Europe as a means to analyze the development of distinct cultures.\(^5\)

The first portion of Easton’s treatise began by establishing the greatness of African civilizations in antiquity. According to Easton, Africans, descendants of Noah, established the first government after the flood: “Ham was the son of Noah, and the founder of the African race, and progenitor to Assur, who probably founded the first government after the flood.” Not only was an African the founder of the first civilization, but Easton contended “it is evident from the best sources extant, that the arts and sciences flourished among this great branch of the human family, long before its benefits were known to any other.” To demonstrate this point, he used the example of Chederaom, king of the Elamites, who had already begun a reign of robbery and murder while Africans were engaged in more worthwhile pursuits. Easton established fundamental differences in the development of civilizations by discussing of the journey of the Israelites into Egypt.

\(^5\) Changing public sentiment was a key component of African-American agitation against charges of black inferiority. See Easton, _Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States_, 6-7. It was generally accepted by 19th century historians that Egypt played a seminal role in the diffusion of art and literature to the rest of the world. Rollin, arguably the most popular writer of this period, stated the case for Egypt succinctly. “Egypt was ever considered, by all the ancients, as the most renowned school for wisdom and from whence most arts and sciences were derived. The kingdom bestowed its noblest labors and finest arts on the improvement of mankind; and Greece was so sensible of this that its most illustrious men, such as Homer, Pythagoras, Plato, even its great legislators, Lycurgus and Solon, with many more whom it is needless to mention, traveled into Egypt, to complete that studies, and draw from that fountain whatever was rare and valuable in every kind of learning. God himself has given this kingdom a glorious testimony, when praising Moses, he says of him, that, he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. See Rollin, _Ancient History_, vol 1., 135-136.
He also described the Egyptian state as advanced in the social, economic, and political realms.  

Not only were Africans capable of establishing empires, but they also possessed the intellect to construct the apparatus of government, which they did. Referencing the work of the Roman historian Diodorus Siculus, Easton noted that several Egyptian princes worked to perfect the development and operation of the government. By the time of Jacob, in sacred history, Egyptians had a working knowledge of political institutions. Governmental institutions among the Egyptians were divided into several districts or departments. Councils were composed of qualified persons who assisted with the management of public affairs. Egypt also conducted a considerable commerce on the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Civility and refinement, according to Easton, were not endemic to European civilization, but rather, "It is from the Egyptians, that many of the arts, both of elegance and ability have been handed down in an uninterrupted chain, to the modern nations of Europe."  

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53 See Easton, A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political condition of the Colored People of the United States, 8.

54 In passage, Easton is explicitly engaging an earlier abolitionist tradition on Africa and African Americans. Works in this canon include Abbe Henri Gregorie, A Inquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties and Literature of the Negro: Followed with an Account of the Life and Works of Fifteen Negroes and Mulattoes Distinguished in Science, Literature and the Arts, 9-89. Easton may have been also drawn on his knowledge of theology and African places in the Bible to further his critique of Africa. For information on the relationship between black theology and Africa, see Cain Felder, Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990). Information on the black presence in the ancient world, especially Egypt and Ethiopia, see Frank M. Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience (Harvard: Belknap University Press, 1970), 101-12.; and Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 63-107. also see Martin Bernal, Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization vol 1. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 11-74. While he did not explicitly cite historical works, Easton was clearly aware of Rollin’s Ancient History and patterns his own historical assessment of African civilizations on Rollin’s work. Rollin’s states that
The general peacefulness, humility and generosity of Africans was viewed by Easton as a trait that was fixed and immutable. This presentation of the historical development of African societies reinforced Easton’s hypothesis of African and European polarity. Historian Bruce Dain has noted that Easton’s construction of European and African civilization as “polar opposites” anticipated the twentieth century African-American perspective on race. The sentiment of polarity is vividly demonstrated in Easton’s assessment of the environmental influences on European civilization. Subscribing to the biblical genealogy, Easton used this genealogy to demonstrate fundamental differences between blacks and whites. Whereas Ham was the first African, Javan (Japeth) another of Noah’s sons, was the first European. After establishing himself on the Western coast of Asia Minor, Javan’s descendants proceeded to occupy present day Europe. While Africans distinguished themselves in government, science, and literature, Easton suggested that Europeans did little of note until the establishment of the Roman empire. Following the decline of the Roman Empire, however, “all Europe exhibited a picture of the most melancholy barbarity.” Ann Plato’s text while not explicitly engaging the idea of African origins does recognize Africa’s place in the dissemination of ancient knowledge by pointing out that “Egypt that once shot over the world brilliant rays of genius is sunk in darkness.”

Plato also argued in favor of the self-regeneration theory of racial evolution. James W.C. Pennington’s Textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People, like Ann Plato’s work, also foregrounded the question of African origins through an

55 “the Egyptians were the first people who rightly understood the rules of government. A nation so grave and serious immediately perceived that the true end of politics is, to make life easy and a people happy.” See Rollin, Ancient History, 136-137.

55 See Easton, A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and the Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People, 10.
examination of the Hamitic myth. In the first chapter of his study “The Vexed and Vexing Question,” Pennington challenged the veracity of the Hamitic myth. Using the Bible and Josephus’s *Histories*, Pennington showed that Noah cursed Canaan rather than Ham. As historian Benjamin Braude has pointed out, the Hamitic myth evolved into a potent symbol of black inferiority in the nineteenth century. Originally posited in theology as a means of showing the early genealogy of man, the myth took on racist characteristics and eventually was used, primarily by proslavery advocates, as a biblical justification for the debased condition of persons of African descent. This myth, drawn from a loose interpretation of Noah’s actions after the Great Deluge (flood) described Noah’s drunkenness and nakedness and Ham’s mockery of it. As punishment, supposedly, Noah cursed Ham and his progeny. According to the legend, they would be hewers of wood and drawers of water. This curse was more devastating because Ham’s descendants were supposedly the inhabitants of Africa.⁵⁶

It is not surprising given the impact of the Hamitic myth in scholarly circles that Pennington devoted a chapter to the discussion of Noah’s genealogy. On first glance, this may seem irrelevant and ahistorical, especially when compared with the methodology of modern history. Yet in the nineteenth century, an examination of biblical genealogy was

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deemed essential as a means of questioning the veracity of public statements and sentiments, especially the origins of races. While Pennington’s predecessor, Hosea Easton, offered a vague assessment of the qualities of Noah’s sons, and did not offer an exact genealogy, but rather focused on the polarity of civilizations they sired, the linchpin of Pennington’s argument rested on refuting the Hamitic myth.\(^{57}\)

Pennington’s genealogical assessment was a series of questions and suppositions challenging the accuracy of the Hamitic myth. In answering the question, “who and whence are the colored people,” the foundational question of this treatise, Pennington dismissed the supposition that blacks were the seed of Cain, who was believed to have committed the first murder in human history. In challenging the veracity of his proposition, Pennington suggested that the framers of this line of argument failed to do their homework. A quick glance at a “school boy’s textbook” would reveal that Cain lived before the great flood and that “all his prosperity were swallowed up.\(^{58}\)

Pennington also traced the Adamic genealogy and offered a fairly extensive commentary on it. He listed the names of Adam’s sons beginning with Seth and concluding with Noah. Since Noah was the ninth son after Seth, Pennington designated Noah’s family, a convenant family. Consequently, the eight sons entered the ark and Cain’s descendants perished in the flood. Having established that African Americans were not the progeny of Cain. Pennington critiqued the supposition that blacks were instead the


\(^{58}\) See Pennington, Textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People, 7-8.
descendants of Canaan. Listing the direct line of descent, Pennington listed the “Sons of Ham”--Cush, Misraim, Phut, and Canaan. Cush’s sons were Nimrod, Havilah, Sabatah, Raamah, Seba, and Sabtecha. Given the genealogy, Pennington opined that blacks were an amalgamation of Cush and Misraim. Referencing Jospehus’s Antiquities and Perene’s Biblical Geographies, Pennington pointed out the term Cush means black, aithops, or aethiops in Greek. With the universal meaning of Cush as black, it necessarily followed that blacks were descendants of Cush not Cain or Canaan.59

Further questioning the veracity of the Hamitic myth, Pennington examined the actual text, reprinting Genesis 9: 25-27. The traditional storyline of Noah’s curse actually begins with verse 20. He reminded the reader that since blacks were not descendants of Canaan, proponents of the myth “must discharge the Africans, compensate them for false enslavement and go and get the Canaanites.” Viewed more in jest than as an actual desire, Pennington proceeded to determine whether Noah’s curse extended to the descendants of

59 There has been a great deal of debate between scholars over whether or not color prejudice existed in the ancient world. Scholars have shown that color prejudice was less pronounced in the ancient world and distinction based on race is a product of the European Age of Discovery. Some scholars such as Frank Snowden, argue that color prejudice was minimal in the ancient world. Other historians such as Martin Bernal have posited the Ancient v. Aryan model to describe the rise of European racism. The Ancient model refers to the understanding and reception of blacks in the ancient world prior to the European Age of Discovery, and the Aryan Model, which Bernal suggests, contributes to our modern misunderstandings of Egypt’s relationship with the rise of the ancient world. See Frank Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity and Before Color Prejudice and Martin Bernal, Black Athena, introduction. For a collection of documents that uses this approach, see Graham Irwin, Africans Abroad: A Documentary History of the Black Diaspora in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean During the Age of Slavery (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). Bernal’s work has come under assault by more conservative classicists, see Mary Lefkowitz, Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentricism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History (New York: Basic Books, 1996) and Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maclean Rodgers, eds., Black Athena Revisited (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Another uncritical reading of Afrocentricism is Steven Howe, Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes (New York: Verso, 1998).
Canaan. He pointed out the singular number of the noun and pronoun demonstrated its reference only to Canaan. Pennington followed this supposition with a number of points regarding whether or not Noah intended to curse Ham. Pennington pointed out that Ham’s name is not mentioned in Noah’s curse coupled with the fact that Ham received Noah’s blessing after they disembarked from the ark. Neither is it possible that Noah’s curse would have effected his three sons, from which Africans descended. Only Canaan’s name is used, and those of the first three sons are omitted from consideration. The final question that Pennington tackled is whether Noah’s curse carried divine power. Both the frequency of patriarchal blessings and curses following Noah and Ezekiel 13:20, which explicitly stated that the sins of fathers or sons could not be assumed by future generations, precluding the divine implications of Noah’s curse for future generations.  

Pennington’s discussion of the genealogy of Noah is a necessary precursor to his examination of the role of Africans in sacred history. Another important component of the origins discussion is the relationship between various African nations. One of the most important issues was the characterization of the relationship between the Egyptians and Ethiopians. Consistent with nineteenth-century constructions of historical causation, Pennington noted that the four universal empires: the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Macedonian and Roman “were the four universal theatres on which Divine Providence has controlled a wonderful series of events for his own glory.” The assessment of modern empires was an important component of universal history in the nineteenth century. Given

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that Misraim settled Egypt and Cush settled Ethiopia, Pennington surmised that the Egyptians and Ethiopians were one people.

Although Egypt and Ethiopia had separate social, political and cultural achievements, Pennington noted that there were many connections between the two. Both nations enjoyed a prosperous trade in various commodities, and in every respect, Nubian civilization was comparable to that of the Egyptians. To demonstrate the intellectual acumen of the Ethiopians, Pennington reprinted a section from Herodotus’s *Histories* Book III, which described the ill-fated attempt of Cambyses of Persia to conquer Ethiopia. Instead of accepting a dubious offer of alliance from Cambyses, the Ethiopian king exposed the true intent of the mission—to provide reconnaissance for a planned attack. The king then handed the messengers a large bow, and instructed them that when the Persians were able to bend the bow with ease then they would be adequately prepared to attack the Ethiopians. This bow, a symbol for Ethiopia, represented the strength and the malleability of the Ethiopian empire. Insulted by the Ethiopian king’s gesture, Cambyses embarked on his ill-fated mission to Ethiopia. En route, the Persians were reduced to cannibalism and forced to abandon the mission.61

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61 See Pennington, A Textbook of the History and Origin of the Colored People, 23-28. Frank Snowden also cited Herodotus’s assessment of the Persian delegation and the king of the Ethiopians as part of his section on the perception of blacks in the Greco-Roman world. According to Snowden, this group of Macrobian Ethiopians were called “the tallest and most handsome men on earth and had a high regard for justice.” See Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: Ancient Views of Blacks*, 46-47. In his histories, Herodotus devotes much of Book II to a discussion of Egyptian civilization. In Book III of the Histories, we find the story referenced by Pennington. According to Herodotus, the Persians also brought to the court of the Ethiopians other gifts such as a purple robe, gold chain for the neck, armlets, an alabaster box of myrrh and a cask of palm wine. Each of these gifts was received by the Ethiopian king and judged inferior—except the wine. See Herodotus, *Histories*, Book III (Great Britain: Hertfordshire, 1996), 20-24.
Like earlier studies, Benjamin Lewis's *Light and Truth*, emphasized the connection between classical learning and the redemption of African-American character and intellect. According to the publishers, *Light and Truth* was written with a "determination that a correct knowledge of the Colored and Indian people, ancient and modern, may be extended freely, unbiased by any prejudicial effects from descent or station." More structured than the works of other writers, Lewis presented an encyclopedic compilation of black achievements during classical antiquity. His work is clearly patterned on the style and format of historical textbooks of the era. The book's title: *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History, Containing the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Race from the Creation of the World to the Present Time* demonstrated its breadth and comprehensive coverage. Its organization featured an overview of biblical genealogy and ends with an assessment of manners and customs of persons of African descent in the Caribbean, in Haiti and Guiana. The author's attempt to provide a thoroughly documented text for persons of African descent rivals the multivolume histories of the ancient world common in the nineteenth century. Lewis skillfully combines elements of language and content from Rollin's *Ancient History*, in his examinations of various ancient societies including the Ethiopian, Egyptian and Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman empires. Instead of beginning with Egypt, however, Lewis began his narrative with the historically black empire of Ethiopia. Lewis also uses a number of biographical sketches of prominent individuals either born on or associated with the African continent such as Hanno, Hamilcar, Imilcon, Hannibal and Scipio Africans, from Plutarch's *Lives*.  

By focusing on the accomplishments of blacks rather than whites, Lewis's work made a profound statement about the vindicationist nature of African-American historical

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discourse. Black writers carved out a unique niche for historical expression which simultaneously affirmed nineteenth-century methodologies and expanded the content and emphasis of traditional histories. The focus on ancient Africa is not as uncritical as some observers have suggested. While Lewis made bombastic claims such as the Old Testament was written in Africa and diffused to the rest of the world or that Strabo, Euclid, Homer and Plato were Ethiopians, he also offered sobering assessments of the achievements of the ancient Egyptians including the invention of hieroglyphics, use of papyrus, coffins and embalming. He also discussed the achievements of the Egyptians in the arts and sciences. Lewis pointed to their identification and naming of the planets and the creation of religious systems and their contributions to philosophy, mathematics, jurisprudence, and medicine. Lewis’s claims should not be taken literally. Instead, Africa during classical antiquity, like nineteenth-century America represented a site of great achievement and possibility.63

Other writers such as Henry Highland Garnet discussed the African past as a way to remind African Americans and Americans that Africa had an illustrious history. According to Garnet, it was the Egyptians who gave Moses “the materials with which he reared that grand superstructure, partaking of law, poetry and history, which has filled the world with wonder and praise.” Despite the fact that mournful reversals of fortune have passed over the illustrious people,” the monuments of ancient Egypt stand as a testament to the greatness of African people. Garnet also devoted a considerable portion of the essay to discussing the antiquity of early African civilizations. Garnet did not end his analysis of the treatment of Africans with the Bible, but also discussed their reception and treatment in classical antiquity. Instead of objects of disdain and abhorrence, Africans were presented by Homer as participating in the “feast of the gods.”64

63 Ibid., 309-310.
64 See Henry Highland Garnet, The Past, and the Present Condition and Destiny of the Colored Race, 7-8

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Rather than an exhaustive discussion of the genealogy of Ham, as Pennington had
done before him, Garnet simply names of the three sons of Noah who were believed to be
the ancestor of the three major races: Europeans, Africans, and Asians. Garnet based
many of his claims on the biblical patriarch Moses, and Herodotus, a Greek historian.
These men were often viewed as the fathers of sacred and profane history. To support this
belief, Garnet opined: “To the chronicles of these two great men we are indebted for all
the information we have in relation to the early condition of man. If they are incorrect, to
what higher authority shall we appeal—and if they are true, then we may acquaint
ourselves with the history of the race from that period.65

In exploring antiquity, Garnet referenced many of the same symbols of black
greatness present in earlier works. According to Garnet, several of the queens of Egypt
were Africans. He also cited Herodotus’ statement regarding the color and texture of
African hair, and the fact that Ham, also known as Misraim, settled Egypt. Blacks of
antiquity were also praised for their mastery of the arts and sciences. Their military ability
was such that they became “masters of the East, and the lords of the Hebrews.” The
greatness of the ancient Egyptians is further demonstrated by Garnet’s remark that “No
arm less powerful than Jehovah’s could pluck the children of Abraham from their hands.”
Despite the plagues visited upon Egypt by the wrath of God, the Egyptians managed to
preserve the greatness of their empire. The greatest tribute to Egyptians was that Moses,
the individual who led the children of Israel out of bondage was also learned in all the
wisdom of the Egyptians.66

65  Ibid., 7-8, 10 and 12.
66  See Garnet, The Past and the Present Condition and Destiny of the Colored Race,
7-8.
Discussions of modern history also played an important role in the construction of antebellum history. Modern history began with the rise of Western civilization and served to demarcate the end of sacred history and the beginning of profane history. Unlike the glorious presentation of African history in antiquity, the African predicament was significantly diminished in the modern period. All of the writers believed that the European Age of Exploration and the Slave Trade were directly responsible for the condition of nineteenth century African Americans. In most accounts, while Africans enjoyed a high standard of living and made advancements in prior periods of history, Europeans were semi-barbarous after the fall of Rome. It was only during the constitution of city-states during the Middle Ages that Europe was able to make claims to advanced civilization.67

As Easton had done with the ancient Egyptians, the establishment of political institutions was an important indicator of the capacity of any group for civilization. Easton’s comparative assessment of the development of governance among Europeans raised striking differences between European and African civilization. In Europe, governance entailed a feudal system which reduced a large proportion of the population to servitude. “A form of government, distinguished by the name of the feudal system, was one under which the leaders of the barbarians became intolerable. They reduced the great body of them to actual servitude. They were slaves fixed to the soil, and with it transferred from one proprietor to another, by sale or conveyance.”68

67 Most writers viewed sacred history (biblical history) as being more authentic than profane (secular history). Many writers concurred with Pennington when he stated: “Profane or human history must be valued mainly, in proportion as it has the coincidence of sacred history. In the first period of profane history we have only mist and uncertainty. The facts which we find sufficiently attested to rest our judgment on, are few and far between.” See Pennington, A Textbook of the History and Origin of the Colored People, 19.
68 Easton, A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and the Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People, 10. Easton’s construction of European history is quite consistent with modern connections between the social and political institutions of
Easton also pointed out that some European kings rather than displaying the highest arts of statehood often led their subjects on missions of conquest in neighboring lands. Once the land was conquered, the chiefs or generals parceled out the captured land to their lesser officers. These men, in turn, became part of an armed force that was sworn to protect the king’s standard. The lesser officers would also impose this standard on their dependents. Whereas the Egyptians were not skilled in war, Europeans “for the smallest pretext would make war with one another and lead their slaves on to conquest.”

Components of the feudal system remained vibrant in Scotland until 1156.69

After presenting the European historical record in the modern period, and pointing out deficiencies in relation to African history. Easton used his portrayal of European history to challenge Euro-American claims of superiority. “It is not a little remarkable that in the nineteenth century remnant of this same barbarous people should boast of their national superiority of intellect, and wisdom and intellect and religion, who in the seventeenth century, crossed the Atlantic and practiced the same crime their barbarous ancestry had done in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries.” Easton also saw a direct correlation between modern European history and current historical events. One such outcome was the “unholy war” against African Americans--slave and free, but also against


Ibid., 12
Native Americans and the pre-Columbian ethnic groups in Mexico, during the European Age of discovery and the nineteenth century.\(^{70}\)

Armed with historical facts and a racial theory premised on cultural polarity, Easton discussed Europe’s disruptive effect on Africa. In the case of Africa, Romans subdued Carthage, and the Vandals, one of several Germanic groups, plundered North Africa. Easton’s discussion also displayed some of the prejudices found in nineteenth century literature. The most obvious was the aversion to Islam. Easton described the Muslim invasion of Egypt in the seventh century, and the subsequent ascendancy of the Ottoman Turks in the fourteenth century as a casual factor in Africa’s demise.\(^{71}\)

James W.C. Pennington also viewed modern history, from the 1500’s to the nineteenth century, as the period during which the fortunes of Africans markedly declined. In Pennington’s presentation, however, Europeans bore partial responsibility for this occurrence. Unlike Easton, Pennington did not involve the idea of cultural polarity to explain the origins of African degradation and American slavery. Instead, Pennington utilized what Wilson Jeremiah Moses has conceptualized the “fortunate fall.” This idea posited the notion that slavery was a part of God’s divine plan for the redemption of people of African descent. The casual factors for slavery, then, were not inherent differences between Europeans and Africans, as Easton suggested, but the existence of idolatry and polytheism among African people. According to Pennington, these practices led to a series of damaging consequences: blindness of the mind or the inability to think


clearly about the consequences of one’s actions, loose morals, divisions and animosities. Pennington believed it was the last characteristic animosity that “opened the door to the slave trade.” Not only did animosity open the door to slavery, but it caused Africans to be “riven up by animosity into petty tribes and ready to be made dupes of.”

Moreover, the Atlantic Slave Trade and subsequent downfall of Africans was consistent with the belief of black historical writers in cyclical history. Rather than promoting progress, which was impossible under the constraints of slavery, African-American writers clung to the belief in the ultimate redemption of Africa and African Americans through the social, cultural and intellectual advantages of the Western world. Another component of this construction was a belief in Divine Providence and the continued acceptance of cyclical theories of history albeit in a modified form, by black historians. It was generally believed that each nation had its particular moment of world domination predetermined by the will of God. If a particular nation invoked the wrath of God, it would then experience his judgment and diminish in social, political and economic stature. For Pennington, Providence was an important factor in ordering the history of African Americans. Therefore, slavery was the result of a spiritual failing rather than representative of inherent physical or mental inferiority.

Operating with a belief in Divine Providence, but with a critical understanding of the development of empires and nations, Pennington did not see a direct relationship between charges of African inferiority and New World slavery. Rather as Easton had before him, Pennington understood that initially New World slave systems used Amerindian rather than Africans as slaves. Moreover, human slavery existed in what he

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73 Ibid., 36 and 38.
termed the Old World—in classical antiquity and Europe prior to the Age of exploration. Slavery was an outgrowth of the social, political and economic organization of Europe prior to the Age of Exploration, not a consequence of nor justified by African inferiority.\(^4\)

The treatment of modern history revealed the erudition and engagement of African Americans with nineteenth-century historical forms. This point is evident in the work of Robert Benjamin Lewis. In addition to modeling his work on that of other nineteenth century historians, Lewis, who was of mixed racial heritage—Native American and African American—also devoted considerable attention to the origins of Native Americans. Fashionable as an area of legitimate historical inquiry in the nineteenth century, interest in Native American antiquities was a burgeoning field reflective of the all-encompassing influence of Romanticism and the wanderlust of restless ethnographers who embarked on journeys to the West in search of American Antiquities comparable to those found in Europe. Although some reviewers of these works lamented the uncritical and unreliable nature of some of the inferior works, the more respectable scholarship was widely read and respectfully reviewed. A reviewer writing in the *North American Review* summed up the state of the scholarship: “The early history of the aborigines is taking a deeper hold on literary attention in America. Materials for its illustration have, from time to time appeared, rather, however, as the result of casual rather than of professed research. It is only within late years, that systematic inquires into the curious principles of their languages and intellectual character, have been made, and these efforts are due almost entirely to individual zeal.”\(^5\)

\(^4\) Ibid., 39-44.  
The issue of antiquity was an important part of this discussion. Lewis cited the work of several classical authors who surmised that another continent existed on the other side of the world. Lewis was clearly borrowing this approach from Native American ethnographers such as Samuel Drake. Drake’s Biography and History of North America (1837) also attempted to document mention of America in classical works. Writers who mentioned ‘America’ included Hanno, Plato, Diodorus Siculus and Aristotle. Another author, Thomas Morton suggested that Indians may be descendants of the scattered Trojans.76

Lewis also devoted a chapter to examining the similarities and differences between Native Americans and the ancient Hebrews. A common assertion among eighteenth- and nineteenth- century historians, interest in Native American lore was fueled by Romanticism. Lewis relied on the work of Elias Boudinot and Ethan Smith, two researchers on the question of Indian origins among the ancient Israelites. Lewis noted the similarity in birth and death rituals, language and myths between Native Americans and ancient Hebrews. Lewis’s study also demonstrated an awareness of the major ethnographic works on Native Americans. In the space of more than two pages, Lewis cited more than thirty authors who wrote on this question. Again, drawing on the work of his predecessors and contemporaries, Lewis provided an etymological chart listing English, Native American, and Hebrew words, Lewis exclaimed. “Can a rational doubt be entertained whether the above Indian words and parts of sentences were derived from their corresponding words and parts of sentences in Hebrew.” According to Lewis, given the foul deeds that Europeans perpetrated against Native Americans, they are the only true

Christians in the land. He supported this claim by reprinting several speeches made by 
Native American leaders to white settlers.77

While most authors of his day accepted and praised the forces which ultimately led 
to the rapid disappearance of Native Americans as a matter of course, Lewis did not. In 
fact, he used his work to argue in favor of Native American sovereignty. He reprinted 
speeches by Native Americans and treaties between white Americans and Native 
Americans that demonstrated the mistreatment of the former in dispossessing Native 
Americans. In a section of the chapter titled “The True Christians of the Land are 
Indians,” Lewis reprinted a response by Red Jacket, a leader in the Six Nations, to a white 
missionary: “Brother once our seats were large, and yours small. You have now become a 
great people and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets. You have got our 
country, but are not satisfied. You want to force your religion upon us.” Like African 
Americans, Native Americans were important contributors to American society, yet they, 
too, had been marginalized and relegated to the fringes of American society. Lewis’ 
commentary served to remind Americans of the importance of this group and articulate the 
relationship between Native Americans and African Americans.78

77 For information on 19th century scholars and the Hebrew origins of the Native 
Americans, see Ethan Smith, A View of the Hebrews; or The Tribes of Israel in America 
(Poutney, VT: Simon & Shute, 1825); and Theda Purdue, ed., Cherokee Editor: The 
Writings of Elias Boudinot (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1983). For a more 
contemporary understanding of the origins of this thought in Puritan circles, see Arthur 
Hertzberg, The Jews in America Four Centuries of Uneasy Encounter: A History (New 
York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 32-45. Locating the lost tribes seems to of some interest 
in the antislavery press. An article titled “The Missing Tribes,” notes that the subject 
always one of deep interest has occupied the attention and research of eminent divines and 
historians, see M.M. Noah, “The Missing Tribes,” National Antislavery Standard, 
February 1, 1849. Also see Address to the Whites; Delivered in the First Presbyterian 
Church of Philadelphia, on the 26th of May 1826 (Philadelphia, 1826)

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For Henry Highland Garnet, the European Age of Exploration (1400-1800) irrevocably altered the African landscape. The rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the abolition of the slave trade in Britain, France, and Sweden were the two poles of African reality in the present. A common strategy during the antebellum period was to juxtapose the abolition of slavery by the British, French, and Dutch to debunk the idea that chaos would ensue if slaves were emancipated in the United States. The former condition of the race paled in comparison to their present state in Garnet’s analysis. “The scourge of slavery has left a once mighty people benighted and debased. Intellect is brutalized and manly energies are chilled by the frost of slavery.” Garnet was also critical of nations that maintained slavery in the Western hemisphere such as Cuba, Spain and Brazil whom he considered idolaters. Unrelenting in his criticism Garnet also focused on the shortcomings of African Americans. He directed his animus toward what he considered, gaudy displays of African-American wealth and pride, namely, the Pinkster and Masonic celebrations common among blacks in New York state in the antebellum period. Garnet suggested rather than membership in fraternal and other social organizations, and contestation over naming the group, he urged the race to “arise and act like men and cast off this terrible yoke.”

In the period between 1837 and 1850, African American writers offered myriad ways to view the historical project. Aoo of these writers were clearly conversant with a number of nineteenth century historical forms such as the use of various sources on ancient and modern history, the Romanticism, especially the interest in Representative men and an intense interest in the African role in classical antiquity and in the past in general. Unlike the first period of African American history, 1789-1836, the second period

of African-American historical writing was dynamic and vibrant. Not only do we see a greater number of writers, although still small, a significant number of monographs addressed a wide variety of issues. Driven by their associations with various Christian denominations and active involvement in the abolitionist movement, these writers understood the tangible connection between historical writing and racial advocacy.

At the center of their intellectual projects was a strong interest in racial vindicationism. This is demonstrated through the efforts of black writers to present a more accurate and refined portrait of African-American life in the Republic and to amplify their contributions to it. Racial vindicationism, however, was not the only guiding principle underlying historical production. African-American intellectuals, like their white counterparts, were also highly conversant with the dominant intellectual paradigms and movements of their day. The educated elite, the abolitionist clergy, were active in establishing social, political, and communal sites for the articulation of various agendas of self-improvement. Their interest in historical work and vindication of the race arose from the communal wellsprings of the African-American community. It was manifested in their struggle for educational excellence and their extensive involvement in communal concerns.

Black writers of history also utilized many of the same sources prevalent among white writers. They used classical writers such as Herodotus, Josephus, Livy, Thucydides, and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers such as Daniel Webster and Charles Rollin. The Bible, for both black and white writers, was an important source for a critical understanding of the development of empires and nations. The jeremiad intonations of its prophets and its call for ultimate redemption and justice for the oppressed made it a useful tool in the hands of African-American writers. Black writers used the jeremiad as a means of reminding America of its failings, especially on the issue on the treatment of African Americans.
Like the jeremiad, Romanticism served much the same purpose. Rather than positing reason as the defining principle of human existence, Romanticism offered African Americans a means to transcend the brutish stereotypes foisted upon them by proslavery advocates. In contradistinction to the brute and the wench, African-Americans, in the Romantic conception, became thinking, feeling, and rational human beings. Blacks in this construction became Representative men and women and emblematic of all the best qualities of the Western world.

Lastly, African-American writers used African achievements in the ancient world as a means of repositioning themselves into relationship to the Western world. Rather than an ethnocentric or racist ideology, which is probably more true of current Afrocentric philosophies, African-American writers were more concerned with historicizing the achievements of Africa and Africans in classical antiquity. Race was a secondary consideration in this efforts. Surely, many of these writers knew that Strabo, Euclid, St. Augustine, Origien and others were not associated with sub-Saharan Africa, and thus did not have typically Negroid features. African associations, then, not simply racial characteristics, informed their usage in these manuscripts.

African-American writers continued to use history as a means of rethinking and solidifying their relationship to the Republic. A persistent integrationist and civilizationist theme was present in much of the writing of early black intellectuals. But by the 1850’s, rather than seeking to renew what was by then a rather tenuous relationship with Africa, black intellectuals began to appropriate the imagery and meanings of Africa and various sites in the Black Atlantic such as Haiti, to agitate for better treatment within the United States. This fact would become strikingly evident as the legacies of the American and
Haitian Revolution came into bold relief as the nation fought its last and final battle with the slave power in the decade leading up to the Civil War.

So the bill for the re-capture of fugitive slaves has passed the Senate! That it will pass the House, I have no kind of doubt. Let the slavecatchers try to put it into force. Let the marshals of different districts come to our houses on the devil-sent errand of capturing our wives and our children. Not a black man must go unprepared for such a contest as the exigency of our case demands... There is but little to be expected from our friends. We must depend upon ourselves.

--Samuel Ringgold Ward (1850)\(^1\)

Samuel Ringgold Ward’s admonition to African Americans to “depend upon ourselves” reflected the dominant mood of the 1850’s. It was a decade of uncertainty and contestation over the nation’s future and the place of African Americans in it. Having constantly fought the “hydra-headed monster” of slavery since the Republic’s inception, black people were encouraged by the rise of immediatism in the abolitionist movements in the 1830’s and the development of an independent autobiographical voice through the publication of slave narratives in the 1840’s. African-American hopes “for jubilee” were deflated, however, by the Compromise of 1850 which, among other things, featured the Fugitive Slave Act.\(^2\)

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\(^{2}\) For information on the importance of the Fugitive Slave Act to African Americans, see “New Sentiment on the Fugitive Slave Law,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 151.
The Compromise of 1850 included provisions that capitulated to the growing strength of the Slave Power, but, for African Americans, the Fugitive Slave Act or law was the most problematic portion of the compromise. It contained a provision that allowed the apprehension of former slaves and free blacks alike with limited due process. Other roadblocks to jubilee included the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), which facilitated the expansion of slavery into Kansas and Nebraska on the basis of popular sovereignty, and the Dred Scott case (1857) which decided that blacks were not citizens under the U.S. Constitution. This decision served only to heighten sectional animosities ultimately culminating in John Brown’s raid on the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia) in 1859.3

Since the 1830’s, the Slave Power forces, an increasingly powerful element in American life, had evolved into a loose mixture of proslavery, manifest destiny, and

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expansionist advocates who worked diligently to extend the power of the slaveholding oligarchy to newly settled regions and newly admitted states. In the midst of the seemingly irrepressible power of proslavery forces, in 1850, the nation celebrated the 80th anniversary of the Revolutionary War. The irony of the situation was not lost on African-American writers. While the South was aggressively moving to enthrone slavery as the national God, the nation, as a whole, sought to celebrate and commemorate the struggle for independence from a despotic mother country, England, previously characterized as a virtual slave master. Consequently, unlike the previous two decades of African-American history, historical discourse more stridently contested what many viewed as the omnipotent and omniscient discourse of the so-called Slave Power.4

History’s functions as a discursive element were affirmed in its varied uses to debate, conceptualize, and affirm notions of black destiny. Although the idea of destiny was fiercely debated in the mid-1840’s, this concept acquired a new urgency in the 1850’s. Destiny, however, was just one of several themes emphasized by writers. With what historian David Potter termed “the impending crisis” looming large in the nation’s imagination and reality, black writers, like their predecessors, used history as

a weapon in the arsenal of freedom. Black writers, as William Wells Brown suggested, critiqued the limits of America’s revolutionary tradition by exposing the gulf between the nation’s professed revolutionary principles, and the mistreatment of African Americans since the inception of the Republic. Historical writers were not only concerned with the plight of African Americans, but extended their examinations of history to the familiar center of black concern, Haiti. In an historical moment punctuated with hemispheric concerns--emigration and immigration--Haiti, a site of contestation over the benefits of republicanism for blacks and a site of incendiary possibilities for whites in the Early Republic, reemerged in the forefront of the urgent historical discourse in this period. The Haitian Revolution was reinvested with sanguine and incendiary meanings to effectively battle proslavery forces and thereby, played an important role in the intellectual preoccupations of the period. For these writers, the Haitian Revolution, although it occurred in the 18th century, because of the political climate of the 1850’s, had meanings, possibilities and realities that were especially relevant. The idea of revolution becomes more literal in the 1850’s because the history and legacy of the Haitian and American revolutions became incendiary and explosive weapons in the Antislavery War. The writers of this period, William Cooper Nell, William Wells Brown, James Theodore Holly, and George Boyer Vashon were all cognizant of history’s importance in the antislavery war, and used it to their best advantage. 

My thinking on the themes of African American history in the 1850’s has been influenced by the work of literary historian Eric Sundquist. Sundquist views the literature of the period as enacting the disequilibrium between slavery and freedom in the Western hemisphere. This is certainly true in the United States, where free states outpaced slave states and gave rise to expansionist plans to annex Cuba. Moreover, given the ongoing contestation over slavery’s role in America life, the literature, most notably Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno*, and Martin Delany’s *Blake or Huts of America*, highlight the unfinished work of the American Revolution to extend the benefits of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all. Although the Civil War settled questions of annexation and expansionism, the volatility and uncertainty of the
In addition to the urgency that was evidently, other features distinguished this historical writing from earlier periods. One of the primary differences was the writers. Rather than abolitionist clergy who affirmed the power of moral suasion and classical education, as discussed in chapter two, most writers of this period were freeborn, pursued non-religious occupations, and had no direct experience with slavery. Although concerned about the plight of the large portion of blacks located in the South, these writers also understood the difficulties under which free blacks labored as a result of slavery. The assertion of a free black secular voice in historical writing was unmistakable in this period. The growth of a secular elite deflated the once hegemonic voice of clerical elites. Drawing on the apocalyptic and millennial themes common in the antebellum period, black intellectuals viewed history as providential and informed by the limitations of constitutional republicanism.6


6 For an assessment of millennial themes in the work of African-American intellectuals, notably Frederick Douglass, see David Blight, Frederick Douglass’s Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 1-25. I have not explicitly included Frederick Douglass in my analysis of antebellum historical writers. In my estimation, Douglass, as David Blight has shown, had a historical outlook which revolved around providence and the apocalyptic. This construction of history was evident in his pronouncements throughout the 1850’s. However, Douglass’s engagement with history was not as direct as the work of other writers featured here. He did not give a specifically historical lecture, nor did he write a work which focused exclusively on history. The impact of Douglass’s work is largely confined to the abolitionist field and issues of black leadership, destiny and elevation rather than purely intellectual discourse. In this area, Douglass is best known for his lecture “The Claims of the Negro Ethnological Considered address Delivered at Western Reserve College, July 12, 1854” in Philip Foner, The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Pre-Civil War Decade, 1850-1860 (New York: International Publishers, 1950). For an assessment of Douglass’s historical vision, which is primarily an overview of his views of societal evolution, and ethnology see Waldo Martin, The Mind of Frederick Douglass (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984),
Given the mood of the period, the thematic preoccupation with destiny or self-elevation was an integral part of historical writing. Destiny was conceptualized by Americans and African-American intellectuals in different ways. In the expansionist lexicon of white America, it connoted unchecked expansionism, providential design, and the expansion of the Slave Power. In this sense destiny was the fulfillment of American possibility, including the acquisition of large tracts of Mexico and plans to annex Cuba. The proposed plan to acquire Cuba, the Ostend Manifesto, fostered an Africanization scare. This concern temporarily stymied desires expansion beyond U.S. borders.  

For African Americans, the millennial and providential aspects of destiny were connected to possibilities for African-American citizenship. Destiny connoted a practical preoccupation with demonstrating civic responsibility and manhood as a prerequisite for inclusion in American society. The acquisition of territory was only the first step in this process. Once the territory was acquired, one had to prove, through the establishment of industrial and commercial enterprises, the importance or

184-85, and 249-250. Douglass’ sentiments regarding history are more pronounced in the Reconstruction period as he attempted to preserve the meaning of the war as a means of furthering black claims for equal treatment. For a comparative assessment of the role of Douglass and Delany in African-American intellectual life, see Robert Levine, Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Representative Identity (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). For the definitive assessment of how Northern intellectuals responded to the war, see George Frederickson, The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).  

efficacy of the undertaking. It followed from this logic that if the traits of responsible
citizenship could not be cultivated in America, then emigration to Africa, Canada, or
Central and South America offered a viable alternative.8

William C. Nell: Historicizing the Roles of African Americans in the American Revolution

The 1850's, a decade in which the nation sought to reconcile its contentious
present and uncertain future with a seemingly heroic and revolutionary past, exposed
deep fissures in the national narrative. Rather than a tradition of uninterrupted
progress on the social and moral fronts, America had, from an African-American and
abolitionist standpoint, disintegrated into a nation which states rights and slavery
threatened to tear asunder. The legacy of the American Revolution, then, as it had in
the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was invested with the degree of moral
certainty. Many Americans believed appealing to the heroic deeds of the patriots and
the pronouncements of the Founding Fathers could heal a nation deeply vexed over its
course. Given that the 80th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence occurred
in 1850, many Americans seized upon the opportunity to dedicate monuments and
battlesites and venerate the Founding Fathers. Interest in the revolutionary tradition
also increased during this period.9

8 For an assessment of destiny among African Americans, see Delany, The
Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United
States Politically Considered, 159-209. For an assessment of the origins of American
Racial Anglo-Saxonism, see Reginald Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny: The
Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1981), 79-186. For a discussion of the millennial aspects of destiny, see William J.
Watkins, “The Destiny of the Colored Race,” Liberator, December 12, 1851
9 Popular interest in black participation in the Revolutionary War was an
important component of black historical writing. Examinations of the historical
evolution on American thought on the meaning of the American Revolution include
While black writers appealed to the same revolutionary tradition, this tradition, however, from a black perspective, was markedly different. Blacks, like their white counterparts, had served, bled, and died with their white brethren; but in the war’s aftermath, they received few of the same rewards—freedom to settle down and start a family, a pension for military service, or general recognition of their service. Rather the contestation over the meaning of the black presence in America swung like a pendulum from begrudging acknowledgment to outright hostility and erasure of their services from the national memory. For blacks, then, as Elizabeth Bethel Raul has noted, the meaning of the revolutionary war transcended heroic deeds, momentous battles, or national heroes, but turned on the legacy of the Revolutionary War itself. Invoking the revolutionary legacy was a means of vindicating the capabilities of the race. Pulling together the fragments of a neglected history, remembering events long past, and investing them with new meanings and understandings for the turbulent circumstances of the 1850’s, was an important aspect of black historical accounts of the black role in the nation’s founding dramas.  


Elizabeth Raul Bethel’s The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Black Communities (New York: St. Martins Press, 1997) is one of the few studies to examine the textual tradition in African-American historical production prior to 1860. Russ Castronovo, a literary historian, has greatly influenced my approach to the meanings of the Revolutionary War for the nation and African Americans. As he asserts in his study, Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom, he is engaged in adding story to story,” a process Castronovo views as allowing him to “read and dismantle the architecture of national narrative and examine how fragmentation and unity as formal principles have been inextricably wrapped up in the most significant political issues from representation to exclusion, from participation to disenfranchisement, from freedom to slavery.” Castronovo adds further: “Even though genealogical metaphors seek to fix the citizens memory along
For white Americans, the Revolutionary War offered a means to legitimizing
the creation and subsequent growth of the new republic. Popular works on the
Revolution varied in quality and tone. One of the most popular works in this genre
was Mason Locke Weems’ (Parsons Weems) *The Biography of George Washington.*
A popular juvenile author, Weems is best known for the myth that Washington cut
down a cherry tree and never told a lie, which appeared in the fifth edition of his
biography of Washington. Other works include the encyclopedic compilations of Jared
Sparks, *The Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution* (1829-30) and
the *Works of Benjamin Franklin* (1836-40). Although the patriot histories of David
Ramsay, Carlo Botta, and Mercy Otis Warren were also important components of this
canon, they are infinitely less important in shaping the popular memory of the war. By
the 1830’s, with increased concern over states rights and slavery, and in the two
decades that followed, Americans, the sons and daughters of the Revolutionary legacy,
began to realize the extent to which the present social, political, and economic
arrangements compromised the legacy of the Revolution.11

11 For information on the scholarly production of Carlo Botta, see Carlo Botta,
The glaring contradiction in the meanings of the Revolutionary legacy and its practice caused deep reflection among Americans. Thus, as historian Michael Kammen has noted, the psychic burden of filial loyalty caused many Americans to strive to fulfill the founders expectations by collecting documents and other items that assisted in preserving their memory, what David Joyce and Michael Kraus termed a period of “Gathering the Records: Waiting for the National Historian.” Historical production during the 1840’s and 1850’s followed these general trends. These works include Benson Lossing, *Pictorial Fieldbook of the Revolution* (1850, 1852), William Gilmore Simms’ *Life of Francis Marion* (1844), Lorenzo Sabine’s *American Loyalist* (1847) and George Bancroft’s multivolume *History of the United States* (1835-1895).

*History of the War of the Independence of the United States of America*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: J. Maxwell, 1821). According to Michael Kraus and David Joyce, Botta’s work was praised by Thomas Jefferson, but was on the whole misleading and inaccurate. See Michael Kraus and David Joyce, *The Writing of America History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 88-89. Also see David Ramsay’s *A History of the American Revolution* 2 vols (1793; rpt New York, Russell & Russell, 1968). Ramsay’s history on the whole, was more reliable than Botta’s, but he too fell into general disrepute when it was discovered that large portions of the work was copied from the *Annual Register*. For information on Ramsay, see Arthur H. Shaffer, *To Be An American: David Ramsay and the Making of American Consciousness* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); and Kraus, *The Writing of American History*, 61-62.

One of the most significant writers on the revolutionary legacy among Africans Americans was William Cooper Nell. Nell’s *Services of Colored Americans* (1851) and *The Colored Patriots of the Revolution* (1855) are excellent illustrations of integrating African Americans into the contributionist history of the period. A staunch integrationist, Nell was born in Boston on Beacon Hill in 1817, and lived there for the remainder of his life. Following in the footsteps of his father, William C. Nell, a race leader and organizer in the 1820’s, the younger Nell attended the Smith School, in the basement of the African Meeting House in Boston. As a young man he exhibited talent as an orator and organizer, and garnered the attention of William Lloyd Garrison who hired him as an errand boy for *The Liberator*. Working closely with white reformers throughout his life, Nell was a firm believer in integration. Beginning in the late 1840’s and culminating in the mid-1850’s, Nell led a successful movement to integrate the Boston schools.13

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Nell was also extensively involved in numerous antislavery and intellectual organizations throughout the antebellum period. He worked with the Committee of Vigilance, organized in 1846 to formally aid fugitive slaves en route to Canada, and the Western Antislavery Society in upstate New York. Nell, in addition to serving as a writer for Garrison’s Liberator, also worked briefly as an editorial writer and publisher of Frederick Douglass’ North Star. Despite his extensive involvement in the antislavery movement, Nell was also a member of the Adelphic Union, a prominent Boston literary and historical society. Nell served as the group’s secretary and was responsible for arranging the society’s lecture series that featured, among others, lectures by Wendell Phillips, an abolitionist and Nell’s benefactor; and Charles Sumner, antislavery advocate and U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania. All of these causes sharpened Nell’s awareness of slavery’s impact on African Americans, and gave him an intimate knowledge of the extensive networks and communal organizations designed by free blacks to topple the “peculiar institution.”

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14 For information on Nell’s involvement in the Western Antislavery Society, see “Western Antislavery Society,” North Star, February 25, 1848. Nell was also associated with the American Reform Board of Disenfranchised Commissioners, see “Speech of William C. Nell: Delivered Before the First Annual Convention of the American Reform Board of Disenfranchised Commissioners,” on Thursday, September 9, 1841 at Zion Wesley Methodist Church in New York,” National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 7, 1841. For information praise of Nell’s involvement with the North Star, see “James W.C. Penington to William C. Nell,” North Star, January 7, 1848. Prior to the publication of his studies of the American Revolution, Nell articulated a strong antislavery position, see “Antislavery Agitation,” North Star, February 23, 1849. For information on Nell’s involvement in the Adelphic Union, see William C. Nell to Maria Weston Chapman, August 24, 1843 in BAP, Reel 3; Adelphic Union Library Association,” Liberator, October 27, 1843; and William Wells Brown to Charles Sumner, December 29, 1845 in BAP, Reel 4.
Nell extended his firm belief in integration and black self-determination to his writing of *The Services of Colored Americans* and the enlarged *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. His interest in writing about the “services of colored Americans,” peaked in the early 1840’s. During this period Nell maintained an extensive correspondence with Wendell Phillips. In the early 1840’s, Nell broached the possibility of writing a biography of Crispus Attucks, but he lamented that “I have been unable to find much of the history of Attucks.” His examinations of the work of Carlo Botta, an Italian author who wrote a history of the American Revolution and the *Memoirs of Hewes* yielded little information. Nell, however, was convinced from the small amount of information available that Attucks was a central figure in the Boston Massacre. He was a central participant in the massacre and the fame that emanated from this participation was assured by the fact that “he was buried from Faneuil Hall as one of the strangers who fell in the struggle.” Undaunted by the difficulty of the task, Nell stated his intention to find William Pierce, a Boston Tea Party participant, to garner more information on Attucks.15

Nell’s desire to fully recover a record of the “services of colored Americans,” was no doubt encouraged by the work of John Greenleaf Whittier, poet and prominent abolitionist. His publication of a series of articles in the *National Era* in 1847, served to authorize and legitimize the importance of Nell’s work. Given Nell’s integrationist proclivities, it is not surprising that Whittier—whom Nell dubbed “The Bard of Freedom”—would become a starting point for Nell’s work of historical recovery. Nell reprinted Whittier’s rationale for publishing these materials in the preface of his study. “Of the services of the Colored Soldiers of the Revolution, no attempt has been made, to our knowledge, to preserve a record. They have no historian.” Whittier’s comments

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15 See William C. Nell to Wendell Phillips, April 15, 1841 in BAP, Reel 3.
indicated a void in historical understanding of black participation in the nation’s life. Nell used Whittier’s comments to appropriate the role of historian, and in doing so, converted a heretofore dormant and complacent national memory into an activist and engaged one.\footnote{See Nell, The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, preface.}

In both of his studies, the Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812 (1851) and Colored Patriots of the American Revolution (1855), Nell cited the 1851 refusal of the city of Boston to erect a statute in memory of Crispus Attucks, a black resident of Boston who is widely heralded as the first martyr in the Revolutionary conflict, as his major motivation for writing these studies. Nell used history to refute the Boston’s Transcripts charge that Attucks was the “very firebrand of disorder and sedition, the most conspicuous, inflammatory and uproarious of the misguided populace, and who, if he had not fallen a martyr, would have richly deserved hanging as an incendiary.” Nell’s text sought to arouse the nation’s historical memory with the noble and valorous deeds of African Americans in the nation’s War of Independence. He stated that the “rejection of the petition was to be expected, if we accept the axiom that a colored man never gets justice done him in the United States, except by mistake.”\footnote{See William C. Nell, Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812 (Boston: Primus and Sawyer, 1851). The same account appears in Nell’s Colored Patriots of the American Revolution (Boston: Robert F.Walcott, 1855), 5-7. For a contextualization of Nell’s work, see Robert Cottrol, “Heroism and the Origins of Afro-American History: Review Essay,” New England Quarterly 51 (June 1978): 256-263. For a discussion of the role of Crispus Attucks in the Boston Massacre, see Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), 3-18. For a discussion of the concept of historical memory, see Genieve Fabre and Robert O’Meally, ed., History and Memory in African American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). While a monument for Crispus Attucks was not erected in Neil’s lifetime, it was finally built in 1888. For an official history of the Crispus Attucks Memorial, see A Memorial of Crispus Attucks, Samuel Maverick.}
Nell’s Colored Patriots of the American Revolution relied on a wider variety of primary sources than his previous studies. These sources ranged from newspaper articles, journals, social and political speeches to funeral orations, engravings and personal reminiscences, Nell reconstructed the extensive participation of blacks in the nation’s founding dramas. In many ways, Nell’s construction of black participation in the nation’s wars commented on the present condition of the race. A constant theme emphasized by Nell is the removal of blacks from the foreground of the revolution and, by extension, the nation, since the war’s conclusion marked the nation’s inception. A good example of this idea is his discussion of revolutionary engravings. Nell noted that initially in engravings of the Battle of Bunker Hill, blacks were prominently displayed in the foreground. But in later editions, blacks were relegated to the background or removed altogether.  

Other instances of black omission from the Revolutionary record figure prominently in Nell’s text. In New Hampshire, two black soldiers Lambo Latham and Jordan Freeman were separated from the names of their white counterparts in

revolutionary service on a commemorative monument. The issue of separation or segregation of the black soldiers is juxtaposed with the “Negro Pew” distinction as an unjust act of segregation. For Nell, the inversion of historical memory was difficult to understand. While their names appear last on the monument, Nell noted “they were not last in the fight.” In an attempt to foreground blacks, Nell examined the extensive involvement of African Americans in numerous battles. He pointed to the services of numerous black patriots who saw action at Bunker Hill. Those soldiers included Titus Coburn, Alexander Ames, and Branzali Lew of Andover, Massachusetts; as well as Peter Salem and Cato Howe of Plymouth, Massachusetts. 19

Another theme in Nell’s work is the level of mistreatment and prejudice against blacks who had rendered service to the nation. One stark example of this idea was the case of Samuel Charlatan, a New Jersey slave who served as a soldier and later a

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19 See Nell, The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, 136, 161. Both Lambo Latham and Jordan Freeman were killed at Fort Griswold in Connecticut in September 1781. Lambo Latham worked for a farmer named Latham. When the British assaulted the garrison where Lambo was stationed, it was forced to surrender. When Lieutenant General William Ledyard surrendered to the British, he was immediately killed. Lambert who was nearby retaliated by killing the British officer. Jordan Freeman, on the same day, it credited with killing the Major Montgomery, the British commander of the assault on the fort. When the monument was erected, not only were the names of Latham and Freeman separated from the others, but Lambo was inscribed on the monument as Sambo. Brazili Lew was a veteran of the French and Indian War. Thirty-two years old at the time of the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, he served in the army for seven years as a front-line soldier, fifer, and drummer. Peter Salem also participated in the Battle of Bunker Hill and is prominently featured in Trumbull’s “The Battle of Bunker Hill.” For information on Latham, Freeman, Lew and Salem see Kaplan, The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution, 20-21, and 55-56. Philip Foner has estimated that between 5,000 and 8,000 blacks served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. See Foner, Blacks in the American Revolution, 67. For a listing of black participants in the Revolutionary War, see Debra L. Newman, List of Black Serviceman Compiled from the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records (Washington: National Records and Archives Service General Services Administration, 1974).
baggage handler for George Washington. Instead of being rewarded for his services through manumission, Nell pointed out that Charlatan was “returned to his master to serve again in bondage after having toiled, fought and bled for liberty in common with the regular soldiery.” In another instance, Nell cited the story a former Revolutionary solider who had participated in the defense of Fort Moultrie during the War of 1812 from the Charleston Standard and Mercury. Having taken employment on a ship as a cook at the war’s conclusion, the former soldier was falsely accused of poisoning a crew member who subsequently died. At the trial, evidence regarding the desertion of several crew members was ignored, and Nell added that the “real proof, no doubt, was written in the color of his skin, and in the harsh and rugged lines of his face.” He was found guilty and subsequently executed. The trial, according to one Charleston paper, “must excite the feelings of every benevolent heart against the ruthless prejudices engendered by the foul and leprous stain of slavery.”

Nell also enlisted the words of prominent black orators such as William H. Day to heighten the sentiment against black omission. Day’s words, taken from a speech before a mass convention of African Americans in Cleveland, Ohio, September 10, 1852, summed up the state of omission of black soldiers from the record of valorous deeds in establishing the nation, and corroborated Nell’s work of historical recovery. Day began by recalling the words of John Whittier regarding the omission of blacks from the historical record of the Revolution. According to Day, the reluctance to preserve a record by white Americans left the responsibility wholly to African Americans, a responsibility that Nell welcomed. Given this situation, Day argued that Whittier’s comments were true. While “their history has not been written,” it did exist. Day opined that it was a living and breathing history in need of recovery and

restoration. He issued a challenge to his listeners to become actively involved in its recovery for it “lies upon the soil watered with their blood: who shall gather it? It rests with their bones in the charnel-house: who shall exhume it?” 21

Perhaps the most important human interest stories discussed in Nell’s work is of James Forten, the famous Philadelphia sailmaker and prominent abolitionist. Robert Purvis’s funeral oration at the Philadelphia Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1842 makes Forten’s devotion to the revolution is evident. At the outset of the oration, Purvis noted his desire to “give but the recollection of treasured facts.” Purvis characterizes Forten’s mother as a “Roman matron” who yielding to the solicitations of her son, “gave the boy of her promise, the child of her heart and hopes, to his country, upon the altar of its liberties she laid the apple of her eye, the jewel of her soul.” Purvis’s depiction of Forten’s mother served to place women in the forefront of revolutionary struggle, especially black women. Women were not only the bearers of children, but those who made the greatest sacrifices for their nation through committing their sons to war, however, painful or difficult. When offered on the altar of liberty, Forten volunteered as a powderboy on the Royal Louis commanded by Stephen Dectaur. When the ship was captured by the British, Forten was offered several inducements--freedom, a good education, and money-- to abandon the revolutionary promise and escape to England. Forten’s steadfast refusal is another demonstration of African-American loyalty to a country which it refused to grant equal citizenship rights.” 22

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22 See Nell, Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, 162. For information on black sailors during the war, see Foner, Blacks in the American Revolution, 54-59. 168
Nell's interest in the nation's revolutionary heritage did not end with the publication of *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. The points raised in Nell's work found resonance in the speeches and pamphlets of blacks throughout the country. This is not to suggest that blacks did not make use of the revolutionary legacy prior to this time, but it is clear that more references occurred to the American Revolution and the black role in it during the 1850's, especially after the publication of various editions of Nell's book. Martin Delany, newspaper editor, abolitionist and emigrationist declared that "for a concise historical arrangement of colored men who braved the dangers of the battlefield, we are much indebted to William C. Nell, Esq.."

Like Nell, Delany also invoked the memory of blacks as central participants in the nation's Revolutionary drama. "That colored men, not only took part in the great scene of the first act of independence, but they were the actors—a colored man was really the hero in the great drama, and actually the first victim in the revolutionary tragedy." For Delany, and other black writers of the period, the tragedy was not only the physical death of Crispus Attucks, but the non-fulfillment of the revolutionary promise.  

Forten's participation in the war is documented by testimonials from several individuals who served with him. Reports of Forten's patriotism are legend. According to Purvis, "Of his patriotism who doubts? He gave the best evidence of his love for his country, by consecrating his life in "those days that tried the souls of men," for her liberties. And when urged by an honorable gentlemen to petition his government for a pension, he promptly declined saying, "I was a volunteer sir." See *Remarks on the Life and Character of James Forten, Delivered at Bethel Church, March 30, 1842* by Robert Purvis in BAP, Reel 4, p 11. The facts of the Purvis discourse are corroborated by S. H. Gloucester, the prominent black Presbyterian minister. See S. H Gloucester, *A discourse Delivered on the Occasion of Mr. James Forten Jr. in the Second Presbyterian Church of Colour of the City of Philadelphia, April 17, 1842 before the Young Men of the Bible Association of Said Church*. Philadelphia: I. Ashmead and Co., 1843.

As early as 1854, clearly using the second edition of The Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812, John Mercer Langston, ardent abolitionist and lawyer, in a Memorial Speech before the General Assembly of the State of Ohio invoked the memory of the revolution to encourage the legislature to strike down “from the organic law of this State, all those clauses which make discriminations on the ground of color.” Charles Langston, addressing the white citizens of Franklin County in Columbus, Ohio, December 28, 1855, wondered why blacks were not allowed to serve in the militia. “Have we proved ourselves enemies to our country? Have not our fathers stood side by side with your fathers in the battles of the revolution and the war of 1812? Was not the first blood shed in the revolution that of Crispus Attucks a colored man? Did the blacks not fight for the liberties of this country, in all the battles that gave glory to the American arms!” In a Memorial of Thirty Thousand Disenfranchised Citizens of Philadelphia, a committee of black petitioners used black participation in the Revolutionary War as proof of citizenship. They spoke at length concerning the participation of African Americans in the Revolutionary War using passages quoted in Nell’s book.²⁴

The exclusionary tactics of the white population regarding black participation in the war spurred Nell onward in his determination to stage a public commemorations “of the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770, the day which, by the valor, patriotism and martyrdom of the colored American, Crispus Attucks and his associates, has been selected by history as the dawn of the American Revolution.” The celebration in 1858

took place at Faneuil Hall on March 5th. It was linked with a lively protest against the Dred Scott Decision and featured prominent abolitionist orators such as William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Lenox Redmond, Theodore Parker, and John S. Rock. In addition to these speakers, the advertisement featured an account of the Boston massacre, a lengthy excerpt from Hosea Easton’s *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States and the Prejudice Exercised Towards Them With a Sermon on the Duty of the Church to Them*, in which Easton argues that blacks were slaves when the country belonged to Great Britain, but once independence was declared, slaves became citizens of the United States. According to Easton, this fact is further demonstrated because Congress did not specify color in its initial calls for troops to participate in the conflict. And yet, the circular made direct reference to Taney’s decision in the Dred Scott case, “the colored men had no rights that white men are bound to respect.”


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In addition to the abolitionist oratory, the program also featured “emblems, relics, engravings, documents—together with a few Living Mementos of Revolutionary and other Historic Associations.” This primary evidence of black participation in the war was staged and displayed in a number of interesting ways. There was a reenactment of the March 1770 scene on State Street that precipitated the Boston Massacre; the display of a goblet and powder horn belonging to Attucks; a Certificate with George Washington’s signature discharging Brister Baker, a black soldier from Connecticut; a letter from Captain Perkins to Brigadier General Green ordering the arrest of Lieutenant Whitmarsh for abusing a colored soldier on Long Island in 1776; and Brazillai Lew and other participants in the Battle of Bunker Hill attended the meeting.\footnote{The programme also featured three songs, two of which were written by prominent female abolitionists, Charlotte Forten and Frances Ellen Watkins, see William C. Nell, “Program of Boston Massacre Commemoration Festival,” in the BAP, Reel 10.}

Nell used this commemorative festival and his knowledge of the historical record to refute the pronouncements of Stephen Douglass, the Democratic candidate for President, and Roger Taney, regarding black citizenship. Nell was no doubt encouraged by the words of John Greenleaf Whittier, who in an open letter to Nell which was printed in the \textit{Liberator} on March 12th, shared his support of Nell’s work and stated, “It is due to the colored men that they should wrest from their ungrateful and mean oppressors the acknowledgment of the services of their fathers in the Revolution.” Whittier’s words must have echoed in Nell’s mind as he labeled the spurious claims of Taney and Douglass that blacks were not entitled to the benefits of citizenship as an “appeal to white Americans to ignore many of the prominent and significant facts in the early history of their country.” To counter these claims Nell
offered "a few simple facts of Colored American's patriotism and loyalty to their country." Moreover, Nell added that "facts could be piled Olympus high in proof that the Colored American has ever proved loyal and ready to die, if need be at Freedom's shrine." Nell continued these commemorative celebrations in 1859 and 1860.

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See Address of William Nell," The Liberator, March 12, 1858. Nell's remarks were reprinted as "Colored American Patriots," in the Anglo-African Magazine, January, 1859. For Whittier's comments, see "John G. Whittier to William C. Nell," Liberator, March 12, 1858. The commemoration celebration in 1859 was not as elaborate as the previous year. For a description of the celebration and Nell's comments at a meeting to protest the Dred Scott decision, see William C Nell to William Lloyd Garrison, February 2, 1859 in BAP, Reel 11, and "Remarks of William C. Nell," Liberator, April 1, 1859. In 1860, Nell organized another annual celebrations to memorialize the death of Crispus Attucks. In addition to Nell, William Lloyd Garrison, J. Sella Martin, and John S. Rock were in attendance. Rock's was the keynote address comments dramatize the plight of African Americans in the 1850's. Rock stated that he was "not yet ready to idolize the actions of Crispus Attucks, who was a leader among those who resorted to forcible measures to create a new government which has used every means in its power to outrage and degrade his race and posterity, in order to oppress them more easily, and to render their condition more hopeless in this country." Rock went further to say that the only events "in the history of this country which I think deserve to be commemorated are the organization of the Anti-Slavery Society and the insurrections of Nat Turner and John Brown." Rock also compared Attucks and Brown: The John Brown of the second Revolution is but the Crispus Attucks of the first. A few years hence, and this assertion will be a matter of history." Rock spent the rest of his address lamenting the lack of work for qualified free blacks. Historian Paul Teed has argued that Rock's comments were radically inconsistent with Nell's celebratory project of integrating blacks into the legacy of the American Revolution. Rock's comments are a validation of the mistreatment of blacks since the American Revolution. Nell's comments throughout his book Services of the Colored American in the War of 1776 and 1812 and in the last portion of his study, Colored Patriots of the Revolution affirm Rock's conclusions. See "Speech of John Rock" Liberator, 16 March 1860. In 1862, Rock supported the participation of blacks if the country was attacked by a foreign power, See "Lectures by John S. Rock Esq.," The Christian Recorder, April 19, 1862. Nell also continued to link citizenship rights to black participation in the revolutionary war. See William C. Nell, Property Qualification or No Property Qualification: A Few Facts From the Record of the Colored Men of New York, During the Wars of 1776 and 1812, With a Compendium of Their Present Business and Property Statistics (New York: Thomas Hamilton, 1860). Nell's work continued to receive notice in various black newspapers until the Civil War. See "Advertisements: Colored Patriots of the American Revolution," Frederick Douglass' Paper, February 17, 1860; "Interesting Facts--Colored Soldiers in
In the years preceding the Civil War, Nell’s work offered the most engaging reconstruction of black participation in the Revolutionary War. Steeped in his deep commitment to integration, antislavery and communal concerns, Nell’s work challenged the nation’s selective presentation of the national narrative by interjecting it with a holistic portrait of black services to the nation. His use of a wide variety of primary sources such as newspapers, speeches, interviews and personal memoirs made him one of the most credible African-American activists of the antebellum period.

As a result of Nell’s work, the nation would have to rethink its relationship to its citizens of color and their role in the founding dramas. No longer able to claim as Whittier had, that “they [black soldiers] have no historian,” the nation, had to acknowledge that black and white soldiers served, bled and died together. When the nation dedicated its monuments and commissioned engravings, it had to acknowledge the bravery of Peter Salem, Lambo Latham and John Freeman removing them from the background and placing them in the foreground joining not separating their names from the names of their white compatriots in arms. And when the nation reflected on the invaluable services of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives on King Street, Boston in 1770, the incident which sparked the revolutionary struggle, it was forced to acknowledge the centrality of blacks in the conflict by erecting a monument to Crispus Attucks, which the city of Boston dedicated in 1888.28

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28 A contemporary account of the erection of the monument is Victoria Earle,
The Haitian Revolution and Its Historical Meanings in the 1850's

While the American Revolution offered a means for blacks to integrate themselves into the American narrative, Haiti played a distinctively different role in the Antislavery War. During the 1850's, Haiti was transformed from a site of black achievement to a harbinger of revolutionary possibilities. In a milieu informed by the intensification of the battle against the Slave Power, black intellectuals compared the revolutionary promise of the American War of Independence to what William Wells Brown would call "St. Domingo's Revolutions and Its Patriots." Gone was the dispassionate rhetoric of James McCune Smith's "Sketches of the Haitian Revolutions," (1843). This rhetoric was replaced by caustic remarks regarding the evilness of slavery, Haiti's ability to serve as an example of black self-government, and comparisons between the American and Haitian Revolutions which exposed the limitations of the former and the infinite possibilities of the latter. Historical discourse, then, offered a means for black intellectuals to claim two revolutionary heritages in the Western hemisphere, the American and Haitian. While the American Revolution's outcome negated liberty, compromised freedom, and enthroned slavery, the Haitian Revolution ensured liberty, promoted freedom, and dethroned slavery. The differing outcomes of these two events resonated in the minds of African Americans, who, during the turbulent days of the 1850's, promoted emigrationist schemes to various parts of the world. With history as their guide, black historians offered a wide range of commentary on the historical intersections between these two revolutions.29

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29 For a more dispassionate discussion of the Haitian Revolution and its
The most visible works on the intersections between the Haitian and American Revolutions were George Boyer Vashon’s “Vincent Oge,”(1853), William Wells Brown’s “St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Its Patriots”(1855) and James Theodore Holly’s “A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race”(1857). These works built on the work of Martin Delany and William Cooper Nell by affirming the sense of exclusion and uncertainty experienced by African Americans. Each of these men was very visible in the abolitionist community, and two of the three, Vashon and Holly, traveled to Haiti in the late 1840’s and 1850’s. Although Brown did not travel to Haiti, he was an active participant in what R.J.M. Blackett has termed the transatlantic abolitionist community. Brown spent a considerable portion of the 1850’s in Europe lecturing on the abolitionist circuit. The hemispheric implications of both meanings, prior to the expansionist discourse of the late 1840’s and 1850’s, see James McCune Smith, A Lecture on the Haytian Revolutions: with a Sketch of the Character of Toussaint L’ Ouverture Delivered at the Stuyvesant Institute, February 26, 1841 (New York: Daniel Farnshaw, 1841). For assessments of Haiti’s influence on antebellum America, see Alfred Hunt, Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean, 1-106; and Brenda Gayle Plummer, Haiti and the United States: the Psychological Moment (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993). I support Benjamin Quarles contention that blacks were “keepers of the Revolutionary flame.” I would extend Quarles comments to the uses of the Revolution almost a century after its occurrence. Democracy was unfinished, the legacy of the revolution unfulfilled, black writers in the 1850’s offered radically new rhetorical formations that awakened America and to remind Americans of the importance of living up to its revolutionary promise. That the Haitian Revolution is used to accomplish this is not surprising. For Quarles’s initial characterization of the importance of the American Revolution to blacks, see Benjamin Quarles, “The Revolutionary War as a Declaration of Independence,” in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 283-301. For assessments of Haiti in the 1850’s, see “Haiti,” Liberator, January 17, 1851; “The Lessons of St. Domingo,” Douglass’ Monthly, August 1861.
the Haitian and American Revolutions make the historical work of these writers even more intriguing.\textsuperscript{30}

In order to understand the development of African-American ideas about Haiti and the fluid meanings of the Haitian Revolution, it is necessary to briefly examine the relationship between Haiti and the United States prior to the 1850’s. Initially, a site of fear and uncertainty for the slavocracy of the Western hemisphere, and a source of pride for the African descended populations, Haiti’s independence in 1804 did not assure it entry into the community of Republican nations. Rather its incendiary meanings caused its ostracism from those nations whose principles it actualized, namely France and the United States. This ostracism accentuated the dominant motif, explored by historian Brenda Gayle Plummer’s \textit{Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment}, the idea of Haiti’s centrality yet marginality in relationship to the United States. While Haitian commodities such as cotton and coffee provided revenue for the United States, America refused to recognize the country until the Civil War. Haiti’s awkward position as a benefactor of the French ideals of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and the embodiment of the “Spirit of 76” raised a glaring contradiction when it was not allowed the benefits of having adopted a Republican form of government. These truncated visions of Haitian possibility exposed the hypocrisy of the West and illuminated vistas of possibility for African Americans. The pride and admiration for Haiti was not diminished among African Americans in the 1840’s. Its fairly peaceful state of affairs, and thriving commerce made Haiti an

\textsuperscript{30} For information on the transatlantic antislavery community, see R.J.M. Blackett, \textit{Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).
example of the possibilities of emancipation and black governance in the Western hemisphere.\textsuperscript{31}

One of the best examples of this dispassionate and vindicative writing by African Americans about the situation in Haiti was James McCune Smith’s “Lecture on the Haitian Revolutions with a Sketch of Toussaint L’ Ouvrier,”\textsuperscript{(1843)} clearly drew its inspiration from earlier black oratory as well as social, political and economic concerns of the free black population. James McCune Smith was a distinguished member of New York’s free black community. After being trained as a physician at the University of Glasgow, he returned to New York and played an active role in a number of organizations within the free black community. In 1838, Smith was the main speaker for the American Antislavery Society Annual Convention, and by the mid-1840’s, treasurer of the Society for the Promotion of Education Among Colored Children, the founder of the Statistics Institute, and an outstanding member of the Philomathean Literary Society.\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{32} Activism of James McCune Smith is discussed in David Blight, “In Search of Learning, Liberty and Self-Definition: James McCune Smith and the Ordeal of the Antebellum Black Intellectual,” \textit{Afro-Americans in New York Life and History} 9 (July 1985): 7-25. When Smith returned from the University of Glasgow in 1837 , he was welcomed by the black community in New York: “In conclusion we call on the physicians of the city who value themselves on account of the character to concede to Dr. Smith the consideration and courtesy which his character and talents demand. We hope they will, by their generous feeling , their noble conduct, and their friendly intercourse, efface from our city the reproach brought on her in the eye of all Europe by denying Dr. Smith the privileges of her institutions.” “Return of Dr. Smith,” \textit{The Colored American}, September 9, 1837. Smith kept a journal of experiences while a student at the University of Glasgow. Entries from the journal were reprinted in

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Haiti’s contested meaning as both a symbol of black achievement and as the site of supposed untold horrors, resonated in the minds of all free blacks who invoked the country’s name. Haiti’s position was very different than that of the Early Republic, the incendiary meanings, such as social and political anarchy, were used as excuses to deny it the full benefits of nationhood. Consistent with his advocacy of racial vindicationist discourse, Smith used this lecture to divest the Haitian Revolution of its more incendiary meanings and subtext, historian Alfred Hunt has characterized as a “slumbering volcano.” By offering an objective account based on articles from the British Quarterly Review, D.M. Brown’s History of St. Domingo and Vide’s History of St. Domingo, Smith hoped to dignify the struggles of the Haitian people to establish a democratic government and situate Haiti as an indisputable example of the benefits of immediate emancipation. Haiti’s continued ambivalent meanings for antebellum America necessitated this construction.

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Smith’s presentation’s complexity and dispassionate nature is demonstrated in lecture’s introduction. Smith not only examined the plight of the slaves, but other issues such as caste distinctions, the treatment of the free colored population, and the topographical features of Haiti which facilitated the revolution. In Smith’s estimation, one of the primary causes of the revolution was the prohibitions against the free black population. Free blacks were prevented from practicing medicine or surgery. They were also prohibited from employment as clerks and were denied entry to France. According to Smith, this law was designed to restrict appeals by free blacks to the home government for amelioration of their grievances, and to prevent them from obtaining an education. Other strictures included a provision which prevented blacks from accosting whites with the penalty of losing the offending hand. For Smith, the recitation of these abuses was sufficient to convince the audience that a revolution was necessary.34

Rather than a single explosive event, Smith presented the Haitian Revolution as a gradual development influenced as much by the actions of St. Dominque’s grand blancs, planters and slaveowners; petit blancs, small farmers, artisans and overseers; affranchis or gens de couleur, the free black population, as it was by the servile population. The goals of the presentation included a discussion of causes of the Haitian Revolution, and a sketch of the character of Toussaint L’Ouverture. According to Smith, the origins of the Haitian Revolution could be traced to the expanded importation of slaves into St. Dominque. The idea of the Revolution’s

34 See Smith, A Lecture on the Haytien Revolutions: With a Sketch of the Character of Toussaint L’Ouverture, 7-8. Also see James McCune Smith, The Destiny of the People of Color, A Lecture Delivered Before the Philomathean Society and Hamilton Lyceum in January 1841. (New York: Self-Published, 1841).
prehistory was viewed as an important issue in vindicating occurrences on the island. Concerned only with the profitability of the slave enterprise, the *grand blancs* paid little attention to the impact that massive slave importation would have on the colony. Moreover, the hatred that existed between the *petit blancs* and the free people of color only served to exacerbate a difficult situation. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 caused the first Haitian Revolution. Smith viewed this event as the catalyst for subsequent occurrences on the island. The refusal of the *grand blancs* to allow *petit blancs* representation in the new government aroused their fury. In violation of the established government, the *petit blancs* then organized themselves into an army and sought to expel the Attorney General and the Intendant at Port-au-Prince. Both men fled from the colony. 35

The *petit blancs* maintained this posture until the arrival of Vincent Oge which inaugurated the second Haitian Revolution. Oge, a member of the *affranchis* had traveled abroad seeking support for the demands of the free people of color. Most important, he sought to secure compliance with the decree of the French Assembly in 1790 allowing all persons twenty-five and above to vote in the formation of a national assembly. However, instead of complying with the request, the Assembly sent a force of 600 men to capture Oge. Oge was subsequently captured and put to death. In the aftermath of his death, the National Assembly decreed that all people of color were entitled to the benefits of French citizenship. The opposition of the *petit blancs*, delayed implementation of the new law. Instead, it was postponed by the colonial governor and a colonial assembly was convened which again excluded the free people

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of color. Concurrent with these events was the tightening of restrictions on the servile population.\textsuperscript{36}

Smith also informed the listener and reader that this “insurrection was the legitimate fruit of slavery, against which it was a spontaneous rebellion. It was not therefore, the fruit of emancipation, but the consequence of withholding from men their liberty.” To buttress this point and divest the Haitian revolt of its more lurid connotations, Smith discussed the destruction and plunder of the town of the Cape in 1792. The survivors of this ordeal are the same persons from whose “lips came the now traditional views entertained in this country concerning the Horrors of St. Dominque; i.e. that the first use of their liberty made by the slaves, was ruthlessly to imbrue their hands in their former master’s blood.” To refute these charges, Smith showed that the army consisted of more than 100,000 men, yet only 3,000 participated in the destruction of the town. He also noted that servile insurrections are the most sanguinary of all wars citing the uprising of Spartacus and the fact that servile insurgents during the Haitian Revolution murdered 2,000 whites while white insurgents murdered more than 10,000 people.\textsuperscript{37}

Toussaint L’Ouverture’s faithful service to Jean Francis, general of the insurgent forces, led to L’Ouverture’s promotion to colonel. After Francois retired to Spain, L’Ouverture was appointed commander by the French Commissioners. He defeated British and Spanish forces on the island, and his administration of the colony was also remarkable. By imposing strict labor laws, the colony regained much of its former strength as a site for sugar, coffee, indigo, and cotton production. L’Ouverture

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 11-15.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 15-18.
also drafted a new constitution which included provisions for equality before the law of all men. All of L’Ouverture’s accomplishments were overshadowed by what Smith termed the “dark spirit of Napoleon, glutted but not satiated with the gory banquet afforded at the expense of Europe and Africa, seized upon this, the most beautiful and happy of the Herispedes, as the next victim of its remorseless rapacity.” Napoleon’s plan to reinstate slavery was never realized, but his capture of L’Ouverture set the stage for the bloodiest portion of the revolt led by his generals Dessalines and Christophe. According to Smith, their massacres did not equal the atrocities committed by the French upon the Haitians.\(^{38}\)

Smith’s civic life and his lecture and its subsequent reprinting in prominent black newspapers inspired many black writers in the 1850’s. Like Smith, each of the prominent intellectuals in the 1850’s came from communities that were actively engaged in the antislavery struggle. George Vashon was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1824. When his family moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1832, his father played a prominent role in the establishing a free African school in the city. Vashon entered Oberlin College in 1840. Upon graduating in 1844, he briefly worked with Martin

Delany’s fledgling newspaper, *The Mystery*. Vashon later trained for a career in the law. Denied admission to the bar in Alleghany County because of an 1838 statute in the Pennsylvania constitution which limited the franchise to white men, he journeyed to New York. Vashon reputedly became the first African American to pass the bar exam in New York State.  

While not born free, William Wells Brown rapidly rose from slavery and first attracted public attention with the publication of *The Narrative of William Wells Brown* (1847). He later became an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and published a songbook *The Anti-Slavery Harp* (1847). Brown also traveled on the European antislavery lecture circuit. During this tour, Brown published *Three Years in Europe or, Places I Have Seen and People I Have Met* (1852). This publication was followed by, *Clotel; or the President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the*

39 For biographical information on George Boyer Vashon, see Nell, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, 328; and Catherine M. Hatchett, “George Boyer Vashon, 1824-1878: Black Educator, Poet, Fighter for Equal Rights Part One,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 68 (July 1985): 205-219. Vashon would later assume a professorship at Central College in McGrawville, New York. For a prospectus of the college, see “New York Central College,” *Impartial Citizen*, September 14, 1850. Vashon’s travels in Haiti had a deep impression on his psyche: “It would be impossible for me to describe the rapture with which I beheld for the first time, this land, unpolluted by the foul stain of slavery, and upon which the insults and cruelties of the tyrants had been washed out in the blood of himself and his children.” “Harold,” *North Star*, April 21, 1848. In 1862, Vashon wrote a widely publicized letter to Abraham Lincoln regarding a recent meeting with notable black leaders including Frederick Douglass in which he suggested emigration as a viable solution to race problems in America. In the letter, Vashon trumpeted Haiti as a reason for considering immigration: “Haiti with her proud boast, that she, alone, can present an instance in the history of the world, of a horde of despised bondsmen becoming a nation of triumphant freeman, will by her gracious invitation, induce many a dark hued native of the United States to go and aid in developing the treasures stored away in her sun-crested hills and smiling Savannah. See “Letter from George B. Vashon,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, October 1862.
United States, the first novel by an African American writer. In 1854, he published The American Fugitive in Europe.\textsuperscript{40}

James Theodore Holly was born free in Washington, D.C. in 1820. A large component of Holly's education consisted of math and classical languages. He was educated by Dr. John Fleet, a prominent black physician and notable citizen. Later, when the family moved to Brooklyn, New York, Holly was exposed to the teachings of Reverend Felix Varela, a radical Roman Catholic priest. Later, in Burlington, Vermont, Holly completed his formal education, and took an interest in the work of the American Colonization Society. Instead of immigrating to Liberia, Holly became politically active at home. Attracted by Henry Bibb's call for black immigration to Canada, Holly became a voluntary correspondent for Bibb's newspaper, Voice of the Fugitive.\textsuperscript{41}

Brown's, Holly's and Vashon's publications were written during and informed, directly and indirectly, by the regime of the Haitian leader Faustin


Souloque. Elected in 1848, Souloque was proclaimed Emperor Faustin I in 1849. During his ten year reign, Faustin identified himself with the Republic’s black tradition. Since the Republic’s inception, contestation between a mulatto and black tradition had raged. The color question caused the split between the revolutionary generals, Christophe and Dessalines, and continued to have an impact on Haiti’s social and political affairs throughout the antebellum period. By supporting the black tradition, Faustin sought to limit the influence of local and foreign merchants in the Haitian economy. He imposed a state monopoly on the importation of sugar and coffee, and organized state controlled houses which regulated imported goods. Faustin also employed several Free Masons in his cabinet, and the practice of Voodun became more pronounced during his government. 42

Each of these writers had different experiences with Souloque. Vashon did not meet the leader, but did comment favorably on the early years of his regime, and the impact of his reforms on the country in Douglass’s North Star. Holly arrived in Haiti on August 3, 1855, more than six years after Vashon, on an exploratory mission on behalf of the Episcopal church. He met Emperor Faustin Souloque and presented his plan to the emperor to settle African Americans in Haiti. He proposed an exemption for all settlers from military service for a period of seven years and that they be able to import tools and personal possessions. Although he received no conclusive answer and failed to get an agreement on an emigration settlement, Holly found Haiti a ripe ground for missionary activity. Brown’s only exposure to Faustin I was what he

read in the black press, but the strident militancy of his tone is in line with the pro-black pronouncements of Faustin’s regime.\textsuperscript{43}

Another influence on the work of each of these writers was the lengthening shadow of the Fugitive Slave Act. Upon returning from Haiti, Vashon immersed himself in the work of African-American elevation. In early 1853, Vashon and his father joined in the “Call for a Colored National Convention” which was held in Rochester, New York from July 6-8, 1853. The forceful language of the convention and its denunciation of the exclusion of blacks from the body politic had a marked impact on Vashon’s historical production. Holly became even more active in emigration work. He attended Bibb’s North American Convention of Negroes in Toronto, Canada in September 1851. Composed of fifty-one delegates from five states and Canada, the convention, on its last day, adopted a resolution placed on the floor by Holly to construct a League of Colored People from North and South America and the Caribbean. The league goals included the construction of an agricultural union for the purposes of purchasing and cultivating land. By 1852, Holly had not only moved from Burlington to Windsor, Canada, but had also assumed an official role with Bibb’s organization as a corresponding editor and traveling correspondent. In 1852, Brown left the country and lectured on the European antislavery circuit.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} For information on Vashon’s visit to Haiti, see Catherine M. Hanchett, “George Boyer Vashon, 1828-1878: Black Educator, Poet, Fighter for Equal Rights,” 208-209. Vashon’s letters in the North Star include April 21, 1848; June 9, 1848; August 4, 1848; August 21, 1848; April 7, 1849; and September 28, 1849. For information on Holly’s journey to Haiti, see David Dean, Defender of the Race: James Theodore Holly Black Nationalist Bishop, 22-24. For information on Brown’s intellectual development, see William Farrison, William Wells Brown: Author and Reformer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 255-258.

\textsuperscript{44} See David Dean, Defender of the Race: James Theodore Holly, 11-12. For information on the African Civilization Society, see “African Civilization Society: Objects and Prospects,” in BAP, Reel 10. See Proceedings of the Colored National
Each of these writers devoted a considerable portion of their lectures to the role of the free blacks in the Haitian Revolution, but Vashon's work identifies the major themes which would characterize subsequent discourse: a sympathetic portrayal of the role of free blacks in the Haitian Revolution, and a romantic construction of the life and death of Vincent Oge, mulatto leader of the free people of color. Vashon’s 1854 tribute is the only poem in the group of literary and historical works on Haiti, and demonstrated his love of language and ability to invoke Romantic forms, a feature displayed in all of the works under consideration.45

Vashon's “Vincent Oge” was first published in Julia Griffith’s, Autographs for Freedom (henceforth Autographs). Griffith was the Secretary for the Rochester Ladies’ Antislavery Society. The book consisted of a compilation of reprints from prominent white and black abolitionists, including Theodore Parker, William Wells Brown, Lewis Tappan, James Cephas Holly (James Theodore Holly’s brother), Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, James McCune Smith, Frederick Douglass, and Horace Greeley. Autographs featured the signatures of abolitionists affixed to their respective texts. Highly stylized and visible within the antislavery community, it was a fitting forum for Vashon’s work.46

Convention Held in Rochester, July 6, 7th and 8th, 1853 (Rochester: Printed at Frederick Douglass’ Paper, 1853). George Boyer Vashon was intimately acquainted with the work of Reverend Jeremiah Loguen, see George Boyer Vashon, “Rev. J. W. Loguen,” Frederick Douglass’ Paper, February 1, 1856.

45 For information on the development of the mulatto legend in Haiti, see Nicholls, From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti, 95-102.

In sketching the most important elements in his poems, Vashon makes a clear linkage between the French and Haitian revolutions. In a direct reference to the splendor and power of the French monarchy beginning with Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King, and ending with the beheading of Louis XVI, Vashon referred to this period as a necessary precursor to the triumph of Freedom: “The visions of grandeur which dazzlingly shone,/Had gleaned for a time, and all had suddenly gone./And the fabric of the ages—the glory of the kings,/Accounted most sacred mid sanctified things,/Reared up by the hero, preserved by the sage,/And drawn out in rich hues on the chronicler’s page,/Had sunk in a blast, and in ruins lay spread,/When the altar of freedom was reared on its stead.” He added further, “And a spark from that shrine in the free-roving breeze,/Had crossed from far France to that isle of the seas.” The importance of this passage lies in its ability to evoke the majesty of France under the absolutist monorarchy of Louis XIV and how this splendor served as the catalyst for the French Revolution.47

Once the spark of freedom crossed from France to Haiti, it gave life to feelings of “vengeance, hatred and despair,” especially among free blacks and slaves. Free blacks were excluded from the body politic, and the slaves were treated harshly in the island’s sugar regime. According to Vashon, once freedom’s spark ignited a need for the redress of grievances among these two populations nothing could stop it: “And when they burst, they wildly pour/Their lava flood of woe and fear./And in one short—one little hour./Avenge the wrongs of many a year.” Given the historical

evolution of the Haitian Revolution, the spark of freedom ignited the passions of the free black population first. This population was ably represented by Vincent Oge.”

Oge, influenced by his membership in the Friends of the Negro, an organization of French abolitionists composed of a number of prominent French liberals including Abbe Gregorie, Antoine Pierre Barnarve, a lawyer and liberal, and Brissot de Warville, founder of the Friends of the Negro and a Girondin leader in the General Assembly, was intent on returning to the island of Haiti to foment revolt. As historian C.L.R. James has noted Oge, despite having procured weapons and support from the prominent abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, was not suited to the contingencies of revolution. Instead of initiating a revolt, Oge, who voiced support for the slave system, issued two high sounding proclamations calling for mutual cooperation between free blacks and whites to alleviate some of the odious restrictions on the free black population. Oge’s pressing concern was that the Colonial Assembly recognize the rights of the free blacks, in short, to implement the proclamation of March 8th, 1790. This proclamation, issued by the Committee on the West Indies, was led by the French liberal Barnave. Despite the intent of the initial proclamation to apply to all persons of property and standing, the final version of Article 4 was vague as to whom the right of suffrage should extend. Abbe Gregoire, one of the most outspoken of the Friends of the Negro challenged the vagueness of the document. He argued that mulattoes should be explicitly included under this article. After a vigorous debate, the floor discussion was closed without resolving the ambiguous nature of the article.

48 Ibid., 51.
49 For information on the Proclamation of March 8, 1790, see David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 139-140; and James, The Black Jacobins, 70-73.
After the rebuff of the mulattoes by the Colonial Assembly, free blacks were left with no other choice but to let the “other torrents louder roar.” These “other torrents” symbolize the recourse to armed revolution. Amid the clamor for this course of action, the voice of the Spartan mother is heard-- an obvious reference to the Greek city-state of Sparta where men’s upbrining was preparation raised to participate in battle. Women, while not participating in battle, played an important role in supporting the military orientation of the Spartan state by undergoing rigorous physical training to produce strong male and female children. Vashon applied this image to an Afro-Caribbean woman whose support of the mulatto revolt is reminiscent of the Spartan state. Oge’s mother bids the troops, the freeman, her figurative sons into battle. By doing so, she played a traditional role in the nation as a female citizen. It is her voice that authorizes and sanctions the struggle for freedom, and sacrifice for freedom is viewed as a noble cause: “And there’s the mother of Oge,/Who with firm voice, and steady heart,/ and looked unaltered, well can play/ The Spartan’s mother’s hardy part;/ And send her sons to battle-fields,/ And bid them come in triumph home,/Or stretched across their bloody shields,/Rather than hear the bondsman’s doom.”

Despite the nobility of the freeman’s cause, presented in its most Romantic form by Vashon, it “availeth them nought/ With the power and skill the tyrant brought.” Like “Sparta’s brave sons in Thermopylae’s straits,” the freeman, like the Spartans were unable to overcome the power of a superior foe. It is also important to note that the Spartans made tremendous sacrifices to safeguard central Greece from the Persian invasion by attempting to secure the pass at Thermopylae. Despite their small numbers, the Greeks fought the Persians tenaciously with Leonidas, the Spartan

50 See Vashon, “Vincent Oge,” 53-54.
general reputed to be a descendant of Hercules, who lost his life along with 350 troops. The defeat was made possible only through the deceit of a Greek traitor who showed the Persians a way around the Spartan soldiers. Like the Spartans, the freeman represented the most privileged class on the island. They did not possess the military genius of the Spartans, but they were best equipped to launch an insurrection against the white planters. To sacrifice themselves for the cause of liberty was their ultimate contribution to the Haitian Revolution, as the Spartans sacrificed themselves for the benefit of all Greece. And for the mulattoes of Haiti, the outcome of the revolt was similar to that of the Spartans. A small force in a preemptive strike against Le Cap was defeated by a much larger force composed of planters and petit blancs. Oge and his brother Jean Chavannes were not only defeated but captured.51

Vashon captured the martyrdom of Oge in compelling tones. These brave “Spartans” had given their all to the cause of freedom in Haiti. After being captured, both Oge and Chavannes were subjected to a grueling trial. Afterwards, they were tortured and made to confess their crimes with a candle in their mouths. Chavannes never submitted, but Oge broke down under pressure and begged for mercy. Whereas Leonidas’s body, after a great struggle for possession of it between the warring parties, was preserved by the remaining Greeks, the full power of the state literally destroyed the bodies of Oge and his brother: both men were placed upon the rack and their limbs were broken. Yet, like the Spartans whose preservation of the body of Leonidas ensured his fame, the brutal execution of Oge and his brother preserved their names for posterity and served as a catalyst for the Haitian Revolution.52

51 For information on the Spartan defense of the Pass of Thermopylae during the Persian Wars, see Herodotus, The Histories Book 7, 586-601.
52 For a description of the trial and torture of Vincent Oge, see James, The Black Jacobins, 74-75.
While Vashon focuses on the romantic aspects of Oge’s life and the self-determination of free blacks, Brown and Holly were more concerned with the larger implications of the Haitian Revolution, and its connection with the American Revolution. Although the corpus of his historical production was written in the postbellum period, Brown’s speech “St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots,” offered what literary historian Russ Casanova has termed a “radical configuration of history.” That Brown chose to title his lecture “St. Domingo: It Revolutions and Patriots” is a telling commentary on both the inclusionary and exclusionary legacy of the American Revolution. On one hand, the American Revolutionary tradition was inclusionary enough to be compared with the participants in the Haitian Revolution, yet the mistreatment of Haiti and systematic denial of the intersection of the two revolutionary traditions since the conclusion of both revolts begged for redress.53

The connection between the revolutions was not a far fetched one. In fact, regiments from Haiti had participated in the Siege of Savannah in 1779. This favor was not returned by Americans during the Haitian Revolution. In fact, America’s unwillingness to acknowledge Haitian contributions to its own freedom provided further evidence of the ruptures and fissures between these two revolutionary traditions. Brown’s use of the term patriots is also suggestive. In the American context, its strongest connection was with the American Revolution, but just as Brown carves out a space for an acknowledgment of the Haitian Revolution, he simultaneously authorizes its revolutionary legacy and names its followers and adherents, patriots. These Haitian patriots occupied the same ambivalent space as


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African-American patriots of the Revolution War. Brown hoped, by linking the two patriotic traditions, to clarify and exonerate the contributions of both to the Revolutionary history of the Western hemisphere.\textsuperscript{54}

Holly's "Vindication of the Capacity of the Colored Race for Self-Government," published two years after Brown's lecture, occupied the same ideological terrain. Holly used the same rhetorical devices, offered celebratory examinations of the exploits of free blacks, centralized the exploits of slaves, and commented on the continuance of the revolutionary legacy by Toussaint L'Ouverture's successors. Holly, consistent with understandings of history prevalent in his day, used history to vindicate the mental and moral capacity of blacks for self-government. In Holly's mind, the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath was "one of the noblest, grandest, and most justifiable outbursts against tyrannical oppression that is recorded in the pages of world history." Like Vashon, Holly devoted a portion of his address to the role of free blacks in the initial stages of the Haitian revolution. Holly borrowed some of the romanticism of Vashon's poem and incorporated it into his presentation of Oge. Holly makes a compelling case for the grievances of the free people of color. Their pain and affliction are reminiscent of the social, political, and economic disabilities experienced by free blacks in the United States. Their restraint and judicious manner become further proof of black capacity for self-government.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} Brenda Gayle Plummer notes in her groundbreaking study of Haiti that the "American Revolution offered inspiration to the Haitian, but the revolutionary generation in the United States feared Caribbean upheaval. Eighteenth century conservatives perceived Haiti as a source of subversion and a threat to slaveholding societies. See Plummer, \textit{Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 4-5.

While Vashon presents none of Oge’s faults or the limitations of the free black vision of an independent Haiti, Holly briefly discusses Oge’s capitulation to the denial of freedom to slaves. He rationalized this position by suggesting that Oge was exercising the necessary traits of a good steward of government. These traits were evident from the outset of his mission to France. He appealed to a colonial slaveholder to present the case for enforcement of the March 8th proclamation, and he won the support of several prominent Europeans for the Haitian case before returning to the country. The potency of Holly’s argument derived from its juxtaposition to the hypocrisy of the American patriots. According to Holly, Oge’s capitulation on the slave question “shows as much wisdom and the tact in the science of government, as is evinced by the sapient or sap headed legislators of this country, who made similar compromises as a peace offering to the prejudice and injustice of the oligarchic despots of this nation.” In describing Oge’s return to Haiti, as dramatically recreated in Vashon’s “Vincent Oge,” Holly invoked the imagery of the Spartans at the pass of Thermopylae. Oge’s “mock trial” is compared to the Fugitive Slave Law trials in Boston, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati. Holly then shifted the focus to Oge’s denial of freedom to black slaves and to the tyrants that killed him—individuals whom he termed “those monsters of cruelty in St. Domingo.” He concluded this section by quoting a portion of Vashon’s poem on Oge.56

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Brown's "St. Domingo: Its Revolution and Its Patriots," also presented the mulattoes as an oppressed and grieving class. Education should have entitled them to certain privileges within the Haitian colony, but the badge of color effectively precluded these considerations. Unlike Vashon, Brown located the spark of freedom in England, in the pronouncements of "Wilberforce, Clarkson and Sharp." This spark was later adopted by the supporters of free blacks in Paris. Brown also reprinted a portion of Oge's address to the colonial assembly.57

The most well developed claim in both Brown and Holly's lectures is their focus on the slaves as the true catalyst for change rather than the mulattoes or free blacks. Affirming both Faustin's vision of the black republic, and harnessing the dormant power of slave insurrection to turn the tide in the AntiSlavery War against the Slave Power, Brown's "St. Domingo: Its Revolution and Its Patriots," presented the slaves as a tempestuous factor in the slave revolt. The slaves "awoke as from an ominous dream, and demanded their rights with sword in hand." The fury of slaves was a storm which swept over the entire island. Fire consumed villas, factories, and farms. These fires made the island resemble a volcano, and the atmosphere akin to a furnace. For Brown the level of ferocity was justifiable for a people whose "ancestors had been ruthlessly torn from their native land, and sold in the shambles of St. Domingo." For Holly, the issue of self-government was directly linked to the behavior of the slaves prior to the Haitian Revolution. He began his lecture with an examination of the plight of slaves, and their self-composure and restraint as the colonists agitated for freedom from France. Although they exercised restraint, Holly did not wish the

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reader to confuse this behavior with cowardice. Rather he pointed out that from 1522 onward, Polydore, Macandel, and Padrejan, prominent maroons, led slave revolts.58

Another important component of these lectures is the juxtaposition of the Haitian and American Revolutions. This juxtaposition of the two revolutions served to heighten their overall emphasis on the intersections between these seemingly disparate realities. In his discussion of the debate in the Constituent Assembly regarding the provisions of the March 8th proclamation, Brown quotes Warville de Barnave, who in seconding the claim of mulatto rights forwarded by Vincent Oge, exclaimed “Perish the colonies, rather than the principle!” Brown added: “Noble language this! Would that the fathers of the American Revolution had been as consistent.” In another instance when describing the massacre of five hundred faithful servants who refused to bear arms in the conflict, Brown noted that this “example set by the whites taught the men of color that the struggle was for liberty or death.” Here, Brown echoed the sentiments of Patrick Henry, a member of the Virginia House of Burgress, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The urgency of “liberty or death” was manifest in the massacre of innocent people as demonstrated by the Haitian example, and in the imminent death of many Americans in the cause of liberty from Britain 59

Brown’s presentation of the exploits of Toussaint L’Ouverture also invoked the American Revolution. Like the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution was a national crisis that needed a leader “adequate to the emergency.” Not only did L’Ouverture possess dignity and calmness, but he was self-taught and well read in the

literature on freedom, especially that of Abbe Raynal, the French liberal cleric. His suitability to lead Haitian forces was demonstrated by his ability to restore commercial enterprises on the island and gain the respect of mulattoes, whites, and former slaves alike. L’Ouverture’s ability to achieve consensus is similar to that of George Washington in the early years of the New Republic.60

Holly was far more trenchant than Brown in comparing the two revolutions. In providing evidence to support his claim that the Haitian Revolution was more significant than the American Revolution, Holly noted that the American Revolution was one of a people already free and highly enlightened. “Their greatest grievance was the imposition of the three pence pound tax on tea.” The Haitians, however, suffered under more significant burdens. Their revolt was led by slaves who were menial and uneducated, and the tax imposed upon them was not simply on their “unrequited labor,” but it also usurped their bodies. The opponent in the Haitian struggle was not simply the mother country, as it was in the American case, but the colonial government also played an active role in attempting to suppress the revolt. The Haitians had not only to fight for their personal liberty, but also to seize control of the colonial government. Given the sum total of these observations, Holly concluded that the American revolution was but a “tempest in a teapot” when compared with the magnanimity of the Haitian Revolution.61

60 For information on Abbe Raynal, see Foner, Blacks in the American Revolution, 23 and Langley, The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850, 87-88.
61 See James Theodore Holly, A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government, 19-66. This lecture was published in 1857, but similar to Brown’s was delivered before a Literary Society of Colored Young Men in New Haven, Connecticut after Holly’s return from Haiti. It was delivered a second time, in the autumn of 1855, and repeated several times in Ohio, Michigan and Canada West during the summer of 1856. See Holly, A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government, dedication and 19-66.
Lastly, both Brown and Holly devoted a substantial portion of their lectures to the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution. The beginning of the revolutionary legacy was not 1804, but in 1802 immediately following the capture of Toussaint L’Ouverture. Patriots such as the Andre Rigaud, the mulatto general, and Christophe and Dessalines, former slaves, were also discussed. These patriots fought not merely for independence but an AntiSlavery War. This sentiment, popular in abolitionist circles, found expression in Brown’s lecture. When the main contingent of the French Army landed at Cape City, and a smaller force at Port-au-Prince, Toussaint and Christophe, like “Nat Turner, the Spartacus of the Southampton revolt,” fled into the mountains. Again, Brown made a tangible connection between the prudent military tactics of slave revolt leaders. In another instance when describing the numerous atrocities committed by the black general Dessalines against white planters, Brown noted that this should serve as an omen for American slaveholders: “Let the slave-holders in our Southern States tremble when they shall call to mind these events.” According to Brown, the revolutionary father of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint L’Ouverture and the patriots of the Haitian Revolution, would reappear in the Southern United States. Their spirits were already there, and when these spirits combined with the impulses from the American Revolution, Brown believed, “the day is not far distant when the revolution of St. Domingo will be reenacted in South Carolina and Louisiana.”

Brown also linked the aftermath of the revolutionary conflict to the legacies bequeathed to the western hemisphere by the revolutionary fathers. For Brown the

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important question was what traditions did the French and American Revolutions produce? Were they consistent with liberty or opposed to it? In Brown’s analysis, Napoleon Bonaparte and George Washington, as inheritor of a Republican tradition, pale by comparison with Toussaint L’Ouverture. While Napoleon and L’Ouverture shared a number of commonalities ranging from their humble origins to ending their careers in exile, the differences in how they achieved their stature were too striking to overlook: “Toussaint fought for liberty; Napoleon fought for himself. Toussaint gained fame by leading an oppressed and injured race to the successful vindication of their rights, Napoleon made himself a name and acquired a scepter by supplanting liberty and destroying nationalities, in order to substitute his own illegitimate despotism.”

George Washington, the American inheritor of the Republican traditions, fared no better than Napoleon. The outcome of the American Revolution was the antithesis of the Haitian Revolution. L’Ouverture was the true Republican, a Haitian Republican. The appellation would have been viewed as an oxymoron to most American Republicans of his day, but Brown’s application of this term to L’Ouverture was essentially correct in terms of the preservation of the goals and aims of the Haitian Revolution. His government made “liberty his watchword, incorporated it in its constitution, abolished the slave trade and made freedom universal among his people.” Washington’s government took the opposite course, and thus perverted the true spirit of Republicanism. His government “incorporated slavery and the slave-trade, and enacted laws by which chains were fastened on the limbs of millions of people.” Washington’s legacy not only perverted the revolution, but also gave “strength and vitality to an institution that would one day rent asunder the UNION that he had helped to form.” As a result of this failure to fulfill the revolutionary promise the

63 See Brown, St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Patriots, 35-37.

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“slave in his chains, in the rice swamps of Carolina and the cotton fields of Mississippi, burns for revenge.” 64

While Holly did not invoke the legacies of founding fathers, he did compare the social policies of L’Ouverture and his predecessors to various European governments. Holly titled this portion of his lecture, “The Auspicious Dawn of Negro Rule.” The power of L’Ouverture’s government originated from his ability to impose strict regulation on land and quotas on sugar production in order to stabilize the island’s commercial enterprises in the wake of the Haitian Revolution. These restrictions were also sensitive to the needs of the recently enslaved populace, which helped in the establishment of a constitutional government, international commercial relations, and the enactment of the Rural Code, which facilitated the transition of slave to wage labor. Under the Rural Code, the island returned to the prosperity it had known prior to the Haitian Revolution. L’Ouverture also instituted the Haytien Code which compelled the unemployed to seek a private employer, and if one could not be found, the person was required to seek employment by the government on sugar plantations in rural areas. In Holly’s opinion, L’Ouverture’s industrial regulations were an outstanding success, and achieved a high degree of efficiency in Haiti that the British could not achieve in its Afro-Caribbean colonies in the 1830’s. Haiti’s labor regulations were fair, and did not resort to apprenticeship or encourage voluntary or forced immigration of Asians to accomplish the production goals of planters. 65

64 According to Farrison, Brown borrowed heavily from the work of John Beard. Beard was a minister who wrote Life of Toussaint L’Ouverture. See Farrison, William Wells Brown: Author and Reformer, 256-257. For a copy of Beard’s work, see James Beard, Toussaint L’Ouverture: Biography and Autobiography (Boston: James Redpath, 1863)
65 See James Theodore Holly, A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race, 45-46.
That Haiti never resorted to an apprenticeship system, or L’Ouverture’s plan of wealth distribution defraud the peasant in favor of the landed class boded well for Holly’s claims of innate ability for self-government. For Holly, L’Ouverture’s redistribution of land was favorable to the common people. Holly noted that William Pitt the Younger, the Prime Minister of England during the American Revolutionary War satisfied the needs of the wealthy, but failed to satisfy the needs of the common people. These differences in leadership styles and efficacy and efficiency of plans for reordering governments during moments of precipitous change offered practical lessons in the art of statesmanship. With these achievements, L’Ouverture emblazoned his name on the “historic page of the world’s statesmanship.”66

L’Ouverture’s successors possessed the sophisticated qualities of statesmanship exhibited by their predecessor. Like his presentation on Oge, Holly fails to mention the darker side of the Dessalines’ diplomacy. He focused instead on Dessalines’s ability to build a 60,000-man army, and his unsuccessful attempt to unite the French and Spanish portions of the island. Despite the serious differences over race and caste that surfaced during the regimes of Christophe and Petion, Holly noted though opposed to one another, both men were united against any external enemy. Under Boyer, the divisions between the French and Spanish portions of the island were healed. The disorder that occurred during Boyer’s regime was attributed to the “smoldering feud between the blacks and the men of color and the animosities that the

66 See Holly, A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government, 47-49. The British colony that imposed the most extensive apprenticeship program was Jamaica. For an overview of the Jamaica system and its impact throughout the Caribbean, see Thomas Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), 55-114.
ancient regime of slavery had created among them.” However, all dissension and discord were settled under the “vigorous specter of the present ruler, Faustin I.”

Visions of a heroic, revolutionary, and intensely patriotic Haiti offered an alternative to the hypocritical politics of revolutionary and postrevolutionary America. As literary historian Eric Sundquist has argued, the Haitian Revolution was increasingly used by blacks as the model for American slave rebellion. As I have mentioned earlier, no major slave revolt occurred in the United States in the 1850’s, yet Brown’s invocation of this imagery fills the void of nonresponse by slaves to the increasing influence of the Slave Power. In some ways, free blacks interjected themselves into a space that had been largely reserved for slaves, physical violence and rebellion, and invigorated it with erudition and incendiary allusions. Therefore, the slave rebellions of the 1850’s were intellectual wars waged by black abolitionists in various historical lectures and tracts. By drawing these two revolutions, the Haitian and American, seemingly disparate realities, into a conversation about the future of America, black writers engaged in a revolutionary undertaking. Benevolent fathers,

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See Holly, A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self Government. 55. Holly continued his lecture in the first three installments of a regular column in the Anglo-African Magazine entitled “Thoughts on Hayti.” In the first installment of the column, Holly stated the purposes of the column: “I propose to profit by the attention which is now being bestowed upon the affairs of that country, to furnish some food for the public mind, by exposing some of my own thoughts derived from a somewhat careful and extended study of the history of the Haytian people. These thoughts, I will give in a short series of articles on various subjects; such as may be of the most important consideration; and shall begin in this one to speak of the important relation that this sovereign people hold to the future destiny of the negro race.” See James Theodore Holly, “Thoughts on Hayti,” Anglo-African Magazine, (April 1859): 185-191; James Theodore Holly, “Thoughts on Hayti: No 2: The Disabilities under which that Country Labors,” Anglo-African Magazine (April 1859): 219-221; James Theodore Holly, “Thoughts on Hayti: Number III: Emigration as a Means of Removing the National Disabilities of the Haytian People,” Anglo-African Magazine (August 1859): 241-243.
incendiary possibilities, and devoted patriots were important characterizations of these realities and served as potent weapons in the arsenal of the Antislavery War, especially at a moment when it seemed that proslavery and expansionist forces were destined to remake all of America in their image. 68

The historical writing of African Americans in the last decade before the Civil War reflected the uncertainty and tenuous nature of black existence. Uncertainty regarding the impact of the Compromise of 1850 gave the decade an urgent cast. African-American intellectuals not only chose whether to integrate or emigrate, but they also decided which weapons would be most effective in waging war against proslavery forces who were better organized, financed, and more visible than in any previous decade.

Given the commemorative nature of the decade, blacks used history to situate themselves at the heart or center of revolutionary memory. William Nell, a Garrisonian abolitionist and amateur historian, offered the most vibrant reconstruction of the Revolutionary War and its aftermath and the role blacks played in the national dramas. Drawing from a wide range of primary sources, Nell skillfully “conferred with the living and the dead” to offer a holistic history of the trials and tribulations of blacks in the Early Republic and antebellum period. It is clear that Nell viewed his war as a viable tool in turning the tide of racism and as a means of according blacks their proper place in the creation of the Republic. While steeped in antislavery concerns, this work had communal resonance that challenged the majoritarian practice of excluding black participation from the memory of the war to justify increased circumscription and denigration of free and enslaved blacks.

68 See Sundquist, To Wake the Nations, 34-35.
The 1850’s was also a moment for blacks to rethink their historical relationship to Haiti. Previously, Haiti’s incendiary possibilities were downplayed in favor of reports of the island’s prosperity and adaptation to republican forms of government. However, during this decade, the name that struck fear in the breasts of the slaveholding South was reinvested with revolutionary possibilities. Free blacks such as George Boyer Vashon, James Theodore Holly, and William Wells Brown invoked Haiti not only as site of revolutionary fervor, but also as the ultimate hemispheric revolution. It stood in their minds as a model of revolution which could and should displace the American Revolution. Its revolutionary leaders abolished slavery and promoted freedom while American leaders such as Washington and Jefferson allowed slavery to flourish and in doing so dismantled the legacy of the revolution.

The call for citizenship, respect and dignity echoed through the intellectual production of black writers. History offered a means of integrating blacks into the story of America. It also gave abolitionists a fighting chance in the Antislavery War. In the aftermath of the only raid of the decade, John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, blacks were poised for the eventual dissolution of the union, the outbreak of the Civil War and the coming of the day of jubilee. History played an important role in making these events a reality. 69


Whenever emancipation shall take place, immediate though it may be, the subjects of it, like many who now make up the so-called free population, will be in what Geologists call, the “Transition State.” The prejudice now felt against them for bearing on their persons the brand of slaves, cannot die out immediately. Severe trials will be still be their portion—the curse of a “taunted race” must be expiated by almost miraculous proofs of advancement; and some of these miracles must be antecedent to the great day of Jubilee.”

--Charles L. Reason

The period between 1863, the year of the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation, the publication of William Wells Brown’s The Black Man, and the decisive Union victory at Gettysburg, and 1882, the year prior to the publication of Joseph Wilson’s Emancipation: Its Course and Progress, which signaled a decisive shift in the style and content of historical writing among African Americans, was a dynamic moment of modernization, urbanization, and industrialization in American history. The Civil War was not only the most cataclysmic event of the period, but a harbinger of change in American culture. The changes wrought by the war altered the American landscape, and in doing so, significantly altered the structure and emphasis of American social, political, economic, and most important, intellectual life. Historian Robert Wiebe has characterized this period as one in which the nation “searched for

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order.” The nation moved from an insular, disconnected, autonomous set of “island communities” to a more cosmopolitan, connected, and bureaucratized set of interlocking spheres. The end result of this process included capital accumulation, corporate consolidation, and Social Darwinism, which defined America in the Gilded Age (1865-1895). ²

The intellectual community, like the nation, also experienced tremendous upheaval and change. During the same period, an insular, elitist, and regionally oriented intellectual class evolved into a more pluralistic, scientific, and nationally oriented intelligentsia. The intellectual crisis of the Gilded Age, according to Dorothy Ross, was against an antebellum clerical elite, which held the social sciences hostage in colleges to religious concerns and moral philosophy. With the transference and adoption of German models of scientism and historicism in American institutions of higher learning, the clerical leadership of the nation’s intellectual life was increasingly called into question. This questioning led to fundamental changes. Intellectuals moved aggressively from what historian Thomas Bender has characterized as “civic professionalism”—intellectual life organized around local and urban civic life, to a broader and more rigorously defined, “disciplinary professionalism, whereby intellectual inquiry was organized around the modern university.”³

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³ Changes brought about the late 19th century shift to scientism are chronicled in a number of studies, see Paul Cotkin, Reluctant Modernism, American Thought and Culture, 1880-1900. (New York: Twayne Press, 1992), 51-73, Dorothy Ross, The Origins of the Social Sciences (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 53-76. ²⁰⁷
For African Americans the Gilded Age also brought unprecedented changes, both good and bad. As one historian has noted, 1863-1882 were years of “triumph and travail.” In one way, the Civil War and its aftermath irrevocably raised their status in the United States. The Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves in the Confederacy, the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery; the 14th Amendment, which granted citizenship; and the 15th Amendment, which gave black men the right to vote, contributed to destroying the firmly entrenched institution of slavery and granted the benefits of freedom to a once enslaved group. Unfortunately, however, the guarantees of citizenship were short-lived and a clear indication of the travail of African Americans. The collapse of Reconstruction was evident from the start. As most southerners saw it, a victorious North could not deal fairly with the vanquished South—Northerners did not understand the peculiar history of the region and were determined to impose a postbellum order that was antithetical to Southern sensibilities. Consequently, despite the presence of federal troops, vigilantism was the order of the


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day in many Southern states. This lawlessness, combined with contradictory and
vacillating presidential leadership and congressional loss of will, irreparably damaged
the Reconstruction experiment. 4

The fall of Reconstruction coincided with the increasing popularity of Social
Darwinism. The theory of Social Darwinism, in keeping with the promotion of
Southern paternalism, provided the impetus for white Southern hegemony. As historian
George Frederickson points out: “The theory that evolution toward higher forms of life
stemmed primarily from the conflict and competition of varieties and species, with the
survival of the fittest and the disappearance of the unfit, had obvious attraction for
those who believed that some human races had a much more exalted destiny than
others.” The intense contestation over the worth and usefulness of blacks that ensued
in the aftermath of the war and that raged furiously throughout the late-19th century

4 Other seminal studies of the postwar and late nineteenth century south include
C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana
State University, 1971) and Edward Ayers, The Promise of a New South: Life After
Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Also see Armstead
Robinson, “The Difference Freedom Made: The Emancipation of Afro-Americans,” in
Darlene Clark Hine, ed. The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present and Future
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 51-90. An excellent study The
classic history of Reconstruction is Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished
Revolution, 1863-1877 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Of the social and
cultural implications of Reconstruction with a focus on blacks is Leon F. Litwack, Been
An important political study is Thomas Holt, Black Over White: Negro Political
Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction (Urbana: University of Illinois
Press, 1979). An older study that is useful for detailing the black role in Reconstruction
is W.E.B. Du Bois’s Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880 (1935; rpt New
York: Atheneum, 1973) and John Hope Franklin, Reconstruction After the Civil War
(Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961). Good economic histories include Gerald
Jaynes, Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the America
South, 1862-1882 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Jay Mandle, Not
Slave, Not Free: The African American Economic Experience Since the Civil War
prompted black intellectuals to design an appropriate response, which, for the first
generation of postbellum historical writers, lay partially in merging antebellum and

African-American intellectuals, like their white counterparts, were also in a
state of transition. Black intellectuals, members of an abolitionist elite located primarily
in the North, responded to the changing position of African Americans by cultivating a
sense of \textit{noblesse oblige} toward less fortunate blacks in the South. Black & white
Northerners who had played seminal roles in antislavery agitation, made their way into
the South to “uplift the black race.” Prominent abolitionists such as Charlotte Forten,
Susan King, John Mercer Langston, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Martin Delany
actively contributed their knowledge and know-how to acclimate freedpeople to the
responsibilities of citizenship.\footnote{See Kevin Kelley Gaines, \textit{Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in Twentieth Century} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).}

There was no greater example of \textit{noblesse oblige} than the promotion of
education. Thus, the most significant accomplishment of the postbellum period in the
intellectual sphere was the establishment of a black academy--black colleges and
universities. The antebellum black academy--a loose amalgam of abolitionist academies,
free African schools, and secondary institutions—consisted of a number of classically and indus-
trially oriented schools. Oneida Institute, located in the burned over district of New York, which specialized in both classical and industrial models of black education, and the Philadelphia School of Colored Youth in Philadelphia, a more classically oriented school under the direction of Fanny Mae Jackson Coppin, a prominent black educator and later, Charles Reason, offered the only alternatives for advanced secondary training. Colleges such as Oberlin in Ohio trained members of the African-American antebellum elite, but this institution was an anomaly among antebellum colleges. Lincoln and Wilberforce Colleges, the only colleges for African Americans were founded late in the antebellum period and had little impact on the training of black elites until later in the nineteenth century. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that no member of the antebellum elite who produced a major historical study held a degree from an American college.⁷

The postbellum period drastically changed these realities in terms of the growth of a more substantial black academy. The formation of a number of educational institutions throughout the South led to the establishment of black academy. This

period, however, did not see a substantial departure from the clerically oriented educational model of the antebellum period. Initially, these colleges adhered to antebellum methods of instruction. Additionally, because a sophisticated intellectual infrastructure had not existed in the antebellum period—blacks were more deeply involved in civic professionalism in various Northern cities—the clergy continued to play a dominant role in African-American intellectual affairs. Thus, it is not surprising that while majority institutions such as Johns Hopkins, Cornell, and Stanford, and graduate departments at Columbia and Harvard were enthroning scientism and positivism led by men who were the very paragons of the scientific tradition, a substantial number of black normal schools and nascent colleges were dominated by clerical elites and missionaries who emphasized religion and moral philosophy both as a mechanism to control the impulses and attitudes of the newly freed population and as a means of discouraging significant agitation for civil and political rights. Consequently, the emergence of a university trained black elite with graduate degrees in the newly constituted social sciences was in the offing but not a tangible reality in the years between 1863 and 1882.8

Located outside of the nascent black academy, giving them some degree of autonomy from the clerical elite, “older” black intellectuals used the status garnered from the ante-bellum period to foist their agenda upon the race. Frederick Douglass, the representative man of the race until his death in 1895, was one of the writers active in the struggle to end slavery and in the fight to define freedom. The critical markers for these writers were the Emancipation Proclamation, and the 13th Amendment. These intellectuals used the early post-bellum period to outline and sketch the “historical mind of emancipation.” Using ante-bellum historical formations—the focus on black achievements in classical antiquity, and now, post-slave trade Africa, black participation in the nation’s founding dramas, and most importantly, biographical sketches of representative men and women—these writers sought to provide tangible evidence of black participation in the nation’s unfolding story. A characteristic distinguishing characteristic these histories from earlier ones, which also studied black participation in the creation of the nation, was their Janus-like quality, their ability to look simultaneously backward and forward. The narratives black intellectuals constructed not only concerned the future possibilities of the race, but they also hearkened back to the courageous role played by African Americans in the ante-bellum period to end the horrid institution of slavery.  

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Narratives that reflected the past heroism and the future prospects of the race required an outlet for distribution. Because the Gilded Age offered unparalleled opportunities for the publication and dissemination of books, local and regional networks gave way to national ones. The 1860’s witnessed the convergence of a number of older forms of literary production such as sampling books, trade papers, and literary and book agents with a virtual explosion in the production of books and magazines wrought by changes in the organization of labor within the larger publishing houses, which had begun in the 1850’s. Rather than an occasional review in the black press and publication in one edition, most historical works were published in numerous editions and with sample books and aggressive advertising strategies making these histories more visible than ever. The story of the race became inextricably linked to the commercial demands of the marketplace. And some, more than others, utilized these approaches extensively—with telling results. By examining historical production among African Americans, we can gain insight into the world of black intellectuals at mid-century, their writing strategies and their attempt to merge antebellum sensibilities and postbellum realities to chart a course for a lasting and beneficial freedom for all African Americans.10

Early postbellum historical discourse was framed in an atmosphere defined by recovery from war, social and economic dislocation, and black triumph and travail in the South. In the North, the consolidation of capital, transformation of the intellectual class, and explosion of print media had untold effects on the intellectual climate of the

nation. As the nation’s transcontinental dreams became reality, its organizational coherence spurred innovation in all areas, and by the end of the century, its international hegemony materialized; antebellum organizational ideas rapidly lost their explanatory power and were gradually displaced by more modernist conceptions of reality--professionalism, scientism and pluralism. This process, however, was a gradual one, and white as well as black intellectuals resisted it.

William Wells Brown and the Tripartite Strategy of Early Postbellum Historical Writing

William Wells Brown, former slave, abolitionist, and author, was the most prolific writer of black history in the early postbellum period. He produced three significant monographs on the black experience between 1863 and 1874, and his historical production was as varied and complex as the era in which he lived. I term Brown’s historical work a tripartite, of sorts because it reflected three distinct forms of historical writing and enacted three different but interrelated themes or intellectual preoccupations. Each of his historical productions represented a particular genre of historical writing and race history that would become popular in the subsequent decades, most notably the biographical catalog, accounts of black participation in the nation’s wars, and race histories. Each of these forms of historical production chronicled African-American achievements in slavery as a means of foreshadowing the race’s possibilities in freedom. Brown actively brings together the past and the present, presented heroic models of black personhood, and offers a prognosis and blueprint for the future of the race.  

The first of these works was Brown’s *The Black Man*, published in 1863. At first glance, the *Black Man* appears as a miscellany of random facts recorded to chronicle the achievements of the race. However, upon closer examination, *The Black Man* is actually a carefully constructed catalogue of representative black men and women. Brown included information on prominent black abolitionists and their exploits, and he devoted a substantial portion of the text to discussions of the intellectual achievements of African Americans in the antebellum period. In a historical moment rife with uncertainty regarding the plight of African Americans, *The Black Man*, promoted the usefulness of the race in slavery and its intent to accomplish more noble and valorous deeds during freedom. In his introduction, Brown made clear that his antebellum experiences significantly shaped his historical writing. His “long sojourn in Europe,” and the opportunity to research “amid the archives of England and France and in the West Indies,” provided him with “information respecting the blacks seldom acquired.” All of his “sojourns” were made during his participation in the transatlantic abolitionist community in the antebellum period.  

Brown’s major biographer William Farrison concludes that Brown’s *Black Man* is a miscellany of random facts. Farrison, however, in making this assessment failed to recognize the logical pattens in Brown’s work or to relate them in any meaningful fashion to his project of preserving and extending the memory of African-American achievements of the antebellum period. Brown’s sketches of representative men and women, when divided into categories, sheds light on his intellectual project. Brown’s work featured sketches of intellectuals James McCune Smith, James W.C. Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet, Charles Reason, George Vashon, and William C.

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12 As was customary with Brown’s literary and historical production, he printed a memoir of his life accompanied by fairly perfunctory remarks on the relative position of blacks when juxtaposed with whites. See Brown, *The Black Man*, 1-50.
Nell, abolitionists Henry Bibb, Frederick Douglass, William Still, Charles Lenox Redmond, and Samuel Ringgold Ward; literati Ira Aldridge, the dramatist, Alexander Dumas, author, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, poet, Charlotte Forten, author and abolitionist, and James Whitfield, poet; foreign dignitaries, Toussaint L. Ouverture, Dessalines, Christophe of Haiti and President Jenkins and Roberts of Liberia; war heroes Crispus Attucks; slave revolt leaders, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Joseph Cinque; and scientist Benjamin Banneker. Of these groups, Brown’s discussions of abolitionists, intellectuals, and foreign dignitaries, especially the Haitian leaders, constituted the largest number of sketches. Thus, his antebellum interests in promoting intellectual accomplishment, involvement in the abolitionist movement, and his interest in Haiti, found extended voice in his postbellum historical writing. The construction of his narrative further proves the point that Brown viewed the early postbellum period as an extension of the abolitionist crusade. In this instance, it was not so much an attempt to abolish slavery but an attempt to define freedom. 13

The Black Man appears to have no structural order, sketches are not alphabetized, arranged by category or by date of birth, and the length of many sketches is not commensurate with the accomplishments of the particular individual. Brown

devotes only three pages to Frederick Douglass, arguably one of the most distinguished antebellum abolitionists. Charlotte Forten is the subject of an exhaustive treatment. Phillis Wheatley and Frances Ellen Harper are represented by a reprinted poem. Brown also gives short shrift to women. Of fifty-seven sketches, only three are devoted to women. Despite these lapses, Brown’s The Black Man provided one of the earliest biographical compilations of blacks in the early postbellum period.14

From the outset of the text, Brown was concerned about the debased and degraded status of blacks in comparison to whites: “I admit that the condition of my race when considered in a mental, moral, or intellectual point of view, at the present time cannot compare favorably with that of the Anglo-Saxon.” This statement can be viewed in two distinct ways. First, Brown is making a fairly perfunctory deferral to the advantages that whites enjoy and blacks do not. But second, and perhaps more important, Brown used this comparison to begin to argue, as he does throughout the book, that blacks possessed the instinctive determination to advance their cause in the antebellum period, and through the advantages of freedom the race would be empowered. Appealing to the role Africans played in classical antiquity, Brown reminded readers that African-Americans have not always been “considered the inferior race. The time was when he stood at the head of literature and science.” A mainstay of antebellum history, Brown would constantly return to this theme in subsequent histories. But for now, it will suffice to say that Brown understood that stirring the embers of race pride was essential to the furtherance of his project of racial vindication.15

14 See Brown, The Black Man, 138-142, 160-162, and 190-198
Racial vindication is one, but not the seminal, idea in Brown’s text. Black northerners, mostly abolitionists, were eager to prove the justness of abolishing slavery. Presenting biographical sketches of antebellum figures showcased black achievements during the height of slavery. If American slavery was detrimental to moral, mental, social, political and economic advancement, which all opponents of the institution believed, surely with the fetters of slavery sundered, African Americans would demonstrate to the world their ability to rise, rapidly rise, and assume their rightful place in American society.¹⁶

In all of the sketches, Brown characterized each individual by physical appearance, intellectual accomplishment, and moral standing in the black community—a typically Victorian approach. His sketch of Henry Highland Garnet is particularly instructive in this regard. Brown characterized Garnet as “forty-five years of age, unadulterated in race, tall and commanding of appearance, has an eye that looks through you, and a clear and ringing voice.” Speaking of Charles Reason, a professor of belles lettres at New York Central College, Brown noted Reason was a “man of fine education, superior intelligence, gentlemanly in every sense of the term, and one of the best of students.” In describing George Vashon, Brown used similar adjectives. Vashon was both a “student and man of literature” and a “poetic genius far superior to many who have written and published volumes.” James McCune Smith was not only hailed as “the representative of the black man,” but according to Brown, his essays on the comparative anatomy and physiology of the races, “completely vindicated the Negro,

¹⁶ For Brown's role in constructing alternative visions of America, see Christopher Mulvey, “The Fugitive Self and the New World of the North: William Wells Brown’s Discovery of America,” in The Black Columbiad
and place that author among the most logical and scientific writers of the country.”

Brown praised individuals for their service to particular causes, especially abolitionists. The discussion of contributions to the abolition of slavery was an extension of his personal involvement in the seminal events of the antebellum period. Brown described William Nell as a truly exceptional servant of the race: “No man in New England has performed more uncompensated labor for humanity, and especially for his own race than William C. Nell.” Not only did Brown praise Nell for his editorial work with the Liberator and North Star, but he also lauded the exceptional contribution of Nell’s Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, as a book “filled with interesting incidents connected with the history of the blacks of this country, past and present.” Brown also made clear that “from 1835 to 1850, no public meeting was complete without William C. Nell as Secretary.”

Brown’s adulation also extended to abolitionist clergy such as James W.C. Pennington and Samuel Ringgold Ward. Both Brown and Pennington had experienced slavery, escaped, and established themselves as prominent abolitionists. Deeply appreciative of their similar experiences, Brown praised Pennington’s efforts to acquire basic literacy and his current standing in the African-American community. Currently, the “doctor has been a good student, is a ripe scholar and is deeply versed in theology.” Deeply interested in racial advancement, Brown described Pennington as “laboring zealously and successfully for the education and moral, social and religious

17 As demonstrated in chapter 3, both Garnet, Reason and Vashon played important roles in antislavery abolition and early historical writing. Both men are representative of an era that is rapidly passing away. Brown invokes their memory as a tribute to the “manly” qualities of the race. See Brown, The Black Man, 149-151, 187-189, and 223-226,
18 See Brown, The Black Man, 238-240
elevation of the race.” Pennington described Samuel Ringgold Ward as the “black Daniel Webster.” He added that “few public speakers exercised greater influence in the pulpit and the platform than did Samuel R. Ward in the early days of abolition agitation.” Ward, a Presbyterian minister and author, stood more than six feet tall, had a strong voice, and was energetic. According to Brown, Ward “always impressed his highly finished and logical speeches upon his hearers.”

Although Brown praised the work of abolitionists, he was less enthusiastic in his description of the accomplishments of prominent emigrationists, especially Martin Delany and James Theodore Holly. After characterizing Delany as a “traveler, discoverer, and lecturer,” and an active participant in the Niger Valley Exploring Party (in present-day Nigeria with Robert Campbell, an Afro-Jamaican, between 1858 and 1861) and a member of the International Statistical College, Brown provided a mixed review of Delany’s oratorical style. “Though somewhat violent in his gestures and paying but little regard to the rule of oratory, Dr. Delany, nevertheless, is an interesting and eloquent speaker.” Brown also seemed ambivalent about Delany’s strong sense of what he termed “Negro Nationality,” an uncritical alliance to Africa or other diasporic locations.


James Theodore Holly, a staunch proponent of emigration, was grouped with Delany as an adherent to the idea of “Negro Nationality.” Holly, had done more to promote the concept, according to Brown, and he “has made the matter one of much thought and study.” Brown viewed Holly’s personal sacrifice as folly rather than race service. Indeed, Brown described Holly’s decision to immigrate to Haiti as a dangerous “infatuation.” Dangerous because it led to the death of members of Holly’s family during the first six months of settlement.”

One can only speculate why Brown offered such harsh assessments of Delany and Holly. During the antebellum period, Brown, himself, advocated the efficacy of emigration in the United States and Canada in the 1850’s; Delany and Holly were avowed emigrationists from the 1850’s onward. The utter despair occasioned by the seemingly irrepressible “Slave Power” led many abolitionists to conclude that emigration offered a viable alternative to their tenuous situation in the United States. Papers such as William Hamilton’s Anglo-African, and Weekly Anglo-African, and James Redpath’s Pine and Palm trumpeted the benefits of emigration and favorably reviewed Martin Delany’s Niger Valley Exploring Report. Brown, a special contributor to the Pine and Palm, printed early sketches of prominent black personages in a paper dominated by advertisements for emigration to Haiti. As opposition mounted to Haitian emigration, and the tide of the war turned in favor of the Union, Brown gradually abandoned his emigrationist interests and turned instead to discussing how blacks would adapt to freedom. Delany also abandoned his emigration interests,

139-184.

21 James Theodore Holly’s emigrationist work is discussed in David Lambeth Dean’s Defender of the Race: James Theodore Holly Nationalist Bishop (Boston: Lambeth Press, 1979).
returned to the United States, and received a commission as Captain in the Union Army. Holly, however, persisted in his belief in emigration and continued to promote immigration to Haiti. While Brown understood the seminal role that the diaspora played in African-American life, he promoted emigration, but saw it as a means, not an end for accomplishing black equality in the United States.22

Brown’s interest in Haiti went beyond fascination with emigration. Brown was a student of the Haitian Revolution. His knowledge and admiration for the Haitian struggle is suggested by the fact that he included more sketches of Haitian leaders in his biographical compilation than any other group of foreign leaders. The fundamental difference between Brown’s antebellum and postbellum writing on Haiti was the fact that in the antebellum period Haiti held multi-faceted meanings for African Americans. It served as a source of black pride, Republicanism, and as a potential site of emigration in the 1850’s. Diplomatically unrecognized by the United States, Haiti occupied an ambiguous position in Western hemispheric policy. In 1864, however, just one year after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, Haiti was officially recognized by

22 Fierce debates occurred between abolitionists regarding the efficacy of emigration. Brown supported the idea of using emigrationist motifs to spur the country to action on the question of slavery, but was never an avowed emigrationist in the same way as Martin Delany and James Theodore Holly. Support for emigration was pervasive among African American intellectuals, especially after some Southern leaders called for the reopening of the Slave Trade in the late 1850’s, Thomas Hamilton in his highly respected journal, The Anglo-African, supported the emigrationist cause by printing articles about the topic and promoting the sale of Delany’s Niger Valley Exploring Party. See Weekly Anglo-African, 1861 and 1862. Advertisements also appeared in James Redpath’s Pine and Palm. For a typical example of Redpath’s interest in Haiti, see “Notes of the Movement: Haitian Bureau of Emigration,” “Letters from Hayti,” “History of the Haytian Press,” and “Haitian Advertisements.” Pine and Palm, August 24, 1861. In 1861, Redpath also authored a guide for emigrants from America, see James Redpath, ed., A Guide to Haiti (New York: Woolworth Colton, 1861). Also see Charles Horner, The Life of James Redpath (New York: Barse and Hopkins, 1926).
the United States as a sovereign country. As a result of this act, the post of Minister to Haiti became one of several diplomatic positions reserved for black elites in the late-nineteenth century. No doubt aware of these changes, Brown’s book was one of the earliest to reflect this sensibility. Haitian history could now be appropriated as an example of black possibility in the postbellum period.

The **Black Man** includes sketches of the following Haitian leaders: Toussaint L’Ouverture, Dessalines (1804-1806), Henri Christophe (1806-1811, 1811-1820), Andre Rigaud (1810-1811), Alexandre Peton (1807-1811), Jean Pierre Boyer (1818-1843), and President Géffard (1859-1867) His sketch of Toussaint L’Ouverture was taken verbatim from his “St. Domingo: Its Revolution and Its Patriots” (1855). One of the longest sketches in the book, the L’Ouverture sketch is more than twelve pages. L’Ouverture’s successor, Dessalines receives more than seven pages, and Henri Christophe’s sketch is more than six pages. The more contemporary rulers were granted less than three pages each. How do we account for such differences? It is clear that Brown’s sketches were based on the traditional antebellum approach to the Haiti’s glory. Although both Dessalines and Christophe were tragically flawed as leaders, Brown considered those who took an active part in the revolution and ruled the country during the first days of independence to be the greatest. Despite the fact that Dessalines was illiterate, this flaw, according to Brown, was compensated for by the intellectual achievements of his mulatto wife and the fact that he kept three secretaries “who, by turns read to him.” Henri Christophe, a devoted follower of L’Ouverture, who openly defied the legitimate government of Alexandre Peton and proclaimed himself Emperor of Haiti, plunging the country into fourteen years of civil war, was
viewed by Brown as a patron of the arts, and an individual who promoted industry and commerce. Christophe, unable to subdue his enemies, committed suicide in 1820.23

Brown's Black Man was more than a simplistic biographical compilation or a shoddily constructed historical text. It was a memory book, even if the memories were selective and the biographical accounts skewed; it was a compilation of the collective deeds of the race. Its message was that despite the difficulties of slavery, blacks waged a successful fight against slavery through their constant vigilance at freedom's forge. Abolitionists such as Henry Highland Garnet, William C. Nell, James W.C. Pennington, and Samuel Ringgold Ward demonstrated through their intellectual achievements and moral standing that blacks possessed the requisite qualities for membership in the human race as well as all of the benefits of citizenship. These claims took on new life in an era in which freedom's possibilities were more tangible. These achievements were not only confined to the United States but encompassed the world. Political leadership, an important component of race leadership in the postbellum period, was also present in the race. The accomplishments of the Haitian leaders demonstrated the truth of the claim.24

23 Brown respect but bias for Haitian leaders is clearly evident in his biographical sketch. It also supports my contention that Brown was, like many antebellum writers, attracted to the libertory sensibilities of Haitian history. After 1804, Haitian history was turbulent, but the country did manage to maintain some semblance of order and thus gained the admiration of many antebellum writers. For a good overview of Haitian history, see David Nicholls, From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Brown also lectured in upstate New York on the benefits of emigration to Haiti, see "Advertisements of Haiti: Lecture by William Wells Brown Delivered in Troy, New York, Pine and Palm, August 17, 1861 and Pine and Palm, August 24, 1861."

24 My use of the terms "memory book" is taken from the work of Nick Salvatore, see Salvatore's We all Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber (New York: Random House, 1996), xiii-xx. Advertisements for The Black Man appeared in the following newspapers: Liberator, December 12, 1867 and "The Book for the Times," Liberator, November 21, 1862. The book's popularity is also demonstrated by the fact
Brown’s interests were not limited to biography. He also wrote one of the earliest monographs on the Civil War, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*. Few histories of the conflict existed in this early period. Thus, Brown was forced to rely on a wide variety of primary sources for his study. One of the most important sources was George Livermore’s *An Historical Research* published in 1863. Livermore, a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, initially presented his findings on the role of blacks “as citizens and soldiers” during the proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1862-1863. The work focused primarily on black participation in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. However, the book’s balanced treatment of the black experience, pioneering methodology, and lucidity in presentation made it one of the most important documentary texts of the period, and a model for subsequent historical work. Brown also made extensive use of newspaper correspondents, battlefield officers, and actual participants in the “colored” regiments.

Brown, in keeping with his interest in the antebellum period, began his text with an examination of black participation in the Revolutionary War and their fight for

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that it was reprinted in the ensuing years. The editions of the book include *The Black Man* 2nd ed. (New York and Boston: Thomas Hamilton, 1863), *The Black Man* 3rd ed. (New York: James W. Symms, 1863) and *The Black Man* 4th ed. (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1865)

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25 Brown apparently used a number of different historical sources in his narrative. He used Bancroft’s multivolume *History of the United States*, Frank Moore’s *Diary of the American Revolution*, and Arnold’s *History of Rhode Island*. One of the most sophisticated historical documentary accounts on black participation in the Revolutionary War was George Livermore’s historical compilation, see George Livermore, *An Historical Research Respecting the Opinions of the Founders of the Republic on Negroes as Slaves, as Citizens, and as Soldiers* (Boston: A. Williams, 1863). For contemporary assessments of the Civil War which include the role played by black soldiers, see Benson Lossing, *Pictorial History of the Civil War in the United States of America* 3 vols (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1866).
inclusion in the nation’s body politic. He recreated the revolutionary impetus provided by the Boston Massacre, detailed black heroism at Bunker Hill and Red Bank, and the grateful acknowledgment of black services to the nation in General Andrew Jackson’s “Proclamation to the Free People of Color.” Short accounts of the Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner revolts were also provided. As did most abolitionists of his day, Brown located the origins of the Civil War in the passage of the infamous Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, and the intense contestation over slavery in the 1850’s. One might recall that Brown, a fugitive slave himself, was forced to travel abroad to avoid recapture. The hurt, anger, and betrayal Brown felt toward Northerners and Southerners over slavery resonated in the language of his text.\textsuperscript{26}

After mentioning the Anthony Burns and David Simms cases, two of the most famous fugitive slave recapture cases in which the subjects were returned to the South, and both of which took place in Boston, Brown castigated the Northern supporters of the Fugitive Slave Law exposing the gulf between the nation’s ideals and its realities:

On that occasion, the sons of free enlightened and Christian Massachusetts, descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers, bowed submissively to the behests of tyranny more cruel than Austrian despotism; yielded up their dignity and self-respect; became the allies of slavecatchers, the associates and companions of slave catchers and serviles, they seized the image of God, bound their fellow man with chains and consigned him to torture under the lash of a piratical overseer. God’s law and man’s rights were trampled upon; and the self-respect, the constitutional privileges of the free states were ignominiously surrendered.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26} See Brown, \textit{The Negro in the American Rebellion}, 1-36.
\textsuperscript{27} See Brown, \textit{The Negro in the Rebellion}, 40. The best sources on the Simms and Burns case include \textit{Boston Slave Riot and Trial of Anthony Burns: Containing the Report of the Fanueil Hall Meeting; the Murder of Batchelder; Theodore Parker’s Lesson of the Day; Speeches of Counsel on Both Sides, Corrected by Themselves; A Verbatim of Judge Loring’s Decision; and a Detailed Account of the Embarkation}
Brown characterized the Boston Court House, the scene of numerous Fugitive Slave cases, as shrouded “in chains.” According to Brown, the Courthouse was also the place where “two hundred rowdies and thieves were sworn in as special policemen” and used to augment the traditional police force in the recapture of fugitive slaves. While the Fugitive Slave Act inflicted irreparable harm on the black communities throughout the nation, the Dred Scott Decision was the final straw. For Brown and fellow abolitionists, the “Dred Scott decision added fresh combustibles to the smoldering heap.” While blacks were struggling to affirm their worth, the seeming success of proslavery forces emboldened slaveholders “whose wealth made them arrogant,” and “independent of the United States.” According to Brown, this arrogance and independence left no doubt in the minds of the “authors of the rebellion” of the “success of the attack on the Federal government.”

Upon the outbreak of hostilities, blacks were eager to join the Union effort. Initially rebuffed by Northern authorities, Brown pointed out the problematic nature of this policy. While Northern forces were returning blacks to their masters, “it was a notorious fact the enemy was using negroes to build fortifications, drive teams and

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(Boston: Fetridge and Company, 1854) and *The Boston Kidnapping: A Discourse to Commemorate the Rendition of Thomas Simms, Delivered on the First Anniversary Thereof, April 12, 1852. Before the Committee of Vigilance, at the Melodeon in Boston.* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Company, 1852), and Charles Emery Stevens, *Anthony Burns: A History* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856). One of the few anomalies in this business of slave recaptures was the case of Shadarach Minkins. Minkins, a fugitive slave from Norfolk, Virginia employed as a waiter at the Cornhill Coffee House in Boston, was arrested on February 15, 1851. Minkins was tried on the afternoon of the 15th, but before the proceedings ended, a group of Boston blacks successfully recaptured Minkins and spirited him away to freedom, see Gary Collison, *Shadarach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Brown, *The Negro in the Rebellion*, 52

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raise food for the army.” And in Montgomery, Alabama, the capital of the Confederacy, “negroes were being drilled and armed for military duty.” Brown also pointed out that African Americans who desired to participate in the war effort were mistreated in the Northern states as well. In Cincinnati, a proclamation was issued calling on all able-bodied men to form a regiment for defense of the city, in case of attack. African Americans were not allowed to participate in the military functions, but were forced to build fortifications. Their labors were eventually reduced, but not before their white commander had inflicted great harm. Nevertheless, African Americans were heralded by the city fathers for the important role in protecting the city.29

As war policy shifted, especially after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, which Brown characterized as “only a prelude to calling on the colored men to take arms and the one soon followed the other,” black regiments were raised and demonstrated their willingness to serve their country. While the Southern

29 The history of black participation in the Civil War, both as Union and Confederate soldiers is examined in the following studies: Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the Civil War (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1953), Dudley Cornish, The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865 (Lawerence: University of Kansas Press, 1987), Richard Long, ed., Black Writers and the American Civil War: Black Involvement in the War Between the States (New Jersey: Blue and Gray Press, 1988), Joseph T. Glatther, Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers (New York, 1990), William Gladstone, United States Colored Troops, 1863-1867 (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1990). Erwin L. Jordan, Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War Virginia (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995), 201-251. James McPherson, The Negro’s Civil War. The experiences of the Black Brigade in Cincinnati are particularly telling. General Lewis Wallace put blacks to work on the fortifications in Covington and Lexington, Kentucky. They were arrested by the police and forced to work at bayonet point, as servants. The impressed blacks worked without weapons from September 3-20, 1862. The brigade was commanded by Judge Martin Dickson, see Peter Clark, The Black Brigade of Cincinnati: Being a Muster-Roll of its Members, Together with Various Orders, Speeches, Etc. Relating to It... (Cincinnati: Joseph Boyd, 1864) and Charles Wesley, Ohio Negroes in the Civil War (Ohio Civil War Centennial Publication #6 Columbus, 1962).
question was moving toward resolution, the existence of Northern blacks remained perilous. Blacks in the North faced a number of difficult problems, among them disenfranchisement, exclusion from jury service and, in some instances, the public schools. While blacks in the North did not feel the “manacles that fettered the slave of the South,” they did suffer from the “iron hand of prejudice,” which was just as circumscribing as the shackles of slavery.30

Despite their mistreatment in the Northern and Southern states, African Americans were eager to prove themselves on the battlefield. Brown’s coverage of black participation in the Civil War was by no means exhaustive. He sought rather to provide an overview of black heroism in the war. Moreover, it is doubtful that Brown could provide a comprehensive historical portrait of the war only two years after the conclusion of the conflict and before official statistics or accounts could be published. Thus, he devoted chapters to the formation of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment, which included one of Frederick Douglass’s sons and which fought heroically at the Battle of Fort Wagner, South Carolina in 1864, and the role black soldiers played in the Battles of Olustee, Florida; Poison Springs, Arkansas; and Honey Hill, South Carolina.31

Black service to the nation was not without its trials and tribulations. In addition to long hours, low pay, inadequate training, clothing and other rations, African Americans also faced unusual hazards on the battlefield. The Confederacy declared

30 See Brown, The Negro in the Rebellion, 54.
early on in the conflict that the formation of black regiments was anathema to the conduct of war and an affront to the Southern way of life. Thus, in numerous battles, black regiments were given “no quarter,” executed to the last man, and white officers in command of these regiments were usually buried alongside their troops in a common grave rather than accorded the military honors befitting their rank. This policy was brutally demonstrated in a Confederate attack on Fort Pillow, Kentucky on 13 April 1864.32

Fort Pillow was under the command of Major L.F. Booth. Of the 557 men under his command, 262 of them were African Americans, members of the 6th U.S. Heavy Infantry. The Confederates were led by General Nathan Forrest. Having killed Booth in the early morning, Forrest demanded the surrender of the fort, but surrender was refused by Booth’s replacement, Major Bradford. The Confederates continued to gain ground pressing in upon the fort preparing for the final assault. Recognizing that the situation was hopeless, the Union troops began to surrender. As quickly as they surrendered, the troops were murdered. Cries of “no quarter” reverberated through the afternoon air, and a literal massacre commenced—lasting from three o’clock in the afternoon until twelve midnight. After the smoke cleared, more than 238 of the 262 black soldiers lay dead. Brown characterized the slaughter and the motivations that lay behind it in the following way: “In no other school than slavery could human beings have been trained to such readiness for cruelties like these. Accustomed to brutality and bestiality all their lives, it was very easy for them to perpetrate the atrocities which will startle the civilized world as they have awakened the indignation of our own people.” In his chapter on the incident, Brown reprinted a long portion of the “Report of the

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32 The Fort Pillow Massacre was the most appalling example of the mistreatment of black soldiers, see Dudley Cornish, The Sable Arm, 173-179.
Committee on the Conduct of the War, on the Fort Pillow Massacre,” the official report of the incident.  

Brown understood that the war’s end brought even greater challenges to the nation than its commencement. While it was important to chronicle African American participation in the war, Brown also understood the importance of offering a prognosis for the future. What meanings did the war have for African-Americans? How would blacks cope with freedom? How would blacks ensure their hard won rights? These questions were of paramount importance. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln, “The Great Emancipator,” and the ascension of Vice-President and southern sympathizer Andrew Johnson to the presidency caused great consternation among Radical Republicans and black civil rights advocates. While Reconstruction enjoyed the support of Congress between 1865 and 1870, signs of outright resistance to the process emerged as early as 1867. The formation of the Ku Klux Klan, a vigilante group of former planters who used intimidation and murder to thwart the plans of Reconstruction governments, and Andrew Johnson’s blanket pardons of former Southern confederates and willingness to restore former Confederate states to the Union with minimal requirements led to Johnson’s impeachment and the gradual erosion of the Reconstruction experiment. 

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From the vantage point of an intellectual, Brown, like Charles Reason, argued that the Civil War created a great deal of animosity between Southerners and Northerners, blacks and whites, former masters and slaves. The defeat of the Confederacy left deep scars on the Southern psyche. According to Brown, these feelings intensified the Southern sense of dominance and superiority rather than fostering feelings of defeat and despair. And these feelings of racial superiority emboldened Southern desires to “reduce the Negro to servitude” with the agencies and auxiliaries of the federal government such as the Freedom’s Bureau and federal troops powerless to stop them. Brown also cited the occurrence of riots in Memphis, Tennessee and New Orleans, Louisiana in 1865, and the involvement of former confederates in outrages and violations of federal law, as tangible manifestations of the hostile feelings of white Southerners towards blacks.35

As Benjamin Quarles has remarked, where Brown’s history fails as a complete account of the Civil War, it succeeds in telling the human side of the story. And while antebellum writers could only make declarative statements to foster the abolition of slavery, postbellum writers had a more weighty charge: to provide guidance and tangible intellectual assessments of the African-American condition in freedom. In response to southern animosities, vigilantism, presidential pardons, and race riots, Brown asked: “Now, what shall be done to protect these people [African Americans] from the abuse of their former masters.” Brown’s question was not rhetorical; rather, he sought to provide a tangible blueprint for how the race should adapt to freedom.

Brown proposed granting blacks the elective franchise, which would become a reality with the passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870. But ironically, acquisition of the vote is the only directive that Brown provides. This was probably due to the focus on political and economic affairs in the early postbellum period. Issues of moral suasion and appeals to humanity were less effective in a milieu defined by the ordering processes of politics and economics. Thus, Brown viewed voting as a natural right not a privilege and a critical possession. In fact, the vote was the very basis of a republican government: “Does anyone doubt this?” asked Brown, “Let him ask himself what constitutes a republican government, or government of the people, and what is implied by such a government, and he will soon see, that without the elective franchise, or right to choose rulers and law-makers, there can be no such governments.” The vote, political enfranchisement, had important ramifications for newly freed African Americans. Its usage would give rise to substantial political empowerment during the Reconstruction era.36

A combination of history and racial prognosis, The Negro in the Rebellion is an interesting specimen of race history in the early postbellum period. As an historical text, Brown’s work leaves much to be desired, but as a record and reflection on the events of the period, his work is invaluable. Brown weaves lived experience from the antebellum period and melds it with the concerns and sensibilities of the early postbellum period. Better positioned than most to tell the story of the race, Brown

36 For the emphasis on political solutions to black problems, see Foner, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, and Holt, Black Over White. alternatives to political solutions are explored in Lewis H. Putnam, The Review of the Revolutionary Elements of the Rebellion and the Aspect of Reconstruction; With a Plan to Restore Harmony Between the Two Races in the Southern States (Brooklyn: Lewis Putnam, 1868).
tangibly ties together the agitation to end the peculiar institution in the antebellum era with the mapping and charting of race possibilities in the postbellum period. 37

Radically different from the Black Man and the Negro in the American Rebellion, yet incorporating some features of these earlier studies, Brown’s Rising Son was the most popular of his race histories in the 1870’s. The book presented more enlightened approaches to the study of Africa and the Diaspora than antebellum race histories. The book, however, employs antebellum themes and issues to keep the memory of this period alive and provide a prognosis for the future. Brown’s treatment of Africa, is clearly one of the original aspects of the book. The other sections of the book, his assessment of black life in antebellum America and Haiti, are taken from earlier works. Slightly less than fifty percent of the text discussed Africa and the diaspora, especially Haiti. 38

The strength of the Rising Son lies in its portrait of Africa during the Era of Free Trade (1830-1880). During the Era of Free Trade knowledge about the social, political, economic terrain of Africa was substantially augmented and most important, the European rush for commercial expansion, the civilizing mission, and the desire for world-wide hegemony, led to a rash of African exploration beginning after the British abolished the slave trade in 1807. The desire to stamp out any vestiges of slavery on

37 Noted historians of the black experience in the Civil War, Benjamin Quarles viewed Brown’s work as anecdotal but Deadly Cornish viewed Brown’s work as an important beginning in enhancing our understanding of the Civil War’s meanings, despite the work’s limitations, see Quarles, The Negro in the Civil War, 350 and Cornish, The Sable Arm, 316. The Negro in the American Rebellion was also reprinted, see The Negro in the American Rebellion (Boston: A.G. Brown & Co., 1880) and The Negro in the American Rebellion (Boston: William Wells Brown, 1885). 38 Brown’s discussion of the diaspora encompasses almost 41% of the book, see Brown, The Rising Son, 36-264.
the continent led to the settlement of Sierra Leone, initially a colony designed to accommodate former slaves from various British colonies in the Caribbean, in 1808. The British military extended their influence throughout Western Africa penetrating from the Gulf of Benin into the hinterland of the Asante, one of the most well-organized kingdoms in West Africa. By 1882, British and French capital crippled the Egyptian state, and British occupation was necessary to stabilize the situation. The French did much the same in Algeria, which 1830, it was forced to garrison French forces in order to combat a jihad—a religiously inspired war to rid the territory of invaders—by the Muslim population. The French also penetrated into Senegal and Mali, central territories in what later became known as French West Africa.39

In Southern Africa, exploration began much earlier. The Boers, a mixture of French, German, and Dutch elements from the lower classes, settled at the Cape in South Africa and established a town, later known as Capetown, in the 17th century. The arrival of the British in the 18th century, and the imposition of restrictive laws on the Boers led to the first of several trekboers—movements by small groups of Boers into the hinterland. Once in the hinterland, however, Boers encountered various Nguni peoples who waged pitched battles to preserve their autonomy in the face of Boer onslaughts. This led to a series of “Kaffir” Wars between the Boers, British, and various Nguni groups. These wars lasted through the mid-19th century. The mineral revolution, the discovery of diamonds and gold in the Orange Free State and Wittwateraan permanently altered the South African landscape. British settlement in Boer areas and the influx of British capital left the Boers at a distinct disadvantage and virtually displaced the Nguni groups in these areas.40

40 The standard history of South Africa is Leonard Wood, A History of South 236
Therefore, it is during a moment of imperialist and colonialisit expansion that Brown wrote about the African experience. His opening chapter on Ethiopia followed the traditional antebellum approach to the subject. Brown argued that while Europeans wallowed in paganist practices, Africans reared great monuments to the endurance of their civilizations. He also mentioned the innovations in pottery—handmade and urewe—which were characteristic of the civilization, especially at the height of Meroe. Brown also focused, however, on the Ethiopians of the nineteenth century, the Abyssianians. He praised the social organization of the state, primarily feudal fiefdoms, and discussed the reign of Theodore I. Ethiopia, long impregnable to the onslaught of Islam and the machinations of European colonizers, also had a distinguished biblical tradition. The rulers claimed direct descent from King Solomon as a result of a sexual liaison between Makeka, the Queen of Sheba, and Solomon, King of Israel.\footnote{One of the best treatments of Ethiopia at the advent of the colonial age is David Levering Lewis, \textit{The Race to Fashoda: Colonialism and Resistance} (New York: Henry Holt, 1987), 99-136. Also see M.B. Akpan, "Liberia and Ethiopia: The Survival of Two African States," in A. Abu Boahen, \textit{General History of Africa: Africa Under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935} Vol VII. (California: UNESCO, 1985), 249-282.}

In other instances, Brown departed with many antebellum black historians on the treatment of seminal historical issues. For instance, on the issue of the racial makeup of the Carthaginians, James W.C. Pennington, in his \textit{Textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People} (1841), could not conclusively prove that Carthaginians had any relationship to Egyptians and Ethiopians. Many African-American antebellum historians viewed Carthage as a racially amalgamated civilization. These black historians, however, praised the exploits of Hannibal as an African without specifically labeling him as black. In fact, Carthage, a trading city
located in present day Tunisia founded in 832 BC, was strongly influenced by Berber traditions in North Africa, and by extensive contacts with the Mediterranean world, thus its people were probably more a product of that interaction than anything else. Brown, however, is unusually skeptical about this narrative. He insisted that the country was populated by Ethiopians, possibly through trade. This is highly unlikely given Berber merchants were the prominent actors in the trans-Saharan slave trade, and there are no extant records to support an Ethiopian presence in Carthage. Brown’s interest is not historical accuracy, but rather to claim an Ethiopian ancestry for Hannibal. He also recounts the Punic Wars, Hannibal’s greatest claim to fame.  

Brown took the reader on a journey through Eastern Africa. Although he is relying on missionary accounts, we see this region of Africa through Brown’s eyes. He was highly selectively and moved indiscriminately from one region to the next. In one instance, he discussed Segu, the capital of the Bambara in Eastern Africa. Using information from Mungo Park, a British missionary who explored the region and left extensive travel records, Brown described Segu as a thriving city of thirty thousand with mosques and two-story houses. He also praised the Mandingo and Fulbe (Fulani), strong proponents of Islam in Central Africa, as excellent pastoralists able to command

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42 Pennington argued that the Carthaginians were Africans but not Ethiopians. He made this critical distinction because the word, Ethiopian was used denote the color of the skin while Africa referred to a geographical location He also cited a number of compelling reasons using the historical surveys of the period why the Carthaginians were not Ethiopians. According to biblical lore, the Carthaginians derived from a colony of Tyrians and were possibly Canaanites. Pennington also pointed out that Carthage was settled more than a thousand years after the first mention of the Ethiopians in the Bible. Lastly, their was no evidence that the Carthaginians ever intermarried or intermixed with the Ethiopians. See James W.C. Pennington, *Textbook of the History and Origin of the African People* (Hartford: L. Skinner, 1841), 27-31. Historical information on Carthage is found in G. Mokhtar, ed., *General History of Africa: Ancient Civilizations of Africa* Vol 2 (London: UNESCO, 1990), 246-260.
a wide variety of animals ranging from oxen to goats. In the next instance, Brown discussed the impact of the slave trade on Guinea, a West African country. Later he discussed the Hottentot influence in Southern Africa and commented extensively on their relationship with the Boers in that region.43

Brown’s discussion of West Africa is also very intriguing given this region’s tangible connection to the plight of African Americans. Brown focused on Sierra Leone, Dahomey, a creation of the slave trade, and Gabon. He also discussed some of the social patterns common to the region such as polygamy and polytheistic religious practices. Brown was particularly incensed regarding the continuance of slavery in Dahomey. The Slave Trade, a staple feature of antebellum histories, marked the decline of African fortunes and the beginning of the long night of African enslavement and degradation throughout the world. In contrast to today’s postmodern milieu, in the 19th century, little ambiguity existed regarding the meanings of the African slave trade. For most abolitionists, slavery was a retrogressive practice fueled by the greed of Africans and Europeans alike. The fact that the British were the first Western power to abolish the trade gave them an honored place in the narratives of many prominent black abolitionists. Brown heralded the British role in trying to eradicate slavery from the West African coast. In an effort to dramatize the damaging effects of slavery on Dahomean society, Brown portrayed the society as lurid because of its involvement in slave trade. He illustrated some of the more unpleasant practices of the people. The Dahomean soldiery, wrote Brown, “for the past two hundred years, have done little less than hunt slaves for the supply of traders.” In addition to hunting slaves, Brown

claimed human sacrifice was practiced, and reptiles were kept in storage pens in the center of town and used in elaborate ceremonies or as an incentive for criminals to confess crimes.44

While Brown uncritically praised the role of the British in eradicating slavery, he was silent on the question of British designs on African territory. In the 1870's, Britain and France were fast becoming the dominant colonial powers in Africa. Brown's silence on the land question and the rising specter of capitalistic acquisition was rooted in nineteenth century notions of civilizationism. Like many blacks of the period, Brown believed in the unquestioned power and hegemony of the West, especially England, at the height its power during the Victorian Age (1838-1901). As stated earlier, England's abolition of the slave trade and abolition of slavery in its territorial possessions in 1833, nearly thirty years before the abolition of slavery in the United States and fifty years before the abolition of slavery in Cuba and Brazil, and its strong abolitionist community which welcomed fugitive slaves such as Brown, silenced all would be critics. As Brown noted in a chapter explicitly titled "Progress of Civilization," the agents of progress deserved praise for their efforts: "To the English

44 Dahomean society was not only built on the slave trade, but its decline was also directly related to a decrease in European demand for slaves. Robert July, a distinguished Africanist, also notes that the Dahomeans did practice human sacrifice and bloodletting was a staple part of the culture. These practices should be qualified by noting that the Dahomeans performed these ceremonies to prove to Europeans that they were a fierce, warrior group and hoped to improve their position in the slave trade by doing so. See July, A History of African Peoples, 143. The standard history of West Africa is J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, History of West Africa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972). The impact of slavery on African society and its impact on the creation of the Atlantic World is explored in the following studies, see Joseph Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), and John Thornton, Africa, Africans and the Making of the Atlantic World (New York: W.W., Norton, 1993) and Barbara L. Solow, ed., Slavery and the Atlantic System (Cambridge University Press, 1991).
first, and the Liberians next, the praise must be given for the suppression of this inhuman and unchristian traffic. Too much, however, cannot be said in favor of the missionaries, men and women, who, forgetting native land and home comforts, have given themselves to the work of teaching these people, and thereby carrying civilization to a country where each went with his life in his hands.”

Given his former status, worldly attainments, and burgeoning literary career, Brown could also appropriate the role of “carrier of civilization.” His desire to connect himself tangibly to African-American uplift, even as he praised the agents of culture in Africa, is reflected in his discussion of the plight and needs of African Americans. “Education is what we now need,” wrote Brown, and blacks must achieve it “at all hazards.” The liberal arts schools such as Howard, Atlanta and Fisk universities were viewed as “harbingers of light to our people.” African Americans, like Africans, were also in need of an educated ministry—a tactful admission of both the need for an educated ministry and the power of clerical elites in the black community. Blacks were also in need of “Temperance, that John the Baptist of reforms.” Its introduction to the community, “along with every other method resorted to by the whites for their elevation,” urged Brown, “should be used by the colored men.”

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Thus, Brown was not selective in applying the program of civilization. The need for civilization in Africa, although not as great as Europeans portrayed it, was dependent on the training of natives in the rudiments of Christian theology and civilization, especially in those areas where the slave trade had the greatest impact. This point is illustrated by Brown’s discussion of Samuel A.J. Crowther, an ex-slave, member of the Church Missionary Society, and later bishop, who played an important role in opening the lower Niger Valley to British trade and Christianity. Crowther was an example of the ultimate civilizationist—lifting Africans, as they argued, from the blindness of witchcraft and superstition to the light of civilization.47

Brown did not see European civilization, however, as the only carrier of culture, but he also recognized, like his contemporary Edward Blyden, the positive impact of Islam in Africa. Islam, no longer perceived solely as a disruptive force, was viewed by Brown as an important stabilizer of polytheistic African societies. Brown also rejected the contention that Islam had been imposed on Africa solely by force, rather he recognized that traders and clergymen had spread the religion to various parts of Africa, and Africans had modified the religion to suit their own needs.48

Brown’s discussion of Islam in Africa can also be applied to other aspects of African culture. Brown clearly noted the differences in culture. While the inhabitants of


Guinea, the Congo, and the Hottentots, bordered on barbarism, other groups such as the “Kaffirs,” black South Africans, “inhabit towns and cities, have made progress in the arts of industry, cultivate vast fields of sugar and tobacco, manufacture various kinds of cutlery.” As mentioned earlier, Brown also praised other African groups such as the Mandingoes and the Fulani for their industry in agricultural arts. Therefore, while Brown acknowledged that some African groups were in need of civilization, he did not view the entire continent as languishing in total darkness.49

Brown’s tripartite structure of writing history was extremely illuminating in the early postbellum period. With his carefully constructed narratives, which were more propagandistic in nature than historical, Brown’s work served a number of very tangible purposes. In addition to providing substantial proof of black accomplishments in the United States and the diaspora as a means of demonstrating black preparedness for freedom, Brown also revealed the seminal role that black intellectuals played in presenting plans, blueprints, thoughts and ruminations on race politics. More importantly, Brown’s work also engaged the dominant ideas regarding race and civilization. Brown’s discussion of Africa and the diaspora affiliated him with the civilizationist urge that was manifesting itself throughout Victorian culture.50

49 See Brown, The Rising Son, 60-70.
To Render the Private Public: William Still and the Selling of The Underground Railroad

In a contemporary sketch of William Still, which appeared in the book Black Man in 1863, William Wells Brown, well-known abolitionist and author of the controversial Clotel; or, the President’s Daughter, described Still’s interest in the plight of slaves in the following manner: “The long connection of Mr. Still with the antislavery office, in a city through which fugitive slaves had to pass in their flight from bondage, and the deep interest felt by him for the freedom and welfare of his race have brought him prominently before the public.” Brown’s assessment of Still was only partially correct. William Still (1821-1904) was a prominent antislavery agitator, but the nature of his work—head of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee—required him to be more circumspect in his actions than many of his contemporaries. While Still performed Herculean labors on behalf of the fugitive slave population in the ante-bellum period, he did not receive the same level of adulation as his contemporaries. He was not born a slave and thus, did not write a slave narrative. Still lectured on the evils of slavery in the United States and Canada but was not a part of the more visible transatlantic abolitionist community. He was a visible member of Philadelphia’s free black community, and this is where he exerted his greatest influence and earned his reputation as a prominent antislavery man. It was not until the postbellum period, however, that Still would be positioned to render his private labors public.51

The publication of William Still’s book The Underground Railroad in 1872, heightened Still’s public notice and popularity while simultaneously resurrecting the memory of slavery and antislavery rhetoric. In a historical moment defined by

contestation over the place of African Americans in American society and the demise of those, both black and white, who had fought to end the peculiar institution. Still’s 800 page work revived their memory, authorized their work, and renewed the vigor of the abolitionist spirit in its waning moments. This section, then, will explore the meanings of the Underground Railroad at two levels, the construction of the text and the uses of history and its dissemination in the wider abolitionist and African-American communities.52

Constructing and Reconstructing the Underground Railroad

William Still, one of eighteen children, was born in obscurity in Medford, New Jersey in 1821. His parents, Levin and Charity were both escaped slaves. With little formal education, Still left home at twenty and found work on neighboring farms. In 1844, he arrived in Philadelphia where he found employment as a janitor and later as a clerical assistant in the office of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery. When the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, an organization dedicated to assisting fugitive slaves, was formed in 1850, Still was named corresponding secretary and chairman. In addition to aiding fugitive slaves, he traveled widely in Canada and befriended the abolitionist Mary Shadd Carey. In 1859, he led a campaign to end racial discrimination on Philadelphia’s railroad cars. In addition to his civic work, Still also, in 1861, organized a statistical group to collect data about African Americans. After his

52 See Williams Still, The Underground Railroad, A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters & C. Narrating Hardships, Hairbreath Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in their Efforts for Freedom, as Related by Themselves and Others or Witnessed by the Author, Together with Sketches of Some of the Largest Stockholders and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers of the Road (Philadelphia: Prentiss & Coates, 1872), 1-2
work with fugitive slaves ended in 1861, he remained with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society for eight years, as vice-president and president from 1896-1901. 53

Still’s writing career was launched through a resolution of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in May 1871:

Whereas, The position of William Still in the Vigilance Committee connected with the “Underground Rail Road,” as its corresponding secretary, and chairman of its acting subcommittee, gave him peculiar facilities for collecting interesting facts pertaining to this branch of the antislavery service.  
Resolved, That the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society request him to compile and publish his personal reminiscences and experiences related to the “Underground Railroad.” 54

Given his extensive involvement in the abolitionist movement and his familiarity with all aspects of the Underground Railroad, Still was probably the best choice for this undertaking. And for his own part, he was also keenly aware of the importance of appealing to public sentiment regarding the historical events of the past and with merging this historical sense with shrewd business practices designed to generate high sales of the completed project. There were several factors which worked in Still’s favor in achieving his goals. Prior to 1872 there were no expansive studies or accounts

of the Underground Railroad, and those produced later by Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin (1876), and Wilbur Siebert’s Underground Railroad (1898) were radically different than Still’s work. Coffin’s Reminiscences were largely autobiographical and anecdotal and lacked the power of Still’s narrative. Siebert’s Underground Railroad, published more than twenty-six years after Still’s study, represented the new genre of academic history. As historian Philip Lapansky has noted “while other Underground railroad histories focus mainly on the white agents, and the remote country houses with secret cellars and attics, Still’s work and his book underscore that in Philadelphia the muscle and backbone of the operation was the black community.” Moreover, Still, unlike the previously mentioned authors, understood that solid book production and generating sales depended upon two factors: first, the authenticity and believability of the account; and second, the dramatic and compelling retelling of incidents in the lives of fugitive slaves as a means of exciting reader interest in the material.55

At the heart of the issues of readability and marketability was the authenticity of the account. Still prefaced the text with his own experiences, both professional and personal, rather than the common practice in the antebellum slave narratives of prefacing the remarks of prominent white abolitionists as proof of the validity and importance of the material. The accounts that Still presented were those he personally documented, and consisted of reprinted letters from Fugitive Slaves to the

Philadelphia Vigilance Committee asking for various types of assistance in the perilous journey from “slavery to freedom.” Given the sensational nature of some of the material, which was subject to charges of fabrication, Still informed readers that “the most scrupulous care has been taken to furnish articles, stories, simple facts—to resort to no coloring to make the book seem romantic,” for he was “fully persuaded that any exaggerations or additions of his own could not possibly equal in surpassing interest, the original and natural tales given under circumstances, when life and death seemed about equally balanced in the scale, and fugitives in transit were making their way from Slavery to Freedom, with the horrors of the Fugitive Slave-law staring them in the face.”

The authenticity of Still’s work was also informed by his personal ties to the slave community. Still’s brother, Peter, from whom Still had been separated shortly after birth, was reunited with him as a result of his work with the Philadelphia Abolition Society. This personal experience, one which Still was certain was shared by other members of the abolitionist and African-American community animated his efforts to render public what was heretofore private. Still’s description of his reunion with his brother heightened the account’s authenticity. Still wrote: “But after the restoration of Peter Still, [my] own brother (the kidnapped and the ransomed), after forty years cruel separation from his mother, the wonderful discovery and joyful reunion, the idea forced itself upon [my] mind that all over this wide and extended country thousands of mothers and children, separated by slavery, were in a similar way. living without the slightest knowledge of each other’s whereabouts praying and weeping without ceasing, as did this mother and son.”

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Still also anchored his text in the experiences of slaves—old and young, men and women. As mentioned earlier, the reprinting of accounts from the letters of fugitives gave added poignancy to the narratives presented. One of the most interesting accounts was that of Romulus Hall, an elderly slave who lost his life trying to escape from slavery. His fellow escapee, a younger man, negotiated the journey, but Hall, an elderly man, succumbed to cold and was left behind. He was eventually found but not before suffering a severe case of frostbite. Despite impending death, Hall, when questioned by the Vigilance Committee regarding the prudence of his escape replied: “I am glad I escaped.” The Vigilance committee provided medical services and he was buried in Lebanon Cemetery in Philadelphia.⁵⁸

In other accounts, some fugitives were forced to resort to the threat of physical violence to effect their escape. A group of slaves, which included three men and two women, escaped from Loudon, County, Virginia. At Cheat River, Maryland the group was confronted by a group of slavecatchers. The slavecatchers demanded to know why such a large group of slaves was on the road without adequate documentation. The fugitives refused to answer the inquiries of the slavecatchers. According to the report, at this moment, “one of the white men raised his gun, pointing the muzzle directly towards one of the young women with the threat that he would shoot. Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!, she exclaimed, with a double-barreled shot gun in her hand and a long dirk

⁵⁸ See Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 51-54
knife in the other, utterly unterrified and fully ready for a death struggle. The male leader of the fugitives by this time had pulled back the hammers of his pistols and was about to fire.” Seeing the determination of the party, the slavecatchers retreated, and the party proceeded north.\(^{59}\)

In other incidents of female heroism Lear Green, the female Henry Box Brown, escaped from Baltimore, Maryland in a chest. She stayed in the chest for more than eighteen hours before arriving safely in Philadelphia. Another mother, Harriet Shepard and her four children escaped from a plantation in Chestertown, Maryland through sheer luck and determination. Although lacking the basic rudiments of education, Shepard, her four children and five other passengers escaped slavery by simply taking a team of her master’s horses, a carriage, and proceeding north. Once the party arrived in Wilmington, Delaware, they were assisted by underground railroad agents.\(^{60}\)

Still’s concern about the authenticity of the text, his personal engagement with the slavery community and his dramatic public rendering of harrowing tales of escape from the prisonhouse of bondage, which heretofore were private, all combined to make the Underground Railroad a very marketable product indeed. Similar to his antebellum colleagues, but in radically different ways, Still’s postbellum slave narrative, a term popularized by literary historian William Andrews, contained all of the elements to breathe life into a bygone era of American history and in doing so, offered untold insights into the history of slavery and the abolitionist movement in the antebellum period and the memory of slavery and the meanings of freedom in the postbellum era.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 124-129
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 281-284
Still’s marketing and selling of the *Underground Railroad* would bring these dynamics into bold relief.

Still’s *The Underground Railroad* blazed new pathways in a number of areas, his greatest accomplishment, however, in an age dominated by aggressive marketing, was the distribution of the book. Rather than an occasional review in the black press and publication in one edition, most historical works produced by African Americans were published in numerous editions accompanied by sample books and aggressive advertising strategies making these histories more visible than ever. Still took advantage of this new milieu of book production and promotion aggressively marketing his book in a number of ways including, the active solicitation of sketches and comments regarding the book from notable antebellum and postbellum personalities, an advertisement campaign in the *Christian Recorder*, and the establishment of a nationwide network of book agents.\(^6^1\)

In anticipation of the publication of the *Underground Railroad*, Still solicited sketches and critiques of draft versions of the work from members of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee and a host of prominent postbellum personalities. Still’s location in Philadelphia, a well established site for book distribution since the Early Republic, immensely aided his project. Many of the advertisements for his book included excerpts from endorsements received by Still. In addition to the endorsements of James Miller McKim, corresponding secretary and general agent of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, and Reverend William H. Furness, a Harvard trained Unitarian minister and

fund-raiser for the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, Still’s work was also endorsed by prominent individuals whose work for the benefit of African Americans straddled the antebellum and postbellum periods such as Charles Sumner, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts who was a prominent Radical Republican during Reconstruction. One of the most notable postbellum luminaries to endorse Still’s work was Oliver Otis Howard, a Civil War General and Commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau.\(^{62}\)

Still’s most important endorsement, however, came from the dean of abolitionists, William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison examined the book “with a deep and thrilling interest.” He concluded that Still’s work was “voluminous and well-executed. Moreover, Garrison wrote, Still’s work was “a most important portion of Antislavery History, which, but for your [Still’s] industry, research, and personal experience and knowledge might nearly all have been lost to posterity.” He also hoped the sale of the book would assist Still in covering his expenses. But more importantly, Garrison thought the message and the meaning of the Under
ground Railroad was “for the enlightenment of the rising generation as to the inherent cruelty of the defunct slave system, and to perpetuate such an abhorrence of it as to prevent all further injustice towards the colored population of our land.”\(^{63}\)

The complexity of Still’s marketing plan for the Underground Railroad was inspired, in no small part, by his previous business experience. Aside from his work in the Antislavery Office, Still was a community businessman. He owned a small but profitable coal and ice yard, and during the Civil War, he secured a contract from the


\(^{63}\) See William Lloyd Garrison to William Still, 7 April 1872 in Peter Still Papers, Rutgers University, Special Collections and University Archives, Archibald Alexander Stevens Library.
federal government as a supplier for Camp William Penn, located outside of
Philadelphia. Rather than showy flamboyance, Still was frugal, a model of what
historian Roger Lane termed the “Protestant bourgeois.” His belief in the acquisition
of capital by blacks for the purpose of providing useful services to the black community
served him well in the area of book publication. 64

Although advertisements for Still’s Underground Railroad appeared in a
number of papers during the 1870’s, however, the advertising campaign in the Christian
Recorder was the most extensive. The Christian Recorder was the official organ of the
African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Its readership was among the most
sophisticated and well-educated among the race. Thus, the style and content of Still’s
advertisements coupled with their frequency, link the production of the book to its sale
and dissemination in the black community. 65

Each of the five major advertisements used for the Underground Railroad
accentuated the themes of intrigue, interracial cooperation, subversion of gender roles,
and the impact of the peculiar institution on families. The first advertisement for the
Underground Railroad was an advance notice which appeared in July 1871. A fairly
simplistic ad, it noted that Still was a “well-known benefactor of the race,” and
predicted the contents of Still’s book “will be devoured with avidity, we set down as
certain.” By March, 1873, a small advertisement appeared announcing the sale of the

64 An assessment of the life and accomplishments of William Still can be found in
Roger Lane’s William Dorsey’s Philadelphia and Ours: On the Past, Present and Future
65 The late antebellum and postbellum impact of the Christian Recorder as an
organ of the A.M.E. Church, advocate for political and civil rights and supporter of
educational reform is discussed in Gilbert Anthony Williams, The Christian Recorder,
Newspaper of African Methodist Episcopal Church: History of a Forum of Ideas,
book and the need for agents. Just one month later, in April, 1873, the first full page advertisement appeared\textsuperscript{66}

Still's use of advertisements was probably based on presenting the most dramatic and well-known incidents of successful escapes from slavery. The book's title, The Underground Railroad, was emblazoned in bold letters across the top of the page. In the center of the page, a picture of one of the book's 70 illustrations, "Resurrection of Henry Box Brown," was prominently displayed. Brown's image—one that had captured the attention of antebellum America due to his daring escape—was probably an image that Still thought would attract attention to his book. Still also included a section titled "What Has Been Said About It By Prominent Abolitionists," which featured brief endorsements of the book by numerous antebellum and postbellum personalities. This section no doubt reflected his desire to tangibly connect the events of the past with the present as well as to attract more interest in the book.\textsuperscript{67}

Perhaps, the "Resurrection of Henry Box Brown" advertisement was not as popular as Still thought it would be, for it appeared only once more: April 24, 1873. By May 15, 1873, another advertisement featuring an illustration, "The Mayor of Norfolk Searching Captain Fountain's Vessel for Runaways," was used to promote Still's book. The Fountain illustration is useful because it, like Still's study The Underground Railroad, demonstrated the great risk whites took and the role they played in helping fugitive slaves. This illustration, however, may have proved less popular than the

\textsuperscript{66} Early advertisements for Still's Underground Railroad appeared in the following issues of the Christian Recorder, see July 8, 1871; March 28, 1872; April 18, 1872; April 25, 1872; August 15, 1872; August 22, 1872, April 3, 1873; and April 10, 1873.

\textsuperscript{67} For the Henry Box Brown advertisement, see the Christian Recorder, April 24, 1873 and May 15, 1873.
Henry Box Brown ad and was only used twice more: May 22, 1873 and May 29, 1873. One of the most popular early advertisements was "the Death of Romulus Hall." The Hall illustration is particularly striking suggesting the nobility and the tragedy in the struggle against slavery. In it, Hall, an elderly slave, is sitting semi-erect on his death bed talking with a member of the Vigilance Committee. If Still wished to convey the horror of slavery, Hall's pleading yet tender and wise face accomplished this goal. Still utilized this advertisement in 13 consecutive issues from June 5, 1873 to September 1, 1873.68

In keeping with the idea of presenting as many facets of the slave experience as possible, Still used an illustration titled, "A Desperate Conflict on the Underground Railroad--Women Facing the Enemy with Revolvers and Bowie-Knives." This advertisement illustrates how effectively Still manipulated certain images. This illustration, is simply labeled as a "Bold Stroke for Freedom." As mentioned earlier, the knives used by the men and women were dirks, a swordlike dagger, not bowie knives, which are knives with a large single-edged blades. In the advertisement, Still placed the women in the foreground, making the story more sensational. This advertisement manipulation does not detract from the bravery of the women, rather it challenged the Victorian ethos of the proper place of women, and it demonstrated that women were forced to assume attributes that were perceived as belonging solely to men in order to escape from slavery. Indeed, in both instances, in the book and the advertisement, the escape of these slaves was a "Bold Stroke for Freedom." This ad proved extremely

68 For advertisements in the Christian Recorder featuring Romulus Hall, see June 5, 1873; June 12, 1873; June 19, 1873; June 26, 1873; July 3, 1873; July 10, 1873; July 17, 1873; July 24, 1873; July 31, 1873; August 7, 1873; August 14, 1873; August 21, 1873; August 28, 1873; and September 11, 1873.
popular and was used in 23 consecutive issues, from September 18, 1873 to March 26, 1874.69

Another popular advertisement, which also featured the plight of black women was titled, “The Father Died in the Poor House, a Raving Maniac, Caused By the Sale of Two of His Children. The Heroic Mother with the Balance, Sought Flight on the Underground Railroad.” Again, as with the previous illustration, this illustration in the Underground Railroad simply listed the names of Anna Maria Jackson’s seven children. This advertisement, which appeared on April 2, 1874, featured assessments from reviews printed in the New York Daily Tribune, Friends Review, Lutheran Observer, and The Nation. With the strong endorsements of the white press, Still was positioned to profit immensely. His use of the Anna Maria Jackson story demonstrated both his recognition of the power of this subverted gender role made and his commitment to black women as well as his determination to show the devastating impact of the peculiar institution on the African American family. The ad appeared in more than 40 consecutive issues.70

69 For pictorial illustrations of “Bold Stroke for Freedom,” in the Christian Recorder, September 18, 1873; September 25, 1873; October 2, 1873; October 16, 1873; October 23, 1873; October 30, 1873; November 6, 1873; November 13, 1873; November 20, 1873; November 27, 1873; December 4, 1873; December 11, 1873; December 18, 1873; December 25, 1873; January 8, 1874; January 15, 1874; January 22, 1874; January 29, 1874; February 5, 1874; February 12, 1874; February 26, 1874; March 5, 1874; March 12, 1874; and March 26, 1874.

70 The Anna Maria Jackson advertisement appeared in the following issues of the Christian Recorder: April 2, 1874; April 9, 1874; April 23, 1874; April 30, 1874; May 7, 1874; May 14, 1874; May 21, 1874; June 4, 1874; June 18, 1874; June 25, 1874; July 4, 1874; June 18, 1874; June 25, 1874; July 4, 1874; July 16, 1874; July 23, 1874; July 30, 1874; August 6, 1874; August 13, 1874; August 27, 1874; September 3, 1874; September 10, 1874; October 29, 1874; November 5, 1874; November 12, 1874; November 19, 1874; and November 26, 1874.
In addition to an extensive advertisement campaign, the core of Still’s strategy consisted of a nationwide network of agents, the details of which are sketchy. The best data exists for 1873-1874, we can glean some of its contours through his correspondence with various individuals between 1871 and 1897. Beginning in 1873, the year he completed his one-year contract with Prentiss Coates, which gave him exclusive rights to the printing and distribution of the book, Still began to establish a network of agents, which was facilitated by his contacts in the AME church and the nascent black academy. Still corresponded with and received help in procuring agents and selling books from such notables as Bishop Daniel Payne, president of Wilberforce University and later founder of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association; William and Ellen Craft, ex-slaves who escaped from slavery by passing for white; General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, president of Hampton Institute; and William Wells Brown, who often relied on Still for advice in selling his book, The Black Man, in various parts of the country.\footnote{For Still’s correspondence with black notables, see William Wells Brown to William Still, February 2, 1865 in the American Historical Society Collection, 1790-1905, Reel 6 (ANHSC, 1790-1905); Ellen Craft to William Still, June 13, 1873 in ANHSC, 1790-1905, Reel 6; William Still to G.L. Smith, May 19, 1874 in Henry P. Slaughter Collection, Atlanta University Collection, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Complex, Box 34, Folder 7 (hereafter Slaughter Collection); T.F.B Marshall to William Still, April 30, 1874 in the ANHSC, 1790-1905, Reel 6 and W.H. Stanton to William Still, January 15, 1872 in ANHSC, 1790-1905, Reel 6.}
townships before stopping.\textsuperscript{72} The ability to sell books to individuals of all classes, and the possession of business acumen were important tools of the trade. Once he identified a potential agent, Still wrote to the individual and inquired about their competence. Some of his questions he included were: "Have you any experience as a book canvasser," and "If you should be appointed, what amount of time could you devote to the agency.\textsuperscript{73}

Once an agent was recruited, Still offered very generous renumeration. In his circular, "Terms for Agents," which he insisted agents keep confidential, for a minimal cost of $3.75, Still offered agents copies of the book, a dummy volume for orders, and one hundred circulars. Initially, he offered 40% of the sale to agents in 1871 and in 1872, he raised the percentage to 50%, and for prepaid order for at least one standard case of 48 books, Still offered 60%. Despite these generous terms, Still also imposed a system of checks and balances on his agents. He maintained regular correspondence with his agents and preferred them to send prepaid orders prior to his sending the merchandise. If orders were not prepaid, in most instances, Still would send them cash on delivery to their destination As a testament to Still’s success, within a few months, agents for the \textit{Underground Railroad} increased from 30 to more than 100, within a few months.\textsuperscript{74}

Subscribers also benefited from Still’s sale network. Because agents were constantly canvassing in various parts of the country, subscribers could obtain the book almost anywhere. Still encouraged agents to give copies to editors of major newspapers

\textsuperscript{73} See William Still to W.H. Jones, June 3, 1873 in Still Letterbook, 4.
\textsuperscript{74} See Lapansky, “Aboard William Still’s Underground Railroad,” 14.
at no charge for promotional purposes. Additionally, Still offered the book in several attractive covers: Fine English Cloth at a cost of $4.50; a Paneled Style at a cost of $5.00; a Sheep Library Style at a cost of $5.50 and a Half Turkey Morocco at a cost of $6.50. Good agents often guaranteed timely delivery of the book which increased confidence in the overall efficiency of the project and bolstered sales.\textsuperscript{75}

Still’s sales network was quite impressive. At its height in 1874, agencies existed in California, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. Still encouraged his agents to be responsible and take advantage of every opportunity to sell the \textit{Underground Railroad}. For he believed that “Agents who hold themselves prepared to deliver to all who will take their books immediately succeed best. Strike when the iron is hot.”\textsuperscript{76} Agents were discouraged from canvassing large areas. It was preferable to canvass a small area thoroughly before moving to a larger field for Still knew that “canvassing [was] no holiday play…. It require[d] learning and much perseverance.”\textsuperscript{77}

Still clearly practiced what he preached. In addition to recruiting professional men such as W.H. Stanton, publisher of the \textit{Freedom’s Journal} in Clinton, Missouri; G.L. Smith, Superintendent of Schools in Bolivar County, Mississippi, and Marshall Taylor, the first black editor of the \textit{Southwestern Christian Advocate}, the official organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Still also used family members such as his niece, Mrs. Catherine Still, the daughter of his brother, Peter Still, who canvassed in  

\textsuperscript{75} The styles of Still’s book appear at the end of every advertisement for the book.  
\textsuperscript{76} William Still to William McHenry, August 27, 1873 in Still Letterbook, 381.  
\textsuperscript{77} William Still to James William, Bloomington, Indiana, September 1, 1873 in Still Letterbook, 416
Syracuse, New York and his son-in-law, Edward A. Wiley, to sell the *Underground Railroad*. Wiley served as a partner in several of the business interests and in 1873, he became an agent for *Underground Railroad*. Wiley controlled several agencies in Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In Pittsburgh, Wiley sold more than 400 books in six months and earned more than $1500. He had similar successes elsewhere. Wiley, ironically, like so many of the subjects of the book that he sold, died of a brain hemorrhage while selling the *Underground Railroad* in Baltimore during 1874.\textsuperscript{78}

Another component of Still’s business tactics included appealing to race pride to bolster the confidence of agents in their product. While some historians have attributed this characteristic of Still’s sales tactics to a nascent “black nationalism,” Still’s correspondence suggests otherwise. His interest was promoting economic self-sufficiency and the Protestant work ethic. These characteristics are explicit in an 1873 letter to an agent in Lawrence, Kansas, in which he connected race pride to economic advantage. This book needs to be presented by a man who appreciates and comprehends the value of having our heroes and our martyrs under slavery well represented in the history of our times--to make the work take exceedingly well.”\textsuperscript{79} In a letter to an agent in Columbia, South Carolina, Still used the success of the book’s sale among whites as a means of embarrassing African Americans into supporting the work: ‘I can not say the UGRR is being appreciated by our people as well as by the whites for wherever it has been pushed among them, it has been well received. When we consider that we have no books or history produced by colored men (except now & then one few and far between) that our enlightened age is demanding of us now greater

\textsuperscript{78}  William Still to John Green, January 15, 1874 in Still Letterbook, 724.
\textsuperscript{79}  William Still to Reverend J.E. Embry, October 14, 1873 in Still Letterbook, 547.
show of ability than we have hitherto had the opportunity to evince, it seems to me that such work would be heartily sought after.”

Despite his tremendous success—estimates indicate that Still sold between 1,000 and 5,000 copies of his book by the late 1870’s, he, like other businessmen encountered problems. Some agents did not fulfill their obligations, and Still was forced to sever his relations with them. One of the most highly public cases was that of a reliable agent in Kent County, Delaware. In a deviation from his standard practices, Still sent 13 books to Jones in June 1873. Jones did not respond nor did Still receive any money for the shipment. When word had not been received in September, Still wrote a harsh note to Jones, reliving him of his duties and threatening to “publish him” and to “take legal action to have this matter lifted.” In another case of fraud, William Perry, an agent in Felton, Delaware, after failing to pay for several shipments of books, wrote to Still and stated that his trunk was open, and he suspected robbery. Perry, too, was dismissed as an agent and warned not to engage in any further sales of the UGRR.

Despite the unscrupulous nature of some agents, Still’s work sold extremely well and agencies throughout the country prospered. So well, in fact, in 1883, he inaugurated his own edition of the volume titled, Still’s UNDERGROUND RAILROAD RECORDS: WITH A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR. Rather intentionally or not, the publication of this work coincided with the advent of race history, for in the same year, George Washington Williams published the History of the Negro Race, 1619-1880. Still’s book included a sample book, a standard marketing tool for

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80 William Still to W.D. Harris, June 5, 1873 in Still Letterbook, 13-14
81 William Still to W.D. Jones, September 1, 1873 in Still Letterbook, 421-423.
booksellers, included a lengthy introduction to the issues raised in Still’s book, endorsements from prominent abolitionists and reviews, and excerpts from the work itself. In a summary of the work’s import, Still boldly proclaimed: “For the colored man no history can be more instructive than this, of his own making, and written by one of his own race. The generations are growing in light. Not to know of those who were stronger than shackles, who were pioneers in the grand advance toward freedom; not to know of what characters the race could produce when straightened by circumstances, nor of those small beginnings which ended in triumphant emancipation, will, in a short time, be a reproach.”

The revised edition featured a biography of Still and was twenty pages longer than the original study. In addition to sending this work to President Grover Cleveland in 1886, Still was, until his death in 1902 also in demand, as an antislavery speaker and a general informant regarding the whereabouts of prominent black abolitionists. Sojourner Truth, sickly, nearly destitute, and in need of funds to stave off eviction from her home, asked Still about the possibility of procuring lodging for her in Philadelphia to sell copies of her book. Another correspondent inquired about the welfare of Harriet Tubman, “the Moses of her people.” Still thought she was still alive in Albany, New York and promised to look for her. Others wrote to ask Still to make recommendations for various remembrances of the abolitionist movement.

83 See Sojourner Truth to William Still, January 4, 1876 in ANHSC, 1790-1905, Reel 6 and B.W. Austin to William Still, August 13, 1892 in Slaughter Collection, Box 34, Folder 7
84 R.P. Hallowell to William Still, August 13, 1892 in Slaughter Collection, Box 34, Folder 7.
When Still died in 1902, he was remembered as a respectable and honorable gentleman. His work, The Underground Railroad, endeared him to abolitionists and race men and women alike. Not only had he preserved the memory of a bygone area, but he merged an engaged account of the African-American experience in slavery and freedom with emerging book distribution networks to market the first comprehensive history of the Underground Railroad throughout the country. In addition to producing an extremely reliable and readable text, Still’s The Underground Railroad was an extension of his approach to issues of economic self-sufficiency and the Protestant work ethic. These ideas found their greatest outlet in the sales network he established. In this network we find Still’s vision of American and African-American possibility. It was an equal opportunity operation, agents were given wide latitude to canvass areas in the way they felt was best, hardwork and perseverance were rewarded through a generous profit percentage. And unscrupulous agents were relieved of their duties. Most important, Still believed that race pride was predicated on reconstructing accurate and reliable histories of African Americans and presenting them in sophisticated ways including book design, content, and marketing. Still captured these sentiments best as he described the importance of the Underground Railroad to African Americans and the true meaning of heroism as he sought to render the private public: “The colored race may now read of its real heroes, its Joshuas, Spartucuses, Tells and Glendowers, among the list of those who silently broke their chains and dared everything in order to breathe the sweet air of liberty. They are not blazoned heroes, full of loud deeds and great names, but quiet examples of what fortitude can achieve where freedom is the goal.”

Martin R. Delany: Race Man or Romantic Racialist

Of all the individuals considered here, Martin Delany was the one most deeply involved in the politics of Reconstruction-era America. A staunch nationalist and emigrationist during the antebellum period, Delany became an integrationist and supporter of Republican and Democratic governments in South Carolina during the postbellum period. Delany, like other intellectuals, grappled with the problems presented by the demands of Reconstruction—its limited aims and unclear means, the corruption of Republicans at the national, state, and local levels, and attempts to fashion an adequate response to the shifting fortunes of blacks during the period. Always outspoken and strident in his approach to various issues of concern to African Americans, the latter part of Delany’s career, 1868-1880, witnessed no marked depreciation in this character trait. Delany often took unpopular positions in order, at least he thought, to guide the race in the proper direction. Delany’s antebellum affiliations, which included an active involvement in the abolitionist movement, a brief stint at Harvard University’s medical school in the 1830’s, service as a correspondent for Frederick Douglass’s North Star in the 1840’s, and active involvement in the emigrationist movement in the 1850’s. He embarked on a mission to the Niger Valley in Africa to negotiate territorial acquisition for the purpose of setting up a cotton plantation to rival the plantation system in the southern United States. His postbellum preoccupations and his historical interests merged in dynamic and interesting ways in the last portion of his active life. In order to understand his work, Principia Ethnologia: Origins of the Races (1879), it is necessary to interrogate the relationship between Delany’s experiences in Reconstruction and his understanding of race in the latter portion of the nineteenth century. A heretofore neglected aspect of Delany’s work, I
hope to shed significant light on this important chapter in Delany’s intellectual development 86

Reconstruction-era South Carolina was contested terrain for African Americans. A state with what Peter Wood has termed a “black majority,” blacks were poised to play a significant role in directing its affairs in the Reconstruction period. Despite numerical preponderance, blacks were often the pawns and dupes of more politically experienced whites who ran the party’s patronage apparatus and controlled the lion share of political appointments. Although some blacks such as Benjamin Cardozo, state treasurer, were able to hold significant offices, most black officeholders were insignificant to the party apparatus. Delany was an anomaly in this regard. Although he never held an elective office, he was a powerful force in Reconstruction-era South Carolina. As was the case with William Wells Brown and William Still, Delany’s power and potency emanated from his accomplishments in the antebellum period. Delany served in a variety of positions from a member of the Freedmen’s Bureau, shortly after the war’s close through the early 1870’s, to a Trial Justice under Wade Hampton, a former Confederate general, who redeemed the state in the 1875 gubernatorial election. In these positions, Delany fought courageously but

valiantly against an entrenched party apparatus that was reluctant to concede real power to African Americans. More content to provide piecemeal tokens such as land at inflated prices, or obligatory and token seats on insignificant commissions, white Republicans were embroiled in tactical and strategic battles with their Democratic opponents, and some—a significant group—practiced self-aggrandizement through graft, destroying the Republican party’s viability as a political or economic force in South Carolina.87

Without describing all of the intricacies of South Carolina politics during the Reconstruction era, it will suffice to say that Martin Delany was deeply distressed by the failure of white Republicans at the national and state level to effectively curb violence by white redeemers against black officeholders and voters. Moreover, Republican corruption, the stuff of “Tragic Era” hyperbole,” was a significant feature of Republican politics in the state. Disgusted by the party’s betrayal of his interests and those of his people, Delany supported Wade Hampton, a former Confederate general and prominent redeemer, for the governorship of South Carolina in the wake of sustainable charges of corruption and fraud in the previous administration of Franklin J. Moses and Daniel Chamberlain. What ensued, as a result of the election, was the collapse of Reconstruction in South Carolina and Delany’s loss of his position as trial justice just two years after the election of Wade Hampton. Discouraged at the intensity of racial violence, black proscription, and the loss of will to preserve the guarantees of the Constitution by the federal government, Delany turned inward and backward to his staunch nationalist positions of the antebellum period. He supported a return-to- Africa

scheme which failed due to insufficient interest and funds, and he wrote a study of race which served as his last testament on the issue prior to his death in 1885.88

The connections between the social, political, and historical ideologies of the late nineteenth century found voice in Delany’s *Principia Ethnologia: Origins of the Races* (henceforth Principia). The work was less than 100 pages, the shortest work under discussion here. Premised on the work of the Duke of Argyll’s *Primeval Man* (1869), a defense of the theological basis of evolution, *Principia* is located squarely in the debates over the shifting meanings of race in late nineteenth century America. Rejecting deterministic and biological constructions of race, Delany promoted an earlier version of what intellectual historian George Stocking terms, “Prichardian ethnology.” James Cowles Prichard, a medical doctor widely heralded as the founder of English anthropology, published an influential work titled *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, which appeared in three volumes between 1808 and 1848. Prichard posited that the original man was black and that all other races had evolved from this stock, which Prichard termed “biological sports.” Although he never provided concrete scientific proof for this position, he nonetheless believed that mankind was a single species.89

Prichard’s view was influenced by the religious impulses in the Quaker and Anglican churches—both of which he was associated with at one juncture or another

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88 Delany’s conversion to Democratic politics is described in Victor Ullman, *Martin Delany and the Beginnings of Black Nationalism*, 478-506.
during his lifetime. In short, he never privileged scientific rationalism over the biblical account of man’s evolution. Prichard attempted to make connections using a wide variety by comparing social and cultural mores such as religion, political institutions, customs, and most notably language. He also used comparative philology, the comparison of language groups to determine similarities or differences, as a tool to prove his theory of the basic unity of all races.  

According to Stocking, Pritchard’s work emerged as a defense against drastic changes in the Victorian scientific establishment which had the effect of severely challenging his ethnological vision. These factors include the rise of comparative anatomy, which seriously challenged the supposition that all men descended from the same source and suggested that blacks represented a separate line of creation; archaeological discoveries which exploded the 6,000 year time span for man’s existence on the earth, and scientific discoveries that brought the study of mankind within the realm of naturalistic explanation. Pritchard continued to argue for the basic unity of humankind in the face of a changing scientific establishment.  

Delany’s *Ethnologia Principia*, draws heavily on the Prichardian notion of ethnology while responding to scientific changes in the nature of human ethnology. The best example of this concept is the work of Charles Darwin. Darwin, best known for his work, *The Origins of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871) became increasingly popular in the 1860’s and 1870’s due to the application of his work to the human predicament. Social Darwinism substantially differed from the scientific principles promoted in the *Origins of Species*. Darwin argued for the unity of the

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91 See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 74-77.
human species and presented a portrait of human evolution. He did not construct a hierarchy of races, with whites at the apex and blacks at the nadir, nor did he view the evolutionary process as favoring one race or another. Darwin did, however, note that their were differences between races in a wide variety of areas and that these differences could be measured. Social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer, extended Darwin’s ideas to a grandiose scientific agenda based on the Darwinian idea of natural selection. In fact it was Spencer who coined the terms “survival of the fittest,” and the “struggle for existence.” Spencer and his adherents extended this struggle to classes, nations, and races. 92

Delany did not directly challenge the scientific underpinnings of Darwinism, just as Argyll had chosen not to attack the theory. He sought to show the compatibility of Darwinism with the Mosaic record, especially since Darwinism argued for the essential unity of the human species. As was true for Prichard and Argyll, the focal point of Delany’s treatise is not the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires, but rather the “origins of races.” Delany also utilized the same format as Argyll did in his study, Primeval Man. Argyll’s text featured an introduction which defined the Bible as an accurate and reliable history of the process of human evolution. He challenged the suppositions of Sir J. Lubbock, a scientist and contemporary, who presented a paper before the British Association for the Advancement of Science titled, “The Early Condition of Man,” in 1867. Lubbock challenged the conclusions of an earlier paper by Dr. Whately, late archbishop of Dublin, titled, “Origin of Civilization.” Lubbock argued for a scientific understanding of the origins of humankind rather than a merely  

theological one. Argyll used the rest of his text to present arguments which rationalized the theological approach to evolution. He was careful to engage questions of human time—discoveries of Neanderthal Man in Brixham Cave in England which would radically revise biblical notions of time. He also discussed issues of genealogy as well as the origins and antiquity of man, field anthropology among “Eskimos,” the Chinese,” “Fijians,” the “Australians” and “the Negro Race.” Argyll also explored the Darwinian question, Max Muller’s findings in philology, work which fueled an interest in Aryanism, and comparative assessments of cultural creations in the area of language such as Sanskrit text and the East Indian Vedas.93

Delany began Principia by attacking the theories of creation posited by the American School of Ethnology, which consisted of Josiah Nott, Joshua Gliddon, and Louis Agaisiz, and promoted the polygenetic evolution of humankind during the antebellum period. Delany declared that “the theory of Champilion, Nott, and Gliddon and others, of the three creations of man, we discard, and shall not combat as theory, only as it shall be refuted.” Delany, adopting what was an anomalous position given his staunch secular position, argued for the validity of the biblical view of Creation, which consisted of a short history from Adam to Noah and the division of early human history into three parts: the creation of man, confusion of languages, and the dispersion of the people from the Tower of Babel. This view also supported the belief that all human beings were of one color before the dispersion. Delany also claimed that the

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93 See Argyll, Primeval Man, 1-37, 16-117, 111-164-175, 190-192. At the time when Prichard and other, what George Stocking terms, “armchair ethnologists” were writing ethnological treatises, important fieldwork was radically revising many older assumptions. See Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, 78-109. The standard source on the development of anthropology of George W. Stocking, Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology (New York: Free Press, 1968)
word Adam, the first man in the biblical tradition, meant dark red. Therefore, his complexion must have been a clay color or yellow.⁹⁴

Delany, who was being trained as a physician at Harvard Medical school in the 1830’s when his education was unceremoniously cut short by white medical students who threatened to leave the program if the black students were not dismissed, also challenged the persuasive attitude regarding color. Delany opined that color was a natural product of the human body and produced by color pigmentation located in the layers of human skin. Delany noted that there were three layers of human skin: cuticle (external), rete mucosum (middle or intermediate structure), and the cutis vera (true skin). Color pigmentation was located in the middle or intermediate layer of the skin. Although Delany posits a scientific rationale for color, he justifies this position using a biblical explanation: “The Divine Creator had but one plan; so in the human races running through all the various shades of complexion, there is but one color, modified and intensified from negative to positive, as seen from in the purest white to the purest black.⁹⁵

Delany also noted that Darwinian evolution was compatible with the Mosaic version of creation. After discussing the origins of the races, Delany, unlike Argyll whose treatment of blacks is fairly cursory, provided an extensive treatment of blacks in the human record. Focusing primarily on the biblical record, he demonstrated that the Egyptians, whom Delany viewed as black, possessed an advanced civilization. Argyll depicted the Negroid type as a servant in an Egyptian painting, and while favorable representations of the race existed in ancient records, Africans since were unable to

reach the apex of their former glory. Such a truncated assessment was not adequate for Delany. His work not only stated that they possessed civilization at a very early juncture in human existence, but he demonstrated this point with a wide variety of illustrations in his text. Delany showed that Africans were the builders of the pyramids, developed a highly sophisticated theory of language, termed hieroglyphics, which he discussed at length in the text, providing illustrations; possessed religion and had marked success in the construction of literary classics. Therefore, rather than savage or barbaric, people of African descent, too, were civilized.96

For Delany there was no doubt that Africans were the oldest and most distinguished race: “The African branch of the human family is that which was the earliest developed, taking the first strides in the progress of civilization known to the world, and for this cause, if for no other, it may be regarded as the oldest race of man, having doubtless centuries prior to the others, reared imperishable monuments to their superior attainments.” In fact, Delany shows, using comparative anatomy, that the present day Ethiopians differ little in morality, social and religious practices and achievements from their ancient forebearers.

And the enquiry naturally presents itself: How do the Africans of the present day compare in morals and social polity with those of ancient times? We answer, that those south of the “Sahara” uncontaminated by influence of the coast, especially the Yorubas (Yorubas), are equal in susceptibility and moral integrity to the ancient Africans. Those people have all the finer elements of the highest civilization; virtue and matrimonial fidelity being the basis of female excellence and worth, and honor being held sacred among men, their plighted word on their moral responsibility being a sufficiently binding obligation to ensure its

96 The Duke of Argyll devoted less than five pages to “The Negro Race,” see Argyll, Primeval Man, 98-103. Also see Delany, Origins of the Races, 37-59.
fulfillment. Friendly, sociable, and benevolent, they are universally the politest of people.97

Delany concluded the book by engaging in a bit of speculation on the future of what he termed abnormal races. These abnormal races, which did not belong to either the white, black or yellow race, groups such as the Malays, the Australians, and the Mongolians, would eventually become extinct—a tacit acceptance of Social Darwinism's maxim of "survival of the fittest," leaving only the three original races. The black race, Delany's primary concern, was destined for redemption and restoration to its rightful place in history and human civilization. This effort for regeneration was not one that would be accomplished with the aid of Europeans, but a belief and trust in "God our Heavenly King." Delany's discussion here was no doubt fueled by the horrendous failure of Reconstruction and his misplaced faith in the power of politics to solve the problems of African Americans. His return to the nationalistic sentiments of the antebellum period were not surprising. His civilizationist efforts in the late 1850's, allowed him in the 1870's, to speak with authority on the history and progression of Africans in the nineteenth century. For Delany, given the failure of Reconstruction, the rising specter of violence against blacks throughout the South, the advent of social and political disenfranchisement, and the return to conditions resembling slavery for the vast majority of blacks, required a renewed appreciation for the race's majesty in classical antiquity.98

A history of Africa's ancient glories was one of the only ways, so Delany believed, to stave off vicious attacks on the scientific and intellectual communities on the innate capabilities of African Americans, and to present an alternative portrait of

97 See Delany, Origins of the Races, 90.
98 Ibid., 91-95.
black possibility. In a moment when earthly forces had failed the race, Delany sought divine intervention as the last desperate attempt to save the race from what he saw as its imminent erasure from the national life. Only with the intervention of God could the race “boldly advance, singing the sweet songs of redemption, in the regeneration of our race and restoration of our fatherland from the gloom and darkness of superstition and ignorance, to the glorious light of a more than pristine brightness—the light of the highest godly civilization.”

The years between 1863, were clearly years of great possibility and potential for the race. Historical studies, namely the work of William Wells Brown and William Still, heralded the future possibilities of the race while hearkening back to the race’s achievements in slavery. In these historical texts, the achievements of antebellum blacks as abolitionists, intellectuals, and fugitive slaves were used to demonstrate that these same individuals were worthy of the benefits of citizenship in the postbellum period. These writers were not only dependent on the achievements of the race in the antebellum period, although this is where the majority of examples were drawn, but they could also look to the sacrifice of black soldiers in the Civil War and at the achievements of black statesman in the Reconstruction governments throughout the South as proof that African Americans were capable of making important contributions to the stability of the Republic.

Moreover, these accomplishments were not only limited to the United States, but had diasporic import. Black achievements in the Republic of Haiti, and the role of black missionaries in Africa, such as the Bishop A.J. Crowther, demonstrated the potential of the race to uplift itself. Black intellectuals, like their American and European counterparts understood the need for blacks to measure up to the civilizationist ideal—a theme that would become even more pronounced in the
aftermath of Reconstruction. The heady days of Emancipation, which heralded untold possibility for the race, had, by 1882 disintegrated in a nightmarish reality of disenfranchisement, nominal freedom, and racial proscription. Martin Delany, whose historical writing straddled the antebellum and postbellum period while it simultaneously embraced religion and scientism, represented one of the earliest responses to the shifting fortunes of blacks in the face of Reconstruction’s collapse. While Delany recognized the importance of science and modernism, he was uncertain about its meanings for the place of blacks in American society. Thus, he turned to theological musings and Providence to provide the assurance of African and African-American redemption that science could not offer due to its more scientific and objective position in the intellectual sphere.

The loss of a viable political solution to black problems caused many to turn inward to the home, the school, and the press to effect change in the late nineteenth century. History, as we shall see in the next chapter, was an integral part of this process. The role of African Americans as agents of civilization and harbingers of a new day of greater racial inclusion in American society is the idea that animated many intellectuals in this period. Their desire to tell the “story of a rising race,” was a staple feature of historical writing between 1883-1896.
Chapter 5: "Advancement in Numbers, Knowledge, and Power": Representation, Progress, Civilization, and African American History in Post-Reconstruction America, 1880-1915

By far the most important and interesting period in the history of this people, is that which followed emancipation and witnessed their struggle for existence, their establishment as citizens of the United States, and their advancement in numbers, knowledge and power.

William Alexander

The 1880's marked a complete break with antebellum modes of historical discourse; a process that began to take place in the early postbellum period. While early postbellum writers, primarily abolitionists, looked to the future by analyzing the past, historical writers of the new period firmly situated their historical discourse in the postbellum period. The years between the publication of Joseph Wilson's Emancipation: Its Course and Progress in 1882, and the formation of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), in 1915, witnessed an explosion in the number of what historian Kevin Gaines has termed "uplift" texts. Gaines argues that the catalyst for the rise of uplift texts was both external and internal to the black community. Externally, the foreclosure of politics as a viable option or outlet for the

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1 See William Alexander, History of the Negro Race in America: Containing Also Their Ancient and Modern Life in Africa, Modes of Living, Employments, Customs, Habits, Social Life, etc. The Origin and Development of Slavery, in the Old World and Its Introduction to the American Continent; the Slave Trade, Slavery and Its Abolition in Europe and America. The Civil War and Emancipation, Education and Advancement of the Colored People, Their Civil and Political Rights (New Orleans, LA: Palmetto Publishing Co., 1887), 462.
amelioration of African-American grievances occasioned the rise of what Dewey Grantham has termed a herrenvolk democracy, democracy for whites only. By century’s end, the institutionalization of segregation in Plessy v. Ferguson officially circumscribed African Americans in the public sphere. Internally, African Americans, like any recently enfranchised group, needed to prove their worth in a society convinced of the race’s inferiority and inability to adapt to freedom. This internal need promoted adherence to uplift ideology, especially among the middle and upper classes. Uplift philosophy consisted of a combination of Euro-American values and nationality theories. African Americans combined the values of the Victorian period—sexual prudery, social and civic pride, and strong beliefs in the invincibility of the nation-state—with the idea of the race as a nation within a nation. ²

The post-Reconstruction period also witnessed the intellectual maturation of several constituencies in the African-American community. Unlike the writers of the antebellum and early postbellum period, African-American intellectual expression was more varied and dynamic than in previous decades. Ministers, journalists, and educational leaders, representative men and women of the race, were in the forefront of presenting the race in the most favorable light. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to unpack the meaning of history and its uses in uplift ideology. Unlike recent assessments of this concept, which, due to excessive presentism, dismiss historical writing and representation as celebratory and as a contributionist strand of uplift

ideology, this chapter views historical representations of African Americans not as a celebratory subtext, but as the pretext for the rise of a critical African-American historical voice. Representation, an idea embodied in what Henry Louis Gates has termed a “reconstruction of the image of the black,” is of seminal importance in understanding the historical constructions of Africans in this era. According to Gates, the intention of black intellectuals was to “restructure the race’s image of itself.” This reconstructed self was at sharp variance with and sought to subvert the social and intellectual stereotypes found in plantation fictions, blackface minstrelsy, vaudeville, psuedoscience, and Social Darwinism.³

Although Gates’s construction of the meanings of these histories is essentially correct, race histories also served a larger purpose when viewed with an eye towards disciplinary coherence: they provided the catalyst for the growth and maturation of a

more sophisticated historical discourse demarcated and defined by disciplinary boundaries. The professionalization of African American history, a gradual process, was informed by the writings of black intellectuals whose work amplified the importance of the discipline in the public sphere. An interest in professionalization, although clearly embryonic and heavily influenced by contributionist conceptions of history, was evident by the fact that a number of the writers were affiliated with the nascent black academy, actively involved in presenting useful information on race achievements for purposes of vindication, and involved with mutual aid societies or historical and literary societies some of which were the precursors of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), founded in 1915.4

In this chapter, I have chosen to analyze the development of historical writing in the post-Reconstruction period through the prism of representation and progress, two dominant ideological and philosophical constructions in the late-19th century and explicit in all of the works under consideration here. Instead of ascribing a presentist framework to my analysis, I examine these works from the vantage-point of those who produced them. I have selected works based on their popularity determined by the frequency of advertisements in the leading African-American periodicals of the time period such as the A.M.E. Church Review, The Voice of the Negro, The Colored American Magazine, and the Southern Workman, their general availability, and their

ability to elucidate the major themes of African-American history in the post-Reconstruction period. In order to streamline the analysis and make the linkages between the contributionist historical discourse of the post-Reconstruction period and the historical professionalism of the early twentieth century, I have examined the various forms of historical writing—emancipation narratives, race textbook and collective biographies—in which historical studies appeared.

**History as Representation and Progress**

Emancipation was a dramatic turning point in American history. For African American intellectuals, emancipation, dated from either Lincoln’s promulgation of the Emancipation Proclamation on 22 September 1862, or in 1865, the year the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, became the starting point for measuring the progress of the race as it emerged from the “dark night of slavery into freedom.” Emancipation was the culmination of a long struggle for slavery’s abolition beginning with the advent of the British abolition movement in the eighteenth century. In the 19th century, fueled by more democratic conceptions of individual rights and the rise of an aggressive worldwide abolitionist movement, the British, French, and Dutch abolished the slave trade and slavery prior to 1850. The Spanish, however, maintained slavery in Cuba until 1886, but they abolished the slave trade in 1850. Brazil, a former Portuguese colony, also abolished the slave trade in 1850 and slavery in 1888. Like their international counterparts, African Americans and their allies waged an unremitting war to end the peculiar institution in the United States. The success of the movement did not lead to the granting of unfettered freedom. As historian Thomas Holt has shown, “slavery defined the outer boundaries of freedom.” That is to say that from the vantagepoint of slavery, freedom was simply a condition antithetical to slavery. Once freedom was enacted, however, its inner boundaries—citizenship, including suffrage
and civil rights—represented the contested terrain on which this concept rested. While the rights of citizenship were included in the Constitution, the maintenance of these rights was much more problematic.  

Resolving the problematic of freedom occupied the thought and writings of a wide variety of African-American intellectuals throughout the post-Reconstruction period. The struggle to preserve the meanings of freedom was less defined in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Therefore, as the previous chapter demonstrated, African-American intellectuals provided only tentative outlines and programs for how the race should adapt to freedom. With the collapse of Reconstruction, freedom’s struggle with new forms of slavery became more pronounced. This attenuation of the struggle between slavery and freedom increasingly took the form of lynchings, rapes, and other deprecations committed against persons of African descent. An acute rise in extralegal means of black proscription was tethered to pseudoscientific constructions of race spawning the belief

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5 Numerous studies have explored the relationship between slavery and freedom. Classic studies include see Edmund Morgan’s American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975) and David Brion Davis’s The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (1966). As Orlando Patterson has shown the concept of freedom was generated from the experience of slavery. As Patterson states: “People came to value freedom, to construct it as a shared vision of life, as a result of their experience of, and response to, slavery or its recombinant form, serfdom, in their roles as masters, slaves, and nonslaves. See Orlando Patterson, Freedom in the Making of Western Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1991), xiii. Also see Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, eds., The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics and Culture After Slavery (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992) and Thomas Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 3-12. Also see David M. Oshinsky, “‘Worse than Slavery:’ Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice (New York: Free Press, 1996). A postmodern reading of the problematic of freedom is Sayiddya Hartmann’s Scenes of Subjection (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
that African Americans could not adapt to the conditions created by freedom and would thus become extinct.  

The drastic rise in lynching was an indisputable component of African-American life in post-Reconstruction America. Intent upon containing a former slave class, whites located the rationale for this practice in the psychosocial and sexual fears of Southern white males, the mythical Southern tradition of pure womanhood, and the stereotypes of the black male as beast and the black female as seductress. This construction of lynching facilitated the ability of whites to inflict the totality of extralegal methods of redress upon the bodies of African Americans. Not content to serve as whipping posts for whites, black elites were quite vocal on questions of black repression.

African-American activist Ida B. Wells, editor of the *Memphis Free Speech* portrayed lynching and rape as crucial components in the erection and maintenance of a mythological Anglo-Saxon purity. When Wells, in an attempt to expose the mythology underpinning the idea of pure white womanhood, stated in her newspaper and provided documented proof that some white women welcomed the advances of black men, she was threatened with lynching. Certain that no woman could make such

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inflammatory remarks that challenged Anglo-Saxon hegemony, Well’s critic also threatened her with castration, a central component of the lynching ritual.8

Widespread belief in African-American retrogression and degeneracy, and its endorsement in the nation’s scientific circles added scholarly legitimacy to racial issues, or the “Negro Question,” as Euro-Americans and African Americans styled the issue in the post-Reconstruction period. According to George Frederickson, as early as 1874, articles began appearing in respectable intellectual journals suggesting the inevitable extinction of African Americans if they continued to press for basic civil and political rights, an issue in most instances equated with domination of Southern whites. In an atmosphere informed by Social Darwinism and its variants-Anglo-Saxonism and Negrophobia—concern regarding the size of the African-American population either proved or disproved African-American retrogression and degeneracy.9

By the 1880’s, predictions regarding the future size of the African-American population swung back and forth like a pendulum. The numerical data contained in the Census of 1880 contributed to the situation by flatly contradicting the doomsayers on African-American increase. Instead of decline, the census showed that the African


American population would increase so substantially whites would be forced to use drastic measures to subdue it. In 1890, however, the census showed a relative decline in the black population. Encouraged by these results, Frederick Hoffman, an insurance statistician, published *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* in 1896. Hoffman’s study, which had the effect of reducing the availability of insurance to African American, argued high crime rates among African Americans were due to innate inferiority rather than environmental conditions. Influenced by Hoffman’s study and an atmosphere of antipathy toward African-American possibility, other studies such as Charles A. Carroll’s *The Negro: A Beast* (1900), Joseph Tillinghast’s *The Negro in Africa and America* (1902), and R.W. Shufeldt’s *The Negro: A Menace to White Civilization* (1907) continued to perpetuate the idea of African-American inferiority.  

Literary discussions of African-American inferiority were also commonplace. The popular literary magazines of the period—*Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, *Scribner’s*, and *Atlantic Monthly*—between 1880 and 1901, participated in a vicious campaign of lampooning African Americans. Rayford Logan, Sterling Brown, and Kevin Gaines all agree these magazines portrayed African Americans as “superstitious, dull, stupid, imitative, and hence not creative, happy-go-lucky, improvident, lazy, immoral, and criminal.” The literal assaults on African-American personhood, whether physical, scientific, or literary, necessitated a response by African Americans. 

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As a response, both to the externally manufactured atmosphere of racial and cultural repression by Euro-Americans and the internally imposed interest in uplift and regeneration counseled by middle- and upper-class African American elites, the idea of collective progress took hold among African Americans presented through the medium of representation and progress. This approach was a necessity given the complex interplay between competing visions of freedom espoused by different segments of the national population—bourbon planters, freedmen and women, Northern industrial capitalists, and Southern merchants. Bourbon planters tended to think in terms of maintaining what little power they had and restoring the vestiges of the plantation system. Freedmen and women focused on altering the relationship between themselves and their former masters, Northern industrial capitalists along with progressive Southern merchants fought to make the South more cosmopolitan and promoted the region through aggressive booster campaigns designed to attract capital to their respective cities.12

Here, my goal is to balance the internal motivations of African Americans above and against the restrictive atmosphere in which they lived. While cognizant of

responded to pervasive stereotypes, see Dickson Bruce, Black American Writing From the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

the impact of the Nadir, defined by Rayford Logan as the period between 1877 and 1908, in which African Americans witnessed the total erosion of the rights and guarantees of Reconstruction, African Americans who advocated uplift philosophy were also motivated by their desire to conform to American mores and prove their worth as citizens in a new nation. The term new nation here refers to the fact that African Americans as well as Euro-Americans constructed themselves as new people in a nation baptized by the fire of the Civil War, and the destruction of slavery's scourge on the land. The rise of new social arrangements, especially in the South but also throughout the nation, forced a realignment of American society.  

Given the fluidity of these new social arrangements, the black middle and upper classes assumed a paternalistic position in relationship to the lower classes and a representative position in relationships with Euro-Americans. Their visions of the New South, the location of over 90% of the black population prior to 1915, and the nation attempted to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable visions of black personhood and progress with white supremacy. In their historical writings, African-American intellectuals enacted and deployed a number of strategies to demonstrate the compatibility of African Americans with the dominant strands of American social and political thought. Most importantly, black intellectuals informed their claims for

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13 Kevin Gaines makes a distinction between the connotations of uplift. There were clearly two visions. The first entailed "a broader vision of uplift signifying collective social aspiration, advancement, and struggle had been the legacy of the emancipation era. The second meaning is linked to an elite appropriation of "class stratification as race progress" and linking this vision to "bourgeoisie qualifications for rights and citizenship." See Kevin Kelley Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, xv. The representation of freedom and its contested meanings in the public sphere are addressed in Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
unfettered citizenship through appealing to the late-nineteenth century ideas of progress, civilization, and the rhetoric of the New South.\textsuperscript{14} 

Progress, an important component of civilizationist theory, was premised on traditional beliefs in American exceptionalism and providential destiny. Despite increasing interest in other causal factors in historical events, these concepts remained at the heart of the historical enterprise into the early twentieth century. African-American intellectuals, caught between contributionism and scientism, viewed progress as the solution to racial discrimination. If African Americans could prove they were a progressive race, it would be impossible deny them full entry to the body politic.\textsuperscript{15} 

Civilization, the antithesis of Christian egalitarianism, was an integral part of late-nineteenth century social theory. As historian Gail Bederman has shown civilization was a braided concept, to use Linda Kerber’s term, which contained components of race, sexual differentiation, and Anglo-Saxon dominance. Fused with concepts of Social Darwinism, civilizationists argued that Anglo-Saxon (Euro-American) civilization represented the apex of human achievement. These societies were more advanced in terms of social, political, and economic structures than primitive or darker societies. The concept of civilization was also predicated on socially demarcated spaces for men and women. Men emulated the masculine ideal,

\textsuperscript{14} See Gaines, \textit{Uplifting the Race}, 1-17.
they were strong, rugged, and the primary supporters and protectors of women. Women ascribed to notions of genteel womanhood. They were soft, feminine, and protectors and nurturers of children. The hegemonic functions of male dominance precluded access to these traits in groups defined as less developed in relationship to advanced white civilizations.  

African-American intellectuals both supported and challenged the fluid construction of civilization. As Claudia Tate has shown, many African Americans accepted the idea that men and women had prescribed roles. They sought to appropriate traditional notions of manhood and womanhood predicated on Victorian conceptualizations of this idea, and trumpeted the importance of developing civilization. Many, however, rejected the idea of innate African-American inferiority and the belief that Euro-Americans were entitled to the benefits of citizenship while members of the darker races remained relegated to the peripheries of the nation’s promise. Black intellectuals challenged these ideas by using history to incorporate themselves into the New South paradigm and by appropriating Christian millennialism to argue for the eventual ascension of an infant race to the heights of power and prestige in America.

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16 Both Bederman and Jackson Lears emphasize the correlation’s between race, gender, and class in the construction of masculine ideas of civilization. Lears like George Cotkin also situates these developments alongside other antimodernist impulses. See Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 1-44 and Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 107-116.

17 Claudia Tate, examining the literature written by black women during the post-Reconstruction period, convincingly demonstrates that African American writers used their literary work to create domestic situations that reflected their political desires. See Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories and Political Desires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
Situating African Americans as progressive people also required an intense engagement with New South philosophy. The concept of the New South informed the region’s attempts to modernize, urbanize, and industrialize in the late-nineteenth century. African-American intellectuals understood the need to connect the race’s ambitions to this new philosophy. Doing so, would guarantee, so they believed, unfettered access to the social, political, and economic benefits of the region. At the heart of the African-American belief system was the concept of newness. Newness, also an integral part of New South rhetoric, symbolized the desire of the region to disconnect itself from the legacy of the antebellum period. In short, to create a region which transcended the old by amplifying the new. The idea of a Southern rebirth was an important part of this imagery. African Americans appropriated much of the same imagery. Some advocates of this position even went so far as to suggest that African Americans, as a race, were in their infancy. Rather than being reflective of infantile regression, or the inability to negotiate the terrain of black proscription, or a tacit acceptance of inherent inferiority, as posited by Social Darwinists, this approach demonstrated that African-American intellectuals understood the need to dislodge or disconnect the current condition of the race from the dehumanizing condition of slavery.18

18 The civilizationist discourse as espoused by Alexander Crummell linked it to religion as well as scientism and racial uplift. For “man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedth out of the mouth of God, given for the nourishment of humanity. To make men you need civilization; and what I mean by civilization is the action of exalted forces, both of God and man. For manhood is the most majestic thing in God’s creation, and hence the demand for the very highest art in the shaping and moulding of human souls.” Crummell also links Civilizationism to scientism and racial uplift. “Scientific ideas, however, must be apprehended, else their can be no progress, no elevation. Just here arises the need of the trained and scholarly men of a race to employ their knowledge and culture and teaching to guide both the opinions and habits of the crude masses.” See Alexander Crummell, Civilization: The Primal Need of the Race (Washington, D.C.: The American Negro Academy, 1897)), 5-6. Also see several earlier addresses by Crummell, “The Social Principle among a People and Its Bearing
Social Darwinist theory posited the notion that inferior races needed tutelage by stronger and more advanced civilizations in order to attain civilization. This idea often manifested itself in what I term Race-infancy theory in the writings of black intellectuals. This theory posited that since the race was in its infancy it needed protection. Like infants, the race required training by those more experienced—older and wiser—in the basic skills of life. The South, the baby’s crib, was the site with which the race was most familiar. Advocates of this position counseled patience with the region’s barriers to progress—lynching, sharecropping, and black codes—and urged African Americans to remain there, for the South was one of the few places where the race could learn to crawl, coast, and eventually walk. The focus on training, tutelage, and progress was viewed as essential to developing a race “worthy of emulation.” This adherence to civilizationist theory affirmed the importance of African Americans to the creation of a New South and new nation. It also incorporated the race into the dominant constructs of the period demonstrating that African-American elites, like other southern and northern counterparts, intended to encourage the development of civilization among the masses. Thus, it is not surprising that many black intellectuals measured the race’s progress by the amount of time that had elapsed since Emancipation, almost in the same way one measures the progress of a child since its birth.¹⁹

¹⁹ This idea draws upon the characterization of the race presented in the works of Adolph Reed, Wilson Jeremiah Moses, and Kevin Gaines The sense of a rebirth is present in all of the historical works under examination. Black intellectuals usually employed this imagery not to suggest the race was uncivilized, but rather to argue for more ethical treatment of the race. Anna Julia Cooper summarized this approach in the following way: “I will not here undertake an apology for the shortcomings of the American Negro. It goes without saying that the black is centuries behind the white
The emphasis on progress and newness informed the race’s approach to the meanings of slavery in the post-Reconstruction period. Although a great deal of attention has been accorded the work of Booker T. Washington, who argued that slavery was a necessary precursor to freedom during which the race learned much about freedom, many African-American intellectuals opposed this position, especially those who were active in the abolitionist struggle. Frances Ellen Harper, Alexander Crummell and Frederick Douglass counseled a complete break with the legacy of the past completely separating the memory of slavery from the present strivings of African Americans. Rather than slavery as the pragmatic school which outfitted the race for freedom these intellectuals argued freedom, was the school which would inculcate in the race the then current requisite skills to assume their rightful place among the citizenry of the country.20

race in material, mental and moral development. The American Negro is today but 37 years removed from chatteldom, not long enough to ripen the *century plant of a civilization.* After 250 years of a most debasing slavery, inured to toil but not to thrift, without home, without family ties, without those habits of self reliant industry by which people maintain their struggle for existence, poor, naked, weak, ignorant, degraded even below his pristine state as a savage, the American Negro was at the close of the War of the Rebellion “cut loose” as the slang of the day expressed it, and left to fend for himself. The master class, full of resentment and rage at the humiliations and losses of a grinding war, suffered their old time interest to turn into bitterness or cold indifference, and Ku Klux Klan beatings with re-enslaving black codes became the sorry substitute for the overseer’s lash and the auction block. At this juncture the conscience of the Nation asserted itself and the federal constitution was so amended as to bring under the aegis of national protection these helpless babes whom the exigencies of war had suddenly thrown into the maelstrom of remorseless life. That they are learning to stem the current is ground for hope; that they have already made encouraging headway even enemies cannot deny. See Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question,” in Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, eds., *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* (Latham: Rowan & Littlefield, 1998), 206-215. An example of race progress writing is Gilson Willetts, “After Forty Years of Freedom,” *Alexander’s Magazine* 1(November 15, 1905):11-18

20 The *A.M.E. Church Review* was one of the most important forums for black intellectuals between 1884 and 1910. Frances Harper chronicled the past of the race
Belief in progress, civilization, and the New South philosophy informed the efforts of African-American writers to promote the advancement of the race. As Wilson Jeremiah Moses has shown, African Americans were no longer the happy-go-lucky or complacent slave of the antebellum period. Nor were they the aggressive murderous brutes or lascivious wenches depicted in postbellum lore. Instead they were a new people, in the new South, and the new nation, intent upon developing their civilization. These concepts were privileged in the emancipation narrative.  

and hoped for a brighter day: "among the facts of history of a race who have behind them ages of heathenism, and the inferior civilization of slavery, the deliverance that came through the Civil War and failure and crimes of the Reconstruction. To some the aspect may seem gloomy, but if we look beyond the present to the future possibilities of our race, we have no right to despair." See "The Democratic Return to Power--Its Effects," A.M.E. Church Review 1 (January 1885): 213-250. Crummell in a commencement address at Storer College in Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia espoused disconnecting the memory of slavery from the realities of freedom. "What I would fain have you guard against is not the memory of slavery, but the constant recollection of it, as the commanding thought of a new people, who should be marching onto the broadest freedom of though, in a new and glorious present and a still more magnificent future. My desire is that we escape the limit and restraint of both the word and the thought of slavery. As a people we have made an exodus from it. The thought, the routine, the wages and calculations of that old system are dead things, absolutely alien from the conditions in which life presents itself to us in our disenfranchised and uplifted state." See Alexander Crummell, "The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for Afro-American for a New Era," A.M.E. Church Review 2 (October 1885): 115-118. Frederick Douglass's assessment of slavery differed little from that of Harper and Crummell. "Our past was slavery. We cannot recur to it with any sense of complacency or composure. The history of it is a record of stripes, a revelation of agony, It is written in characters of blood. Its breath is a sigh, its voice a groan, and we turn from it with a shudder." See "Future of the Race: As Carefully Reviewed by Mr. Douglass," A.M.E. Church Review 6 (October 1889): 220. For a full explication of Crummell’s civilizationist beliefs, see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989).  

Race Histories, Emancipation Narratives

Race histories, overviews of black history from Africa through the late-nineteenth century, proliferated during the post-Reconstruction period. These histories, which might be more appropriately called emancipation narratives, a modification of literary historian’s William Andrews term for autobiographical accounts written by African-American leaders in the postbellum period, were instrumental in fueling the black history movement. While the appeal of these texts emanated from their representative function and use, without fail, emancipation narratives, race textbooks, and biographical catalogs (discussed in subsequent sections) adhered to late nineteenth-century conceptions of history. History was viewed as an important component of the liberal arts, and functioned as a record of the progress of races and the lives of prominent men and women. Most important, many historical works produced by African Americans combined contributionist functions with the tutelary and exhoratory functions required by uplift philosophy. By combining these functions in the historical narrative, African-American intellectuals used a voluminous record of black achievement in the years following emancipation to diminish the ability of whites to portray black people as a retrogressive race.\textsuperscript{22}

Published in 1882, Joseph Wilson’s \textit{Emancipation: Its Course and Progress} symbolized the meaning of the post-Reconstruction period. Wilson, former slave,

participant in the Civil War, and author of *The Voice of a New Race*, a collection of poetry, and *Twenty-Two Years of Freedom*, a book published in 1882, demonstrated an intense interest in the meanings of freedom. *Emancipation: Its Course and Progress*, published by the Normal School Steam Print Press of Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, was designed to “provide a codification of the several acts by which the institution of slavery, peonage, vassalage and servitude, or what other name may be used to signify oppression has been abolished in the several countries of the civilized world.” The language Wilson employed is very intriguing. His use of words such as peonage, vassalage and servitude, all reminiscent of feudal and early modern forms of social organization, demonstrated the extent to which he and (many of his contemporaries) viewed slavery—the first designation used by Wilson to describe human bondage—as the byproduct of an uncivilized world.23

The work’s central premise is freedom, interpreted here not only as the abolition of slavery, but the dawn of new possibilities for the race. For Wilson, freedom was not only contained in the act of emancipation, but in the tangible documents and instruments of government used to effect this process. Not only was this true for the international community, but documents of emancipation had greater

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meaning for African Americans. During much of the post-Reconstruction period, African-American orators often read from the Emancipation Proclamation or the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution to celebrate the destruction of slavery and the advent of freedom.  

For Wilson, as was the case with many of his contemporaries, emancipation had no tangible meaning if African Americans could not demonstrate progress as a result of its occurrence. Civilizationism, the indicator of progress and advancement, served as the vehicle through which these concepts were articulated. In Chapter IV, ("Since Emancipation") of his study Wilson reviewed the progress of the race from the passage of the 13th Amendment to 1875. He concluded African Americans were "eagerly drinking draughts from the once forbidden well of knowledge." Wilson went on to show that African Americans made progress morally, financially, and intellectually. Socially, Wilson pointed to the improvement of home life, the strengthening of morals, and the building of churches. He believed "the social problems of the Negro [had improved] by his advanced conception of moral responsibility and duties. No church will tolerate him with two or more wives, nor permit him, as a member to live clandestinely with two wives as before emancipation. Financially, Wilson pointed out African American laborers assisted in rebuilding the South after the war. According to Wilson: "The newer South must owe her obligation for the advanced position occupied today, not only to the influx of Northern capital, but to the brawny arms from which the shackles of slavery so recently dropped."


25 See Wilson, Emancipation: Its Course and Progress, 142, 146-147.
Intellectually, Wilson noted that the number of African Americans entering the professions was gradually increasing. He recognized the unique opportunities available to trained men and women of the race. Black lawyers, doctors, ministers and teachers faced little competition among themselves as opposed to white graduates who often faced stiff competition from their peers. Wilson urged these graduates to take advantage of these newly created opportunities to advance the race.26

George Washington Williams, one of Wilson's contemporaries and the author of History of the Negro Race (1883) devoted an extensive portion of his history to African-American life after Emancipation. One of the most advanced historical researchers of his day, Williams consulted with historian George Bancroft, obtained information from numerous archival units ranging from the State Library of Ohio to the Library of Congress. Despite the vast research contained in Williams's work versus that of his contemporaries, Williams methodology mirrored that of his fellow writers. As John Hope Franklin has shown Williams wrote the work hastily and employed a providential approach to the history of African Americans. Williams's illustration of African-American progress took the form of various graphs, charts and tables. Actual measurements, in this case, of black progress, an integral component of many early race histories, is an example of nascent professionalization. In the post-Reconstruction period, a component of the move toward professionalism was the rise of quantitative and qualitative analysis using graphs, charts, and other means to measure sociological phenomena in society. Black writers, most of whom were educated and involved in the

emerging bureaucracy of their day, produced work which they hoped would be employed to challenge myths regarding black inferiority. These works, because of the inclusion of statistical data, would further buttress black claims of adaptation to freedom. 27

One such table was entitled, “Comparative Statistics of Education at the South,” which contrasted the white and black school populations in the South. Although the table showed the disparity in funding for black schools, Williams nonetheless stressed his statistics “exhibit the wonderful progress the Colored people of the South have made during the brief period of their freedom in the department of education.” Other charts included a listing of African-American educational institutions, population statistics from 1770-1880, and annual deposits in the Freedman’s Saving and Trust Company from 1866-1871. 28

William Alexander’s History of the Negro Race (1887) focused less on quantitative measurements of African-American progress and more on the everyday issues of uplift. In doing so, he offered a poignant characterization of emancipation and its meanings for African Americans. “Between four and five millions of people suddenly thrown upon the world,” wrote Alexander, “ignorant, poor, and without a foot of land to stand upon, and that too, not by the voluntary action of the people whose possessions they had been, and among whom they were to live (and who were


thus rendered, more or less, bitter and unfriendly), but by those whose distant point of view gave them little conception of their nature and needs.”

Implicit in Alexander’s discourse was the idea that Northerners had little conception of the needs of African Americans. He was clearly using the history of the race as a tutelary tool. Alexander continued this line of argument in his assessment of the meanings of Reconstruction. While he praised the North’s *noblesse oblige* in sending Northern missionaries to educate blacks, some Northerners, Alexander labeled them “enthusiasts,” he encouraged agitation for political rights. He believed these pursuits distracted the race from more important goals such as establishing an economic base as taxpaying citizens and instead promoted the irresponsible doctrine of acquisition of goods and services based on entitlement rather than hard work and perseverance. Published less than four years after the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional in 1883, Alexander used his work to demonstrate the tenuous nature of political and legal enactments. Although Reconstruction represented the apex of black possibility, the current retrenchment of the race’s gains indicated a decided shift in the emphasis on black rights. An exclusive focus on politics rather than political economy in the Reconstruction period, a position ably argued in T. Thomas Fortune’s *Black and White* (1881) caused the race irreparable harm according to the civilizationists. Civilizationists argued for a more concerted emphasis on internal racial development, especially economic development, to offset the most pernicious effects of racism.

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30 For discussions of the importance of labor in uplift philosophy, see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*. Also see T. Thomas Fortune, *Black and White* (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1884).
An integral part of New South ideology and the internalist approach to racial advancement was the containment of the African-American population in the South. Alexander applauded African Americans who resisted the temptation to abandon rural areas and settle in cities. In many southern newspapers of the era, the North, a region thought by some migrants to be a haven, was depicted as a place filled with vice, corruption, and poverty. Advocates of civilizationism and adherents to New South philosophy, however, were not slavish in their adherence to this concept. Alexander realized that if African-American leadership advocated that the race remain in the South they must be guaranteed a fair and equal opportunity to prosper. This meant the curtailment of the discriminatory land leasing and credit systems which reduced many sharecroppers to a condition reminiscent of slavery.  

Through the elimination of unfair economic conditions, the South rather than North could be accurately portrayed as the 19th-century Canaan. “Tillers of the soil,” the Southern maxim suggested, “eventually became proprietors of the soil.” In keeping with the maxim, Alexander argued that farming was not a lowly and undistinguished occupation rather it offered a variety of social and even political benefits. “There seems to be something in the free and healthful life on the farm, wrote Alexander, “that has a tendency to make men—men of broad views and deep intellects, men capable of thinking for themselves, men of such stuff as our Statesman and Presidents are made of.” Alexander used George Washington’s life, the father of the country, as a model of agrarian life: “Our own honored George Washington is said to have been ever more enamored of the sickle than the sword and unhesitatingly pronounced agriculture the most healthy, and the most useful and noble employment of man.”

31 See Alexander, History of the Colored Race in America, 469.
32 Ibid., 469-470.
Interest in Emancipation and its meanings were not only manifested among civilizationist intellectuals, but also among classically trained elites. Largely neglected by contemporary historians of uplift philosophy, William Henry Crogman (1841-1931), was one of the most visible promoters of uplift philosophy among black elites. Born in the Leeward Island of St. Martin, Crogman was a member of Atlanta University’s first graduating class, a Professor of Latin and Greek, and later president of Clark College, he made a number of important contributions to the historical writing during the post-Reconstruction period. Crogman was also active as a member of the Atlanta University Board of Trustees and as the Chief Commissioner of the Georgia Exhibition at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895. In addition to his academic interests, Crogman was also actively involved in religious organizations, serving as a lay delegate to the General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1880, 1884, and 1888. Edward Park, a minister and member of the Gammon Theological Seminary faculty, summed up Crogman’s commitment to the race in the following manner: “Professor Crogman has been a living teacher in no mere technical nor narrow sense. In his class instruction, he has aimed to lead his pupils not only to accuracy of technical scholarship, but to culture, to true and broader ideas of life and to character. In his more public educational work, he has aimed to promote the welfare and advancement of his own people and of all peoples.”

Crogman’s compilation of essays, *Talks for the Times* (1896) embodied his interests in the uplift of the broader African-American community. The compilation consisted of sixteen lectures delivered by Crogman between 1884 and 1893, ranging in themes from dedication speeches to celebrations of Emancipation. These themes differed little from his contemporaries. At the center of his text was the concept of progress. It is interesting to note the differences between the defensive tone of the 1884 lecture versus the more self-confident and assured tone of the 1894 lecture. In his lecture, “Negro Education--Its Helps and Its Hindrances,” delivered before the National Teacher’s Association in Madison, Wisconsin in 1884, Crogman chronicled the rise of higher education among African Americans. Determined to demonstrate the race’s progress since Emancipation, Crogman cited statistics compiled by white authorities and black notables: “The colored people have nearly 1,000,000 children in school; publish over 80 newspapers; furnish nearly 16,000 schoolteachers; about 15,000 students in the Methodist Church, own 68,000 acres of land in Georgia alone and 5,000,000 in the whole South” By citing these statistics, Crogman appealed to the better classes of whites, the white intelligentsia, whom he believed would counsel fair treatment for the black middle and upper class and devote more resources for the education of the masses.34

Speaking in 1894, thirty-two years after Emancipation, his “Thirty-Second Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, delivered at the commencement exercises of Clafin College in Orangeburg, South Carolina, he meditated on the meanings of emancipation. Crogman discussed a wide range of issues regarding the progress of the race, but his historical interest was clear. For Crogman, an appreciation of history was closely connected to the race’s attainment of civilization. He noted that

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ancient civilizations understood the importance of chronicling historical events and hoped African Americans would adopt this custom “for only thoughtful and intelligent men have been accustomed to attach vital importance to historic events, and set them up as a silent monitors to the generations passing by.”

Providence also figured prominently in Crogman’s account. While similar to the approach of his colleagues, Crogman was certainly aware of the work of George Bancroft and George Washington Williams. Despite their adoption of more scientific methods, both of these histonians employed Providence as a central feature in their historical writing. This was not necessarily a reflection of lack of sophistication. As Dorothy Ross has shown, Bancroft’s and Adams’s investment in Providence as a causal explanation of historical events delayed the adoption of the scientism and objectivity of the Rankean approach to historical studies until the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Peter Novick has also suggested that instead of drawing a hard and fast line of demarcation between the amateur and the professional, in the case of Euro-American history, or scientism and contributionism in the case of African-American history, one must realize that the two approaches operated simultaneously until the mid-1920’s.

Crogman, however, linked his belief in Providence and a millenialism to the acquisition of an unfettered citizenship. Couching his language in the familiar appeals to and belief in Providence, he appealed to reformist elements in both the white and

36 Nineteenth century or prehistoricist methodologies of history are discussed in Maurice H. Mandelbaum, History, Man and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth Century Thought (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971); and Dorothy Ross, “Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth Century America,” American Historical Review 89 (October 1984): 909-928.
black communities, especially those individuals associated with churches and civic organizations. “Beyond Lundy and Garrison and Philips and Sumner and Lincoln, beyond federal armies and federal enactments,” wrote Crogman, “stands in the background of our history the awful form of almighty God.” It was God, not man, argued Crogman who “for four years, riding on the storm cloud of war, flashing from the cannon’s mouth, whizzing in the rifle’s bullet, roaring on the battle’s din, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, brought us out into a purer atmosphere, a larger liberty and the enjoyment of blessings innumerable.”

If God was an operative force in history, especially African American history, freedom, then, was ordained by him. Using this premise, Crogman used divine intervention in history to deflate the position of those who advocated African-American emigration. In a hostile social atmosphere, emigration, as it had been in the 1850’s, emerged anew as a possible solution to the race problem. In the post-Reconstruction period, however, unlike the antebellum period, emigration, as opposed to colonization, was advocated by Euro-Americans and African Americans alike. As Edwin Redkey has shown, African Americans of all stripes ranging from Pap Singleton, a southern sharecropper, to Henry McNeal Turner, a bishop in the A.M.E. church, advocated emigration in response to the increased rigidity of the color line.

Crogman’s consideration of the emigration question hinged on his belief in liberalism and individual rights. He recognized, however, that an appeal to Providence would not convince those secular elements in Southern society of the...
futility of such an exercise. Therefore, he equated the support for emigration with a tacit acceptance of disunion: "The best that can be said for this proposition is, that it is entirely foreign to the genius and spirit of the American government. The interests of the people of this country must ever be common. Slavery once divided them, and was swept away. The American people will never again allow any wall to be erected on the continent around any particular people or particular institution. Henceforth, the union will be maintained in its integrity." Invoking disunion, the catalyst for the Civil War in the antebellum South, but a death stroke for the New South, would set off alarm signals in the minds of the region's progressive merchant class which was increasingly dependent on Northern capital, and former bourbon planters who needed a tractable work force.39

From his vantagepoint, Crogman's anti-emigration position was plausible. In light of the shifting rhetoric on emigration in the black community. In the rhetoric of the post-Reconstruction era, emigration lost much of the luster that made it attractive to antebellum black leaders. Rather than a means of demonstrating fitness for citizenship and appropriating the benefits of territorial rights, the emancipation of African Americans made moot the question of citizenship. Race leaders argued that African-American efforts could be more profitably expended by maintaining and expanding the guarantees of citizenship in the United States rather than by focusing on acquiring these rights elsewhere.40

Another important component of this argument involved the perception of emigration in a social and political atmosphere heavily dominated by Social Darwinism

40 Ibid., 321-323.
and Anglo-Saxon superiority. In such an atmosphere, Crogman believed advocacy of emigration was a tacit acceptance of white superiority. In light of the rapid expansion of the United States, and the defeat of the last remnants of Indian resistance at Wounded Knee in 1893, a society many believed was in decline and being pushed aside by the modernizing influences of Euro-American culture, African Americans needed to demonstrate their ability for incorporation into American society. It was unthinkable to Crogman that Euro-Americans had a monopoly on manhood and modernity. If they did, African Americans, who were in the nascent stages of civilization, could never attain the heights of civilization. Emigration, then, in the final analysis, forestalled the possibility of actual competition between the races by removing African Americans from the contest. This was anathema to Crogman whose whole life was invested in demonstrating the ability of African Americans to compete in American society.\footnote{Crogman believed in the indomitable spirit of Anglo-Saxonism, He referred to the tendency of whites to explore in the following way: "He is scouring the seas, dredging the oceans, tunneling the mountains, boring his way into the frozen parts of the north, parceling out the continent of Africa, and giving civilization and laws to the tribes--It is not likely, I say that this restless, energetic white brother will respect the boundary line of a state or territory at home; he has not done so with reference to the Indian; he would never do so with reference to us. Were it possible for us to go off to-morrow into some territory by ourselves, within a week the Connecticut Yankee would be there peddling his wooden nutmegs. The patent medicine man would be there selling his nostrums. The Georgia cracker and the Kentucky horsetrader would be there trading their horse and mules. See Crogman, \emph{Talks for the Times}, 321-322.}

Crogman's most popular work which appeared in numerous editions between 1897 through 1925, was titled \emph{Progress of the Race or Remarkable Achievements of the Afro American}. Co-authored with John Gibson and Henry F. Kletzing, advocates of civilization through racial advancement, Crogman provided an overview of African-American history. More objective than many of its predecessors,
Progress of a Race contained an introduction by Booker T. Washington, principal of Tuskegee Institute, and an alphabetized index. Washington’s introduction, written just two years after assuming the mantle of national black leadership, revealed the importance of history to his project of industrial civilizationism. He also emphasized the conflicting role of the African-American historian. In characterizing the historian, Washington pointed out their job was a difficult one. On one hand, the historian had an obligation to construct an objective reconstruction of the past: “His [the historian’s] work must be the result of careful thinking and an astonishing amount of finesse and diplomacy.” But Washington made it clear that history also had a contributionist component. “The Negro historian,” wrote Washington, “must be able to prophecy and foresee the days to come. The eyes if the prophet must discern whether this leads, upward or downward.”

In each of the many editions of the text, it was clear that tensions existed between the scientific and contributionist methods of history. In addition to general information on Africa, slavery, and black participation in the nation’s war, Crogman devoted the majority of each text to the racial progress since Emancipation. He included chapters on black women, black progress in industry, financial growth, and

educational advancements, and cultural achievements. At end of the book, Crogman included a section titled, “Statistics of the Colored Race,” an exhaustive listing of statistical data on all facets of the black population drawn from the Census of 1890.43

Emancipation narratives were an important component of historical writing. Rather than simple linear and chronological accounts of race progress, they were also reflective of the ideological terrain African Americans were forced to negotiate. Not surprisingly, all of these works staked out positions on the dominant racial questions of the day. Many modified aspects of the Social Darwinist and New South philosophies to carve out alternative positions for African Americans. Rather than slavish adhering to the dominant ideological constructs of the late nineteenth century, African Americans used history not only to present a progressive story, but one which they played an active role in molding.

Race Textbooks

Black intellectuals writing race histories between 1890 and 1915 consciously viewed their historical production in relationship to its larger applicability and usability in the wider community. Since many members of the black elite were associated with

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higher education at various levels, it is not surprising that race history presented in the form primers or textbooks for primary, secondary, and collegiate institutions became popular means of heightening interest in historical textbooks meshed with civilizationist ideology which stressed the importance of a nation's, race's, and group's producing a corpus of scholarly work representing its past, present, and future possibilities. History told the story of civilization and served as a "signboard" containing social, cultural, and intellectual lessons for future generations. The instructive nature of history discourse, then, mirrored the pedagogical goals of teachers.44

Race textbooks, moreso than any other form that race history assumed, served as the base for the superstructure of more sophisticated presentations of African-American history. Daniel Barclay Williams's Freedom and Progress (1890), Edward Johnson's School History of the Negro Race (1892, 1899), Lelia Amos Pendleton, Narrative of the Negro (1908), and John Cromwell's The Negro in American History (1914) were used as racial textbooks in the nascent black academy. Organized explicitly around the concept of providing knowledge for future generations, these texts were organized in simplistic ways to elicit understanding and interest. Immensely popular, many were used in various academic settings. Produced for general

audiences, both academic and nonacademic, these works provided the first detailed exposure to the history for many African Americans.45

Daniel Barclay Williams was a little known promoter of the movement to promote black history textbooks. A graduate of Brown University, Williams worked in a number of capacities as an educator. In the mid-1880's, he was as a teacher in the public schools of Henrico County Virginia and briefly administered the Moore Street Industrial School in Richmond, Virginia. Williams also opened a private school where ancient and classical languages were taught. In 1887, he was elected to a professorship of Ancient Languages and an Instructor in Methods of Teaching and School Management at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, Virginia. In this capacity, Williams authored Negro Race, A Pioneer in Civilization (1883), The Theory of Reverend John Jasper Concerning the Sun (1884), Science, Art and Methods of Teaching (1887) and Freedom and Progress (1890).46

Williams sketched his pedagogical goals in Science, Art and Methods of Teaching. The text provided tips for both students and teachers in all areas of instruction. His discussion of pedagogical approaches to history is particularly suggestive. William's suggestions, intended for both Northern and Southern audiences, endorsed the doctrine of Americanism advocated by reformist elements in


46 Biographical information on Daniel Barclay Williams, see Freedom and Progress, 7-8. Advertisements for all three of his books appeared in the AME Church Review. See “Agents Wanted for Popular and Useful Books for the People,” AME Church Review 7 (July 1890): 129; “Agents Wanted for popular and Useful Books for the People,” AME Church Review 7 (October 1889/1890): endpage.
American society. The influx of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, especially in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries necessitated the construction of curriculum which allowed immigrants to transition from the customs and mores of their particular cultures to a homogenized Americanism. While there were few immigrants to the Southern states, the region always guarded against the importation of radical ideas. Labor disputes, socialism and anarchy were viewed as constant threats to the stability of the South. Therefore, educators were viewed as the front line in the battle against these destabilizing forces.47

Socializing the African-American elite away from the radical doctrines espoused by socialists and anarchists as well as more mundane beliefs in civil rights and equality was an important component of African-American education in the post-Reconstruction period. Normal schools such as Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institution were representative of this position. Science Art and Methods of Teaching meshed the concerns of classicists with industrialists. In his discussion of the pedagogy of history, Williams moved back and forth between the two positions. He suggested that teachers should instill a love of the subject matter within the student. History, however, was viewed as essential in promoting patriotism. Williams also included other suggestions which promoted sound pedagogy while fulfilling the dictates of New South philosophy and Americanism. Teachers were advised to teach history topically to use a variety of textbooks to promote diversity of opinion on important historical issues, to use maps and globes as learning aids, and to emphasize national rather than state history.48

48 See Williams, Science and Progress, 102-109.
Williams expounded on his beliefs in African-American civilization, Americanism, and New South ideology in his race-specific academic and informal talks on various issues of importance to the African-American elite contained in Freedom and Progress (1890). He believed literature played an important role in the intellectual life of the race. Its production not only demonstrated the race’s possibility, but “added to the material, intellectual, and moral elevation of our race.” Literature, an integral component in building a communal ethos based on a love of great authors and books, served as the base of Williams’s program of knowledge acquisition and production. Underlying this faith in the power of knowledge, was also a belief in the possibility of the race. Williams opined: I have faith in our people, and believe that good books will assist them. “Good books,” in Williams’ estimation, began by giving the race a collective sense of its progress since the end of slavery.49

An essential precursor to understanding the progress of the race since Emancipation was an examination of the race’s condition in slavery. Williams, like Joseph Wilson before him, pointed to the sundering of domestic bonds, the tenuous nature of the martial union, and the lack of access to religious expression under slavery. Freedom altered these realities, facilitating the preservation of domestic bonds, the restoration of the sanctity of marriage and unfettered access to religious worship, often in churches controlled exclusively by African Americans.50

50 Ibid., 19-20
Increased opportunities for the race set the stage for the rise of an African-American intelligentsia. As a classicist, Williams was no doubt familiar with the Western conceptions of history. Located at the center of civilization in the biblical and classical periods, literature, a corpus of scholarly material, whether religious or secular, bequeathed a powerful legacy to future civilizations. Largely excluded from the Hegelian construction of history because of lack of movement or development, Africa, according to Hegel, was part of the "Unhistorical, Undeveloped spirit." Notions of the Unhistorical and Undeveloped were relevant to African Americans. Cyclical theories of history informed by Hegel's *Philosophy of History* predominated in historical thought during the late-nineteenth century. Oftentimes associated with the supposed barbarism of Africa, especially in the most racist minstrel shows and phrenological literature, the aspersion of "unhistorical," caused alarm and outrage among African-American elites.  

Demonstrating movement and an engagement with history, especially a corpus of scholarly production, in an atmosphere which depicted the ancestral home of African Americans as uncivilized, took on added importance. African Americans, the westernized extension of Africans, were a developing civilization. Located at the center of the West, African Americans were determined to demonstrate their ability to enter the front ranks of civilization through the proselytisation of their unfortunate brethren in Africa and the increasing mastery of Western mores at home. Williams applauded the sizable race literature produced by African Americans since emancipation. Authors such as William Wells Brown, William Still, Peter Clarke, 

Frederick Douglass, John Mercer Langston. George Washington Williams, Joseph Wilson, and T. Thomas Fortune, Williams believed, were a credit to the race. “What nation or race of mankind can point to a literature,” wrote Williams, “so elegant, so profound, produced in the brief period of twenty-five year’s? None.”

Other components of Williams’s civilizationist program also emerged in his text. Like many of his contemporaries, he embraced facets of classicism, as previously demonstrated, and industrialism. The two philosophies were not incompatible. “Intelligence, Industry, Education and Morality,” were the “sources and conservators of civilization,” wrote Williams. Industrial Education strengthened these qualities by promoting the ideas of self-help and the desire for higher education. He also believed that it served as a bulwark against crime. This reconciliation of the classical and industrial forms of education endeared Williams to Southern educators. Classical knowledge was necessary in promoting civilization, but industrial knowledge fueled the pragmatic needs of the race, building dignity and character.

Edward Johnson’s *School History of the Negro Race*, published one year after the William text, was also informed by the notions of civilization and manhood. In the preface to his work, Johnson, a former slave, teacher, lawyer, historian, businessman, and politician, argued the importance of school children’s studying the history of the race. “Noble deeds” and “valor” were the important ideas which required emphases in Johnson’s account. “I have often felt that the children of the race ought to study some work that would give them a little information on the many brave deeds and noble characters of their own race.” In another statement, Johnson wrote: “It must, indeed,

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52 See Williams, *Freedom and Progress*, 29-30
53 Ibid., 138.
be a stimulus to any people to be able to refer to their ancestors as distinguished in deeds of valor, and peculiarly so to the colored people.” He also distinguished between true and false history. True history, in Johnson’s work, recorded the patriotism and valor of black soldiers in the nation’s wars, the faithfulness of the black population to American values, and offered an impartial assessment of African American history. False history emphasized the inferiority of African Americans, omitted the contributions of African Americans to the nation, and was biased and uncritical in its presentation of history.54

Johnson sought to correct the omissions of false history by encouraging teachers “to teach from the truth of history that complexions do not govern patriotism, valor and sterling integrity.” He also emphasized capitalizing the word Negro. “It deserves to be enlarged,” wrote Johnson, “and will help, perhaps, to magnify the race it stands for in the minds of those who see it.” The majority of Johnson’s text was devoted to acts of heroism and valor within the African-American population. He discussed black participation in the nation’s wars, antislavery rebellions and agitation, the African-American role in Reconstruction, and the race’s progress since freedom.” In the 1911 edition, Johnson published the work with his popular

54 For biographical information on Edward A. Johnson, see Thomas Oscar Fuller, Pictorial History of the Negro (Memphis, TN: Pictorial History Inc., 1933), 288 and DANB, 349-250. Also see Edward Johnson, A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880 (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Company, 1891, 1894), iii-v. Other books by Edward Johnson include History of the Negro Soldiers in the Spanish American War and Other Items of Interest (Raleigh, NC: Capital Printing Company, 1899) and Light Ahead for the Negro (New York: Grafton Press, 1904). Contemporaries felt that Johnson was a highly successful author who sold many books: “Professor Johnson has a wonderful record for selling books to members of his race. The secret of his success lies in the fact that whatever he writes is written from the Negro point of view and in an able and intelligent manner,” see “Professor Edward A. Johnson and His Books,” Alexander’s Magazine 1 (August 15, 1905): 41-42.
History of the Spanish American War, a further testament to the history’s heroic focus. 55

Far too simplistic in style and presentation to be used as a college text, the book was aimed at primary, secondary, and normal school students. Johnson, who was closely associated with the black academy, received an LL.B degree from Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1891, where he subsequently served as an instructor of law, typing, and stenography and as Dean of the law department.

Exposed to the vital functions of the textbook, Johnson believed in the liberatory uses of the classroom, a critical site for the training of black elites. Even the format and

55 See Edward Johnson, A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890 Combined with the History of the Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War (1911, rpt New York: AMS Press, 1969), preface. Johnson also emphasized the importance of history for African-American youth in an address before the American Association of Educators of Colored Youth in 1894. Johnson noted: The importance of instructing colored youth in Negro history is apparent to such minds as have given the future status of the race any consideration. But the first inquiry should be, "Has the Negro any history worth teaching? Our white friends who have written American histories, evidently have answered this question in the negative, for in making a careful examination of the various American white school histories I find only one that has but a slight reference to the Negro and his doings in this country. The usual statement in the white histories is, that we were brought over here in a "Dutch trading vessel," and were slaves to the whites—it is not generally remarked that we were good slaves. The white historian gags at the mention of the Negro in history—he hurries away from him as fast as possible, leaving the inevitable conclusion on the reader's mind that the Negro has no history; that his part was only that of a menial; that he nor his people before him were worthy of anything in the way of historical mention, but the contempt of silence. Even the Encyclopedia Britannica, a book of authority, the world over, does more to our injury than condemn the race with silence—it publishes to the world the truth of history that NO genuine Negro has ever achieved greatness. The geographies print in cuts of the races a savage Negro for Americans to study as a model. But our inquiry is, has the Negro done anything in America worthy of historical mention? If he has the youth of the race ought to know it." See "The Importance of Instructing the Youth of the Race in Negro History," American, Address before the American Association of Educators of Colored Youth, Baltimore, MD July 24 to 27th, 1894.

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style of the history conformed to these ideas. He divided each chapter into subsections with important terms in bold print. He also included an alphabetical index to assist the instructor in locating pertinent information in the text.56

Black female intellectuals also played an important role in the production of race textbooks. Lelia Amos Pendleton’s *Narrative of the Negro* was an important addition to this literature. Pendleton’s work preceded Fanny Jackson Coppin’s *Reminiscences of a School Life*, a pedagogical guidebook for black teachers, by six years. Pendleton was also involved in Progressive era projects of municipal reform. She was founder of the Alpha City Club (1898) and the Social Purity League (1907). In addition to the *Narrative of the Negro*, Pendleton also published *An Alphabet for Negro Children* (1915). While it provided considerable information on Africa and the Diaspora, Pendleton’s work also focused on presenting a progressive portrait of African Americans. Replete with millennial imagery, “the light,” representative of enlightenment and progress, as Pendleton termed it, grew progressively brighter in every century until it reached its apex in the mid and late-nineteenth century.57

For Pendleton, progress was not defined exclusively through the assertion of manhood, literally. Many writers of emancipation narratives either excluded women or more likely relegated them to the domestic periphery. William Alexander’s summation of women’s place in the battle to develop civilization aptly characterized this approach: “Women are formed to become instructors, for while they immediately hold in their hands the mortality of children, those future sovereigns of the earth, the

56 Ibid., preface.
57 For biographical information on Lelia Amos Pendleton, see Mather, *Who’s Who of the Colored Race*, 214.
example they may give and the charm they may diffuse over other periods of life, furnish to them means for the amelioration of every evil." 58

Pendleton’s chapters, the “Dawning Light,” which chronicled the achievements of African Americans in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and “Frederick Douglass and Other Notables,” an extension of her chapter on African-American history in the first half of the twentieth century, challenged the limited ideas of women’s representation contained in the masculinist presentations of her contemporaries. In the “Dawning Light,” the chapter’s frontispiece is Phillis Wheatley, the distinguished African American poetress whom Pendleton considered an outstanding example of the maturity of African-American literature. In “Frederick Douglass and Other Notables,” the image of Douglass provides the chapter’s frontispiece but, the personalities Pendleton considered representative were all women: Sojourner Truth, orator and abolitionist, Harriet Tubman, conductor on the Underground Railroad and Frances Harper, author activist, and lecturer. 59

In addition to academics associated with secondary and collegiate institutions, other black elites connected their historical production explicitly to communal projects of representation. One such individual was John Cromwell. Cromwell, lawyer, historian, and newspaper editor, was born a slave in Portsmouth, Virginia and obtained a law degree from Howard University (1874). He secured an appointment in the Treasury Department and later became the first African American to argue a case before the Interstate Commerce Commission. In addition to his professional activities, Cromwell was active in uplift work in various parts of the black community. He

58 See Alexander, History of the Colored Race, 462.
59 See Pendleton, Narrative of the Negro, 90-100 and 133-145.
founded the Virginia Educational Organization, an advocacy group for black teachers in Virginia, and a newspaper, the *People's Advocate* (1876). During the 1890's, in Washington, D.C, he co-founded with AME Bishop Daniel Payne the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, a showcase for black intellectual concerns. Its membership included many of the District's most prominent black citizens. In the 1890's, Cromwell became an active member of the American Negro Academy (1897), a group of African-American men and one woman, Anna Julia Cooper, founded by Alexander Crumwell, the Cambridge educated Episcopalian minister and classical scholar. The academy sought to promote scholarship, educate youth, establish an archives to document the work of black authors and to foster increased intellectual production by black scholars. In short, it promoted a more enlightened perception of African Americans in the public sphere.  

As historians and archivists Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, W. Paul Coates, and Tony Martin have shown, historical production in the early twentieth century was an integral part of the Negro history movement. This movement had several facets, a loosely connected set of historical and literary societies, and a closely connected set of

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authors and bibliophiles. In addition to the Washington-based societies such as the Bethel Literary and Historical Society and the Mu-So-Lit Club, several influential societies existed in Philadelphia and New York. With the formation of the Afro-American Historical Society of Philadelphia in 1897, the black bibliophile tradition was born. Bibliophiles such as William Carl Bolivar, Robert Mara Adger, and Leon Gardiner collected important pamphlets, books, and articles related to the African-American tradition. Each of these men also published significant bibliographies. In New York City, this tradition flourished through the work of the Negro Society for Historical Research led by Arthur Alonso Schomburg, a Puerto-Rican bibliophile, and John Bruce, a journalist. Schomburg not only collected rare artifacts but was instrumental in urging the inclusion of African-American history in the curriculum of secondary schools and colleges.61

It was in this tradition of collection and preservation that Cromwell produced 

The Negro in American History. In fact, many of the prominent bibliophiles who were active in the Negro history movement—Schomburg, Adger, and Daniel Murray, Assistant Librarian at the Library of Congress—were all listed as contributors to the

book. It was written in response to a formal survey by Mrs. Charles Barlett Dykes, a former instructor at Leland Stanford Jr. University (Stanford University) and a summer instructor at Hampton Institute, who found after surveying more than 600 black schoolchildren that the overwhelming majority of these students felt they would never achieve wealth or become famous. Dykes concluded that these low aspirations were the direct result of the Southern educational system which placed little or no emphasis on the contributions of African Americans to American society. Cromwell concluded that Dykes formal survey affirmed his informal sense of the needs of black schoolchildren: “This necessity [the need to teach race history] formally set forth by Mrs. Dykes, confirmed by my own experience in the classroom covering twenty years, leads me to attempt the publication of a book which shall give to teachers and secondary pupils especially the salient points in the history of the American Negro, the story of their most eminent men and a bibliography that will guide those desirous of making further study.”

With these guidelines in mind, Cromwell’s work anticipated the more scholarly contributionist work of the Woodson school, inaugurated in 1915, just one year after the publication of his study. Less than a third of Cromwell book is devoted to the antebellum period. He does not spend an inordinate amount of time justifying African-American existence nor discussing slavery or colonization. Cromwell covered slave insurrections but gave them short shrift. He does, however, devote significant attention to the Early Convention movement, which he viewed as the practical training ground for future African-American politicians. The demonstration of political interest, a characteristic decried by industrial civilizationists as premature for a race in its infancy, justified some of Cromwell’s affiliations. In 1865, he opened a school in

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Portsmouth Virginia, however, Cromwell’s teaching career was cut short when he was shot and his school was burned to the ground. After returning to Philadelphia, Cromwell, who recognized the futility of educational initiatives without political enfranchisement, embarked on a brief political career during which he served as a delegate to the first Republican convention in Richmond, Virginia in 1867.63

In Cromwell’s book, the postbellum period provided the backdrop for an extensive introduction to representative men and women from the antebellum and postbellum periods, individuals such as Sojourner Truth, Henry Highland Garnet, Frederick Douglass, Fanny Jackson Coppin and Henry Ossawa Turner, Booker T. Washington, and Edward Wilmot Blyden. His book also contained a number of modern features including an appendix which contained information on several important antebellum incidents such as the Amistad Slave Mutiny and the Underground Railroad as well as postbellum events such as information on the Freedmen’s Bureau and Bank. The book also featured a bibliography and a chronology of the black experience.64

Race textbooks like emancipation narratives offered a means to integrate black history into the embryonic black academy. Although many of these books were written by lay and amateur historians, their interest in history was closely connected to the burgeoning “Negro history” movement which found outlets in literary and historical societies, black colleges and universities and in numerous black churches around the country. History, then, required a number of creative outlets in the black community and in the wider social, political and economic spheres of the nation. In order to train

race conscious leaders, it was necessary to instill pride and hope, but more important, to provide detailed, sophisticated and reliable ways to disseminate history. The race textbook offered a more credible way of accomplishing these goals because of its close connection with the black academy.

**Collective Biographies**

In many studies of African-American history and progress, the concept of representative men and women played an important role in historical discourse. The concept of representativeness was most prominent in the biographical catalogs and race uplift manuals. More than showy, gaudy, and miscellaneous catalogs of racial achievement, these works provided tangible meanings within the black community. In direct contradistinction to the images of black depravity rampant in the popular and scholarly magazines of the day, African Americans, in their collective biographies presented themselves as refined, bourgeois, and cultured. These representations had many similarities. Some include stately portraits of African Americans dressed in the formal styles of the late-nineteenth century. They included a large number of ministers, teachers, doctors and lawyers from Northern and Southern cities that were considered to be meccas of African-American achievement: Boston, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, New York, Atlanta, and Nashville. Rather than an accomodationist act, representation should be viewed as an attempt to empower by presenting alternative views of racial possibility.

Outside of Boston, Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia had the most prominent black families prior to 1900. Both families benefited from strong free black populations prior to 1860. Philadelphia was not only the site of Mother Bethel, the first established church of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, but also the home of the Purvis and Forten families--two of the wealthiest black families prior to the Civil War--as well as the site of the prestigious Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth.

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One of the largest biographical catalogs published during this period was William J. Simmons’ *Men of Mark*, a biographical catalog of more than one thousand pages, but the sheer number of race catalogs precludes a thorough analysis here. Simmon’s text easily serves as a representative example of the biographical catalog for several reasons. One is that this work is the most comprehensive biographical catalog published during this period, with the exception of Frank Lincoln Mather’s *Who’s Who of the Colored Race* (1915). And second, Simmons’ position as a minister, educator, and journalist allowed him entree to these diverse constituencies and as a result his book garnered more attention than other race catalogs published during this period.66


William Simmons (1849-1890) was born a slave in Charleston, South Carolina. He served in the Union Army and following the war, he enrolled in Colgate and Rochester universities in upstate New York. He later completed his graduate and undergraduate training at Howard University in 1881. In 1883, he received the D.D. degree from Wilberforce University. Afterwards, he assumed the leadership of the Normal and Theological Institute in Louisville, Kentucky. His able management and leadership transformed the institution into the State University of Kentucky at Louisville.67

Simmons' Men of Mark, which he dedicated to African American women, contained sketches of various notables in the African American community. In order to make sense of the text, it is necessary to read it through the strategies employed by Simmons to effect racial uplift. He used his introduction to provide an overview of issues of importance to the black community. The authenticating voice of the study is Henry McNeal Turner, a controversial AME Bishop, who was an ardent nationalist, and structured the civilizationist approach of the study. The last part of the framing is the text itself.68

The aim of the text was to chronicle the achievements of African-American men, like Simmons, who had negotiated the contested terrain of slavery and emerged

victorious. In many ways, Simmons’ text is an extension of his own story, an attempt to make his life and the lives of those he chronicled what Henry Louis Gates has termed the “mean and norm” of the race. Citing a woeful state of ignorance among “that class of rising men and women,” regarding the accomplishments of the race, Simmons hoped his book would be placed in the hands of young people to inspire them to lofty pursuits. The attainment of lofty goals required reconciling the current possibilities of the race with its previous condition of slavery.69

Cognizant of the role slavery played in the dehumanization of the race, Simmons termed the experience “a sum of human villainies.” He maintained, however, that slavery did not crush out “the life and manhood of the race.” Rather, he argued, the race’s deep sense of spirituality sustained it throughout slavery. Portraying the race as degraded but God fearing was another means of interjecting providential designs into black history. African Americans, Simmons maintained, waited patiently until God “broke their chains.” The idea of the faithful and contented slave was only half true. The more important point was African Americans possessed great patience and fortitude and were thinking and rational beings. This contrasted sharply with postbellum depictions of African Americans as impulsive and prone to violence. 70

In Simmons’ narrative, spirituality rather than violence was the dominant characteristic of the race. This approach informed his belief that “God has planted in us a vigorous spiritual tree, since freedom how has it been growing?” He answered the question by pointing to the building of churches and schools and the education of ministers and children to provide self-help for the larger community. Simmons knew,

69 Ibid., 6-7.
70 Ibid., 7-8.
given the hostile racial atmosphere of the post-Reconstruction period, that narratives of African American progress were not known. And if they were, whites preferred instead to promote stereotypical portraits of the race. Simmons sought to subvert this construction of race marginalization by “exalting” the lives of black men. In short, he wanted their lives and deeds “snatched from obscurity to become household matter for conversation.”

In Simmons’ biographical sketch, written in the postbellum period by another African-American notable rather than a white patron, Henry McNeal Turner traced Simmons meteoric rise from slavery to freedom, from fettered bondage to responsible citizenship. Turner’s biographical sketch of Simmons said as much about Turner as it does about Simmons’. An ardent nationalist and emigrationist, Turner castigated black scholars who after distinguishing themselves forgot “the rock from whence they were hewn, and waste their time in endeavoring to be white, or expend it in worshiping white Gods.” Simmons, of course, did not fit this model, nor did the men in his biographical catalog. According to Turner, Simmons was a true race man upholding the highest ideals of the race.

At the center of Turner’s discussion was a belief in the millennial aspects of civilization coupled with a belief in the manhood of the race. In Turner’s estimation, racial deliverance, ascension, and triumph would be brought about by future members

71 Ibid., 8.
of the race, the true beneficiaries of the current work of race leaders. He couched his millennial visions in classical, national, and racial imagery:

Negro giants now sleeping in the womb of the future will come forth an Armada that will defy the powers of the earth, trample color prejudice in the dust, write glory, honor and immortality itself upon the brow of the black; frown thunders at race distinctions, fire the citadels of manhood discrimination and burn them to the ground; hurl defiance in the face of defamers and contemners, and with pens of lighting write up the history of our ancestry and present them before earth and heaven as no one now ever dream [s].

The millennial and national imagery employed by Turner was a means of challenging what he termed “the abominable heresies set adrift by pseudo-philosophers, and other figureheads as ignorant as they are mean and low, that the Negro race was naturally inferior and nothing great could ever be evolved from them.” Turner was not selective in how he appropriated this imagery. Despite the employment of various modes of civilizationist evidence, black leaders such as Turner were deeply ambivalent about the possibilities of the race in the postbellum period. This ambivalence and endorsement of the civilizationist projects of Western civilization, at times, left leaders no choice but to embrace doctrines of Anglo-Saxon superiority to further race claims.

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73 Turner also suggests that “the name of Dr. Simmons will be as familiar to the millions as that of Herodotus, Josephus, Pliny and Plutarch and other historians enshrined in the gratitude of the world.” See Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 60-62.

The appropriation of the dominant racial theories by African-American writers is demonstrated in Turner’s presentation of the relationship between the three “races”: Euro-Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. Turner, in comparing the ability of these races to master the continent suggested the “Indian is old, decayed and worn out.” Native American inability to resist the onslaught of white settlement in the West meant that they had lost their manhood and were thus destined to disappear from the world stage. According to Turner, “The whites,” however, “are in the prime of life and vigor.” Informing Turner’s efforts to uplift the race, were then current notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. The question becomes how could Turner ignore the facts of reality, Native American subjugation, and Euro-American dominance, and argue that African Americans were equal. Surely, his belief in civilizationist discourse rendered this option without practical merit. To resolve this quandary, he enlisted race infancy theory. “The Negro is a boy, a mere apprentice learning his trade,” wrote Turner “When the white race reaches decrepitude, as races are periodical as well as worlds, the Negro will have reached his own genius and industry to manufacture more and lift him to higher civilization, and he will stand out as the wonder of the world.”

The elaborate invocation of civilizationist theories and ideologies of manhood prefaced the body of Simmons’ work. Because Simmons situated spirituality as one of the guiding components of the race, black ministers, moreso than any other group, were featured in the work. More than 36% of the 172 sketches were of ministers. Black academics followed the ministers making up about 11.6% of the total. Simmons also included politicians, lawyers, artists and antebellum personalities. The overwhelming majority of these sketches were postbellum figures and part of an

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75 See Simmons, Men of Mark, 61.
educated elite of clergymen and academics, the embodiment of Simmons’ ideal of social and intellectual responsibility in uplifting the race.\textsuperscript{76}

If Simmons’ text is truly representative of the biographical catalog, it, like other forms of historical production in the nineteenth century, uses representation as the dominant mode for disseminating acceptable and appropriate images of the race to the larger population. These images contained both literal and figurative power. Their literal power emanated from the fact that they served as both present and past examples of the race’s achievement. Their lives were examples of the values and beliefs that had sustained African Americans during slavery and propelled them forward in the postbellum period. Their figurative power emanated from their almost supernatural or metaphysical representativeness. That is to say, their connection with the national and millennial imagery which their lives and associations represented. These images were more than gaudy displays of black potential; they represented the mean and the norm of the race.

The Regeneration of Womanhood and the Race: Anna Julia Cooper, Pauline Hopkins, and N.F. Mossell.

Promoting accurate representations of the race was not only the province of men, women also played a substantial role in shaping the racial advancement agenda. As mentioned earlier, black women such as Lelia Pendleton, author of the Narrative of the Negro and an active participant in various Progressive era reform movements characterized the work of black women writers. Beginning in the 1870’s and

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{76} My own calculations reveal the following results: Ministers made up 62/172 or 36.0\%, academics, 20/172 or 11.6\%; politicians, 13/172 or 7.5\%; lawyers, 12/172 or 6.9\%; and artists, 11/172 or 6.4\%.
\end{footnote}
culminating in the formation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1895, black women began to organize in clubs to tangibly impact the social, political and economic agendas within the African-American and Euro-American communities. The rise of several highly capable women such as Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, Pauline Hopkins, and N.F. Mossell to national prominence gave black women a visibility in the national life heretofore unachieved. These women became a part of what historian Hazel Carby has termed “the women’s era.” It was within this context that black women began to challenge the patriarchal aspects of uplift philosophy and engage in what literary historian Claudia Tate has termed the “revising [of] the patriarchal text.”

Speaking before the Brooklyn Literary Union, February 16, 1892, S. Elizabeth Frazier offered a direct response to the masculine focus of William Simmons's *Men of Mark*. In her address, “Some Afro-American Women of Mark,” Frazier began her remarks by pointing out: “We have heard and read much of Men of Mark of our race, but comparatively little is known of able Afro-American women. She cited the achievements of Phyllis Wheatley, Frances E.W. Harper, Sarah Garnet, wife of Henry Highland Garnet, sculptress Edmonia Lewis, and Fannie Jackson Coppin as examples of distinguished women. 78

At the center of this effort, was an attempt to wrest the historical debate from the purview of patriarchal authority. A better known contemporary of Frazier, Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), would spearhead these efforts. A graduate of Oberlin College, Cooper served as the Principal of M Street High School from 1902-1906.


After receiving a doctorate from the Sorbonne in 1925, she founded Frelighuysen University and served as its president. Cooper was also active in the women’s club movement. Her *Voice from the South* (hereafter *Voice*), published in 1892, was Cooper’s only book and the most potent and trenchant set of observations on the condition of Southern women in the post-Reconstruction period. Although *Voice* treated a wide variety of issues, Cooper’s historical observations are primarily featured in the essay, “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Progress and Regeneration of the Race” (hereafter “Womanhood”). “Womanhood,” first presented in 1886 before a group of male Episcopal clergy and reprinted in *Voice*, provided an overview of women’s treatment throughout human history and a blueprint for the uplift of women and the race.  

Deeply committed to civilizationist ideas, Cooper’s “Womanhood” posited a reductionist binary between oriental and Western civilizations. The rationale underlying this construction was Cooper’s belief in the efficacy of Victorian moralism and Western progress. More important, however, was her contention that African Americans, a nascent civilization, must draw upon the best features of Western rather than “oriental” society to achieve their fullest potential. Cooper’s affiliations are

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explicit in the text. Regressive practices as opposed to enlightened ones were the sole purview of oriental societies, especially China and Saudi Arabia. In these countries, Cooper contended, women have “been uniformly devoted to a life of ignorance, infamy, and complete stagnation.” Linking cultural practices to nationality, she criticized the nomadic quality of these societies and the devotion of men to the harem. As Gail Bederman has shown, Victorian masculinity could only be expressed within the context of the martial union. Extramarital or adulterous or engagement in commercial sex was viewed as a sign of moral weakness. Given the existence of concubinage in some “oriental” societies, Cooper concluded these civilizations were “effete and immobile.”

The West, in Cooper’s essay, was “fresh and vigorous,” and was synomous with all “that is progressive, elevating, and inspiring.” In this account, the proper model, of civilization, then, was the Western rather than the oriental model. Cooper’s endorsement of Western society was not an uncritical one. Its superiority to oriental culture was encompassed in its historical development, especially Christianity, which encouraged equal treatment of all without regard to race, color or sex, and Feudalism, which promoted chivalry and respect for the place of women in society. Cooper grounded her promotion of Western culture as the race’s example of civilization on equal treatment and mutual respect between men and women.

Another important strategy in Cooper’s writing was to encode her strong appeals for feminist discourses of power in the passive language of pure womanhood common in the late-19th century. Her approach to racial advancement was

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81 See Cooper, Voice From the South, 9-11.
two-pronged. Cooper believed that black women were deserving of the same status as white women. They should be venerated and allowed to appropriate the Victorian ideal of womanhood. Like other civilizationist, however, Cooper believed black women needed to demonstrate to the world their capacity to emulate the best qualities and their deserving the highest accolades of Western civilization. To accomplish this reorientation of the perception of African-American women, Cooper sought what literary historian Edith Alexander has termed an active incorporation of a female voice into a male dominated discourse on racial advancement to heighten the concern regarding black women's issues.82

The inclusion of a female voice from the South not only authorized Cooper's suggestions but implied special or unique knowledge of both Southern conditions for women and of the women themselves. Positioning herself as an authority on black women fulfilled her role as a civilizationist elite. Rather than echoing the prescriptive comments of white civilizationists or black men, Cooper posited the model of regeneration. Regeneration, a concept similar to concepts of the New Woman, New Negro Woman, and New South meant black women must be lifted from an externally imposed state of degradation during slavery to the high plane of respectability and civilization. Achieving this goal entailed an appreciation of the historical development of Western civilization on the womanhood question, an amplification of the needs and concerns of black women, and the linkage of black women's regeneration to the advancement of the race.83

83 See Cooper, Voice from the South, 25.
If the women were the race and the race could only be measured by the civilization of its women, women’s advancement, argued Cooper, should be foremost on the racial advancement agenda. Thus, it was illogical, in her estimation, “for black men to quote statistics showing the Negro’s bank account and rent rolls, to point to the hundreds of newspapers edited by colored men and lists of lawyers, doctors and professors, D.D.’s, LL.D’s, while the source from which the lifeblood of the race is subject to taint and corruption in the enemies camp.” Rendering assistance to women required an appreciation of the condition of women in the South on the part of enlightened Northerners and Southerners. It also meant bringing to bear upon the situation of black women, especially in rural areas, the full power of representative institutions—the home, press, and most importantly, the church.84

Cooper’s devotion of a significant portion of her essay to the role of the church in the work of uplift was consistent with her belief in the regenerating power of institutions, especially the church, in the black community. Moreover, the church was a bastion of culture and civilization as well as an influential forum for the discussion of racial advancement. Dominated by men, Cooper’s talk with Episcopal clergy provided for the articulation of a woman’s viewpoint on the race issue. Even as she attacked the masculinist bias in uplift philosophy, she also demonstrated her affiliation with Victorian ideals. Cooper suggested the Episcopal church (a church she deemed more suited to the task of promoting civilization than the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and Baptist churches due to their discouragement of exuberant forms of worship) should play a more aggressive role in proselytizing throughout the South. To Cooper, it seemed unthinkable that the Methodists and Baptist churches would be

84 Ibid., 26.
in the forefront of directing religious life when most Northern clergy felt the Episcopal church was better suited to the task. 85

Given its civilizing impulses, Cooper was baffled as to why more African Americans had not entered the ranks of the Episcopal clergy. This church, Cooper opined had done little to attract African-American congregants, rather they were content to believe African Americans were too unsophisticated to adhere to the church’s doxology. The same belief in racial proclivities characterized the church’s position on attracting black ministers. Obviously, for Cooper, both of these explanations were insufficient. In response to the church’s failure, she pointed out African-American clergy were not taken seriously in the church. Rather than being used to proselytize among Southern blacks, they were used as “manikins” and “machines,” as figureheads and compliant followers, within the denomination. Moreover, at recent conferences of Episcopal clergy on promoting the welfare and advancement of African Americans in the church, the denomination failed to invite African American race leaders or clergy to address the group. For Cooper these meetings were little more than “remedial contrivances,” which were “purely theoretical,” and demonstrated that the whole machinery of the church was “devoid of soul.” 86

To invest the machinery, the inner workings of the church, with soul, Cooper suggested a more humanistic approach to recruiting black congregants and clergy. Active involvement in African-American communities, sympathy and love not mere abstractions, would win the loyalty of potential black recruits, Cooper also suggested

85 Ibid., 33-48
86 Ibid., 36-37
Episcopalian might do well to take direction from the Congregationalists. “The Congregationalists have quietly gone to work on the young,” wrote Cooper, they “have established industrial and training schools, and now almost every community in the South is yearly enriched by a fresh infusion of vigorous young hearts, cultivated heads, and helpful hands that have been trained at Fisk, at Hampton, in Atlanta University, and in Tuskegee, Alabama.”

Copper’s major concern, however, was the training of women. Like her contemporary and fellow Episcopalian, Dr. Alexander Crummell, Cooper argued that the church should provide more training for women. Citing Crummell’s “The Black Woman of the South: Her Neglects and Her Needs,” an address delivered before the Freedmen’s Aid Society [Methodist Episcopal Church] Ocean Grove, New Jersey, August 15, 1883, Crummell, a consummate civilizationist, argued that African American women were in need of protection and civilization. He suggested that the civilization of black women had not been adequately developed rather under the harsh regime of slavery nor during the early years of freedom. Crummell went further to detail the type of detrimental influences on black women:

Her entire existence from the day she first landed, a naked victim of the slave trade, has been degraded in its extremist forms.... In her girlhood, all the delicate tenderness of her sex has been rudely outraged. In the field, in the rude cabin, in the press-room, in the factory, she was thrown into the companion-ship of coarse and ignorant men. No chance was given her. Her home life was of the most degrading nature. She lived in the scantiest garb and slept in multitudinous cabins, upon the hardest boards!

87 Ibid., 43.
Rather than detailing the condition of African-American women, as Crummell did, Cooper pointed out that the Episcopal clergy were responsible for some of these circumstances. The denomination, Cooper argued, was content to place a quota of clergy in the field without regard to the placement of women. She maintained that this approach did nothing to assist in the advancement of women nor minister to their spiritual needs. To solve this problem Cooper endorsed a more activist program on the part of Episcopal clergy. She endorsed Crummell’s system of female regeneration which entailed the establishment of sisterhoods. Women of high moral integrity and domestic skill would visit rural women. They would establish sewing circles, and provide lectures and talks to “guide these women and their daughters into the modes and habits of clean and orderly housekeeping.” In addition to tutelage by the middle and upper classes, industrial training was suggested for the poorest girls between twelve and eighteen years of age. For more capable girls, intellectual training in reading, writing, arithmetic and geography as well as domestic work and agricultural skills would be provided.  

Regeneration, a common theme in Cooper’s work, permeated her speeches throughout the 1890’s. One year following the publication of Voice, In response to a lengthy address by Fannie Barrier Williams, prominent clubwoman and protege of Booker T. Washington, titled, “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation,” delivered at the World Congress convened in Chicago, Cooper chronicled the struggle for advancement among African American women. She reminded the audience that the “fruits of civilization” could not be developed in the short space of thirty years, but “requires the long and painful growth of generations.” Despite the obstacles, black women were

89 See Cooper, A Voice from the South, 42-43.

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making strides, especially in education. Cooper cited the achievements of black graduates of Cornell University, the University of Michigan, and Wellesley College. She also praised self-help efforts among black women.90

In a speech before the General Society of Friends in Asbury, New Jersey in 1902, Cooper continued her call for the regeneration of womanhood. She grounded her discourse in the historical circumstances of the post-Reconstruction period. Cooper correctly labeled this period as a time of “trial and bondage.” The rising number of lynchings, the increased rigidity of the color line, and American expansionism influenced Cooper’s remarks. She lamented the fact that the nation seemed intent on subjugating African Americans despite their contributions to the nation’s progress in slavery and their acquittal of citizenship functions during the postbellum period. Despite a social atmosphere she characterized as a “saturnalia of blood and savagery,” Cooper hoped the nation would acknowledge its ethical obligations to the “Negro’s uplift and amelioration.”91

91 See Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question,” in Lemert and Bhan, eds., The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper, 206-215
Cooper's optimism was expressed through appeals for the extension of Christian education to all members of her race. Her advocacy of Christian education was consistent with her unwavering belief in the redemptive qualities of education, a belief that promoted the establishment of Frelinghuysen University. Cooper constantly evoked the historical record of African-American progress and loyalty to the nation to reduce the distance between them and the benefits of American citizenship. This required incorporating African Americans into rhetorics of nation, patriotism and character.\textsuperscript{92}

On the question of labor, Cooper appears most conservative. Examining her civilizationist ideology within the context of expansionist and imperialist rhetorics of Americanism reveals another set of preoccupations and motives. Unlike Booker T. Washington, Cooper was not a resident of the black belt. Her long association with educated elites in Washington, D.C., the black mecca of the period, determined her approach to questions of labor. At no time did her advocacy of the concerns of Southern women entail grafting an agenda like industrial civilizationism upon them. Rather her goals were more high-minded and intellectual. For Cooper, labor issues were connected to historical circumstances and ethics.\textsuperscript{93}

The labor question was one of the most volatile issues in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American history. An increase of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe coupled with the rise of more radical options for societal reform promoted by anarchists, socialists, and communists, caused great concern among

\textsuperscript{92} See Cooper, "The Ethics of the Negro Question," in Lemert and Bhan, eds., \textit{The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper}, 212.

\textsuperscript{93} For an assessment of Cooper's positions on labor, see Kevin Gaines, \textit{Uplifting the Race}, 128-151.
Progressive era reformers. African Americans, long considered a menace to American society, were often lumped together with immigrants as undesirable elements. Cooper’s goal, then, was simply to disassociate African Americans from immigrants using history. She hoped to demonstrate conclusively that immigrants and African Americans embraced different historical experiences and were subject to different historical influences.⁹⁴

“The Negro,” proclaimed Cooper, “is the most stable and reliable factor today in American industry. Patient and docile as a laborer, conservative, law-abiding, totally ignorant of the anarchistic, socialistic radicalism and nihilism of other lands.” She explained further, in an attempt to shift American perceptions of African Americans from the murderous beast to the loyal, capable, and reliable citizen, that African Americans would not use the tools of anarchy to further their position. She assured her white counterparts “no dynamite plots are hatching amongst us, no vengeful uprising brewing.” Rather, Cooper argued, Americans must recognize the fact that African Americans were part and parcel of the American Republic and treat them as such. American greatness, Cooper believed, should be predicated on more than “her expanse of territory, her gilded domes, and her paving stones of silver dollars,” but on the nation’s moral and ethical foundations.⁹⁵

Like Cooper before her, Gertrude (N.F.) Mossell understood the importance of history and its role in racial advancement. Mossell, unlike Cooper, was married and had two children. Much of her life was devoted to encouraging women to transcend the domestic sphere. While Mossell was not an opponent of domesticity, as Claudia

⁹⁴ See Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question,” in Lemert and Bhan, eds., The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper, 212-213.
⁹⁵ Ibid., 215.
Tate has shown, Mossell wanted women to combine domestic duties with public sphere work. Although she was active in various uplift activities until her death in 1948, Mossell’s *Work of Afro-American Women*, published in 1894, one year before the formation of the National Association of Colored Women, combined the representative portrayal of middle-class and upper-class African Americans with a well-developed philosophy of history.  

Mossell made no attempt to appeal to subtlety or high-minded intellectualism. Literature, especially history, she argued, was closely connected to race, race pride, and advancement. An opening quote summarizes her position: “The value of any published work, especially if historical in character, must be largely inspirational; this fact grows out of the truth that race instinct, race experience lies behind it, national feeling, or race pride always having for its development a basis of self-respect.” She is also clear about the implications of emancipation for black women. Quite simply, emancipation inaugurated the “women’s century,” especially the expansion of the suffrage and temperance movements. These increased opportunities provided unique opportunities for women of the race.  

Black women, like the male notables profiled in Simmon’s *Men of Mark*, also made substantial contributions to racial advancement. Mossell’s efforts to catalogue the achievements of these women is not as grandiose as Simmons’ effort, however, her portrait is ultimately more holistic. Mossell’s work does not seem driven by an attempt

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96 For biographical information on Gertrude E.H. Bustill, Bustill wrote under the name of her husband, Nathan Francis Mossell. See Mather *Who’s Who Among the Colored Race*, 201; and Hine, Brown, and Terborg-Penn, *Black Women in America*, 820-821. See Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories and Political Desires*, 132-134, 154.

to privilege the members of one profession over any other. She discussed women’s contributions in the traditional professions such as education and journalism, but she also profiled women’s participation in nontraditional professions such as medicine, and law, and the military, where their numbers were negligible.  

According to Darlene Clark Hine, only 20 black women were listed as physicians in the Census of 1920. Mossell lauded the achievements and visibility of two prominent female physicians, Dr. Caroline Anderson, graduate of the Philadelphia Women’s Medical College, and Dr. Hallie Turner, resident physician at Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama. Female lawyers were also a rare item. Mossell highlighted the work of Mary Shadd Cary, Florence Ray, and Ida Pratt. She also highlighted the little-known, career, at the time, of Deborah Gannett, who was a member of Captain Willis Company during the Revolutionary War, enlisted under the name of Robert Shertliffe.

Mossell viewed the accomplishments of these women as an important component of the intellectual history of the race, a history she deemed “always of value in determining the past and future” of the race. The past, in Mossell’s construction, provided useful hints for racial possibility. The writers of race literature were the true historians of the race. Mossell divided the history of African Americans into three epochs: the slave trade and early arrival in the Americas, the period of slavery, and the era of freedom. She also harbored many of the ambivalent feelings toward Africa common among African Americans of her period regarding Africa’s legacy to African Americans. Mossell believed the accomplishments of African Americans...

Americans were extraordinary given the fact that the African “condition of life and climate were not conducive to intellectual development.”

Enlightenment, a theme explored in Chapter 1 of this study, could only be accomplished by native Africans who had “drifted to the shores of Europe and there in that purer light of freedom published the outpourings of their burdened spirits.” Despite the obstacles to literacy and education, Mossell opined: “Here and there faint searchings after knowledge appeared among them.” From the native African who produced the earliest race literature—Phyllis Wheatley and Gustavus Vassa—to the emancipation period, in which the race produced a wide variety of literature in a number of genres, African Americans demonstrated their cultural resiliency and their intellectual abilities. The Emancipation period, moreso than the previous two epochs, facilitated the fullest flowering of African-American letters.

In order to understand what the race was doing, Mossell argued, it was necessary to examine the literary and historical production of the race. “Yes, this race is making history, making literature,” wrote Mossell. “He who would know the Afro-American of this present day must read the books written by this people to know what message they bear to the race and to the nation.” With this in mind, she included an extensive list of black literature including historical works by David Walker, Robert Benjamin Lewis, Martin Delany, William Wells Brown, William Still, and William Simmons.

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100 See N.F. Mossell, The Work of the Afro-American Woman, 48-49
101 Ibid., 54
102 Ibid., 60.
Calls for more accurate presentations of African-American life were an integral part of historical representations by women. Pauline Hopkins (1859-1860), writer and co-editor of the Colored American Magazine, skillfully combined her literary and historical interests in constructing a powerful commentary on racial relations. Known for her fictional work--Hagar’s Daughters, A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice; Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest; and Of One Blood or the Hidden Self--Harper also produced a significant corpus of nonfictional work. One of her most important works in this genre was “Famous Negro Men” and “Famous Negro Women,” a series in the Colored American Magazine in 1901 and 1902. Although the stated objective of the series was to acquaint members of the race with history and biography, many intellectuals have argued that her real intention was to present a new history. This history would draw upon the antebellum and postbellum context of racial agitation to discuss the potential of the race in the present and future. As Hazel Carby has shown, at the center of Hopkins’s historical writing were attempts to revive the activity of New England anti-slavery societies, a deep belief in the efficacy and importance of New England radicalism, and the belief that African Americans not Euro-Americans were the guardians of New England’s abolitionist legacy. 103

Hopkins' intellectual affiliations were encapsulated in what rhetorician C.K. Doreski termed "inherited rhetoric and authentic history." Doreski argues that Hopkins worked to reconstruct the New England regional tradition of biography as a spiritual or ideological rendering of extraordinary lives. But in fact she made exemplary lives of the past (representative men and women) part of the "present-tense" in order to dramatize narratives of "imperiled citizenship." The framing of Hopkins' sketches was also instructive. As Doreski points out, Hopkins framed her male subjects as great individual men whose deeds are representative of the greater possibilities of the race. However, the women are framed differently, in clusters and groups. The group portraits, I suggest, provided an alternative to the patriarchal exclusion or limited discussions of women's roles in communal life. Presenting female sketches in clusters or groups highlighted their collective contributions to the black community.104

"Famous Negro Men" consisted of portraits of well-known men such as Toussaint L' Ouverture, Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown. Hopkins also included biographical sketches of Booker T. Washington, Robert Browne Elliott, Lewis Hayden, William Carney, and Blanche K. Bruce. Doreski argues that


L'Ouverture, Douglass, and Washington provided the larger cultural matrix of Hopkins, study as opposed to the lesser figures. However, Hopkins' portraits of these three individuals, with the exception of Washington, appeared in collective biographies dating to William Well Brown's *The Black Man*. This fact supports Hazel Carby's contention regarding the antebellum and early postbellum foundation of Hopkins' new history. Booker T. Washington, however, was primarily a postbellum figure whose impact on the direction of the African-American community was clearly in its nascent stages, given the fact that his projection into national fame began only after his famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech in 1895, less than six years before Hopkins sketch was published. Consequently, William Wells Brown would be a more appropriate inclusion in Dorieski's "cultural matrix" than Booker T. Washington.105

Booker T. Washington does not clearly serve as part of the cultural matrix which Hopkins constructed for other significant reasons as well. Ambivalence rather than certainty characterized her sketch of him from the outset. In the sketch's first paragraph, Hopkins pointed out: "The subject of this sketch is probably the most talked of Afro-American in the civilized world today, and the influence of his words and acts on the future history of the Negro race will be carefully scrutinized by future generations." Additionally, Washington's accomplishments were presented in a linear fashion primarily focusing on his advocacy of industrial education. Hopkins also seemed uncertain regarding Washington's place in the annals of race history: "When the happenings of the twentieth century have become matters of history. Dr. Washington's motives will be open to as many constructions and discussions as those

105 Ibid., 75-76.
of Napoleon today, or of any other men of extraordinary ability, whether for good or evil, have extraordinary careers.”

It is reasonable to conclude that Hopkins’ sketch is an attempt to deflate Washington’s importance within the black community. By comparing him to Napoleon, the bête noire of the African-American antislavery community for his role in attempting to reinstate slavery in Haiti, she clearly viewed Washington as a problematic figure. Like Washington, Napoleon came to power in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Napoleon, unlike Washington, pursued a reckless course of territorial acquisition, eventually crowned himself emperor, and was defeated at Waterloo in 1813 and forced into exile. From Hopkins vantagepoint, Washington’s success was not guaranteed. Although he had garnered accolades from white industrialists and segments of the black community, his final legacy, unlike the other historical figures, had not been determined. The final gesture towards distancing Washington rather than including him in the pantheon of great men was the placement of his sketch. The biographical sketches of L’Ouverture, Douglass, and Brown appeared at the beginning of the series, between November 1900 and January 1901. The Washington sketch did not appear until October 1901.

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Ambivalence was not evident in Hopkins sketches of L’Ouverture, Douglass and Brown. Their sketches were central in demonstrating African-American capacity for “intelligence, integrity, the capability of receiving culture and becoming useful members of society.” The deeds of L’Ouverture in Haiti answered the race’s ability to assume their civic duties. Frederick Douglass, the representative man of the 19th century, was celebrated for his exceptional qualities. From his providential birth to the inauguration of The North Star (1848), before which Hopkins suggested “the race had no literature,” Douglas’s life stood as an example of the future possibilities of the race. Concerning William Wells Brown, she felt that no eulogy of his life was necessary. This comment is highly suggestive. By offering no eulogy, there would be no closure to Brown’s life, and his deeds would live on in perpetuity. Hopkins concluded her sketches of these men by reminding the race to use them as examples for racial advancement: “It is well for us of this generation, removed thirty-seven years from the maelstrom of slavery in which such men [L’Ouverture, Douglass, and Brown] struggled, it is well for us to ponder the history of these self-made men of our race and mark the progress they have made with nothing but the husks of living to stimulate the soul thirsting for the springs of knowledge.”108

Hopkins also included sketches of African Americans who made tangible contributions to racial advancement in the public sphere during the antebellum period. Lewis Hayden, Edwin Garrison Walker and Charles Lennox Redmond were hailed as important antebellum black leaders. Lewis Hayden, an antebellum legislator in Boston, was portrayed as an active participant in several slave rescues, and as a financial supporter of John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry. Edwin Garrison Walker,

son of David Walker and a lawyer, was depicted as too young to take an active role in antislavery agitation. Walker, however, grew up in an atmosphere where members of his race took an active role in their liberation. Charles Lenox Remond, an antislavery lecturer, despite never being formally recognized as an outstanding antislavery speaker in the United States, took his antislavery message abroad and won acclaim.\textsuperscript{109}

Black political figures such as John Mercer Langston, Blanche K. Bruce and Robert Browne Elliott represented the role African Americans played in shaping postbellum American history. Hopkins presented these individuals as politically asute actors in making contemporary race history. Elliott, who served in numerous elected positions in the state of South Carolina during Reconstruction and represented the state in the United States Congress in the post-Reconstruction period, subverted the racist portrait of black Reconstruction officials as notoriously corrupt. In fact, Hopkins pointed out, at the high point of redemptionist activities in South Carolina during the mid and late 1870’s, Elliott, who served as attorney-general of the state, successfully resisted attempts to impeach Republican officials for corruption.\textsuperscript{110}

In a swipe at Booker T. Washington’s focus on industrial civilizationism to the exclusion of political involvement, Hopkins praised Elliott’s political ability and suggested he was an example of the heights African Americans could attain “if the desire for his industrial development does not blind his eyes to other advantages in


life.” John Mercer Langston, the first black lawyer in Ohio, and Blanche K. Bruce, U.S. Senator from Mississippi, were portrayed as men who used their political positions to enhance the position of the race. Langston served as Dean of Howard University’s fledgling Law School from 1868-1876 during which time an African American woman, Charlotte B. Ray, graduated with a law degree in 1872. Langston later served as minister to Haiti and as president of the Virginia Normal Institute for two years. Bruce also contributed a great deal to his native Mississippi. He served as a teacher, a member of the Mississippi legislature, a sheriff in Bolivar County, and finally he served as a U.S. Senator.111

Concomitant to the idea of African Americans taking a leading role in their own regeneration was demonstrating the manly qualities necessary to accomplish this task. Hopkins’ used her sketch of Sergeant William H. Carney, a member of the legendary 54th Massachusetts Infantry. For Hopkins, the Civil War represented an epic struggle between good and evil, freedom and slavery, union and disunion. Black participation in the war, the result of a great deal of intense lobbying on the part abolitionists and the eventual manpower needs of the Union, was presented as ordained by God. Before African Americans joined the war effort, Hopkins opined, sorrow “sat enthroned in every household at the North. Despair stalked abroad.” Even the Government was “trembling on the edge of abyss, order fled, terror reigned.”112


Given the trauma of the war’s uncertainty, African Americans entered the fray and restored Northern confidence, especially the noble sacrifices of William Carney. Carney’s heroic act, during the Battle of Fort Wagner holding the Union flag aloft after the color-sergeant was mortally wounded and receiving four wounds in the process, redeemed the honor of the race and New England. Hopkins celebration of Carney’s heroism was no different from the praise of African-American participation in the war which appeared in George Washington Williams’ *History of the Negro Troops in the Rebellion* published in 1887 and Joseph Wilson’s *Black Phalanx*, published in 1890. Both works praised the heroic and manly qualities of African Americans which outfitted them to make tangible contributions to the war effort. But Hopkins’ appropriation of manliness also had tangible meanings for the race. Manliness was deemed an essential quality in shaping the race’s destiny.\footnote{See Joseph Wilson, *Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, the War of 1812, & the Civil War* (Hartford, CT: 1887); George Washington Williams, *The History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (New York, 1888). Also see George Mike Arnold, “Colored Soldiers in the Union Army,” *AME Church Review* 3(October 1886): 257-266.} 

Hopkins’ sketches also used two notable antebellum figures, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, to anchor her discussion of the distinguished African-American women. Hopkins’ commitment to “present tense” history was exemplified by her discussion of these two antebellum figures. Both women represented the past condition of the race and by extension, the former condition of black women. Their importance, then, stemmed from their connection to the past and the example they provided for present and future race leaders. Their heroism, public persona, and ascetic lifestyles meshed well with the civilizationist discourse of the post-Reconstruction period. Hopkins believed it was important that the race “not forget the rock from which they were hewn nor the pit from which they were digged.”
These women represented both the rock--fortitude, strength and courage--and the pit--slavery degradation, and bondage--which characterized the past history of the race.\textsuperscript{114}

The representative qualities of Sojourner Truth's and Harriet Tubman's struggle against the peculiar institution paved a path for the progressive women of the race. As writers, educators, artists and activists, black women were making tangible contributions to the uplift of the race. Hopkins featured Frances Harper, author of \textit{Lola Leroy}, as a literary worker. In addition to recounting her early work on behalf of antislavery causes in the antebellum period, Hopkins also discussed her extensive lecturing tour throughout the South in the early postbellum period. She also featured Mary Church Terrell, educator and lecturer, and Mary Shadd, educator, and publisher, in this category.\textsuperscript{115}

Hopkins, however, devoted the largest portion of her sketches to black women educators. Revisiting the tortured history of slavery, especially the barriers it erected to education, was an integral part of Hopkins discussion. Slavery, in Hopkins opinion, was a blight on the mind. It prevented African Americans from assuming their rightful place among humanity. Despite these obstacles, Hopkins presented a history of interracial cooperation in scaling the barriers against education. Hopkins cited the work of Prudence Crandall, a white member of the Society of Friends (Quakers), who opened her Connecticut school to all girls regardless of color, and suffered as a result.


She was arrested and tried for admitting African-American students. Myrtilla Miner, a teacher in the District of Columbia, successfully taught black children and eventually raised enough money to open the Normal School for Colored Female Teachers. Fanny J. Coppin, principal of the Philadelphia Institute of Colored Youth, was also praised for her steadfast devotion to the work of educational advancement in Philadelphia. Hopkins also devoted an entire sketch to the Howard family of Washington, which included Joan Imogen Howard, the first black graduate of the Girl’s High and Normal School and later a graduate of New York University.\textsuperscript{116}

One of Hopkins’ most interesting group sketches was of black club women, which traced the origins of the club movement from the formation of the Women’s Era Club in Boston in 1873 through the founding of the National Association of Colored Women in 1895. Rather than presenting a celebratory history, Hopkins devoted the entire sketch to the struggle of black women’s clubs for legitimacy. She focused on the conflict over the race question at the Sixth Biennial of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in Los Angeles in 1902. Again, the controversy, as it had at the organization’s meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1900, focused on admission of the Women’s Era Club, a black women’s club founded by Josephine Pierre Ruffin, to the general federation. Rebuffed in Milwaukee, Ruffin was determined to carry the fight on to Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{117}


While the exclusion of black women seemed the consensus in Milwaukee, this was clearly not the case in Los Angeles. Kate Lyon Brown, a delegate from Waltham, Massachusetts, spoke in favor of admitting black women to the federation. Brown not only blamed the general federation for a dereliction of duty on this issue as well as capitulating to the Southern federation, but she also castigated the Massachusetts delegation for their initial role in rebuffing the black women. Although this was not the final battle in the protracted war between white and black women's clubs, Hopkins viewed Brown's protest as representative of the spirit of equality that permeated New England. 118

The writing of African American history in the post-Reconstruction period laid the groundwork for professionalization of the discipline. Rather than a conglomeration of lay historians and amateurs devoted only to contributionist and celebratory history, we find instead a wide variety of historical representations—the emancipation narrative, race textbook, and collective biography. Many of these individuals such as Daniel Barclay Williams, John Cromwell, Lelia Amos Pendleton, William Henry Crogman, and Anna Julia Cooper were connected either to the nascent black academy, primary and secondary schools or the fledging Negro history movement. Many of these writers were also associated with a plethora of historical and literary societies including the Bethel Literary and Historical Association and the American Negro Academy to name a few. The works produced by these individuals served as the first models for more specialized historical production by better trained historians in the early twentieth century. However, the historical productions of the preprofessional

118 See Hopkins, "Famous Women of the Negro Race: Club Life Among Colored Women," 176
historians continued to coexist with the more professionalized production until the early 1920’s.

The historical production of black intellectuals was less objective than subsequent studies, but in more cases than not, these individuals linked the production of race literature to racial vindication. This does not mean, however, that the partisan or subjective tone of this work should automatically relegate it to an inferior or substandard status when juxtaposed with subsequent work. Moreover, many of these writers consciously used their historical work to address concerns of importance to the black community such as the quest for progress and civilization, and appropriation of the New South philosophy. Historical production, then, for many of the individuals under discussion was not simply a matter of producing an objective and disinterested study, but an active affirmation of the success and failures of the race coupled with an attempt to change the present and impact the future of the race.
Chapter 6: “To Smite the Rock of Knowledge:” The Black Academy and the Professionalization of History

Bears my congratulations to the brother race that has now been led out of Egypt and now finds the rock of knowledge smitten for them. It shall flow in full abundance for every thirsty soul.

--Henry Warren to President Thirkeld (Gammon Theological Seminary)\(^1\)

The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries witnessed the culmination of processes of professionalization in motion since the completion of the Civil War in 1865. In the historical profession, like other academic and professional disciplines, this period witnessed a gradual transfer of power within the profession from avocational and lay historians to professional historians. While chapter five focused on the production of various types of historical texts, this chapter focuses on changes in with the larger historical profession and their impact on the professionalization of history within the black academy. Although black historians remained a fairly small and loosely connected set of avocational and amateur historians in the first portion of the period under examination they had, by 1915, the year of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History’s formation, become a much more well-defined group. This chapter seeks to discuss this

\(^{1}\) See Henry W. Warren to President Thirkeld, 10 December 1888, Correspondence, Thirkeld Papers, Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta University Archives, Robert Woodruff Library. Reel 1.
process by examining the nature of historical professionalization within the nascent black academy.

At the center of charting the trajectory of professionalism is the need to understand the respective visions of avocational and professional historians in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. As John Higham has shown, avocational and professional historians viewed historical enterprise in different ways. Avocational historians stressed independence; they believed that historical work should be judged on its individual merits, they possessed no collective identity, they worked for personal satisfaction; and, they had little or no appreciation of technique. On the other hand, professional historians stressed the coordination of individual efforts; they emphasized interdependence among historians they promoted authority; and, in short, they sought to consolidate their professional efforts around established historical societies and the university.²

The formation of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1884 led to the construction of a tenuous alliance between avocational and professional historians. Initially, the composition of the organization included more amateur historians than professional historians. This composition eventually led to unresolved differences. Henry Baxter Adams, the AHA’s first secretary, was a patrician historian. Ambivalent about the professional role of the organization, Adams devoted much of his time to shoring up the weak alliance between amateur and professional historians. He hoped that the national organization would decrease tensions between these groups and secure the patronage of the federal government. By the mid-1890’s, it became increasingly clear that the avocational vision of the profession, which included government patronage, was

² Information on the qualities of early historians can be found in John Higham, History: Professional Scholarship in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 6-11.
incompatible with the professional vision of history, which was less dependent on the 
public sphere than on the emergent disciplinary structures located within the university. 3

By 1895, less than eleven years after the AHA’s formation, tensions between the 
lay and professional historians had reached such a pitch that professional historians such as 
George Burton Adams of Yale University, William A. Dunning of Columbia University, 
and Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard University, took decisive action to set the new 
organization on a course towards professionalization. They inaugurated the American 
Historical Review, a scholarly journal devoted to the study of history. James Franklin 
Jameson, a professor of history at Brown University and later Director of the Carnegie 
Institute in Washington, D.C., was named managing editor. With professional historians 
in the driver’s seat, the field began to move aggressively toward professionalization. By 
the turn of the century, the published work was no longer dominated by lay historians. 
With the rise of viable graduate history programs, the number of American students who 
made the annual pilgrimage to German graduate schools to study history also began to 
decline. Moreover, professionalization culminated in two seminal events in 1907. The first 
event was the formation of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (precursor of the 
Organization of American Historians) which was, according to John Higham, a product of 
history’s popularity among regional constituencies, and the installation of Jameson as first 
president of the AHA. Jameson, unlike many of his predecessors, was not a German 
trained scholar, but rather received his training at Johns Hopkins University, graduating in 
1882. 4

3 See Higham, History: Professional Scholarship in America, 15. For additional 
information on the work of Henry Baxter Adams, see Henry Adams, The Education of 
Henry Adams and W. Stull Holt, ed., Historical Scholarship in the United States, 
1876-1901: As Revealed in the Correspondence of Henry Adams (Westport, CT: 
Greenwood Press, 1938),
4 Ibid., 16. Information on the founding of the American Historical Association can 
359
The twentieth century furthered the process of specialization among American historians. This trend took the form of a wider range of course offerings in American rather than European history, and it clearly defined the parameters of historical inquiry. To address the latter concern, historians promoted the concept of scientism, the application of the exacting standards of the natural sciences to historical work. Two schools of thought developed on the increasing importance of scientism or objectivity in history. One school argued that history, like any other science, contained certain generalizations or laws akin to those in the natural or biological sciences. A more extreme component of this belief was that history, if it was truly to be considered scientific, must be, first and foremost, a search for truth.  

By 1915, the process of professionalization was a reality within the larger historical profession. Although the total membership of the AHA remained below 4000, history was a thriving discipline. Much of the process of professionalization was aided by changes in cataloguing, book acquisition, and lending policies at the Library of Congress, which provided an increasingly important site for research and writing in the nation’s


capitol. Moreover, many leading universities in the northeast and midwest significantly augmented their research libraries allowing an increase in scholarly production by historians on faculty. The augmentation of research libraries led to two related developments, the growth of university presses, beginning with the founding of Yale University Press in 1908, created as an additional appendage for the academic university designed to enhance its overall and scholarly reputation, and the proliferation of specialized journals in subspecialties of American history.6

In the black academy, the course of professionalization was somewhat different. This process took place within colleges, universities, and seminaries such as Howard and Atlanta universities, Hampton and Tuskegee institutes, Morris Brown and Clark colleges and Gammon Theological seminary. Unlike their white counterparts, these institutions were, by and large, controlled by white clerics and former missionaries. Few, with the exception of Howard, Atlanta, and to some extent Tuskegee, had adequate resources for the systematic study and promotion of African American history. The faculties of these colleges were dominated by clerical ministry and in some instances, classically trained elites who were slow to incorporate the social sciences into the curriculum. Compounding these problems was the small number of trained African Americans with the Ph.D. Between 1875 and 1914, only fourteen African Americans received doctoral degrees in the social sciences. Only three African Americans, W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and Richard Wright Jr. possessed doctoral training in history prior to 1915. Rather than newly minted Ph.D’s from German universities, history teachers in the black academy, especially at Hampton and Tuskegee, tended to be white schoolteachers from New England until the turn of the century. In classically oriented institutions, white ministers and black graduates of prestigious Northern institutions with Master’s degrees filled these

6 See Higham, History: Professional Scholarship in America, 28-31, 33-34
positions. As a result of this situation, it is highly likely that, African-American scholars were able to organize a professional association before 1915. 7

In 1915, Carter G. Woodson, the second African-American to graduate from Harvard with a doctoral degree in history, founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH). Specialization and the formation of academic presses would also occur after 1916, with the establishment of Associated Publishers and the establishment of the *Journal of Negro History*. Bereft of and sometimes excluded from (through noninvitation rather than formal prohibition) the organizational structures of their white counterparts, black scholars operated in conjunction with the plethora of antiquarian and contributionist literary and historical societies discussed in the previous chapter. Individually, however, and within various institutional spaces, black historians began to publish works, offer courses, and develop repository collections which demonstrated the importance of history within the black academic community. 8

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8 For a characterization of the early black historical academy, see Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 1-8 and Goggin, “Carter G. Woodson and the Movement to Promote Black History,” 61-84. Also see Charles Wesley, “Racial Historical Societies and the American Heritage,” *Journal of Negro History* 37 (January 1952): 11-35. For an assessment of the treatment of black scholars in the nascent
This chapter seeks to investigate the process of historical professionalization in the black academy during the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century. As was the case with Euro-American institutions, black schools witnessed a shift from avocational practitioners of history of the 1870's and 1880's to more professionally trained historians by the turn of the century. The visibility and scholarly production of individuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Benjamin Brawley, and Richard R. Wright, were a continuation and extension of the avocational work of earlier black intellectuals discussed in the previous chapter. Despite awareness of the importance of scientism and objectivity, black scholars and schools continued to emphasize the contributionist and missionary aspects of black history. To make sense of the meanings of professionalization among

African-American scholars and within the black community, I have examined its meanings within the black academy through an analysis of course catalogs, presidential papers, and historical interest at both classically oriented schools such as Howard and Atlanta universities, missionary and clerical training grounds such as Clark and Morris Brown and Gammon Theological Seminary, and industrial & normal schools such as Hampton and Tuskegee. These schools are representative in several ways. Located in urban communities such as Washington D.C. and Atlanta, Georgia and in rural communities such as Tuskegee, Alabama and Hampton, Virginia, these schools epitomized the contested trajectory of African-American education during the period and, therefore, they served as the models for most schools of their type. Thus, examining the role of history within these institutions sheds light on its importance to the development of the discipline in the black academy.

Black historians, both well known and obscure, were instrumental in promoting and advocating the study of history. These individuals, in some cases more so than their institutions, contributed to the professionalization of African-American history. Moreover, this discussion of professionalization in classically oriented colleges and industrial schools ascribes to the patterns in majority institutions, since many of these institutions were patterned on comparable New England schools and the majority of the faculty were trained in these schools. There are, however, discernible differences between professionalization in the two types of schools under consideration here. Ironically, as James Anderson has shown in regards to their missions, and as this chapter will show, both Hampton and Tuskegee had significant avocational historical traditions. The classical colleges did not institute historical courses until the late 1890’s and through the early twentieth century.

**History and the Classical Colleges**
Classically oriented colleges, school which adhered to the classical liberal model of education focusing on the history and literature of classical antiquity, mathematics, and the sciences, played an important role in the promotion of African-American history. Of the schools mentioned above, Howard University had one of the earliest historical traditions in the black academy. Founded in 1867 and named for the first commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau, General Oliver Otis Howard, Howard University, because of its ideal location in the nation’s capital, immediately attracted a highly qualified and diverse African-American and Euro-American faculty. Howard’s initial faculty was small, however, and the school remained wedded to the classical curriculum until the 1890’s. Classes were small and the university faculty consisted of both ministers and lay academics.⁹

In the late-nineteenth century, few institutions, white or African American, had departments of history. Among African-Americans for example, Virginia Union suggests much about the situation at leading liberal arts schools. Founded in 1865 as Wayland Seminary, Virginia Union offered only four history courses between 1906 and 1915. Those courses included Constitutional History of the United States, Modern Europe, Modern Era (1453-1900) and Biblical History. Faculty for these courses usually taught in related areas Three of Union’s faculty members, Albert B. Steer (1906-1910), James L. Caldwell (1910-1915) and Carlos M. Rice (1913-1914), taught both Modern history and Physical Science. John W. Barco (1914-1915) taught Latin and History. Like

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many liberal arts schools, Virginia Union also sponsored a yearly lecture series. During the 1905-06 school year, the sociologist historian W.E.B. Du Bois gave a lecture.\textsuperscript{10}

The structure of the history curriculum at Virginia Union differed little from other colleges and universities of its type. In the late-nineteenth century, history had not emerged from the thicket of other classical disciplines. Rather historical study was often lumped together with rhetoric, literature, elocution, and English; Howard University was no exception. Strongly grounded in classical education, the influence of this form of education began to wane in the 1890’s. As classicism gave way to the scientism and objectivity of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, departments assumed an identity of their own rather than being subsumed under multiple headings.\textsuperscript{11}

The history curriculum at Howard University, in ways similar to its counterparts, was developed through the foresight and vision of its faculty combined with the modernizing tendencies of several of the institution’s presidents. It was, in short, an interracial effort. Although Howard’s early historians demonstrated the more pedestrian aims of the early classical department, by 1905, a new crop of historians trained in the social sciences emerged and redirected the focus of the department. According to historian Michael Winston, one of the earliest teachers of history at Howard was the Reverend Charles H.A. Bulkey. Bulkey, a white Presbyterian minister, was pastor of the Fifteenth

\textsuperscript{10} See *Annual Catalogue of Virginia Union University Combining Wayland Seminary and Richmond Theological Seminary* (Richmond: Virginia Union University Electric Print, 1905), 21-30-31. Also see “History Teachers Virginia Union University, 1906-1915,” and “History Courses Virginia Union University, 1906-1915,” compiled by Dr. Vonita Foster, Library Director, Virginia Union University to Stephen G. Hall, 29 August 1996, in possession of author.

Street Presbyterian Church, an early member of the AHA, and served as professor of English Literature, History, Rhetoric and Logic beginning in 1882. Bulkey also served as the university’s librarian during this period. In 1889, his title was changed to Professor of English Literature, History, Rhetoric and Logic and Elocution. Bulkey’s successor, William Victor Tunnell was also associated with the ministry. A native of the Danish West Indies, Tunnell graduated from Howard’s College Department in 1884, received an A.M. in 1890 and an L.L.B in 1911. He attended the General Theological Seminary in New York and received a S.T.B (Bachelor of Sacred Theology) degree in 1888. Appointed to Howard’s faculty in 1891, from 1891-1892, he served as Professor of History & Literature, Logic, Rhetoric, and Elocution. From 1892 to 1906, Tunnell served as Warden of King Hall.12

During Tunnell’s absence from the College Department, Charles Chaveau Cook, who held undergraduate and graduate degrees in literature from Cornell University, filled the position of Chair of English Literature, History, Rhetoric, Logic and Elocution and began to move the department in a progressive direction. Between 1892 and his untimely death in 1910, Cook introduced the first courses devoted exclusively to history: “The History of Continental Europe from the Eighth to the Middle of the Eighteenth Century” and “English History.” During his tenure at Howard, Cook traveled abroad, studying at the universities of Heidelberg in Germany, Edinburgh in Scotland, and Oxford in England. In addition to his professional commitments, Cook also promoted history outside of the

nascent academy. He was an active member of the American Negro Academy and is best known for his occasional paper, “A Comparative Study of the Negro Problem,” (1899) an assessment of English, Japanese and American civilization designed to determine how these nations evolved from primarily agricultural societies to industrial powers. Several years later, in 1905, Cook participated in a symposium, titled, “The Negro and the Elective Franchise.” His paper was entitled, “The Penning of the Negro,” which discussed the systematic disenfranchisement of blacks in the South. Cook’s death left a void in the maturation of historical studies at Howard, and marked the end of the classical era at Howard.¹³

William Tunnell, who reassumed his duties as Professor of History, in 1906, became the leading light in Howard’s history department after Cook’s death in 1910. In addition to establishing a seminar titled, “History of the Reconstruction Period,” he also established a lecture series in 1911. The first speaker was John W. Cromwell. Cromwell’s topic was “Some Rich but Unworked Veins of Negro History.” He emphasized the achievements of African Americans in the military, in secret societies and in the black church. He also urged students to engage in collecting primary information on the Civil War and Reconstruction. In addition to organizing the lecture series, Tunnell also played an active role in the larger African-American community. He served as Vicar of St. Paul’s Mission in Anacostia and also served as a member of the Washington Board of Education. In 1913, he was selected by the Emancipation Proclamation Commission of the State of New York as “one of the ‘One Hundred Distinguished Freedmen’ during the

¹³ For biographical information on Charles Chaveau Cook, see “Death of Prof. Charles Cook,” Howard University Journal 8(September 30, 1910): 1. Also see Michael Winston, The Howard University Department of History, 1913-1973, 5-7. For a listing of courses offered under Cook, see Howard University Catalog, 1907-08, 36, 43-44.
Emancipation Proclamation Exposition of the State of New York held from October 22-31 to celebrate fifty years of African American achievement since Emancipation.\textsuperscript{14}

By 1905, scientifically trained historians began to take a more active role on Howard's faculty. Many of these changes were directly related to the rise of graduate programs at leading institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whereas Tunnell and Cook were trained in the classical curriculum, Walter Dyson and Charles Wesley were products of the increasing influence of the social sciences in higher education. Therefore, rather than training in literature, the classics, or theology, these men received advanced degrees in history. Dyson was appointed an instructor at Howard University in 1905. A graduate of Fisk University and Yale University, Dyson taught a number of courses at Howard ranging from Civics to Ancient History. In 1911, he studied history under Dana C. Munro at the University of Pennsylvania and in 1913 completed an M.A. in History at the University of Chicago. The following academic year, he pursued additional studies in economics and history at Columbia University. In 1916, he was appointed as one of three associate editors of the \textit{Journal of Negro History} (JNH).\textsuperscript{15}

Like his associate Walter Dyson, Charles Wesley was also a graduate of Fisk University. He pursued advanced study in economics and history at Yale University and received the M.A. in 1913. Recruited to Howard's faculty by Dean Lewis Moore of the Teachers College, Wesley took an appointment as an Instructor of History and Modern

\textsuperscript{14} An overview of Tunnell's tenure at Howard is provided William Tunnell Biographical File and Winston, \textit{The Howard University Department of History}, 11. For a listing and description of courses offered by Tunnell, see \textit{Howard University Catalog}, 1909-1910, 42-43, 81-82. Also see \textit{Howard University Catalogue}, 1912-1913, 52-53 and \textit{Howard University Catalogue}, 1913-1914, 38.

Languages. Wesley published widely and taught a courses in teaching pedagogy and
history. Wesley would later become an active force in the ASNLH and complete an
important study of African-American labor, titled, “Negro Labor in the United States,” as
a doctoral dissertation at Harvard University. in 1927.16

The reputation of the Howard University Department of History was not only
strengthened through the presence of strong historians, but was also aided by the
administrative foresight of the university’s officers, Jesse Moorland, an alumnus and
trustee, and Kelly Miller, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. By 1915, the
university, like the Library of Congress, made Howard a key repository for materials
related to the study of African-American history. Howard had not only acquired the
papers of a famous anti-slavery advocate Lewis Tappan, the “Catchart Clippings,”
materials related to black participation in the Civil War and Reconstruction, but had
secured the collection of Jesse E. Moorland, International Secretary of the Young Men’s
Christian Association and a Trustee and Alumnus of Howard University. Moorland
contributed numerous manuscripts and other rare materials to Howard University related
to African Americans. The university also pledged to establish a chair of sociology who
was responsible for “research in the field of Negro development, as well as to practical
remedial indeaver(sic).”17

16 For biographical information on Charles Wesley, see “Charles Wesley Biographical
File, Moorland Springarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. Also
see Winston, The Howard University Department of History, 25-27. Doctoral
dissertations on Charles Wesley’s life include Janette Hotson Harris, Charles H. Wesley,
Educator and Historian, 1891-1947 (Ph D. diss., Howard University, 1975) and Lathardus
Goggin, “The Evolution of Central State College under Charles H. Wesley from
assessment of Wesley’s work is James L. Conyers Jr., ed., Charles H. Wesley: The
17 For information on Jesse Moorland’s contribution of African and African
American historical materials to Howard University, see Jesse E. Moorland to Carter G.
Howard University was not the only school that developed a comprehensive set of courses in history and a research center for African American history. Next to Howard University, Atlanta University was one of the most comprehensive universities within the black academy. Founded in 1869, Atlanta University, from its inception, was a proponent of classical liberal education. The university’s first three presidents Edmund Asa Ware (1869-1885), Horace Bumstead (1888-1907), and Edmund Trichell Ware (1907-1919) laid the groundwork for Atlanta’s prominent classical curriculum. Under Ware, the university was divided into several divisions offering courses from K-12, the normal, college, and theological schools. New buildings were added, and the university expanded. Bumstead, a tireless promoter of the school, traveled throughout the north to raise money to augment the school’s academic facilities. High on Bumstead’s agenda was the establishment of a cooperative professional school.18

Bumstead’s interest in social problems and history was an extension of his belief in liberal education. This interest was demonstrated with the appointment of John D. Hincks as Professor of History and Social Science. Hincks’ administrative duties left him little time to promote historical studies. In 1897, Bumstead, who inaugurated the Atlanta University Conferences, hired W. E. B. Du Bois as Professor of Economics and History.


Du Bois (1868-1963) was the first African American to receive a doctoral degree in history from Harvard University in 1896. His dissertation, the "Suppression of the African Slave Trade," became the first volume in the Harvard Historical Series. After a brief stint as a professor at Wilberforce University, a private liberal arts college in Ohio controlled by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, he embarked on the first sociological investigation of African Americans. He spent more than a year collecting data on the sociological condition of African Americans in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward. The resulting study, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) established Du Bois as one of the foremost investigators of the African-American experience, becoming the direction of the Atlanta University conferences.  

The Atlanta Conferences were not the first conferences of this type. (I consider these conferences historical because at Atlanta, sociology and history were viewed as part and parcel of the same discipline. Economics were also included in this formulation. In fact, the two departments were housed together during much of Du Bois's tenure at the university). Prior to and after Booker T. Washington's ascendancy to national fame in 1895, Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes inaugurated conferences geared, at Hampton primarily, to race leaders and philanthropic board leaders, and to farmers in Black Belt

at Tuskegee. Atlanta University, however, offered the first scientific discussions of the African-American predicament in various phases and walks of life. The Atlanta Conferences covered a wide range of issues from African-American mortality to economic cooperation among African Americans in Georgia.  

The Atlanta University Conferences and the intellectual enterprises of classically oriented colleges and universities benefited greatly from the reconstruction of the meanings of race in the early twentieth century. Despite the hegemony of sociologists and anthropologists as the arbiters of racial science, the work of cultural anthropologist Franz Boas, a cultural anthropologist began to influence the construction of race by 1911. Prior to this time, sociologists and anthropologists such as Franklin H. Giddings, Professor of Sociology at Columbia University, Lester F. Ward, Chief Paleontologist in the United States Geological Survey; William Sumner, Professor of Political and Social Science at Yale University; Edward Ross, Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin; Alibion W. Small, President of Colby University, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, one of the first female sociologists, believed that generalizations about human capacity were qualified by race. Anthropologists such as Daniel Garrison Brinton, President of the American Association of Science, forwarded an ethnocentric construction of race capacity.  

But Franz Boas, a native of Minden, Westphalia attacked the comparative method in anthropology which established the European type as normative and compared other

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20 For information on the Hampton and Tuskegee Conferences, see David Lewis. W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 218.


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races to it. Boas rejected the evolutionist framework and favored a cultural one. He believed that cultural determinants played a paramount role in racial development and that the evolutionists method of comparing Europeans with other races without examining the differences in development was biased. In 1899, Boas was appointed as Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. From this position he attacked the central theories of racial determinists, the intellectual and psychological inferiority of black, and the congenital inferiority of Africans. By 1911, the Boiasan critique in sociology was infused into the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The adoption of naturalism and an empirical worldview also aided in a slight move away from determinist and essentalist constrictions of race. Robert Park, later a leading sociologist and ghostwriter for Booker T. Washington, would play a prominent role in training a number of prominent black sociologists such as E. Franklin Frazier, Charles S. Johnson, Oliver C. Cox, and Betram Doyle. Park also explicitly linked segregationist policies to sociological and not biological antecedents, and he also moved away from essentalist constrictions of race by suggesting that blacks displayed cultural heterogeneity.

Some of these ideas were incorporated into the Atlanta University conferences and into the institution's well-developed program of sociological and historical courses. These courses were instituted between the 1898-1899 and the 1902-03 school year. The purpose of the courses was described in the following matter:

It is intended to develop this department not only for the sake of the mental discipline but also in order to familiarize our students with the history of nations and with the great economic and social problems of the world. It is hoped that thus they may be able to apply broad and

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careful knowledge to the solving of the many intricate social questions affecting their own people. The department aims therefore at training in good intelligent citizenship; at a thorough comprehension of the chief problems of wealth, work and wages; and a fair knowledge of the objects and methods of social reform.\textsuperscript{23}

Between 1897 and 1915, the Sociology and History Department offered a number of courses on various aspects of the black experience, updating and augmenting its course offerings along the way. In the late 1890’s, courses offered in the department included “Citizenship, Wealth, Work and Wages, and Social Reform.” In conjunction with the Atlanta University Conferences, the department also offered graduate-level study on African American problems in the South. During the 1902-03 school year, a sociological laboratory class was added. This course was designed specifically for seniors in the department. The course description of the laboratory noted that it “consisted of a special library of books on statistics, economics, sociology and history, with duplicate copies of standard works; and of maps, charts and collections illustrating social and historic conditions. Here the Senior class is given a course of one year which is devoted to the study of social conditions and methods of reform with especial reference to the American Negro.”\textsuperscript{24}

After the 1903 academic year, changes occurred in the sociology and history departments. In 1903-04, the department added a course in economics encompassing economic theory and history. In 1904-05, a course was offered in the pedagogy department stressing “analytical methods and discussions of methods of teachings.” In

\textsuperscript{23} For a description of the department’s mission, see Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1898-99 (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1899), 13.

\textsuperscript{24} Changes instituted in the Sociology and History Department are described in Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1898-99, 13 and Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1899-1900, 14. Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1902-03, 14-15.
1905-06, a course on the history of Africa was added to the list of history courses offered. By 1909-10, the department instituted a clearly defined set of courses geared specifically to augmenting knowledge of African-American contributions to history. At the high school, or college preparatory level, a 1/2 year course was instituted on the history of the Negro in America. College courses included a Junior level course on the history of Africa, an economics course on the economic history of African Americans, and a sociology course on the social conditions of African Americans. All of these courses were an important part of the effort by some black schools to serve as sites for the intensive study of the African-American condition.\footnote{Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1903-04, 12-13; Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1904-05, 15; Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1905-06, 14.}

During the administration of Edward Twichell Ware (1907-1919), Atlanta University significantly augmented its library collections. Many proponents of classical liberal education believed in raising money for superior library facilities. The library served as the foundation of a classical education and strengthened the ability of the university to offer quality instruction to its students, especially in the social sciences such as history, sociology, and economics. Initially, the library was supported through the generous donations of R.R. Graves, a New York lawyer, who was responsible for a permanent endowment of $5,000. In 1906, the library was moved from Stone Hall to a new building built by a gift of more than $25,000 from Andrew Carnegie. In 1908, the university, in association with the Marblehead Libraries, a system of traveling libraries inaugurated by James J.H. Gregory of Marblehead, Massachusetts, became actively involved in the Marblehead distribution program. This program entailed shipping traveling libraries, fifty books at a time, to prearranged locations spanning the area from Goldsboro,
North Carolina to Homer, Louisiana and from Jackson, Tennessee to Jacksonville, Florida. Atlanta University was chosen to participate in the program because of its location, Atlanta, Georgia, widely viewed as a gateway to the South, and because the city was at the center of a major railroad connector.²⁶

The Carnegie library at the university contained all of the amenities of the modern library—a fireproof stack room, large reading and reference rooms, and a large storage area in the basement which was ideal for packing and unpacking traveling libraries. G.S. Dickerman, an active promoter of the Marblehead Libraries, who was contacted by James Gregory and assisted him in launching the enterprise. Dickermann, a member of the John T. Slater Board, one of several boards established to underwrite educational projects at black schools in the South, pointed out that Atlanta University, in addition to all of the advantages previously cited, also had a competent staff and a cooperative President in Ware.²⁷

The purpose of this project was to provide libraries to schools and colleges that lacked these facilities. Each collection of books included a copy of the pamphlet, “From Servitude to Service,” describing the work of Hampton and Tuskegee institutes as well as

²⁶ Description of the Atlanta University Library and the Marblehead library operation can be found in “Library of Atlanta University,” in Edward Ware Papers, Atlanta University Archives Collection, Robert Woodruf Library, Clark-Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter Ware Papers).

²⁷ Endorsements of the Marblehead library and descriptions of its operation can be found in Miss Frances B. Clemmer, Local Secretary of Atlanta University to Friends of the University, February 1906, Ware Papers, Box 33; “Appeal for Marblehead Libraries,” Edmund Ware to Trustees of the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation for the Negro Rural Schools, (1910) in Ware Papers, Box 34; G. S Dickermann to Edmund Ware, 25 March 1909 and G. S. Dickerman to Edmund Ware, 21 December 1909, Ware Papers, Box 34. Also see G. S. Dickerman, Education in the Love of Reading: “A Friend of Books and of the People” and “Marablehead Libraries” (Hampton, VA: The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1910), 15-28, in Ware Papers, Box 34.
Atlanta University and other notable African American institutions. In addition to the
inclusion of a pamphlet describing the work of black schools, the collection also contained
public documents from various federal agencies which addressed practical issues
"agriculture, cooking, hygiene and sanitation."\textsuperscript{28}

Much of the literature contained historical themes which reinforced the
acculturating themes of Progressive-era America and the celebratory themes of narrative
history. Several books chronicled the lives of great men and women: P.C. Headley’s \textit{The
Life of Mary Queen of Scots}, J.T. Headley’s \textit{Washington and His Generals}, Thomas
Hughes’ \textit{The Life of David Livingstone}, Sarah K. Bolton’s \textit{Girls Who Became Famous},
Francis Lynee’s \textit{Empire Builders}, Thomas Arnold’s \textit{The Life of Hannibal}, and Louise
Putnam’s \textit{The Children’s Life of Abraham Lincoln}. The books in the collection ranged
from great literature such as Charles Dicken’s \textit{A Christmas Carol}, \textit{Aesop’s Fables}, John
Bunyan’s \textit{Pilgrim’s Progress}, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s \textit{Representative Men}, Jack
London’s \textit{Call of the Wild}, and Rudyard Kipling’s \textit{The Jungle Book} to historical and race
uplift texts such as Charles Chesnutt’s \textit{Frederick Douglass} and Booker T. Washington’s
\textit{The Negro in Business}.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} “Appeal for Marblehead Libraries,” Edmund Ware to Trustees of the Anna T.
Jeannes Foundation for the Negro Rural Schools, (1910) in Ware Papers, Box 34
\textsuperscript{29} The books included in the series are drawn from the shipping invoices, see Mr. JJ
Gregory to Edward Ware, 2 February 1910, Ware Papers, Box 34; Shipping Invoice,
Library #12, 7 July, 1910 in Ware Papers, Box 34; Shipping Invoice, Library #23, Ware
Papers, Box 34; and Shipping Invoice, Library #10: The Risley Public School, Brunswick,
GA, 20 May 1910, Ware Papers, Box 34. For an endorsement and assessment of the
program, see D.D. Little to Edmund Ware, 10 January 1909, Ware Papers, Box 33. While
Little was grateful for the collection, he was also critical of the fact that it contained so
few books about or written by African Americans: "I must confess to a little
disappointment, however, in that there were so few books in the collection that were
written especially for Negroes. We find that our students devour eagerly everything that
they can find that was written by a Negro or about Negro achievement." D.D. Little to
Edmund T. Ware, 23 April 1910, Ware Papers, Box 33.

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By 1915, the university could boast one of the best libraries of modern and African-American history among classically oriented black schools. As a result of the empirical work conducted as part of the Atlanta University Conferences, courses were added in sociology, economics, and history. Additionally, courses for advanced methodological training in teaching history were added in the Pedagogy department. One of the strongest indicators that history, especially black history, played an important role in the black academy was the fact that as early as 1910, and from 1915 onward, the university included among its potential entrance requirements as either mandatory or as equivalents: “United States history and the history of the Negro.”

One of Atlanta University’s neighbor schools, Morehouse College also had an historian. Morehouse’s Benjamin Brawley was an active participant in Atlanta’s intellectual life. Born in Columbia, South Carolina in 1882, Brawley graduated from Morehouse College with a B.A. degree in 1901. He received a his M.A from the University of Chicago in 1908 and an M.A. from Harvard University in 1908. In 1911, Brawley was appointed as a member of a faculty committee at Howard University to oversee the work of master’s candidates. In 1912, he returned to Morehouse College as Professor of English and Dean of the College.

Assisted by his teacher and mentor at the University of Chicago, William E. Dodd, Brawley’s Short History of the American Negro (1910) consisted of fifteen chapters.

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30 See “Form of Certificate Admitting to Atlanta University: Entrance Requirements, 1910-1915,” in Atlanta University Archives, Box 33.
which discussed the history of African Americans from the inception of slavery. Several notable features distinguished Brawley’s history and demonstrated the professional nature of his study. Brawley’s text was half the length of earlier race histories. Although the internal organization of the book leaned toward moral suasion, the text, nevertheless, presented a logical organized and factual history. The text also included footnotes and bibliography of sources.32

Another indication of the increasing professionalization of history was Brawley’s coverage of emancipation, an important component of early race progress and uplift texts. Brawley employed the standard race progress tone to promote African-American history, yet tempered it with a scholarly presentation of the facts. Brawley discussed the progress of African Americans in education and in organizations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the Baptist church which established schools for the freedman. The final chapter of the book highlighted the many accomplishments of African Americans. Brawley featured luminaries in his study poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and the writers Charles Waddell Chesnutt and W.E.B. Du Bois in his study.33

32 Most of the earlier race histories were considerably longer than Brawley’s study. See George Washington Williams, History of the Negro Race from 1619 to 1880 (1883) which consists of two volumes, but is closer in organization and style to Brawley’s history. Also see William T. Alexander’s History of the Colored Race in America (1887) which is a long work, but does not include internal documentation. For a useful discussion of Brawley’s work, see Thorpe, Negro Historians, 39-41.
33 See Benjamin Brawley, Short History of the American Negro (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1973), 147-153, 155-165, 167-176. In 1921, Brawley wrote A Social History of the American Negro. The 420 page work was widely used. William Taylor Burrell Williams, President of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools and an Assistant Librarian and Field Agent and later Instructor at Hampton Institute and Agent for the Slater Fund also believed that Brawley’s book set a new precedent in African American historical writing: “As Negroes advance in intelligence their race pride increases, and they have a growing desire to know more of their history. White people, in rapidly increasing numbers, are also studying the Negro. For both there has long been a simple, concise, and intelligible history of the Negro in this country. This
Classically oriented schools did not have a monopoly on historical scholarship. Theological schools also exerted a great influence. The most important was Gammon Theological Seminary located in Atlanta, Georgia. Gammon Seminary, associated with Clark University until 1889, was established in 1883 through a gift of $500,000 by Reverend Elijah Gammon. Conceived as a training ground for ministers and missionaries, Gammon was a leading proponent of the missionary approach to the proselyization of Africa and the promotion of African and African-American history in the United States. Its existence and its influence on the direction of African-American history demonstrated the continued importance of clerical training and attitudes within the black academy. 34

From the outset, Gammon was beset by problems similar to other institutions of its type. Inadequate housing, especially for married students, lack of proper library facilities and a lack of publicity were some of the most pressing issues. The seminary’s first dean

book by Professor Brawley, dean of Atlanta Baptist College, admirably meets this need. The author disclaims any great originality in the work. Naturally much of this material was first gathered by other hands. But what is most needed obtains clear and interesting presentation, understanding of the conditions under which the Negro has lived, surprising freedom from passion and bias, a readable style and such facts, with suggestive interpretation, as tell the essential story of the Negro in America.” See Review of Benjamin Brawley A Short History of the American Negro by W.T.B. Williams in National Negro School News (May 1911), 10 in Hampton University Archives, Hampton University, Hampton Virginia

and later president, Wilbur Thirkield, later president of Howard University, integrated the college’s curriculum with the collegiate courses at Clark University, built housing for married students, and worked for the passage an implementation of the “New England Conference Alcove.” This program facilitated the collection of books from active ministers, libraries from deceased and retired ministers, and requested each member of the Methodist Conference to donate at least two books for the library. Thirkield also embarked on an aggressive campaign to publicize and promote the school.35

Thirkield’s most important accomplishments, however, especially as they relate to the historical programs promoted by the school, included the establishment of a division of historical theology, the organization of a historical society, and, most important, the founding of the Stewart Missionary Foundation for Africa. The establishment of the department of historical theology was an important component in promoting the school’s historical program. The institution’s rapid growth necessitated the expansion of the school’s offerings. W. H. Crawford, a member of the Rock River Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was appointed as a full-time professor. Crawford, a graduate of Garrett Biblical Institute and Northwestern University, instituted the systematic study of the books of the Bible. He also suggested that the ministerial institutes be held at the Methodist Episcopal colleges.36

In 1890, Crawford became the seminary’s librarian. In 1891, like many of his colleagues in liberal arts colleges, he traveled to Europe to deepen his knowledge of modern church history. Upon returning from his trip, Crawford embarked on his most

important historical enterprise, the establishment of a Historical Society. The objectives of
the historical society were outlined in the seminary’s catalogue in 1894:

The faculty have projected the organization of an Historical
Society, the purpose of which is to build up, in connection
with the Seminary library, a complete and trustworthy his-
torical department upon the various movements that relate
to the Negro and the South. The department is already open
and promises to be one of the most unique collections upon
the subject in the whole country. The historical society proposes
to extend its conference and local branches and by individual
effort throughout the Nation. It is collecting books, pamphlets,
addresses, articles, biographical and descriptive, upon the
origin, ethnology, and history of the Negro; upon the rise, development,
and destruction of Negro slavery; upon the origin and work of the
abolition movement, and is also preserving the literary productions of
negroes. In addition to this, it proposes to collect the history of the
ecclesiastical and educational movements of the churches among
the colored people, and to compile a statistical record of the progress
of the negroes in wealth, learning, industry, inventions, mechanical art,
ecclesiology, and to preserve on file for future study, whatever shall
illustrate the history and promote the interest of the colored people.37

While little is known regarding the specifics of the Historical Society, it is clear
that Gammon’s interest in collecting historical information was an important component of
the Stewart Missionary Society. Founded in 1895 by W.H. Stewart of the Rock River
Conference, the Stewart Missionary Society was an integral part of the late-nineteenth
century effort to proselytize Africa. The principle for the project consisted of a group of
farms under cultivation in Central Illinois. Explaining his desire to endow this component
of the school, Stewart wrote that his “hope is that it [the Stewart Mission Society] may
become a center for the diffusion of missionary intelligence, the development of
missionary enthusiasm, the increase of missionary offerings and through sanctified and

37 For one of the earliest descriptions of the historical society, see Catalogue of the
Gammon Theological Seminary, 1894, 22-24.
trained missionaries hasten obedience to the great commission to 'teach the gospel to every creature.'

Stewart continued his comments by elaborating on a program to further the aims for the missionary society. He proposed a system of literary and oratorical missionary prize contests and to arrange a systematic approach to correspondence with African missions. By 1895, a series of prizes was inaugurated, an academy, a college, and a theological seminary series, which was open to the students of all schools under the auspices of the Freedman’s Aid and Southern Education Society and another series open to the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Most important, Stewart donated more than four hundred dollars for the purchase of books, including curios, stereopticon, slides and other materials focusing on the products, industries and life of Africa.

Stewart’s conceptualization of a library devoted to information on Africa served both educational and evangelical purposes. The Foundation was able to generate funds enabling President Thierkield, Gammon’s president, to travel in Europe. Thierkield conducted research at the British Museum in London and the Bodleian Library in Oxford, England. He compiled a list of 900 volumes and purchased 350 books from this list. These books provided accounts of African prehistory through the Era of Free Trade (1830-1880). It was also proposed, due to the dearth of books available in Methodist

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institutions on the history of Africa, that the Gammon library develop a duplicate set of books to loan to other institutions. ⁴⁰

By 1895, the seminary had also made considerable progress in establishing an African Museum. The seminary purchased numerous specimens of African artwork and handicrafts in wood, brass, and cloth. In addition, they procured more than 200 stereopticon slides to be used in schools and churches to illustrate the products and industries of Africa. The promoters of the Stewart Foundation felt their efforts were “only the beginning of the collection of illustrated material on Africa and its peoples, which it is hoped will be made one of the greatest of its kind in this country.”⁴¹

The Stewart Foundation’s most ambitious project was sponsoring a national conference on Africa in 1895. Designed to further promote the work of the Foundation and assemble the brightest minds in the country on Africa and the importance of missionary work, the conference was an unparalleled success. The conference came on the heels of rapid European colonization of Africa. By 1900, most of the African continent, with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, was colonized by European countries. Another important component of this missionary fervor was the belief that European culture, especially the culture of Western Europe and America, offered redemption for the “Dark Continent.” This belief was not only held by whites, but many prominent black leaders and missionaries wholeheartedly believed in the civilization mission. E.L Parks, Professor at Gammon Theological Seminary spoke for blacks and whites when he noted: “The industrial, intellectual, moral and spiritual progress of the colored people in America is a

prophecy, both of what they will become and will do for the redemption of their fatherland and also of what the native African is capable of becoming.”

The linkage of civilization for African Americans to the condition of native Africans was an important issue in the early twentieth century. Moreover, it is important to note that the missionary efforts of the Stewart Missionary Foundation were genuinely designed to offer aid and assistance to various African countries and territories. Many of these missionaries viewed the colonial project of land acquisition when juxtaposed with the slave trade as equally morally reprehensible and problematic. William P. Thirkield, President of the Congress, proclaimed in his opening remarks: “In other centuries the curse was the ‘stealing of Africans from Africa.’ Now, it is the game among European

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42 Announcements for the Congress on Africa appeared in Quarterly Bulletin: Stewart Foundation Edition: November 1895, 30-31. T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the New York Age and an invited speaker at the Congress, also agreed to place a full page editorial notice of the conference in his paper, see T. Thomas Fortune to Wilbur Thirkield, November 9, 1895, in Papers of President Thirkield in Gammon Theological Seminary Papers, Reel 1 in Robert Woodruff Library, Clark-Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter Thirkield Papers). For information on the solicitation of papers and other preparations for the conference, see Orishatukeh Faduma to Wilbur Thirkield, October 31, 1895, Thirkield Papers, Reel 1; T. Thomas Fortune to Wilbur Thirkield, October 26, 1895, Fortune to Thirkield, November 7, 1895 and Fortune to Thirkield, November 15, 1895 in Thirkield Papers, Reel 1; Alexander Crummell to Wilbur Thirkield, September 30, 1895 and Crummell to Thirkield, October 10, 1895 and Crummell to Thirkield, October 26, 1895 in Thirkield Papers, Reel 1; E.M. Cravath, President of Fisk University to Wilbur Thirkiled, October 30, 1895 and Cravath to Thirkield, December 9, 1895 in Thirkield Papers, Reel 1; W.H. Council to Wilbur Thirkield, November 11, 1895; and L.L. Denton, President of Claflin College to Wilbur Thirkield, December 2, 1895. The role of African American missionaries in Africa is discussed in a number of studies, see Sylvia Jacobs, ed., Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); Walter L. Williams, Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); David W. Willis and Richard Newman, ed., Black Apostles at Home and Abroad: Afro-Americans and the Christian Mission from Revolution to Reconstruction (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982); and J. Mutero Chirenje, Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1987);
nations of “shut your eyes and grab” in their efforts to ‘steal Africa from the Africans.’ But God is yet in the world. Not in vain has its two hundred millions stretched forth their hands to him. He causeth the wrath of man to praise Him. Even though the greed and wars of nations in their selfish partition of Africa, He shall yet “save many of the people alive.”

Ironically, “Africa and the American Negro,” the conference sponsored by the Stewart Missionary Foundation for Africa, was held in connection with the Cotton States and Industrial Exposition on December 13-15, 1895 on the campus of Gammon Theological Seminary. The importance of the conference lies in the fact that it represented an important complement to the Atlanta Exposition. Whereas the Atlanta Exposition focused on showcasing the social, political and economic advancements of the South, the “Africa and the American Negro” conference offered an way for delegates to conceptualize the connection between the plight of Africa and the condition of African Americans. Rather than the symbolic politics of caste and race and compromise of the Atlanta Exposition, the Africa conference offered a program of genuine understanding and cooperation between American missionaries and Africans based on mutual respect. These principles are demonstrated by the participation of a wide crosssection of delegates including black diplomats, white missionaries, and Africans.

The conference consisted of two parts: Part I: “Africa: The Continent: Peoples, Their Civilization and Evangelization.” Speakers included notables such Edward Wilmot Blyden, noted Africanist and Liberian Minister to the Court of St. James, Frederic Perry

Noble, Secretary of the World Congress on Africa at the Columbian Exposition; John Smith, ex-Minister to Liberia; European explorers and members of African ethnic groups such as Heli Chatelain, African traveler and philologist; Mrs M. French-Sheldon, African explorer, and Alexander Crummell, American missionary and civilizationist, who worked for more than twenty years as a missionary and teacher in Liberia.  

Although all of the commentators offered insightful comments on the relationship between African Americans and missionary work in Africa, John Smith, more so than many of the participants in this portion of the conference, representing the Republic of Liberia, called for an enlightened approach to missionary work in Africa. An African American who served for nine years as Minister to Liberia, Smith, like his contemporary Alexander Crummell, was intimately acquainted with the complexities and nuances of the relationship between Africa and the United States. He, too, like Crummell was discouraged by the constant assault by the American press on the efficacy of the Liberian experiment. Smith argued for the building of long-term institutions in Liberia and Africa, in general, which maintained the sovereignty and dignity of African people. Quoting extensively from the work of Edward Wilmot Blyden, who was the author of Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race as well as a former president of Liberia College, Smith affirmed

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the purposes of the conference by pointing out the differences between ineffective and
effective missionary work. This distinction was a crucial one. The former was informed by
the idea that Europeans should be in the forefront of converting Africans with no
appreciation for indigenous cultures and practices. Smyth demonstrated this by pointing to
the theological and moral failings in the initial Portuguese missions in the Congo: “The
ships which brought priests as outward passengers took the human product of the race
back as homeward cargo. The theory and practice of the European being in opposition,
the one to the other, the work perished. The fetish of the cross in the hands of the
Portuguese, did not deter them from knavery and theft and murder, and the Congoes [sic]
concluded that their fetishes were less harmful than the alien Portuguese.” Effective
missionary work, then, depended less on the establishment of Christian missionaries, but
rather the development of indigenous religious organizations responsible for converting
members of various African societies to Christianity. The success of these projects
required fostering an attitude of understanding and respect for African cultures among
missionaries based on an understanding of the complexities of African culture, and an
appreciation for the potential of its societies.45

Part II of the conference, “The American Negro: His Relation to the Civilization
and Redemption of Africa,” explored the relationship between African Americans and
Africa in speeches delivered by African-American notables such as H.K. Carroll, Editor of
the Independent, J.W.E. Bowen, Librarian and Professor of Historical Theology at
Gammon Theological Seminary and secretary of the conference; T. Thomas Fortune,
author, Editor of New York Age, and a member of the Afro-American Council; and

Joseph E. Roy, President of the World’s Fair Congress on Africa. The speeches presented in this section accentuated the civilizationist discourse so prevalent among white and African-American elites in the late-20th century. J.W.E. Bowen, a formidable African-American intellectual, stressed the importance of gathering information on various facets of the African experience and lauded the achievements of African Americans since the abolition of slavery. Henry McNeal Turner, the emigrationist AME minister, castigated the lamentable position of African Americans vis-à-vis whites in the United States, and he advocated the construction of conditions favorable to African Americans and Africans on the African continent. T. Thomas Fortune favored the nationalization of the continent under the auspices of the English.46

The Stewart Foundation and the conference on Africa and America heightened Gammon’s visibility as a site for missionary activity. In the years following the conference, the foundation continued to augment its collections in African history. In 1896, the first library of duplicate books was sent out to several schools and libraries. In 1898, the seminary sponsored an “Africa Day,” a mini-conference on various aspects of the ministry question in Africa and America from May 14-18. Papers were presented by church notables such as Reverend W.F. Stewart, the founder of the Stewart Missionary Foundation; J.W.E. Bowen, Professor of Historical Theology at Gammon; and Reverend J.C. Hartzell, Bishop of Africa as well as Reverend C.M. Melden, President of Clark University; Reverend J.D. Chavis, President of Bennett College, and Professor William Crogman, Professor of Classics at Clark University. The conference also discussed the Church and the Ministry, The Church and the People, the Church and the Ministry, and The Seminary and Its Alumni.47

By the 1904-1905 academic year, more than five members of the seminary and their families were actively involved in missionary work in Africa. By 1909, the Stewart Foundation in conjunction with the seminary’s Historical Society inaugurated a course of studies and lectures on a wide range of topics related to African history, literature, and geography. The president of Gammon, J.W.E. Bowen, was responsible for conducting the ____________________

Stewart Mission Seminar once a week. In 1910, it was decided the Secretary of the Stewart Mission Association would be a regular professor in the Department of Missions and was responsible for arranging a regular course of Mission Study. In 1911, the Department of Missions began formally offering courses. Some of these courses included Africa: Its History and Geography; Africa: Its People and Religions; Africa: Its Mission and the Influence of Christianity.  

The classical schools offered innovative programs in African-American history and studies in the latter portion of the nineteenth century and in the first portion of the twentieth century. Many of the schools discussed underwent a transformation during this period.  

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48 See Quarterly Bulletin, Catalogue Edition: Gammon Theological Seminary, 1904-05 (Atlanta: Gammon Theological Seminary, 1905), 14-16. For the initial description of the courses on Africa, see Quarterly Bulletin: Gammon Theological Institute, July 1909 (Atlanta, GA: Gammon Theological Seminary, 1909), 18-19. For the shift in the Foundation's policies on the Mission class, see Quarterly Bulletin of Gammon Theological Seminary, November 1910 (Atlanta: Gammon Theological Seminary, 1910), 7. Quarterly Bulletin of Gammon Theological Seminary, February 1911 (Atlanta: Gammon Theological Seminary, 1911), 7-8. For an assessment of the early planning for the Mission course, see Dr. Atkinson, President and Treasurer of the Stewart Foundation, to Mr. Earl Taylor, November 25, 1908 in Records of the Gammon Theological Institute: Stewart Missionary Association, Reel 13, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia. In addition to Gammon Theological Seminary, Morris Brown College, established by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1881, also pursued a quasi-historical program in its course offerings and lecture components. From the scant records that exist, Morris Brown did not begin to offer a well-defined set of history courses until the beginning of the 20th century. These courses consisted of the standard offerings in ancient, medieval and modern history. Courses were offered in English history and government as well as American history and government. The primary focus of these courses included the "social, religious, commercial and political lives of the races of mankind, together with the causes leading to the rise and fall of different nations and the general progress of civilization." See Catalog: Morris Brown College, 1904-1905, 54-55 and Catalog: Morris Brown College, 1907-1908, 54-55. Information on the historical development of Morris Brown College can be found in Annie B. Thomas, Morris Brown College: From Its Beginnings in 1885 to Time of Removal, 1932 (1932) and George A. Jewett and Cornelius Troup, Morris Brown College: The First One Hundred Years: A Saga of A Century of Educational Achievement that Began Through Self-Help (Atlanta, GA, 1981)
period. With the rise of scientism and objectivity and the growth of graduate schools in the
discipline, classicists and clerical elites were displaced by scientifically trained historians.
Rather than a revolution, at most schools the process of change was a gradual one. With a
cadre of historians trained more broadly in particular disciplines, many of the classically
oriented colleges were able to augment their course offerings by promoting and funding
conferences, especially the Atlanta University Conferences which made the institution a
center for serious sociological and historical investigations of African-American life.
Unlike Atlanta University, Howard University established a research center. While
Gammon Theological Seminary maintained its close connection to the training of the
ministry, the institution also promoted the study of history through the construction of the
Historical Society in 1894, the collecting of material on Africa and a major conference to
counter the Atlanta Exposition through its willingness to entertain a more humane portrait
of the connections between the African past and African-American possibilities. All of
these occurrences had a profound impact on the nature and direction of historical study in
the black academy.

History and the Industrial Model

As we have seen in schools which adhered to the classical model of education,
history was an integral part of the humanities course. At schools which adhered to the
industrial model, such as Hampton and Tuskegee Institute, history was also an important
part of the school curriculum. Historical interest was framed within the context of the
academic needs of the institution as well as larger racial advocacy issues prevalent during
this era. Hampton Institute was the leading center for the industrial model of African-
American education. Supported by industrial philanthropists this model dominated
approaches to African-American education throughout the latter portion of the nineteenth
century.
This section will discuss the function and uses of history at the Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute, two schools which symbolized the industrial model of education. As educational historian James Anderson has shown, Hampton Institute was not only an industrial center, but the school was primarily geared toward the training of secondary school teachers. This training consisted of industrial courses but also featured a number of academically based courses. History was a part of the academic curriculum at both schools and played an important role in furthering their educational aims. In addition to discussing the faculty and academic courses at both schools, this section will examine how these institutions disseminated history in the larger African-American community.

Hampton Institute and History

Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute was founded in 1867 by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a charismatic leader and the product of a missionary background. Armstrong founded the school on the industrial model. According to historian James Anderson, the industrial component of Armstrong’s educational project was secondary to his desire to train a conservative teaching force in Southern black communities. Therefore, it is not surprising that Hampton produced a large number of normal school teachers in its first twenty classes. Hampton Institute, unlike the previously discussed schools, offered no courses directly related to African-American history, however, references to this type of history did appear in the school’s extracurricular functions such as the Hampton Negro Conference, its official organs such as the Southern Workman or the Alumni Bulletin, and in the scholarly production of its faculty. 49

Less than four years after its establishment, Hampton Institute began to offer courses in history as a part of its three year normal course. The primary purpose of this course was to qualify students to receive a basic teaching certificate. Although, according to James Anderson, this course lacked the rigor of traditional teacher certification programs, what it lacked in academic rigor, it made up with demands designed to imbue students with a undying loyalty to the principles of hard physical work, mental conformity, and moral improvement. In a rigorous daily schedule, consisting of about 17 hours, students were awakened by a rising bell at 5 a.m. and endured a grueling schedule consisting of inspections, field work, devotions, and classes. Like liberal arts schools, Hampton’s Normal course featured offerings in American, British and Universal (World) History. In the program’s first year, referred to as the Junior year, students studied Early United States history and British history; in the Middle Year students completed instruction in American History. In the Senior Year, students studied Universal History.50

Of all of the institutions under consideration here, Hampton maintained the most extensive records of the academic work in history. While descriptions of the institute’s programs were fairly cursory prior to the mid-1890’s, teachers were required to produce reports on the progress of their classes. These assessments were frequently excerpted and reprinted in whole or part in the institute’s annual reports. Their academic reports, especially in history, began to appear in the 1880’s. That assessments of history courses appeared even in the Annual Reports demonstrates the importance of the discipline in the overall scheme of the industrial program.\textsuperscript{51}

Most of the early history classes in the normal school were taught by products of New England Schools. Most of these women were white and unmarried with previous teaching experience in Northern academies. Many were deeply influenced by an explicit belief in civilizationist ideology, discussed at length in Chapter five of this study, and an elevated notion of missionary zeal to recently freed African Americans in the South. Hampton’s mission of improving the character of presumably morally deficient people appealed to many of these instructors. In their writings and public pronouncements, these teachers promoted an evolutionary paradigm for black growth and advancement. Hampton’s program, they believed, was simply an extension of the missions of social uplift emanating from the New England rhetoric about the industrial civilizationism of the South.\textsuperscript{52}

One of the most influential early history teachers was Mary Dibble Smith, a native of Seymour, Connecticut and graduate of Smith College. Dibble, her married name was


\textsuperscript{52} For information on the faculty of Hampton, see Anderson, The Education of Blacks in the South
Smith, held a position at Hampton Institute teaching history and reading from 1881 to 1884. In the reports produced by her division, Dibble often focused on the practical impact of historical studies on the students. A general consensus existed among the teachers that African-American students were “wholly ignorant” of American history. In light of this situation, teachers often grappled with how best to present the material to students not yet exposed to it. Supplementary readings, mostly reference books, were used in conjunction with the main text. This approach was utilized extensively among the Junior and Middle classes. Additionally, exercises, especially games, were useful in stimulating student interest in historical material. For upper-level students, particularly the Senior level, teachers focused on the lives of notable personalities in history. The aim was “not to teach history but rather to teach how to study history.”

In other reports, Dibble suggested ways to facilitate improving student’s skills in reading and vocabulary. Despite these desires, she was honest about the expectations and the shortcomings of the program. After posing a quasi-rhetorical question: “What does the study of history amount to, in practical value to these students?” She answered the question by pointing out “we [Hampton’s teachers] do not look for great results” and “Expecting little, we are not discouraged by the results.” According to Dibble, the greatest results were achieved by the Senior level students who studied Ancient History. For many industrialists and classicists, Ancient History served as the primary introduction to the Judeo-Christian ethic, the ideological and theological bedrock of the Western tradition.

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53 Biographical information on Mary Dibble is located in Mary Dibble Biographical File, Hampton University Archives, Hampton University, Hampton Virginia (hereafter Dibble bio file). Dibble’s assessment of the History program can be found in Report of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute for the Year ending June 30, 1883 (Richmond: R.F. Walker, Superintendent Public Printing, 1883), 14-15.
Dibble felt that exposure to the Western tradition was not only a means of increasing student’s understanding of the Bible and books in general but also helped to foster a “better understanding and appreciation of our own times.”

Another prominent teacher was Anne Scoville, the granddaughter of Reverend Henry Ward Beecher and the great-niece of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Scoville was born in Norwich, New York and educated at Dana Hall in Wellesley, Massachusetts, Wellesley College, and in Oxford, England. She taught history at Hampton from 1891 to 1897. Her work focused primarily on Indian Folklore, but she also wrote several articles in the Southern Workman on various aspects of the African-American historical experience. Her most notable piece was titled “The Negro and the Bible.” Scoville combined her interests in Indian folklore and artifacts, with an assessment of the ritualistic aspects of the African-American church. Scoville’s presentation of the meanings of religion to African Americans is an extension of her involvement with Hampton University and firm belief in the missionary and abolitionist fervor of her ancestors. In the article’s first paragraph, she proclaimed: “To the Negro belongs the tropic fervor, the religious passion, the power of song, and the past of bondage and release. He can sit down to his Old Testament with a sense of ownership which no one else but the Jew can claim.”

54 Dibble’s comments on the program can be found in Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Annual Reports for the Academical and Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1883 (Hampton, VA: Normal School Steam Press, 1883), 23-25.
Scoville’s insistence on a linear and civilizationist assessment of African history and African-American possibility allowed her to amplify Hampton’s role in what they viewed as the reformation and rehabilitation of African Americans. She believed that certain barriers to the “Negro’s intellectual and moral improvement” needed to be surmounted before they could effectively use religion in their daily lives. These barriers included, in Scoville’s construction, the lack of an adequate religious history in Africa. She described African Americans as having no appreciable culture and language. Ruled primarily by passion, she alleged, African Americans adopted many practices of the Christian church but often diluted or compromised the integrity of these ceremonies by employing “the witch-doctor, the hag, the conjuror, and the voodoo dance.” According to Scoville, this blending of faith lead to the creation of the spirituals.  

Another significant barrier to the proper incorporation of religion into the lives of African Americans was what Scoville termed the superstitious nature of the race. In order to combat this flaw in their character, Scoville suggested that blacks should be taught to read the Bible logically and intelligently. For this reason, the Bible rather than classical literature was more suitable to missionary civilizationists such as Scoville. In fact, the text’s instructive nature, biographical sketches of prominent leaders, and the practical wisdom it imparted was viewed as an important part of an acceptable liberal education. The effects of biblical training was duly noted: “Truly the student who has found spiritual ideals, learned Christian virtues, conquered superstition, gained sympathy, with other races, and mastered the English language in his Bible studies has a liberal education.”

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57 Ibid., 147.
Scoville then discussed how Hampton’s program used the Bible to improve the mental and moral character of African Americans. An important component of this program was assisting students in applying biblical doctrine to the furtherance of Hampton’s industrial agenda. This agenda was explicitly clear as Scoville discussed how Hampton instructed African Americans to interpret certain biblical passages:

When the apostle saids, steal no more, but rather let him labor,” Hampton says, “That means teach him a trade.” And when, again, the mandate comes, “Pure religion and undefiled before the Father is this, to visit the widows and the fatherless,” Hampton says “That means for you boys to mend Aunt Marthy’s roof and chop wood for old Pete. And when they read, “Go ye into the world and teach the Gospel to every creature,” Hampton says, “You may go to Africa by-and-by, but this morning that means to go out and teach Sunday school, sing in the jail, and read to the old people in the cabins.⁵⁸

Hampton required all of its students to take courses on the Old and New Testament. The Bible was used as a means of demonstrating the factors which led to the rise and fall of kingdoms such as the rise and decline of Israel, the lives of notable personalities such as Moses, and to affirm the belief that every group of people endured a period of suffering and wandering prior to achieving some degree of stability and permanence. The latter lesson was taught by having students reflect on what the ancient Israelites learned as a result of their “wanderings in the wilderness.” These lessons were also related to a history of inventions from “Adam to the present day” and the “history of the slavery question from Adam to Lincoln.” The association of the Bible with historical information and industrial training was an important component of Hampton’s program.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 147.
⁵⁹ Even as most colleges turned toward a more scientific curriculum, Hampton continued to emphasize the importance of Bible Study. In fact, the institute maintained a department devoted to this purpose. Despite the school’s nondenominational status ( as
While Anne Scoville was a productive author, amateur historian, and folklorist, other instructors also distinguished themselves as writers in the area of history. Of all the teachers of history on Hampton’s faculty, none was more prolific than Helen Ludlow. Ludlow was a graduate of Springer Institute, a precursor of Vassar College. Her brother, Fitzhugh Ludlow, was a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly* and her father, Reverend Henry G. Ludlow, was the pastor of a Congregational Church in Massachusetts. Ludlow taught at Hampton from 1872-1893. She served on the *Southern Workman* staff from 1893 to 1895 and as editor of the magazine from 1895 to 1910. Ludlow best known for her close relationship with Samuel Chapman Armstrong. She initially assisted Armstrong with fundraising efforts in the North. Hampton Institute modeled part of its efforts on that of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The Hampton Singers gave series of concerts between February 1873 and July 1875. Ludlow was responsible for the instruction of the group while they were on the road, especially training in history. Ludlow was also a prolific author. She was responsible for writing on various aspects of the Hampton program, including *Twenty-Two Years: Works, Records of Negro and Indian Graduates* (1893) and *From the Beginning* (n.d.). Ludlow also wrote articles in the *Southern Workman* on topics ranging from assessments of the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson to an examination of the abolition of slavery in Brazil from 1872 until the early 1900’s.60

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Scoville pointed out in her article, "Hampton claims that it is the duty of the school to lay the broadest foundation for church and state, and within the covers of the Bible may be found not only the words of eternal life, but the widest training for the American citizen.” For an example of the institute’s program in Bible Study, see *Catalogue of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Hampton, Virginia for the Academic Year, 1895-96* (Hampton Virginia: Institute Press, 1896), 20-21 and Scoville, *The Negro and the Bible,* 147.

60 Information on Helen Wilhelmina Ludlow can be found in the Helen Ludlow biographical file at Hampton Institute Archives, Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia. Some of Ludoow’s representative publications include a co-authored book titled Hampton and Its Students (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1875); an edited book, *Twenty-Two*
In the 1890's, Hampton, like other schools of its type, began to modernize its program. Modernization did not mean abandoning the normal and industrial emphasis of the curriculum, or replacing the role of Biblical study but augmenting it with civics and economics. Rather than studying portions of United States history in the Junior Year, this subject was taught only in the Middle Year. In addition to studying the Declaration of Independence, a section was added on the U.S. Constitution focusing on the study of its amendments. The ultimate aim of this curricular change was the promotion of the concept of citizenship among Hampton’s students. Several teacher’s reports mentioned the aim of instruction trying to make pupils intelligent citizens of the United States. To augment this project, teachers often relied on teaching aids such as maps, outlines, pictures, poetry, and prose. Students were also required to stay abreast of current affairs by learning about foreign countries. This included a student subscription to the Weekly Current. By 1892, instruction in history and geography were combined. The focus on history and geography furthered the environmental focus on world history and the progress of races. Among environmentalists, it was widely believed that environment played an important role in the development of civilizations. These beliefs were also closely allied with ideas prevalent among positivists and Social Darwinists.

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**Years, Works, Records of Negro and Indian Graduates** (Hampton: Hampton Normal School Press, 1893); an article, “Some Interesting Things at Hampton Institute,” Evangelist 1(1900); and a biographical note in Samuel Chapman Armstrong’s *Education for Life* (1914). Ludlow over one hundred editorials and short opinion pieces to the *Southern Workman*. Ludlow died of cancer in 1924.

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Hampton continued to emphasize biblical study as it instituted a more scientific curriculum, see *The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute: Annual Reports for the Year Ending June 30, 1890* (Hampton: Normal School Steam Press Print, 1890), 40-41. The changes in the history curriculum began in 1891. The faculty thought this change might be beneficial to all parties involved. See *The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute: Annual Reports for Year Ending June 30, 1891* (Hampton: Normal School Steam Press Print), 41, and *The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute: Annual Reports for the Year Ending June 30th, 1892* (Hampton: Normal School Steam Print, 402.
By the mid-1890's, through the turn of the century, Hampton's catalog provided a more complete overview of the courses offered in history. The Junior Year preparation consisted of Eggleson's First Book of the United States History, and The Life of Abraham Lincoln. In the Middle Class students studied United States History, America before the discovery by Columbus, the Struggle for Independence, the Constitution of the United States, Slavery in the United States and the growth and progress of the United States. The Senior class focused on ancient "oriental" civilizations, the rise of the nation-state, the Renaissance and Reformation in Europe, decisive battles of world history and biographies of great men. There is no evidence that prior to this time, there was an explicit focus on slavery.62

In the twentieth century, Hampton continued to pursue its industrial goals with slight attention to the concerns of African Americans in the historical curriculum. In the 1904-05 catalogue, Hampton's graduate history curriculum included "The Status of the Negro and Indian" as a topical issue. This course was primarily designed for individuals preparing to teach in public schools. Catalogues between 1908 and 1915 focused almost exclusively on history's role in uplifting African Americans. According to the Catalogue of 1908, the Junior year of history began with the study of the Old Testament. This was done

1892), 36-37. The shift in the history curriculum, which included the incorporation of history and geography was also discussed in the university's organ, see M.R. Hamlin, "Geography Teaching," Southern Workman (March 1896): 62-63. For the economic focus, see T.T. Bryce, Economic Crumbs or Plain Talks for the People about-Labor-Capital-Money-Tariff-Etc. (Hampton: Institute Press, 1879).

because the faculty believed, echoing the sentiments of Anne Scoville, a "proper understanding of the natural forces which were operative in the development of the Hebrew nation may destroy many of the superstitious notions of religion held by Negro and Indian students. It was also believed that history, especially the study of civilizations, had "numerous lessons [to teach] undeveloped races."\footnote{See Catalogue of the Hampton Agricultural and Normal Institute, 1904-1905 (Hampton: Hampton Institute Press, 1904), 43. The Fortieth Annual Catalogue: The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1908 (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1908), 39-41; The Forty-first Annual Catalogue: Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (Hampton: The Institute Press, 1909), 34-35; The Forty-fourth Annual Catalogue: The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1912 (Hampton: Hampton Institute Press, 1912), 42-44; and The Forty-seventh Annual Catalogue: The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (Hampton: Hampton Institute Press, 1915), 50. For a definitive statement on the civilizationist and religious goals of the race, see Hugh Browne, "Race Loyalty," \textit{Southern Workman} (March 1898): 44-47. Also see Thomas Jesse Jones, Social Studies in the Hampton Curriculum (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1908) and RR Moton, "Some Elements Necessary to Race Development," \textit{Southern Workman} (July 1912): 399-408. Anne Goodrich, an instructor at Hampton Institute, also prepared an extensive outline for courses in Biblical history, see Anne Goodrich, \textit{Outlines of Bible History} (Hampton, VA: The Institute Press, 1906); and \textit{Outlines of History, Part II} (Hampton, VA: The Institute Press, 1908).}
great needs of the masses of the Negro and Indian races. The first of these is for efficient teachers.” Although by 1915, Hampton had attained some notoriety among black schools for its funding and programs, the university remained firmly committed to its civilizationist mission until the 1920’s.

The Tuskegee Model

Tuskegee Institute, founded in 1881, is traditionally viewed as the sister institution of Hampton Institute. Led by Booker T. Washington, one of Samuel Chapman Armstrong’s most devoted pupils, Tuskegee, like Hampton, was primarily an industrial school with a significant commitment to the training of African-American teachers for Southern schools. There were, however, significant differences between the two schools. The greatest difference was in the historical curriculum. Many of these differences emanated from the differing intents of the ideological programs of African-American uplift subscribed to by the leaders of these schools. Whereas Armstrong’s philosophy was based on the idea that African-American character was fixed and incapable of reformation except through the industrial and normal projects of Hampton Institute. Washington offered industrial civilizationism as the paradigm for African-American uplift from the debilitating practices of slavery. This paradigm stressed frugality, social and moral responsibility, and a focus on internal communal issues such as land and business ownership.64

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Washington not only made industrial civilization an integral part of this program at Tuskegee, but used this philosophy to his greatest advantage in the famous “Atlanta Compromise Speech” at the Atlanta Cotton Exposition in 1895. Acquiescence, accommodation, and self-help were the principal themes in this speech. By amplifying the core values of the New South ideology and the Progressive Era, Washington sought to placate Southern politicians, win the admiration of Northern industrialists, and consolidate his leadership among lower class and elite African Americans. This speech allowed Washington to accomplish these goals, and it also led to the internal development of Tuskegee Institute. Between 1895 and 1900, significant changes took place in the institute’s physical plant and in its curriculum. This section will, however, examine how Booker T. Washington promoted the study of African-American history at Tuskegee within the larger African-American community.65

In the post-1895 period, one of the most far-reaching changes at Tuskegee occurred in the history curriculum. Initially, like so many other aspects of the institution, the curriculum—with its emphasis on teacher education, the dignity of hard labor, division into Junior, Middle and Senior classes and three-quarter academic year—resembled Hampton Institute. But in fact, prior to 1900, Tuskegee focused on general course offerings in American, European, and Universal (world) history.66

66 See Catalogue of the Tuskegee State Normal School at Tuskegee, 1887-1882, 5-7; The 1884-85 Catalogue mentioned the library contained 800 volumes. See Catalogue of the Tuskegee State Normal School at Tuskegee, 1884-85; Catalogue of the Tuskegee State Normal School, 1886-1887, 394. During the 1891-92 academic year, the university
During the 1899-1900 academic year, just four years after the Atlanta Compromise speech, significant changes took place in Tuskegee’s history curriculum. The institute announced (probably in anticipation of the erection of a new library) its intention to make Tuskegee “a center of information regarding all matters bearing upon Negro literature.” This project encompassed collecting in every division “every pamphlet and book of value whether fiction, autobiography, or history, written by a Negro author.” To augment the library’s programs, Tuskegee hired a number of classically trained teachers in the history department. In 1888, upon the recommendation of T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the New York Age, Tuskegee hired Edna Hawley to teach geography and history courses. Ethel Chesnutt, the daughter of Charles Chesnutt and a 1901 graduate of Smith College, taught history during the 1901-1902 academic year. John Mercer Langston Jr., son of the renowned antebellum and postbellum orator, lawyer and activist John Mercer Langston, taught history and geography between 1902-1904, and Charles Winter Wood, a graduate of Beloit College, the University of Chicago, and Columbia University served as head of the library. In addition to his duties as university librarian, Wood introduced Shakespeare and other classics to the Tuskegee students and faculty.67

After the erection of the Carnegie library in the 1901-1902 academic year and the receipt of a $60,000 contribution from Andrew Carnegie in 1903, the institute was better positioned to achieve its goals regarding the collection of literature. In the 1902-1903 school year, in addition to continuing to collect information on African Americans, the

announced there were 10,000 volumes in the library. See Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1891-1892, 23

67 The collection of materials on African Americans is discussed in Catalogue of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1899-1900, 13. Information on the faculty is contained in the following materials: For Edna Hawley, see Booker T. Washington to T. Thomas Fortune.
institute included the study of African-American history in its curriculum. Working from the premise, commonly applied at Hampton, that history was essentially the study of great men, officials at Tuskegee believed this study could assist in race development. In addition to the study of great white men--Washington, Adams, and Jefferson--American history included the study of African Americans. The American history courses focused on the "peculiar position of the Negro in America history from the time of Narvez and Desoto through the wars with England and the civil war, to the present time. The catalog also indicated that African-American history is "given due importance, not by isolating it, but introducing it in its proper place along with other events."68

Tuskegee's integrative approach to the study of African-American history included courses other than those in American history. Information on African Americans was incorporated into a course titled "State History of Alabama," which considered important facts in the development of the state, its entrance into the union, government, attitude toward slavery and present status. Another course which focused on the growth of the United States under the Constitution examined the various administrations in the Early Republic, the question of slavery, and the United States since the Civil War. In the Middle Class, elementary history included a topical and thematic treatment of the internal growth of the United States and the question of slavery.69

In addition to American history courses which integrated the African-American experience, Tuskegee's curriculum also featured courses on various aspects of that

68 The 1901-1902 catalogue indicated the Carnegie library was built on campus at a cost of $20,000 and featured a colonial style of architecture, see Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1901-1902, 14-15. Also see Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1902-1903, 14-15.
69 See Twenty-Third Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1903-1904, 30.
experience. In the 1905-1906 academic year, the institute offered a course on “Slavery and the Civil War” for the Senior Class in American history. Although this course would be modified in the subsequent years, its description is indicative of the commitment of Tuskegee University to the promotion of African-American history.

Slavery and the Civil War—early history of slavery, brief review of social, economic, and religious conditions, with special relation to the above, much of this is done as special reference work by pupils. Religious Life: ante-bellum church, origin of the camp-meeting—its present standing. Social life: plantation life; classes on plantation; free Negroes; overseers—white; Negro overseers in South Carolina; house servants, field servants; effect on individual slaves, exceptional character; increased importance of the Anti-Slavery question; rebellions by slaves; Nat Turner’s insurrection. Causes of the War—events of the war—effects. Problems of peace, 1865-1904. Reconstruction—the New South and race problems. Civil Service Reform.\textsuperscript{70}

The following year, the 1906-1907 academic year, the course “Slavery and the Civil War” was integrated into the Third Quarter or the Middle Class in American History. This was probably done to allow the Senior Class to focus exclusively on general history or world history from the ancient through the modern periods. An approach that was common in industrially and classically oriented schools of the day. A few interesting additions were made regarding the African-American experience. Some of the listings include discussions of African-American overseers in North Carolina, the process of emancipation in the Northern states, the Underground Railroad, and African fables and folklore.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} See Twenty-Fifth Annual Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1905-1906, 41.
\textsuperscript{71} See The Twenty-Sixth Annual Catalog of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1906-1907, 43.
During the 1908-1909 academic year, in addition to the introduction of geography and economics into the historical curriculum, the institute made further additions to the Middle Class course in American history including topical discussion on abolition societies, free blacks, and the discussion of African Americans in the post-Reconstruction. By 1910, the institute devoted a significant portion of the senior class to a course titled “The Negro in America.” The implementation of this course coincided with the publication of Booker T. Washington’s quasi-historical study, The Story of the Negro (1909).\textsuperscript{72}

Historical courses on the African-American experience were an important component in instilling pride and confidence in a people recently emancipated from slavery. With this objective in mind, unlike Hampton’s curriculum for the Senior class, which concentrated on providing potential graduates with important civic lessons, Tuskegee’s course focused, among other things, on the “Negro’s life as a freeman, and upon his place in American life; his achievements, his mistakes, and his service to his country.” Given Tuskegee’s emphasis, it is not surprising that this course devoted a considerable amount of time to the contributions of African Americans to American life in the post-emancipation period. In many ways, this approach was reminiscent of the emancipation narratives and biographical catalogs common in this period. Topics included African Americans as explorers, sailors and soldiers, artisans, and businessmen, writers, orators, scholars, musicians, actors, landowners, and builders. By the 1913-1914 academic year, in addition to the Census Reports, the course texts included Booker T. Washington’s Story of the Negro, Benjamin Brawley’s Social History of the American Negro, and John Cromwell’s The Negro in American History.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} See The Twenty-Eighth Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1908-1909, 33-34.
\textsuperscript{73} See Thirty-First Annual Catalog: The Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 410.
In addition to augmenting its courses in American history, Tuskegee also included courses which examined the importance of Africa. With the addition of sociologist Monroe Nathan Work as head of the Department of Records and Research to Tuskegee’s faculty, the university began to offer a geography course as part of the Junior Class’s third quarter course offerings in African geography. The course addressed various facets of the African experience including the people, the exploration and settlement of the continent, trade routes, strategic locations such as the Nile Valley, the Congo Basin, Liberia and South Africa as well as the history of “well-organized native kingdoms--its arts, markets, political and social organization.” The institute also offered a course titled “the Negro in Africa.” The catalog description declared the following:

Throughout this year, the class will make a study of Africa, the continent, its resources, and political conditions. Especial attention will be given to the natives, their past and present history. Among the topics discussed will be: Africa, a land of antiquity, native tribes, Negro kingdoms, natives, myths, fables, music, industries, arts, religion, modern conditions. 74

Washington’s interest in Africa and the African Diaspora was political, economic, and intellectual. His relationship to Africa began in 1908, when he played an important role in renegotiating Liberia’s debt payments to various European powers and secured an American protectorate over the country. Moreover, as Louis Harlan has suggested,

1911-1912, 32 and Thirty-Third Annual Catalog. The Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1913-1914, 33.
74 See Twenty-Eighth Annual Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1909-1910, 31, 33. For other catalogue descriptions of the course on Africa, see Thirtieth Annual Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1910-1911, 33, Thirty-First Annual Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1911-1912, 33; Thirty-First Annual Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1913-1914, 33
Washington’s program of industrial education attracted many Africans, especially in colonies with a strong missionary presence. He also maintained correspondence with a number of African educational institutions. His interest in the affairs of people of African descent and Africans led to his sponsorship of the International Conference of the Negro held at Tuskegee from April 17-19, 1912. The conference featured representatives from several Caribbean nations including Jamaica, Barbados, British West Indies, British Guiana (Guyana), a South American country, Venezuela; and an African country, Liberia. Rather than focusing on issues of race and nationalism, the topic of earlier race conferences, Washington limited the conference’s purview to education: “You have heard that we have been trying experiments, and that we are earnestly seeking to add something to our knowledge of what education can practically do, particularly in the solution of some of these new and difficult problems, which have sprung up in different parts of the world, as the result of the closer contacts of the white and colored races.” Using this approach, the conference was divided into three parts: conditions, missions, and methods. 75

While the interests of the delegates varied, it was clear many were interested in how best to apply educational methodology to better the social, political and economic condition of various groups. For Washington, education rather than politics was a more traditional and less controversial issue to address within the context of an international conference. The interest of this conference seemed to be harnessing the power of the West to assist developing nations. This evolutionist approach combined with Washington’s belief in industrial civilization meshed well with the interests of big business and the Republican Party which supported his work. While some conference attendees such as W.I. Thomas, Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, felt that more effort

should be devoted to studying African peoples, other participants advocated different approaches. Robert Park, Booker T. Washington's ghostwriter and former Secretary of the Congo Reform Association of America located in Boston, Massachusetts, presented a paper titled "Education by Cultural Groups." Given his nascent interests in sociology and his deep belief in Washington's brand of industrial education, Park used his speech to provide an overview of the colonization process in Africa and to suggest that Africa could benefit from the Tuskegee model. Washington's efforts to promote Tuskegee's programs internationally mirrored his efforts to promote the institution and the study of history domestically.76

Booker T. Washington and the Promotion of History

In addition to changes and innovations in the history curriculum at Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington, despite his conservative persona, was a staunch supporter of the "Negro History Movement." He, unlike many other college presidents of his day, used his considerable political and economic influence to promote and write works that celebrated various facets of the African-American experience, and he recruited individuals such as Monroe Nathan Work and Robert E. Park who assisted in providing the American public with accurate information regarding African-American history. Because many members of the black intelligentsia, ranging from T. Thomas Fortune to W.E.B. Du Bois, were

76 Information on the speeches at the International Conference of the Negro, see "The First International Conference of the Negro, April 8, 1912," in Booker T. Washington Papers in Tuskegee Archives, Box 96, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama (hereafter BWPT); and Emmett Scott to Robert Park, May 13, 1912, BWPT, Box 96; "Program: The International Conference of the Negro to be Held at Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, April 17, 18, 19th, BWPT, Box 96 and "Summary of the First International Conference on the Negro, BWPT, Box 96.
dependent on Washington’s public largesse, they often solicited Washington’s advice or assistance in writing and promoting their work.\textsuperscript{77}

This was the case with Edward Augustus Johnson’s \textit{School History of the Negro Race in America} (1891). Johnson, a personal friend of Washington and later a member of the National Negro Business League, mailed a copy of his book to Washington and urged him to adopt it as part of the historical curriculum at Tuskegee. Johnson pointed out that the book was already used at schools in North Carolina, namely Shaw University. Johnson was certain Washington would find the book “contained information that every colored child should know.” Rather than monetary gain, Johnson claimed his intention in publishing the book was for the purpose of “get[ing] the facts of history into the hands of the race.” He also noted that the “gross neglect” of African Americans by most historians made his work an important contribution to the field of historical studies. “Please let me hear from you,” wrote Johnson, “if you decide to place the book in the hands of your pupils.” While it is not clear whether or not Washington incorporated Johnson’s book into Tuskegee’s curriculum, he did send the book to Edward Atkinson, a Boston industrialist, suggesting the work “contained some facts on the Negro’s progress.”\textsuperscript{78}

Washington also wrote the introduction for William Crogman’s and H.F. Kletzing’s \textit{Progress of a Race or Remarkable Achievements of the African American} (discussed at length in the previous chapter) and assisted in the production of another quasi-historical work, \textit{A New Negro for a New Century}. When Crogman and Kletzing’s \textit{Progress of a Race} was criticized by various commentators, Edgar Webber, a publisher,

\textsuperscript{77} Information on the relationship between Washington and other black intellectuals, see Harlan, \textit{Booker T. Washington, Wizard of Tuskegee}, 3-62.

wrote to Washington pointing out some of the shortcomings of the work to encourage him to be more deliberate in the production and publication of the *Future of the American Negro*. The book [*Progress of a Race*] is meeting with a great deal of criticism for the hasty manner in which it was put out,” wrote Webber, “which caused it to be inaccurate in many respects and to be confined in undue proportion to Georgia men when it purports to be national in scope.  

In another instance, in 1900, J.E. MacBrady, President of the American Publishing Company, solicited Washington’s assistance in the production of a volume titled *A New Negro for a New Century*. Although celebratory in tone, the book addressed several historical issues objectively. It focused on gender, educational and political issues among African Americans since Reconstruction. The book’s contributors were Fannie Barrier Williams, a conservative African-American clubwoman, and N.B. Wood, author of the *White Side of a Black Subject*. Barrier contributed a section on the development of the club movement among African-American women and Wood’s contributions addressed African-American concerns during Reconstruction and industrial education. Washington contributed a 32 page introduction to the project and material on the educational program at Tuskegee. According to the correspondence between MacBrady and Washington, Washington did not grant MacBrady permission to publish his name in connection with the finished product nor to use his picture as the book’s frontispiece. When the book appeared, Washington’s name was prominently displayed on the title page as one of its principal authors along with Williams and Wood, his picture served as the frontispiece for the book and his 32 page introduction was expanded to 72 pages. To add injury to insult, Emmett Scott, Washington’s secretary, informed Washington that the book was a reprint

79 See “Introduction to the Progress of a Race,” Tuskegee, Alabama, August 8, 1897, BTWP, IV, 1895-98, 318-319.
of Wood’s *The White Side of a Black Subject*. Once he verified this information, Washington moved aggressively to disassociate himself with the book. He wrote to Scott: “The fraud which they [American Publishing Company] have perpetrated is outrageous. I am going to take some means to have the circulation of the book stopped, at least, in its present form.” While Washington eventually relented in this matter, it is clear that he was fiercely protective regarding how his name and the institution’s reputation were presented in the public sphere.\(^80\)

In addition to the writing or endorsement of book projects, some of Washington’s political activities had wide-ranging implications for the dissemination of historical information. One such project was the Committee of Twelve in 1903. Designed moreso as an advocacy group than a historical one, the Committee of Twelve played an important role in presenting educational, political, moral, religious information on various facets of the back experience. While some historians have dismissed the committee as a “paper committee” run from Hugh Browne’s office at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, from a historical perspective the work of the committee demonstrates an interest among black elites of the importance of reliable and accurate facts on the African-American experience.\(^81\)

The Committee of Twelve originated from a conference in New York City on January 6-8, 1904 of eighteen to twenty of the leading citizens of the race. According to Washington these men would represent the race’s leading achievements in all directions” and “seek through free and frank discussion, to devise, if possible, such measures as

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\(^{80}\) See Booker T. Washington to J.E. MacBrady, July 3, 1900, BTWP, V, 1899-1900, 570-571 and Washington to Emmett Scott, July 2, 1900, BTWP, V, 591.

would possibly improve conditions among our people.” He was also certain that “the present condition as a race in this country demands we should make every sacrifice and put forth every effort to attend this conference. The matters to be considered are of the greatest importance to our future, I do not believe that there has ever been a race meeting so fraught with value and seriousness as the one will be concerning which I am writing.”82

The group’s membership consisted of Dr. I.B. Scott, editor of the Southwestern Christian Advocate, a black Methodist Journal and later a Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal church, H.T. Kealing, editor of the A.M.E. Church Review; Bishop George Clinton, author and Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the New York Age; Dr. C.E. Bentley, a member of the anti-Washington faction from Chicago; Charles W. Anderson, Washington’s operative who served as an internal revenue collector under several Republican presidents; E.H. Morris, a Chicago lawyer; Kelly Miller, Dean of the Arts and Sciences at Howard University, and Archibald Grimke, a Harvard educated lawyer, and Hugh Browne, secretary of the organization.83

The officers of the Committee of Twelve included Washington as Chair, Hugh Browne as Secretary and Archibald Grimke as Treasurer. One of the main purposes of the Committee was to emphasize the progressive effort within the race and amplify the achievements of African Americans in all areas. To accomplish this goal, the central committee was authorized to use the African-American and white press, the church, printed material such as circulars, reports and private correspondence. In addition to the

82 See Booker T. Washington to E.H. Morris, November 19, 1903, BTWPT, Box 8, Folder 78.
83 See Hugh Browne to Booker T. Washington, BTWPT, Box 9, Folder 89.
collection of data, the committee was also charged with tabulating "data bearing upon the condition and progress of the race, as well as the relation of other races to our own." 84

Despite the political and even partisan nature of some of the material produced by the Committee, some of the material had historical value. For instance, Richard Robert Wright Jr.'s pamphlet, "Self Help in Negro Education," was an important historical production of the committee. Richard Wright Jr., President of Georgia State Industrial College, a research fellow in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Economic History of the Negro in Pennsylvania* (1911). In addition to a questionnaire designed for officers at a wide variety of black educational work of churches, private and non-sectarian schools and the contributions of African Americans to public education, black teachers and students, consistent with his advanced training and influenced by Du Bois's work at Atlanta, Wright proposed to consult a number of important primary sources such as the United Census, Reports of the Freedmen's Bureau, Reports of the Commissioner of Public Education, historical sketches of schools, the Proceedings of the Tuskegee, Atlanta, and Hampton Conferences, Reports of the State Auditors, Magazines Sketches, and special Schedules. D.W. Woodward's "A Study of the Conditions of the Negroes in Jackson" offered a sociological overview of the black community. The article included information on possessions, taxed property, occupations, professions, churches, benevolent organizations, women's clubs, educational conditions, and historical facts on blacks in the town. Although the Committee of Twelve was a short-lived organization and most of its work was political in nature, it did provide an outlet for disseminating important historical information to the wider American public. 85

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84 See Browne to Washington, BTWPT, Box 9, Folder 89.
85 See "Self-Help in Negro Education: A Social Study: A Questionnaire Compiled by R.R. Wright Jr.," in BTWPT, Box 7, Folder 77. For information on D.W. Woodward’s study, "A Study of the Conditions of Negroes in Jackson, Mississippi, see BTWPT, Box 7, Folder 77; Washington to Browne, July 29, 1906, BTWPT, Box 7, Folder 71 and 418
In addition to political activity, Washington was also a prolific author. Nine years later, after the publication of *A New Negro for a New Century*, when Washington wrote his own two-volume study of African-American history, *The Story of the Negro*, he had apparently taken his experience with J.E. MacBrady to heart. Washington entered into a contract with Dodd, Mead and Company facilitated by Joseph Gilder, a New York journalist and president of the Critic Company from 1893 to 1901, to publish the book as early as 1902. Dodd, Mead, and Company, working with Walter Hines Page, was developing several book projects for Washington including *The Building of Character, Being Sunday Evening Talks* and *Working with the Hands* in 1902. Hines persuaded Washington not to publish *Story of the Negro* until “the other books which are to come from you have had their due season.”

The publication of *Story of the Negro* represented not only Washington’s interest in promoting Tuskegee’s project but his understanding of the importance of disseminating accurate and reliable facts on the African-American experience. Although Washington used ghostwriters for this book including Robert E. Park, Monroe Nathan Work and Alphansus Orenzo Stafford, it is clear that he wanted his historical work to reflect his self-help agenda at Tuskegee and to present the historic personalities of the race in a realistic but uplifting manner. In addition to having Park and Work produce the index and insure the book was accurate, Washington suggested to Stafford, the principal ghostwriter of the work, to “have a chapter showing what the Negro themselves did to bring about freedom. We could use in this chapter such persons as Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Judge Gibbs and other strong characters that are little known about. Of course, you have already

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Washington to Hugh Brown, June 5, 1908, Box 7, Folder 71.
86 See Walter Hines to Booker T. Washington, March 9, 1901, BTWP, VI, 1904-1906.
treated this subject under another head, but I think you could make a real romantic chapter under this head (emphasis mine)."  

Washington also influenced the direction of the Negro history movement in very subtle ways. He received invitations from the black intelligentsia to speak before their literary and historical associations. This was the case with an invitation secured by Thomas Junius Calloway, Tuskegee’s northern agent, to speak before the Bethel Literary and Historical Association in Washington, D.C. in 1891. In 1897, when the American Negro Academy was organized by Alexander Crummell, John Cromwell, the organization’s secretary and author of the Negro in American History, informed Washington of the group’s initial meeting. Washington also corresponded with Daniel Murray, the first African-American reference librarian at the Library of Congress. In 1900, during the Paris Exposition, Du Bois, Calloway, and Murray contributed materials on African-American culture and life to the event. Murray secured copies of Washington’s pamphlets and books. Moreover, Washington was also consulted by Murray to assist him in securing information on various notables of African descent for his proposed “Murray’s Historical and Biographical Encyclopedia of the Colored Race Throughout the World” in 1908. After describing the book’s plan to Washington, Murray asked for any support that Tuskegee could offer in this regard.  

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87 See Washington to Alphonsus Orenzo Stafford, November 1, 1907, BTWP, VIII, 1906-1908, 462. For information on the role of Park, see Robert E. Park to Washington, October 18, 1909, Box 2, 1909, Monroe Nathan Work Papers, Box 2, Tuskegee Archives, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama (hereafter Work Papers). Also see Booker T. Washington, The Story of the Negro 2 vols (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1909)  
Washington's most substantial contribution to the study of African-American history was the hiring of Monroe Nathan Work as the director of Records and Research at Tuskegee. Work, who possessed a BA in Philosophy and MA in sociology from the University of Chicago, began his educational career with the intention of becoming a minister. While enrolled at the Chicago Theological Seminary, Work embarked on a study of African-American crime in the city of Chicago. This study was eventually published in the *Journal of Sociology* in 1900. After completing his studies at Chicago, Work secured a position, with the assistance of his friend, R.R. Wright Jr., to teach education and history at Georgia State Industrial College in Savannah, Georgia.  

While in Savannah, Work became actively associated with W.E.B. Du Bois and the Niagara Movement. A short-lived protest movement, the Niagara Movement consisted of some of the most notable black intellectuals of the twentieth century. Dedicated to the advancement of both civil and political rights for African Americans, this group met regularly between 1905 and 1910, established two news organs, the *Horizon* and *Moon*, and offered a sustained challenge to Booker T. Washington's industrial civilizationism. Work served as the group's Secretary of the Committee on Crime beginning in 1905. In 1908, Work was asked by Du Bois to go to Lowndes County, Alabama to study conditions there for African American people. He produced a pamphlet titled "Self Help among Negroes," in *Survey* magazine.  

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Work's transformation from a progressive liberal to a firm believer in industrial civilizationism is attributed by his primary biographer, Linda O' McMurry, to continual disillusionment with the deteriorating condition of African Americans in the South, which included race riots in Wilmington, Delaware in 1898 and Atlanta in 1906 as well as disturbances in Brownsville, Texas that heightened racial tensions throughout the South. Moreover, Work was dissatisfied with the meager facilities for research and writing at Georgia State Industrial College. Therefore, when he received the offer to join the faculty at Tuskegee Institute, an affirmative answer was not long in coming.  

Work met Washington in Savannah in 1908. The two men talked and Work visited Tuskegee's campus. Work recalled his conversation with Washington and Emmett Scott:  

"I told him he did not want a History Department of the Negro but I thought what he wanted was information about what is taking place at present with reference to the Negro." Work received a salary of $1200 for a twelve month period and one month's vacation with pay. He established the Department of Records and Research. The Records department was responsible for handling the graduate reports and research allowed for other things.  

Once in charge of Tuskegee Institute's Department of Records and Research, Work pursued an aggressive research agenda. In his "Plans for Making Tuskegee a Greater Center for Information Relating to the Negro," Work focused on making the material currently at Tuskegee more available through indexes and special card catalogs,  

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91 See McMurry, Recorder of the Black Experience, 48-49.  
92 See "Mr. Work's Conference with Mr. Washington Concerning the Establishment of the Department of Records and Research," and "Plans for Making Tuskegee a Greater Center for Information Relating to the Negro," December 21, 1908, Work Papers, Box 2.
continuing to augment the select library of materials on various aspects of the African-American experience and to produce a bibliography or publications on African Americans. Work, in reflecting on his work at the Alabama Teacher's College in 1933, discussed the day-to-day operations at Tuskegee. Work further divided his work into historical materials (documents, books, pamphlets, and articles) and sociological material (statistics, press clippings, studies of various sorts, and public opinion materials). He also collected data from newspapers and magazines--domestic, foreign, mainstream and African American. More than 100 newspapers and periodicals were handled in the department on a weekly basis. Other sources of information included press clippings, books on African Americans, and governmental reports. Additionally, Work established personal contacts with several important organizations including the National Urban League, National Negro Business League, and the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools. Work proclaimed that the collection of material on African Americans at Tuskegee was “an attempt to measure and evaluate what is taking place with respect to all phases of Negro life, first in the United States and second throughout the world.”

In an effort to carry out these goals, Work published The Negro Yearbook in 1913. Although initially envisioned by Washington as a one-time pamphlet to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of African-American emancipation, the project was put on firmer footing through the establishment of the Negro Year Book Publishing Company, suggested by Robert E. Park. According to McMurry, the company was co-owned by Work, Park, and Tuskegee Institute. Work handled the book’s editing, Park handled the publishing, printing, and advertisement, and Emmett Scott handled the finances.

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93 See “Plans for Making Tuskegee A Greater Center for Information Relating to the Negro,” Work Papers, Box 2.
94 See McMurry, Recorder of the Black Experience, 75-77.
The purpose of the yearbook was to present a combination of statistical and historical information on various aspects of the black experience. According to Work, the project served an important educative function:

The notion of placing education within the reaches of the masses is carried out in the publication of the Negro Yearbook. Information on both the common and the uncommon things of Negro life and history have been placed within the reach of all. This information thus becomes both a defensive and offensive mechanism, which on the one hand give strength, courage, inspiration and hope to the Negro and on the other hand, presents to the white world a convincing argument concerning the Negro's capabilities.95

The first Negro Yearbook was published in 1913. The success of the project is demonstrated by the number of copies printed between 1913 and 1915. In 1912, 5,000 copies were printed; and in 1913, 10,000 copies were printed. In addition to the strong sales and distribution, the Negro Yearbook also allowed Work to maintain contacts with various black intellectuals on a wide variety of historical issues. An important example was the state of historical work on Reconstruction. Work corresponded with John Lynch and Henry McNeil Turner. Both men provided information on various facets of the Reconstruction period in Mississippi and Georgia.96

95 See "Fact Gathering and the Negro: Address Delivered at the Alabama State Teacher's College," February 19, 1933, Work Papers, Box 4.
By 1915, the expansion of the library facilities, the hiring and retention of highly skilled liberal arts faculty, extensive course offerings in the African and African-American experience, the establishment of a Department of Records and Research, and the publication of the *Negro Yearbook* demonstrated Tuskegee's commitment to the furtherance of black history. Although overlooked by many contemporary historians, Tuskegee, when compared to the liberal arts colleges, played a significant role in promoting the study of African-American history in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century and laid the foundation for the establishment of the ASNLH in 1915.

The Creation of the ASNLH and the Beginnings of Professionalization.

The development of African-American history culminated in reached the establishment of the Association for the Study of Afro-American History (ASNLH) in 1915 and the subsequent struggles of this organization to obtain adequate funding and recognition from the larger academic community. Founded by Carter G. Woodson, ASNLH was an outgrowth of earlier historical and literary historical societies such as the Afro-American Historical Society, the American Negro Academy and the Negro Society for Historical Research. This organization, however, differed from those previously mentioned because of its permanence and its avoidance of direct advocacy. Rather than simply a repository of information, Woodson envisioned ASNLH as a disseminator of truth through scientific investigation of the African and African-American past.

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A brief discussion of the ASNLH’s founding meeting and the creation of its executive council further distinguishes it from earlier literary and historical societies. The initial meeting to organize the association was convened in Chicago on September 9, 1915. The meeting was held in the offices of A.L. Jackson, Executive Secretary of the Wabash Avenue Department of the Chicago Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Persons in attendance were George Cleveland Hall, a prominent Chicago surgeon; W.B. Hartgrove, a teacher in the Washington, D.C. public schools; James E. Stamps, businessman, and Carter G. Woodson. A permanent organization was established and the following persons were elected as officers: George Cleveland Hall, President; Jesse E. Moorland, Secretary-Treasurer, and Carter G. Woodson, Director of Research and Editor. The attendees of the first meeting also selected an executive council. These individuals were primarily teachers. Woodson’s selection of businessmen, organizational leaders and teachers to serve in elective and appointive capacities was not coincidental. Woodson understood that a fledgling organization such as the ASNLH needed financial backing and expertise in order to survive in a competitive marketplace. The fact that both Hall and Moorland were both leading fund-raisers for the YMCA attests to this fact.98

In 1916, Woodson began publication of the *Journal of Negro History*. Because the Association was in need of funds, Woodson borrowed four-hundred dollars against a two-thousand dollar life insurance policy with New England Mutual. In the first year of the INH’s operation, Woodson produced three separate issues. Between 1916 and 1919, Woodson concentrated on developing the reputation of the *Journal*. W.E.B. Du Bois once remarked that “Woodson’s greatest contribution to history was not his books but his editorship of the *Journal* which brought into print some of the best scholars in that branch of history.” It was designed to propagate the truths of history. In publishing a journal, Woodson was continuing an earlier tradition of using the written word as a weapon to combat racism and stimulate pride among African Americans. The first three volumes of the *Journal* illustrate several approaches used by Woodson to combat stereotypical and misleading portrayals of African-Americans: the use of primary documents in historical analysis; the use of a “Notes” section to announce important publications and events in African American and American history; and the encouragement of revisionist treatments of historical material by black scholars.  

The collection and printing of primary documents relevant to African-American history was one of the most important achievements of the Association. The documents that appeared in the *Journal* from 1916 to 1919 are representative of the kinds of investigations Woodson hoped to conduct in African-American history. The documents

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*History* 10 (1925): 598-606.

were concerned with a variety of topics. There were documents on the origins and history of the black church such as "Letters Showing the Rise and Progress of the Early Negro Churches of Georgia and the West Indies," and "Letters of Richard Allen and Abasolm Jones," early founders of the A.M.E. church. Some documents were concerned with the history of persons of African descent in foreign countries such as "Letters, Narratives, Laws and Comments Bearing on the Dutch West Indies," and "Petition for Compensation for the Loss of Slaves by Emancipation in the Danish West Indies."\(^{100}\)

Woodson also featured documents pertaining to slavery. These included "California Freedom Papers" and the "Letters of Governor Edward Coles bearing on the Struggle of Freedom and Slavery." He also used documents to shed light on major events in African-American history such as the Great Migration of 1916-1918 collected under the direction of Emmett J. Scott." The documents in the Journal served the dual purpose of exposing the public to the history of African Americans in documentary form and providing a forum for the production of factual histories of the race in every facet of American life.\(^{101}\)


The "Notes" section of the Journal provided a useful discussion of various publications and events relevant to African-American and American history. This section of the journal was not unique. It was, however, one of the few, if not the only, historical journal to offer an up-to-date listing of publications in African-American history. In 1916, this section featured a brief tribute to Booker T. Washington. In 1917, Woodson announced the publication of Arthur Schomburg's Biographical Checklist of American Negro Poetry. In 1918, an announcement appeared to promote the publication of Benjamin Brawley's The Negro in American Literature and Art. In 1919, Woodson announced that the Association, itself, would publish a scientific history of African American participation in World War I.102

Another important aspect of Woodson's program to promote African-American history was the writing of revisionist history. Although Woodson considered the work of the Journal as a search for truth, he also understood that the racist nature of scholarly inquiry into issues concerning blacks led to biased interpretations by white scholars. One of the earliest examples of revisionist work to appear in the journal was that of John Lynch. Lynch was a congressman in Mississippi during Reconstruction. In 1917, he published "Some Historical Errors of James Ford Rhodes," and in 1918, he published "More About the Historical Errors of James Ford Rhodes." These articles critiqued the work of James Ford Rhodes, an amateur historian who published the influential work History of the U.S. from the Compromise of 1850. As an actual participant in a

Reconstruction government, Lynch took issue with Rhodes’ biased interpretation of the
Reconstruction period.103

The early issues of the Journal were well received by both black and white scholars
and laypersons. In assessing the first issue of the journal, Edward Channing noted that he
“liked the looks of the thing—the page, the print.” He also became a subscriber and
requested Harvard’s Widener Library to subscribe as well. George Cable, author of the
Negro Question, pledged his support for the Journal, and offered assistance in obtaining
subscribers. Woodson also received favorable assessments of the Association’s work from
several interested parties in foreign countries. Casely Hayford, the Gold Coast activist,
wrote to Woodson to express his deep gratitude for ASNLH’s work. Moreover, he was
expressly pleased with the Journal. Hayford wrote, “The get-up is excellent and highly
credible to our race in America.” Dada Adeshigbin, a Nigerian businessman wrote of the
Journal, “I am pleased to know that it was edited and published by my own color, I am
impressed by the excellent form in which the publication was got up.”104

Despite these favorable evaluations, Woodson continued to encounter difficulty
raising the necessary funds to publish the Journal and to maintain the Association. In 1916
alone, Woodson sent out more than 200 letters to philanthropists. The mailing, however,

generated fourteen dollars. By the end of 1916, both J.N. Grisham and Miss S.P. Breckinridge had resigned from ASNLI's Executive Council. Grisham was replaced by Garrett Crumel Wilkinson, attorney and principal of Armstrong Manual Training School in Washington, D.C. Woodson was forced to use the Journal to solicit funds for the Association. In an advertisement entitled, "A Neglected Work," Woodson outlined the goals of the Association and defined the urgency of the situation. He wrote:

...Excepting what can be learned from current controversial literature, which either portrays the Negro as a persecuted saint or brands him as a leper of society, the people of the age are getting no information to show what the Negro has thought and felt and done. The Negro therefore, is in danger of becoming a negligible factor in the thought of the world. In centuries to come when white scholars after forgetting the prejudices of this age will begin to make researches for truth, they will have only one side of the question, if the Negro does not leave something to tell his own story. 105

Woodson listed five ways the public could assist the Association in raising money and promoting the collection and preservation of black history: "1) subscribe to the Journal; 2) become a member of the Association; 3) contribute to our research fund; 4) collect and send us historical material bearing on the Negroes of your community; 5) urge every Negro to write us all he knows about his family history." Subscriptions to the Journal cost one dollar in 1916. Woodson's appeal to a lay audience was an important step in garnering public support. Because of the small number of trained black historians, Woodson's goal of appealing to the public was essential to the survival of the Association.

105 See the Journal of Negro History 1 (October 1916): advertisement section. Also see Woodson, "Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing," 600-601 and "An Accounting for Twenty-Five Years," Journal of Negro History (October 1940): 423. For biographical information on Wilkinson, see Mather, Who's Who Among the Colored Race, 198.
The public was not only a source of monetary support but a rich resource of information for the emerging specialty of African-American history. At that point, however, the public’s support was not sufficient to sustain a comprehensive historical association, thus Woodson turned his attention to cultivating the support of the large philanthropic organizations.  

Jesse Moorland took the lead in raising funds for the Association and the Journal. By October 1916, Julius Rosenwald was persuaded by Moorland, and by the high quality of the Journal, to support the Association. Rosenwald pledged $100 to the Research Fund which was to “employ investigators to carry out the designs of the Association.” This amount was pledged every quarter. Funds also were donated by Robert E. Park ($30); and by Margaret Murray Washington ($15). Containing the tradition of self-sacrifice himself and his own confidence in the Journal, Woodson donated $30. The establishment of the Research Fund and the subsequent contributions did little to relieve the Association’s debt. At the end of 1916, the Association’s debt averaged between $1,200 and $1,500.  

In 1917, the Association’s fortunes increased substantially. It received several endorsements from individuals in the white and black communities. The noted author, Charles Chesnutt, praised Woodson’s work when he wrote, “It is customary to assume that the Negro has contributed nothing noteworthy to civilization, that a magazine, which in the interest of truth will call attention to the other side of the ledger, will supply a

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106 See the Journal of Negro History 1 (October 1916): advertisement section
distinct need and ought to be cordially and adequately supported.” Chesnutt also became a subscriber to the Journal. Walter H. Brooks, pastor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. commended the Association’s work. He wrote, “You are rendering the race and humanity, a service in your publications. Your journal exists to tell the story of the race in all lines of worthy endeavor. May you have the readers in every family in the country.” Woodson’s work also brought invitations to speak before the civic groups. Mary Talbert, president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) invited Woodson to speak at the group’s convention in Denver, Colorado in December, 1918. Talbert felt that Woodson could “with telling effect impress the women teachers and mothers with the necessity of our beginning to know something about their history.”

Woodson used the Association’s first biennial meeting on August 27, 1917 to stress the beneficial aspects of black history as well as appeal to the philanthropists for financial assistance for the Association. Thus, it is not surprising that this meeting featured a who’s who of white and black notables as well as representation from all of the major philanthropic organizations. In attendance were Mrs. Louis Post, wife of the Assistant Secretary of Labor; Dr. James H. Dillard, director of the John P. Slater Fund; George Foster Peabody, a New York banker and head of the Peabody Fund; Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones, United States Bureau of Education, and Julius Rosenwald. Black notables included Monroe N. Work, compiler of the Negro Year Book, George E. Haynes, social scientist and co-founder of the Urban League; Dr. C.V. Roman, medical doctor and author of

American Civilization and the Negro (1916); Channing Tobias, Moorland’s assistant for youth work; Benjamin Brawley, and A.L. Jackson.109

During the meeting, Work delivered a paper on black involvement in World War I. Woodson took this opportunity to discuss the importance of the Association’s work. He stressed the need to raise money to employ investigators to collect and process valuable documents relevant to African American history. Julius Rosenwald also addressed the meeting. He approved of the Association’s work and praised the scholarly standards of the Journal. James Dillard stressed the importance of studying Africa. The business meeting involved ratification of the Association’s constitution.110

The most important aspect of the meeting was the nomination of new officers and members of the executive council. Woodson skillfully reshuffled the council to reflect the priorities of the Association to represent its most pressing goal, the acquisition of sufficient funding from the philanthropic organizations. Thus, the new members of the executive council featured influential and conservative African Americans as well as representatives of the major philanthropies. Influential black leaders included, John R. Hawkins, banker and financial secretary of the A.M.E. church, and Robert E. Jones, editor and clergyman. The philanthropists included Julius Rosenwald, James Dillard, and J. G.

110 “First Biennial Meeting,” 442-444.
Phelps Stokes. Other prominent whites included L. Hollingsworth Wood, Urban Lea-Chairman, and Moorfield Storey, national president of the NAACP.  

With Robert E. Park as President of the Association, he prepared to launch a major funding drive to raise $10,000. Woodson asked Robert R. Moton, principal of Tuskegee Institute, to serve on the executive council. Moton declined the offer but pledged his support for the cause. Julius Rosenwald consented to serve on the executive council with the stipulation that he was not obligated to take part in the organization’s work. Heartened by these responses, Woodson continued to solicit support from the black and white communities to sustain the Association’s work. 

Despite innovative approaches to the study of African American history and the attraction of major philanthropists to the Association’s cause, the organization continued to be plagued by financial difficulties. In 1917, and again in 1920, Du Bois was “twice alarmed because of “Woodson’s meager income and his overwork,” and offered to incorporate the Journal into the NAACP’s Department of Research and Publications. Du Bois and Woodson could not agree on terms. Apparently, Woodson was intent upon maintaining his autonomy.  

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111 Ibid., 447-448. many of these new members of the executive council represented major philanthropic interests and accommodationist elements within the black community. For information on the new black members of the council, John R. Hawkins and Robert E. Jones, see Mather, Who’s Who Among the Colored Race, 132, 162.

112 See Robert Russa Moton to Woodson, 12 September 1917, Woodson Papers. For information on Rosenwald’s agreement to serve on the executive council, see Julius Rosenwald to Woodson, 27 August 1917 and Rosenwald to Woodson, 8 September 1917, Woodson Papers.

113 See Du Bois, “a Portrait of Carter G. Woodson,” 22. also see Meier and Rudwick, Black History and the Historical Profession, 20-21.
After completing a study titled *A Century of Negro Migration* in 1918, Woodson initiated the first of a series of inquiries into numerous areas of Africana and African-American history. The areas of inquiry included “The Negro in Africa, the Enslavement of the Negro, Slavery and the Rights of Man, The Reaction Against Slavery as an Economic Institution, The Free Negro in the United States, The Abolition Movement, The Colonization Project, Slavery and the Constitution, The Negro in the Civil War, and The Reconstruction of the Southern States, The Negro in Freedom, The Negro and Social Justice.” Although Woodson predicted that this work would be completed in February 1918, its magnitude was such that this series of projects would comprise the work of the Association for the next thirty years.\(^\text{114}\)

Woodson continued to receive support and encouragement for the ASNLH’s work from prominent individuals. Henry B.F. MacFarland, a white attorney in Washington, D.C., praised Woodson’s work highly, “I think you are doing a great service in stimulating the race consciousness and race pride of the Negro race as part of the American people. Woodson also received assistance from Robert R. Moton of Tuskegee Institute in soliciting funds from George Foster Peabody. In his letter to Peabody, Moton outlined the sacrifices Woodson had made for the *Journal*, “I have recently been informed that he (Woodson) gave his personal check for $375 to pay bills without enough being left to pay his board in advance.” Moton also noted that “the *Journal* is meeting a real need and if a contribution of a thousand dollars from some friend or group of friends could be secured, I am sure that it would help the cause very much indeed.”\(^\text{115}\)

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\(^\text{115}\) See Henry B.F. MacFarland to Woodson, 12 March 1918, Woodson Papers, Robert R. Moton to Woodson, 1 June 1918 and Moton to George Foster Peabody, 28 May 1918, Woodson Papers.
Despite a brief battle with W.E.B. Du Bois, Emmett Scott, and Charles Young over the publication of a history of World War I in 1918, in 1919 Woodson persuaded William G. Wilcox, a New York insurance underwriter who was chairman of Tuskegee Institute's Board of Trustees to join the executive council. He also successfully solicited an annual pledge of $400 annually from Moorfield Storey and Cleveland Dodge, mining heir. This support allowed ASNLH to pay many of its debts. With some of its debts clear, Woodson hired a Field Agent, J.E. Ormes of the business department of Wilberforce University, to sell books and solicit subscriptions for the Journal. Ormes also had the responsibility for organizing clubs to study black history. Additionally, Woodson announced another ambitious project. This project involved the preparation of the first textbook of African-American history, to be titled The Negro in Our History. Woodson conceived of the text as one that would provide fundamental facts, suggestions, and references for a more intensive study of black history by high school seniors and freshman college students. He also obtained suggestions from the public on extending the scope of the study.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{116} See Carter G. Woodson to W.E.B. Du Bois, 27 October 1918, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Du Bois to Woodson, 30 October 1918, Du Bois to Woodson, 30 October 1918; Woodson to Du Bois, 9 November 1918 and Du Bois to Woodson, 12 November 1918, Du Bois Papers; and Woodson to Colonel Charles Young, 14 November 1918, and Young to Woodson, 30 November 1918, Du Bois Papers. On the Wilcox appointment, see William G. Wilcox to Woodson, 26 December 1918, and Wilcox to Woodson, 16 May 1919, Woodson Papers. For information on Moorfield Storey's and Cleveland Dodge's contributions to the Association, see Journal of Negro History 4 (January 1919): 110. For information on J.E. Ormes and the black history clubs, see the Journal of Negro History 4 (April 1919): 237. For information on plans to publish The Negro in Our History, see Journal of Negro History 4 (October 1919): 474.
The most important event of 1919 was the second biennial meeting of ASNLH which convened in Washington, D.C. at the 12th Street Branch of the YWCA and the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church. Jesse Moorland presided at the meeting and papers were presented by Monroe N. Work, Emmett J. Scott, C.V. Roman, George E. Haynes, Dr. J. Stanley Durkee, President of Howard University, Charles Wesley, Associate Professor of History at Howard, and John W. Davis, Secretary of the local YMCA. The two most interesting papers were those of Work and Davis. Work presented a paper entitled, the “Negro and Public Opinion in the South since the Civil War.” This paper provided an overview of how white attitudes toward blacks varied after the Civil War. This talk was consistent with the Association’s investigations of African Americans during the Reconstruction era. Davis presented a paper entitled, “How to Promote the Study of Negro Life and History.” This paper provided an overview of the reasons black history should be studied and promoted.  

More encouraging than the papers presented at the conference was the “Report of the Director.” This report indicated that the period from 1917 to 1919 was the most successful in ASNLH’s history. The number of subscriptions to the Journal had reached 4,000. Additionally, Woodson supplemented the income of the Association by selling books on African and African-American history. Woodson felt that these efforts indicated “that the Association will soon develop into a nucleus of workers known throughout the world as publishers of authoritative and scientific books bearing on Negro life and history.” Moreover, Woodson felt that the Association would receive more support from philanthropists once more scholarly studies were produced. 

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117 For the initial announcement of the meeting, see the Journal of Negro History 4 (July 1919): 347-348. For a complete summary of the meeting, see “Proceedings of the Second Biennial Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History,” Journal of Negro History 4 (October 1919): 475-482.

In addition to his work at the Association, Woodson accepted a position as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Head of the Graduate Faculty at Howard University, the latter of which he held for one year (1919-1920). Woodson was clearly an innovator. He conducted one of the first graduate seminars incorporating the study of black history. One of Woodson's students, Arnett Lindsay recalled some of his methods. Woodson did not use a textbook, rather he prepared an extensive outline of materials to supplement his lectures. He also encouraged his students to conduct primary research for the MA thesis in the Library of Congress. Lindsay also recalled that Woodson's "retentive memory enabled him to cite sources accurately and quote verbatim from documents, narratives, and other historical materials."\(^{119}\)

Despite his superior teaching abilities, Woodson's tenure at Howard was short-lived. Woodson resented the patronizing style of Howard's white president J. Stanley Durkee, and attempts by Durkee to reduce him to simply a dean of the college. Woodson anticipated a larger role for himself which Durkee did not wish to acknowledge. Woodson later would describe his conflicts with Durkee by noting that "the President began to hit me like this and I began to hit him like that." There was a constant conflict between the two men.\(^{120}\)

This dispute led Woodson to criticize Jesse Moorland's unwillingness to come to his aid. Woodson wrote to Moorland, "You have a weakness for good-for-nothing white


\(^{120}\) See Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, "As I Remember Woodson," *Negro History Bulletin* 17 (November 1953): 37.
people because of your broken down theory that in the Negro schools the best of the two races may be united. This has never been true, and it will never be until the Negroes have made such progress as to be recognized as the equal of whites.” Woodson concluded by noting that “it is all but criminal to impose such medieval misfits on Negro institutions when these positions can be admirably filled by scientifically trained Negroes.”\textsuperscript{121}

By May 1920, Woodson had resigned from Howard. Because of his intemperate remarks, Woodson alienated his most ardent supporter, Jesse E. Moorland. It was also during this period, however, that Woodson worked with J. Franklin Jameson, editor of the \textit{American Historical Review} and director of the Department of Historical Research at the Carnegie Institution of Washington. From its inception, Jameson had taken an interest in the ASNLH’s work. Impressed by Woodson’s work and convinced that a subsidy from a large foundation would further the Association’s efforts to conduct scientific studies of blacks, Jameson assisted Woodson in initiating a grant proposal with the Carnegie Foundation of New York.\textsuperscript{122}

The institutionalization of African American history in the black academy and the subsequent formation of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History heralded the culmination of a century long effort to institutionalize and legitimize the study of


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African-American experience. The black academy was instrumental in this process. Black schools, like their white counterparts, responded to the shift from religiously based notions of education to more scientific and objective pedagogical ideas. Initially constructed in the mirror image of New England liberal arts schools, black liberal arts colleges focused less on the African-American experience as opposed to the classical tradition. As scientism and modernism began to take hold among African-American intellectuals and social scientists and liberal clergymen such as W.E.B. Du Bois and J.W.E. Bowen designed innovative programs and conferences to study systematically various aspects of African-American life and history. In every instance, the liberal arts schools augmented their library holdings in African-American resources. This was certainly the case at Atlanta University with its Marblehead library program or the Moorland collection at Howard University and the augmentation of materials on Africa in the Gammon Theological Seminary collections. Moreover, each school viewed its historical programs as having not only an insular import within the academy but also a wider impact on the larger African-American community. For instance, Du Bois’s Atlanta University Studies were intended to provide reliable information on African Americans for use by local, state, and federal governments as well as colleges and universities. The Stewart Missionary Association at Gammon Theological Institute was designed to further a more complete and nuanced understanding of the relationship between Africans and African Americans.

While it is clear that classically oriented schools played a significant role in the promotion of black history, industrial schools were also significant in this regard. Hampton Institute, long regarded as the paragon of the industrial model, used history as an ideological tool to further an industrial agenda. Although Hampton’s offerings in history were scant, its press, the Normal Steam Printing Press, and Hampton’s official organ, the Southern Workman, featured numerous articles on the African-American experience, especially history. It was Hampton’s press that published Joseph Wilson’s *Emancipation*...
Its Course and Progress (1882) and the Southern Workman which published the work of black intellectuals ranging from Du Bois to Work. Additionally, many of the institution’s teachers also published historical articles and sought to uphold and extend the school’s mission in their classes and writings.

All industrial schools were not the same in their approaches to history. Tuskegee, Hampton’s sister institution, adopted many of its pedagogical tools and approaches in educating freedmen. Booker T. Washington, however, was not slavish in his adherence to the Hampton model. Instead, Washington modeled his program on the needs of the surrounding community of Tuskegee as well as his idea of what Southern blacks needed as a whole—self respect, discipline and an appreciation of hardwork. As part of his propaganda machine, Washington understood the multi-faceted uses of history. In Washington’s hands, history was a tool for enlightenment, change, and progress. It was the light to lead the race “up from slavery.” Of all the industrial schools, Tuskegee’s historical program was by far the most superior. In addition to course offerings, Washington also wrote several quasi-historical works and maintained an active involvement with race historians including Edward Johnson, John Cromwell, Daniel Murray, and William Henry Crogman. Washington also hired Robert Park and Monroe Nathan Work to assist in building Tuskegee’s collections in African and African-American history.

The 1920’s marked a period of great growth and expansion for the ASNLH. Finally able to obtain support from large philanthropic foundations, the Association was poised to make even greater contributions to the study of African-American life and history. Building on a strong tradition of lay and avocational interest in historical representation and production that extended back to the early Republic, black historians, by 1920, were poised to enter into professionalized historical spaces. As this study clearly
shows, historical and historical consciousness among African Americans evolved in a slow but progressive nature. While history was formally and informally organized around civic and then disciplinary academic spaces in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century the emergence of more formalized structures for the dissemination of historical knowledge emerged. It is the holistic story of how black history became more than simply a conglomeration of lay and amateur intellectuals and historical writers that this dissertation seeks to tell.
Conclusion

The historical period between 1789 and 1915 was one of the most fluid, dynamic and contested periods in American and African-American history. In the mainstream, these, it seems, were years of “progress.” A new nation had been born, there was a market revolution, and the country was poised to, and succeeded at, fulfilling its “Manifest Destiny.” History has shown us, however, that all is not always as it appears. The birth of this new nation cost its original inhabitants dearly. Mired in the contradictions of freedom and slavery, the market revolution, while aiding and abetting the American projects of economic expansion, reinforced the economic viability of slavery. And Manifest Destiny seemed to ensure the the continued subordination of slave and free alike.

But “history” has always done more than simply inform us of the past. Whose past and what information to pass on requires a conscious decision on the part of the author. And even as the nation grew and developed, intellectuals, too, were being molded and shaped by these external goings on. In the mainstream, through Romanticism, American intellectuals reveled in the infinite possibilities of nature. Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau urged the nation to celebrate its individual self and preached the virtues of “rugged individualism.” Although traditionally viewed as the antithesis of more crass celebrations of materialism and unbridled expansionism, the Transcendentalists celebrated the very virtues, individualism and command and understanding of nature, which provided fodder for the market revolution and Manifest Destiny.
Historians such as George Bancroft, commonly referred to as a Boston Brahmin, used Romantic devices such as Representative men and women and an interest in ancient societies and civilizations as a means to present history as a epic. And, as such, history was viewed as a set of instructive lessons for human conduct. Bancroft celebrated the country’s successes and failures as part of a teleologically oriented story of national progress. While the potency of Bancroft’s teleological construction of the national life would wane in the postbellum years, its replacement, scientism and objectivity, would in some instances replicate many of its problematic features.¹

Among African-Americans, the process was similar but informed by circumscription in the North and chattel slavery in the South. African American intellectuals created viable discursive spaces to critique the most pressing issues of the period such as slavery, colonization, and racial degradation. Influenced by what Lewis Perry terms “the reorganization of intellectual life,” the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-centuries witnessed changing technlogies in the modes of intellectual or knowledge acquisition. This period witnessed the growth of the newspaper industry as well as the proliferation of the penny press and chapbooks—inexpensively bound pamphlets

produced for mass consumption. Drawing on the Enlightenment faith in the utility of
science, reason, and progress, African Americans sought to reshape the intellectual sphere
to make it more receptive to the needs of a growing population increasingly interested in
the possibilities of “democratic literacy.” The notion of democratic literacy was
particularly salient for African Americans who viewed it as essential in creating discursive
spaces for reasessing America’s inability to realize its democratic potential by dethroning
the twin gods of slavery and manifest destiny.  

History, then, offered a means to accenuate notions of “democratic literacy” by
serving as a conduit through which an African-American intellecual tradition could be
constructed. For African-American writers, democracy also entailed the equitable
treatment of all American people. Thus, challenging the image of Africa as the benighted
continent featured prominently in these efforts. Essentialism, biologically based ideas
regarding race were one of the paramount reasons that democratic possibilities for African

2 See Lewis Perry, Intellectual Life in America: A History. (Chicago: University of
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Americans were circumscribed. In order to actuate the true possibilities of the race, it was necessary to discredit fallacious notions concerning Africa.\(^3\)

In the postbellum period, historical writing focused on more than justifying emancipation. While these writers provided qualitative and quantitative assessments of black industry, thrift and frugality to refute the Northern and Southern contention that Africans were facing impending extinction, they also produced engaging historical works ranging from emancipation narratives to biographical catalogs. These texts provide important insights into the myriad ways African Americans used history to shape the perception of the race in the public sphere.\(^4\)

As the twentieth century dawned, it gave rise to a new age defined by scientism and objectivity. These tenets of the nascent historical profession also reinscribed projects of separation and circumscription for African-American historians. Largely excluded from professional meetings and journals, through noninvitation as opposed to formal prohibition, black historians initially were forced to work with avocational historians, bibliophiles, and collectors, in order to further their scholarly interests in history. As time


progressed, these historians moved into a professional organization of their own making, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915.  

In the black academy, the shifting nature of the intellectual sphere towards more specialization, however, altered historical writing and the development of the historical profession. With the rise of departments of history and the emergence of professionally trained historians, historical discourse was increasingly shaped by a well-defined and highly educated group of men and women. These African Americans sought to reconcile the contributionist theory of history that presented the race as important contributors to and participants in American history with the ascendant model of scientific history that applied the application of scientific methodology to historical writing.  

In order to broaden our understanding of how African-American history emerged as a historical specialty, this study focuses on an integrated examination of the development of history and historical writing among African Americans prior to 1915. Rather than relegating discussions of the development of African-American history to the periphery of American history or treating it as a separate subject, I have located African-American history in the mainstream of American history and thought. African-American history, like the national history, was shaped by both changes in the country's intellectual climate as well as the shifting nature of the historical profession. These nuances are important to the talking of this story.  

This study departed significantly from earlier works because it moved beyond earlier studies which simply ascribed the creation of an African American historical discourse to racial vindication. Although this was an important factor, it is not the driving force underlying historical writing in the period prior to 1915. Instead this study uncovered a wealth of information regarding African-American intellectual and historical projects. It examined the internal logic (argument, sources, and methodology) of these writings within the historical and intellectual context in which they appeared. Judging nineteenth-century historical writing on its terms rather than imposing the standards of twentieth-century historical production upon it provides a more nuanced and engaged interrogation of its relevance and meanings for scholars today.
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