Elder Voices:
Slavery and Aging in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the ways in which nineteenth-century apologist writers sought to discount and silence the agency of African Americans through literary representations of enslavement in elder(ly) "Aunts" and "Uncles." Despite the many antebellum and postbellum works that countered and corrected the happy caricatures of pro-slavery fiction by demonstrating the power of elder voices, the Christianization and infantilization of aged African-Americans effectively drowned out all other representations. In silencing black elders through stereotyping, apologist literature succeeded in stalling racial progress in twentieth-century America and well beyond. This work aims to provide an understanding of the damaging effects the appropriation and silencing of black elders in apologist literature had on how white America views black Americans. Conversely, this project addresses how pro-equality and African-American writers engaged with and confronted racist representations in their own works to show the country and the world that apologist caricatures do not reflect African-Americans' experiences, nor do stereotypes of aged "Aunts" and "Uncles" reflect the strength, pride, resilience, care, wisdom, and speaking power of our nation's black elders.

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INTRODUCTION

THE LITERARY WAR FOR AMERICA'S ELDER(LY) ENSLAVED

As many Americanist scholars are well aware, there are two famous versions of the address Sojourner Truth's delivered to the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, in the spring of 1851. Abolitionist, writer, and Truth's friend, Marius Robinson, published the speech in its entirety in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* in June of the same year, while Frances Dana Gage, also a writer (and the woman who presided over the Akron convention) published a much different account of Truth's speech twelve years later in 1863. Although scholars and historians consider Robinson's version to be "the more reliable" of the two because of its proximity to the actual event, Nell Irvin Painter asserts that Gage's version, which came to be known as "Ar'n't I a Woman?", is "almost universally prefer[red]" by "Truth's modern admirers."[1] This somewhat illogical preference, Painter argues, is due to the public's love and need for the symbolic Truth we imagine her to have been, and which is more readily accessible through the sentimentality of Gage's version, which contains uncorroborated descriptions of a raucous crowd, slave dialect and stereotyping, and (alleged) details about Truth's life not present in Robinson's 1851 account.

In Robinson's version, Truth is articulate, assertive, and logical in making her case for women's rights and abolition. Instead of an intelligent, well-spoken woman, Gage depicts Truth

[1] Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996), 174.

as an "Aunty" caricature, who arrives to the convention wearing an "uncouth sun-bonnet,"[2] flexes her muscles and cannot remember the word, "Intellect,"[3] and who calls people "honey"[4]—a racialized term of endearment Truth insisted she never used.[5] Gage's combination of abolitionist sentimentalism and racial/racist signifiers not only ages Truth, it de-genders her in many of the same ways that southern, pro-slavery writers did their own "Aunty" caricatures. Just as Gage, a noted feminist, abolitionist, *and* fiction writer, likely believed that sensationalizing and "blacking up" Truth and her speech would bolster public support through sentimentalism, the stereotypes that run throughout her "reinterpretation" of Truth's words creates a schism between the confident, capable Truth of Robinson's earlier account, and the cultural expectations of whites as expressed by Gage. Significantly, the exact opposite was true of many pro-slavery writers, who, at times—unwittingly, to be sure—scripted words and actions of aged "Aunts" and "Uncles" that actually (read: accidentally) demonstrated a shared humanity, and occasionally, acts of resistance.

Gage's version of Sojourner Truth's convention address is just one example out of many in which the lives, dreams, words, and actions of America's aged enslaved were distorted and employed by white authors to persuade readers to their side of the slavery/emancipation debate. When analyzing nineteenth-century *fiction*, in particular, it becomes clear that pro-slavery writers relied almost entirely on aged-slave caricatures to people their literary works, thus making them the unwilling spokespeople for enslavement. As I hope to demonstrate throughout this monograph, the significance of speaking and oral tradition to elder(ly) black men and women during and following enslavement is a predominant theme in the antebellum and

[2] Ibid, 166.
[3] Ibid, 167.
[4] Ibid.
[5] In response to a similar use of the word in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1863 article, "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl," Truth asserted, "I never make use of the word honey." Ibid, 163.

postbellum fiction of both abolitionist and pro-slavery writers—although the literary treatment of black orality was employed very differently by the two camps. When reading such texts with an eye toward how, and to what end these authors were representing the aged enslaved in their works, it becomes clear that nineteenth-century race fiction was a battleground—a literary tug of war—over the figure of the aged slave as a crucial symbol of slavery's benefits and detriments.

Although there is not much recent scholarship on nineteenth-century "apologist" writers[6]—or, those who sought to defend the oppression of African Americans by contending through their works that enslavement was not detrimental, but beneficial to the black race—an analysis of representations of the elder(ly) enslaved in antebellum and postbellum fiction would be incomplete without bringing such authors' works into the discussion. Analyzing the racially-motivated representations of the aged enslaved in nineteenth-century fiction can assist modern scholars in "critiqu[ing] the practices by which current forms of knowledge and power about aging have assumed their authority as a form of truth."[7] The literary works of pro-slavery authors present myriad difficulties for modern readers, yet they are relevant regarding representations of old age and enslavement precisely *because* they are so deliberate and formulaic in their use of aged slave caricatures to publicly respond to the subjects of emancipation and equal rights. In their recent critical work, Gavin Jones and Judith Richardson assert of the apologist novel that "the very failures of the genre are what deserve our attention,"[8] as it "shared, at times, much in

[6] Much of the scholarship addressing the dozens of apologist fiction writers who were most popular and prolific in the nineteenth-century appear in reference works, and southern humor and local color anthologies—the earliest of which, starting in the 1960s, are effectively apologist texts themselves. For example, in *The Smiling Phoenix: Southern Humor from 1865-1914*, author Wade Hall argues that one of Thomas Nelson Page's postbellum apologist stories, "shows many attractive characteristics of the old regime: its splendor, the cordiality between the races, the fraternity between master and slave, the slave's sense of belonging, and the joy of living then." Wade Hall, *The Smiling Phoenix: Southern Humor from 1865-1914* (Gainesville, U of Florida P, 1965), 142.
[7] Stephen Katz, "What is Age Studies?" *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1. no. 1 (Spring 2014): accessed April 15, 2016.
[8] Gavin Jones and Judith Richardson, "Proslavery Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Slavery in American Literature*, ed. Ezra Tawil (New York: Cambridge UP, 2016), 101.

common with the antislavery literature it countered and further provoked—highlight[ing] fundamental dilemmas rankling the nation as a whole, not least the problem of race that both drives and thwarts so much American narrative."[9] For the purposes of this discussion, these texts provide (ugly) glimpses into what the dominant culture thought it meant to be both black *and* old, as pro-slavery "Aunt" and "Uncle" caricatures not only affected the way that the white reading public perceived black people, but how they treated them after Emancipation.

Apologist fiction writers positioned enslaved "Uncles" as both old men and children, with supposedly inferior intellects and faithful demeanors that made them ideal companions and entertainers for white children. Whereas pro-slavery depictions of aged "Aunts" are starkly different in the antebellum period from those in the postbellum—a reflection of the changing relationships between whites and elder black women following Emancipation—the trope of the "Storytelling Uncle" was apparently successful enough in achieving racist ends that it was not only maintained, but highly popular in American literature and entertainment from the 1830s through the 1940s. Consequently, the orality of elder black men was appropriated for well over a century as a symbol of their alleged ineptitude to provide for and take care of themselves and their families. This perceived incompetence did not, however, preclude slaveholders from relying on elder black men to safeguard the wellbeing of their own children; thus, the "Storytelling Uncle" proved a thinly veiled attempt to stifle the agency and progress of a wholly capable, but nevertheless degraded group of men.

After the Civil War, apologist writers *did* adapt their antebellum literary stereotypes of aged black females, yet the changes were merely a new, often more cruel means of silencing their "Aunt" characters. In antebellum fiction, pro-slavery writers had restricted both the mobility and orality of black women in their works through the "Deathbed Aunty" trope, which

[9] Ibid, 112-13.

confined the old women to their cabins and limited their speaking subjects to the glory of having nursed and served their "white families." Since there was no longer a need to argue the contentedness of elderly "Aunties" following Emancipation, apologist fiction writers decisively killed off their frail, beloved old nurses, and replaced them with mentally and spiritually broken outcasts. Passing off the residual psychological aftereffects of chattel slavery as Deep South "local color," postbellum apologist writers employed the "Distracted Aunty" trope as yet another attempt to diminish the speaking power and dismiss the trauma of black women in the minds of nineteenth-century readers.

Abolitionist and post-Reconstruction works by both black and white authors actively refute the pro-slavery tropes of black elders, and at times there is a very clear conversation going on between pro-slavery and pro-equality fiction. The aged enslaved and formerly enslaved characters of these works are meant to demonstrate the resistance and resilience of the black race—the exact opposite of the contentedness and helplessness of racist stereotypes. These characterizations of elder black men and women who did not suffer in silence, but spoke their pain *and* joy, and who used their speaking power to reunite their families and reclaim their lives after enslavement, are testament to the irrepressible talents and unmitigated strengths of America's black mothers and fathers, as well as the communal bonds they built and shared that could not be broken.

Enslavement & Old Age in Nineteenth-Century Nonfiction

I. "Cradle to Grave" Paternalism

Antebellum apologist fiction and non-fiction consistently depicted slavery as a patriarchal system that provided and cared for its "workers" from "cradle to grave," or, from birth until

death. The pro-slavery authors who promoted this paternalism crafted their southern settings around depictions and assertions of black contentment and even gratitude, where their enslaved characters were described as rarely sold, rarely beaten, always loved, and happily housed and fed long after they had ceased to be "valuable" members of the plantation labor force. The latter of these—the notion of security in old age—surely struck a chord with many nineteenth-century Americans anxious about their own physical or mental decline, and fearful of the uncertainties of old age in a time before social security and twentieth-century commitments to the welfare state.

Both southerners and northerners viewed this unofficial policy of caregiving for the elderly as an act of selfless mercy on the part of slaveholders, as it cost money to support older slaves who were no longer contributing to the plantation economy as they had formerly. However, Lydia Maria Child addressed this misconception as early as 1833 in *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, asserting, "When the drudge does not suit, he may be sold for some inferior purpose, like a horse that has seen his best days, till like a worn-out beast he dies, unpitied and forgotten! Kept in ignorance of the holy precepts and divine consolations of Christianity, he remains he pagan in a Christian land."[10] Although Child attaches her own religious leanings to the wrongs done to African slaves, her description of the base and neglectful treatment of the old and feeble is nevertheless accurate. The failure of South Carolina slave owners to adequately feed and clothe their slaves was enough of a problem by the mid-eighteenth century to make it illegal; by the mid-nineteenth century, several slave states had adopted similar laws,[11] but with the notable addition that slave owners must also "cause [a slave]

[10] Lydia Maria Child, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (Boston: Allen, 1833), 10. *Internet Archive*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[11] Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: U of Chapel Hill P, 1996), 195-6. According to Morris, Alabama, Georgia, and Kentucky all enacted laws prohibiting the inhumane treatment of slaves in 1852 (the same year Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in book form—with Louisiana following in 1856.

to be properly attended during sickness, and provide for [the slave's] necessary wants in old age."[12] That multiple slave states found it necessary to pass anti-manumission laws to prevent slaveholders from disposing of their old slaves indicates that the practice was common, despite what slavery's defenders would have the public think.

For many African-American enslaved who remained chattel into old age, there was an expectation, if not a spoken or legal understanding, that they would be cared for after lifetimes of forced labor, and after seeing their children sold away to fund the lifestyles of their owners and their descendants. As the existence of antebellum anti-manumission laws demonstrates, however, this was not always the case, and many elderly enslaved found themselves turned away from the only homes they had ever known—forced into reliance upon friends and neighbors for shelter, sustenance, and care in their old age. The most famous instance of such callous manumission is Frederick Douglass's account of his grandmother's ill treatment in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), wherein he condemns his former owner's "base ingratitude to my poor old grandmother […who] saw her children, her grandchildren, and her great-grandchildren, divided like so many sheep; and this without being gratified with the small privilege of a single word as to their or her own destiny."[13] Douglass comments on her deteriorated health, the result of years of hard labor, and her dependence and defenselessness in her advanced age. An emotional Douglass tells how, in this vulnerable condition, her owner "took her to the woods, built her a little hut with a mud chimney and then gave her the bounteous privilege of there supporting herself in utter loneliness; thus virtually turning her out to die."[14] His vision of his beloved grandmother's final years is filled with pathos to the extent that few readers can remain

[12] Morris, 195.
[13] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Published at the Antislavery Office, 1845), 121. *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.
[14] Ibid.

unaffected by the image his words produce. Douglass's grandmother, like the escaped slave and author, Harriet Jacobs's, is both mother and grandmother to him; therefore, his heartbreak is palpable when he bemoans, "The hearth is desolate. The unconscious children who once sang and danced in her presence are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children, she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom."[15]

Certainly, there were elderly-enslaved individuals who, like Harriet Jacobs's grandmother, purchased their freedom from the money they earned in their few off hours (if they were permitted). In Jacobs's 1861 autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*[16] (published under the pseudonym Linda Brent), the author talks at length about her grandmother,[17] Martha, a highly-respected woman in both the black and white communities who, despite her many years of service, once again found herself on the auction block in her old age. Purchased by an aged female benefactor who then emancipated her, the black matriarch was eventually able to support her grandchildren and great-grandchildren with a thriving baking business. More often than not, however, slaves were not allowed to earn and keep wages from their "off-time" (if, indeed, they were afforded any), and so those of advanced age were likely to be cared for by fellow slaves. As Eugene D. Genovese writes in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World*

[15] Ibid. In the 1881 revision of his 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass added an amendment to his earlier comments on the treatment of his grandmother, stating, "The fact is, that, after writing my narrative describing the condition of my grandmother, Capt. Auld's attention being thus called to it, he rescued her from her destitution." Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Boston, De Wolfe, 1892), 449. *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015. Prompted by Douglass's highly-public chastisement, his former owner was shamed into following up on the final years of a slave who, as Douglass puts it, "had been the source of all his wealth [and] had peopled his plantation with slaves." Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 47.

[16] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861, C. 1860). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.

[17] As Harryette Mullen asserts, "Jacobs, implicitly regards her own narrative voice as the continuation of other voices, especially that of her grandmother, whose story she reiterates in the process of telling her own story." Harryette Mullen, "Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Nig*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and *Beloved*." *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 250.

the Slaves Made (1972), "With blacks as well as whites considered 'old' at fifty, slaves of that age commanded no higher purchase price than eight-year-old children on the open market during the 1850s, and the temptation to cut them loose remained strong among the less scrupulous masters."[18] Genovese claims that although increased anti-manumission laws protected some elderly slaves from being turned out of doors, "Some urban slaveholders solved the problem by sending their old slaves out to peddle or beg and thereby bring in some income as well as support themselves."[19]

Former slave and famed seamstress of Mary Todd Lincoln, Elizabeth Keckley, substantiates this practice in her autobiography, *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (1868).[20] Outraged upon learning that her aged mother was to be put back to work to alleviate the destitution of her "white family," one of Keckley's primary concerns was that she would be sent out amongst strangers. As Keckley explains, the grey-haired woman, "had been raised in the family, had watched the growth of each child from infancy to maturity; they had been the objects of her kindest care, and she was wound round about them as the vine winds itself about the rugged oak. They had been the central figures in her dream of life—a dream beautiful to her, since she had basked in the sunshine of no other."[21] Here, Keckley provides valuable insight as to why some enslaved people genuinely cared (as opposed to merely pretending) for the children they were made to raise, often at the expense of nurturing their own offspring. Her mother, knowing she and her own children were stifled in their individual and communal growth, entwined her hopes and dreams with her white charges. Thus, Keckley's mother—and perhaps many enslaved parents in her position—was forced to live

[18] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll; the World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 520.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G.W. Carleton, 1868), *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[21] Ibid, 44.

vicariously through her "white children" if she was ever to experience what it was like to bask in the sunshine of a child's (and by proxy, her own) accomplishments. As Keckley sees it, forcing her aged mother to toil for strangers denied her this surrogate-parent bond and erased a lifetime of maternal efforts and affections. Therefore, to save her mother such a devastating blow to her body, mind, and heart, Keckley ultimately took it upon herself to financially support everyone involved. Nonetheless, the author's non-fiction account further demonstrates that the paternalism of slaveholders was a façade, and that no enslaved person—even the must venerated—was safe from the auction block or its equivalent.

Figure 1: "Daguerreotype of Elder Slave Nurse and White Child." Digital Image. *Ebay.com*. Accessed June 28, 2014.

In addition to the narratives of Douglass and Keckley, which directly challenge the "cradle to grave" justifications for enslavement, the practice of making slaves look younger for auction by greasing their skin and pulling or darkening their white hairs was a known practice that likewise defied the much-touted paternalism of pro-slavery advocates. As William Wells Brown describes in his 1847 autobiography, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*,[22] as well as in his 1853 novel, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*,[23] many

[22] William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (Boston: Published by the Antislavery Office, 1847), 42-3. *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015. Brown writes, "In the course of eight or nine weeks Mr. Walker had his cargo of human flesh made up. There was in this lot a number of old men and women, some of them with gray locks […] I had to prepare the old slaves for market. I was ordered to have the old men's whiskers shaved off, and the grey hairs plucked out, where they were not too numerous, in which case he had a preparation of blacking to color it, and with a blacking-brush we would put it on. This was new business to me, and was performed in a room where the passengers could not see us. These slaves were also taught how old they were by Mr. Walker, and after going through the blacking process, they looked ten or fifteen years younger; and I am sure that some of those who purchased slaves of Mr. Walker, were dreadfully cheated, especially in the ages of the slaves which they bought."

slaves were not only *not* cared for in their old age, but were sold for a reduced price once their prematurely aged and broken bodies ceased to perform as they once had. It was also not unusual for slave owners to sneak older slaves into large lots purchased by traders in order to be rid of them. Henry Bibb relates an especially heartbreaking example of the hypocrisy of paternalism when he writes of an old couple whose "marriage relation was soon dissolved by the sale," and who "were separated never to meet again."[24] Although pro-slavery writers regularly praised human bondage as a Christian duty, religious conversion only served as yet another feature used to increase the sale price of a slave. As Bibb notes of the forced separation of the elderly man and wife, the couple's owner talks up the man's sale price by stating, "'he is not able to accomplish much manual labor, from his extreme age and hard labor in early life," but he is worth purchasing because he is "'faithful and trustworthy, a Christian in good standing in my church […who] has toiled many long years on my plantation."[25] Thus, the religiosity slaveholders proclaimed to be a saving grace of human bondage was used against the Christian enslaved as a major selling point on the auction block.

II. "Christianization and 'Implicit Contracts'"

Pro-slavery writers designed their fictional representations of America's enslaved to assuage public concerns about the treatment of the millions of black bondsmen and women laboring in the south, and they did so by making the *elderly enslaved* the focus of their pro-slavery texts. In essence, these authors sought to erase the tragic deaths of Harriet Beecher

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[23] William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London: Partridge, 1853). *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.
[24] Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: Author, 1849), 200. *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.
[25] Ibid.

Stowe's widely-read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)[26] by rewriting their own, less pitiable versions of slave life. By offering appeasements such as the supposed faithfulness and religiosity of the eldest on the plantation—those most closely linked to the proclaimed "barbarisms" of Africa—pro-slavery writers promoted enslavement as virtuous and religiously sanctioned.

In the antebellum period, myriad northern and southern proponents of slavery penned attestations—including essays, sermons, and especially novels and short stories—wherein they claimed that slaves lived better, easier lives than northern laborers,[27] and that the Christian charity of the "cradle to grave" policy supposedly ensuring the welfare and protection of aged "Aunts" and "Uncles" was something to be envied by whites. Those from the laboring lower class were the ideal audience for this social misdirection, as it encouraged them to embrace a misinformed and misplaced jealousy for a perceived inequity (irony at its finest), and further persuaded them that emancipation was not only dangerous, but wholly unnecessary. Thus, in positioning the aged enslaved as happy in their state of forced co-dependence, literary apologists were able to redirect the sociopolitical conversation away from abolitionist images of suffering young families to the allegedly carefree lives of "the old folks at home."[28]

The southern minister, Richard Furman, namesake of Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, published on the religious and moral aspects of slaveholding decades before the majority of slave narratives were published in the 1840s and 50s. In Furman's *Exposition of The Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population In the United States In a Communication To the Governor of South-Carolina*, published in 1823, the minister converses

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[26] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture Multi-Media Archive*, accessed May 18, 2016

[27] See Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

[28] A reference to minstrel composter Stephen Foster's, "The Old Folks at Home" (New York: Firth, 1851). Also known as "Swanee River," the song is a nostalgic idealization of the antebellum Deep South. The lyrics are in slave dialect, and chronicle the return of a prodigal son to his southern home, embodied in "the old folks at home"—or, the elder enslaved who are regional fixtures because they legally forbidden from ever leaving.

on "the lawfulness of holding slaves--the subject being considered in a moral and religious point of view."[29] He goes on to discuss how slaveholders care for "The children, the aged, the sick, the disabled, and the unruly"[30] as if they were family. Indeed, Furman owns up to more than he likely intends when he asserts, "a master may, in an importance sense, be the guardian and even father of his slaves."[31] Although the southern minister's signifier of "father" implies a patriarchal and spiritual figurehead, it also signifies—and in its glossing-over of the second meaning, exonerates—white slave owners who raped their female slaves and/or increased their wealth by forcing enslaved couples to breed.

The narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, in particular, speak to the religious hypocrisy and sexual depravity at work on the southern plantation, and within the paternalistic "justifications" for enslavement. Douglass says it is rumored that his owner is his father, but that the subject is only talked about in whispers, suggesting it is a truth no one dares say out loud where vengeful ears might hear. He recounts witnessing the sexualized torture of his half-naked aunt by a jealous owner, who thus exposed, would be tied to a joist where "He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin."[32] The boundaries placed on Douglass's Aunt Hester were much more than physical limitations put in place to keep her safe from the supposed ignorance and ineptitude of her race. She was forbidden from leaving the plantation at night because she had a lover, a black man whom she desired, not the white owner who demanded her chastity only to force himself upon her. The sexual threat of slaveholders toward

[29] Richard Furman, *Exposition of The Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population In the United States In a Communication To the Governor of South-Carolina* (Charleston, 1823), 1. *Furman University*, accessed June 16, 2016.
[30] Ibid, 14.
[31] Ibid, 13.
[32] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 6.

the female enslaved was the impetus for Jacobs's escape and her subsequent narrative, which presented readers with a first-hand account of the daily threat of rape suffered by black females. Harriet Jacobs confined herself to her grandmother's cramped garret for seven years rather than submit to the unwanted, yet unrelenting sexual advances of her owner. Stifled by the limitations placed on her under enslavement, Jacobs chose to effectively sever all ties between herself, her children, and the outside world by restricting her physical mobility even further—and all to escape an institution deemed virtuous by "good Christians."

Narratives by the formerly enslaved charged religious apologists with condoning, and even encouraging the depravity, inhumanity, immorality, and hypocrisy practiced by white Christian slaveholders in the south. In response to the charges levied against them, slavery's religious defenders doubled-down on their paternalistic arguments. Their cause was bolstered in the 1850s and 60s, surprisingly, through an influx of pro-slavery texts written by *northern* clergymen. Nehemiah Adams was one such minister/author,[33] who was born, raised, and later preached in Massachusetts, but who began publishing controversial pro-slavery texts after a visit to the south. In *A South-Side View of Slavery; or, Three Months at the South, in 1854*, Adams declares, "Every slave has an inalienable claim in law upon his owner for support for the whole of life. He can not be thrust into an almshouse, he can not become a vagrant, he can not beg his living, he can not be wholly neglected when he is old and decrepit."[34] Adams's confidence in the

[33] This combination of northern, pro-slavery minister-turned-writer is more common than one would think. For example, another minister/author *not* mentioned here, but who is discussed in chapters one and three, is Rev. Baynard R. Hall, who published several works of pro-slavery fiction (some under the pseudonym, Robert Carlton), including the Anti-Tom novel, *Frank Freeman's Barbershop: A Tale* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.

[34] Nehemiah Adams, D.D., *A South-Side View of Slavery; or, Three Months at the South, in 1854* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1854), 47. *Internet Archive*, accessed April 5, 2016. The February 23rd, 1855 edition of *The Liberator* featured a letter to William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist newspaper's editor, asking him to reprint a scathing review of Adams's book forwarded from the *Middlesex Journal*. The reviewer wrote, "We began to mark the objectionable passages till we had reached nearly a hundred, and ultimately came to the conclusion that the book was nearly all bad, with scarcely a redeeming quality about it. And the most appropriate place we could find for it,

benevolence of slaveholders is unshakeable as he describes an old slave woman whom he claims rejects the very notion of freedom as a burden, commenting, "Her only trouble is, that her master may die before her; then she will 'have to be free.'"[35] In regard to the enslaved in general, Adams suggests that if we "Leav[e] out of view the involuntariness on [the slave's] part of the arrangement, he gets a good equivalent for his services; to his risk."[36] Thus, Adams decries the fate of a slave who will "have to be free" in one breath, while admitting that the enslaved have forcibly been reduced to chattel in the next.

Connecticut-born pro-slavery minister, Samuel Seabury, published *American Slavery Distinguished from the Slavery of English Theorists, and Justified by the Law of Nature* in 1861,[37] wherein the author admitted to only having been south once for a brief trip. Experience notwithstanding, Seabury penned his defense of slavery with a paternalistic justification that is illogical at best. As he asserts:

> The slave can not in equity fall back on his natural right of freedom; for he must be presumed, by his own consent, to have waived that right for the sake of the life and nurture which he owes under God to his master. He can not justly claim exemption on the ground that a definite portion of his time and labor is an adequate compensation for his early nurture; since the very conditions on which the contract was undertaken, and to which he is presumed to have consented, are perpetual service on the one hand, and perpetual maintenance on the other.[38]

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after a patient perusal, was in our air-tight stove, (the first book, by the way, that we ever burned up,) and although it is rather expensive fuel, even in these times of high prices, we know of no better use for the edition now out." "The Liberator," *Accessible Archives*, accessed May 01, 2016

[35] Ibid, 50.

[36] Ibid, 51.

[37] Rev. Samuel Seabury, D.D. *American Slavery Distinguished from the Slavery of English Theorists, and Justified by the Law of Nature* (New York, Mason Brothers, 1861). *Internet Archive*, accessed July 15, 2015.

[38] Ibid, 145.

Such a statement prompts modern readers to wonder how, where, and under what circumstances the author imagined human beings happily sacrificing their lives, nationalities, religions, bodies, and children to strangers in exchange for things they could have provided for themselves. And yet, the argument of implicit "contracts" between the enslaved and their owners was nothing new. The contract Seabury repeatedly references has its basis in the writings of southern ministers such as Richard Furman, who believed that by engaging in tribal warfare, wherein the taking and selling of prisoners of war as slaves was a possibility—and which Furman and other racists conveniently attributed as a given of all African tribes—those enslaved had consciously agreed to the consequences of bondage as an outcome of war.[39] The ways in which northern ministers such as Adams and Seabury latched on to the arguments of southern slaveholders is significant in that it illustrates a widespread regional and religious defense of enslavement that prompts the modern critic to ponder what was at stake for these northern minster/writers. Why would they not only condone enslavement, but advocate on behalf of it?

One possible answer as to why northern ministers became increasingly pro-south and pro-slavery in the mid-nineteenth century is that they were seeking to protect their jobs by convincing their white, laboring-class parishioners that they were actively engaged in protecting their interests. Such public shows of solidarity with the lower classes would likewise have aided the clergy in securing their own (sometimes tenuous) positions within the church, which often came with the benefits of free or discounted housing, and regular invitations for free meals via

[39] Furman's explanation of the "contract" of enslavement relies on the following argument: "the Africans brought to America were, slaves, by their own consent, before they came from their own country, or fell into the hands of white men. Their law of nations, or general usage, having, by common consent the force of law, justified them, while carrying on their petty wars, in killing their prisoners or reducing them to slavery; consequently, in selling them, and these ends they appear to have proposed to themselves; the nation, therefore, or individual, which was overcome, reduced to slavery, and sold would have done the same by the enemy, had victory declared on their, or his side. Consequently, the man made slave in this manner, might be said to be made so by his own consent, and by the indulgence of barbarous principles." Furman, *Exposition of The Views of the Baptists*, 15. The Mason-Dixon Line is a geographical boundary or division that has become synonymous with the division of northern, free states, and southern, slave states.

faithful and grateful congregants—an interesting parallel to the "cradle to grave" paternalism they espoused. In *American Slavery Distinguished*, Seabury claims familiarity with the enslaved at the same time he admits his inexperience, claiming, "I myself have known slaves (at the North, I mean; for, with the exception of one very brief and melancholy visit in Virginia, I have never been south of the dividing line) […] who justly appreciated their condition, and were content and happy in the discharge of its duties."[40] Here, the minister claims ignorance regarding slavery in the south, yet gladly advocates for its continuance.[41] Promoting human bondage as a religious and racial good helped to eliminate the threat of black competition for white jobs, while making it increasingly difficult for abolitionists—who often focused on the religious hypocrisies of slavery—to gain headway toward emancipation. With influential northerners such as the clergy joining the din of southern, pro-slavery voices, white workers would have rested easier knowing their jobs were secure within a racially-regulated labor force. Since the aged black characters of minstrelsy and apologist fiction were meant to embody leisure, they were rarely depicted as working, and if they were, it was in a comedic context, so as to remain non-threatening to white masculinity. Additionally, in focusing on "retired" slaves, apologist fiction writers effectively erased the notion that African Americans could (or would) vie for the same jobs as whites.

[40] Seabury, *American Slavery Distinguished*, 156.
[41] Seabury says he knows *northern* slaves, which, at first glance, appears to be a reference to white laborers, as it was a common claim of the time that the poor treatment of the lower, working classes was worse than actual enslavement. However, his statement that these northern slaves are appreciative and "happy in the discharge of its duties" suggests otherwise, as whites would hardly have been content, let alone happy, to be enslaved, and it was a stereotype that black people were. Additionally, when he refers to *their* duties as *its* duties, he is effectively stripping people of their humanity, which again implies that he is not talking about white laborers.

III. "Systematic Silencing"

Representing the elder(ly) enslaved as little more than grey-haired children in need of white caretaking enabled apologist writers to infantilize all black peoples, and in so doing, swayed the various currents of public opinion. If blacks were perceived as physically dangerous or sexually threatening, pro-slavery caricatures became increasingly older and more docile to suggest absolute servility among the enslaved.[42] If religious readers questioned the morality of slaveholding, apologist caricatures recited passages from the Bible and thanked God that enslavement was their path to salvation. If African Americans proved their intellectual equality to whites in the public sphere, apologist caricatures negated their accomplishments through thicker dialect, a general ineptitude, and increased ties to the slave cabin. In other words, the nature of pro-slavery literature was highly reactionary, as evidenced by the multiple waves of defenses mounted against abolitionist indictments of "the peculiar institution."

Figure 2: "Little Eva reading the Bible to Uncle Tom in the arbor." Full-page Illustration by Hammatt Billings for Uncle Tom's Cabin First Edition. John P. Jewett and Co., 1852.

[42] Although Stowe's Tom was a middle-aged man, the paratexts—illustrations, advertisements, and other promotional materials—that accompanied her novel were prolific. As Robin Bernstein argues, the tableau of Tom and Little Eva together under the arbor was the most reproduced image from Stowe's novel, yet it presented a problem for readers in that it continually situated the black man and white female child in scandalous proximity to one another. The solution to downplaying Tom as a sexual threat to Eva's white, chaste, femininity (in literature, as well as in stage and film adaptations) was to prematurely age him into an old, white-haired man, presumably past the age of giving in to the "savage" and "bestial" proclivities attributed to black men by white racists. See Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

The majority of America's elder enslaved and formerly-enslaved were not able to read the appropriations of themselves that supported their enslavement; nor were most able to answer back in writing. There are relatively few nineteenth-century primary texts available to study by this group, suggesting that the laws prohibiting slaves from learning to read and write had the greatest effect on silencing (at least on paper) the elderly population. Certainly, the frequency with which younger slaves, rather than older, successfully escaped to the north also accounts for why there are fewer non-fiction and fiction texts authored by elder(ly) former slaves than by the middle-aged. This discrepancy in self-representation leaves one searching for how this silenced group was represented by others, and the ways in which the powers of (fictional) suggestion about aging African Americans "play[ed] unacknowledged roles in cultural and political ideologies and fundamentally shape[d] the understanding of identity, relationships, and human experience."[43] Pro-slavery fiction writers employed "Aunt" and "Uncle" characters almost exclusively in their depictions of "typical slave life"—downplaying the barbarities and sexual depravities of enslavement by using old age to frame their arguments of cradle to grave paternalism, religious conversion, and intellectual inferiority. Likewise, because pro-slavery writers recognized the importance of orality to the elder enslaved, they devised fictional caricatures to strip them of their words and agency. Thus, if we are to understand *what* roles the

Figure 3: "Uncle Tom and Eva." Color lithograph poster for "Uncle Tom's Cabin." New York: Courier Litho Co., c.1900.

[43] Cynthia Port and Aagje Swinnen, *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.1 (Spring 2014): accessed April 15, 2016.

elderly enslaved were meant to play in the literary fiction of the nineteenth century and *why*, we must return to both familiar and relatively forgotten texts with an eye toward age and aging in the same manner scholars have approached feminist, queer, disability,[44] and childhood studies.

FICTION WRITERS REACT: SUBGENRES & ENSLAVEMENT

Analyzed alongside contemporary autobiographies of former slaves and black-authored fiction, the once popular, but relatively abandoned genre of plantation/apologist literature informs modern readers as to how nineteenth-century Americans articulated and expressed their fears regarding slavery and emancipation, as well as how they sought to quell these fears through fiction writing that further misdirected an already misinformed public. Sarah Roth's work with pro-slavery antebellum novels[45] examines the emasculation of black males relegated to positions of servitude and childlike dependency, the latter of which became the cornerstone of the argument for slavery as a paternalistic institution. This infantilization was complicated, however, by the combativeness of David Walker's 1829 *Appeal*,[46] and the bloodshed of Nat Turner's 1831 Revolt, after which, as Roth discusses, pro-slavery writers concentrated on disseminating the figure of the young black man as a degenerate brute. Although pro-slavery literary reactions to Walker and Turner begin in 1835,[47] four years after Turner's Revolt, John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn; or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion,*[48] published in 1832, only a year after the fact, is widely considered the first "plantation school" text—yet Kennedy's young male slave is not

[44] Katz.
[45] Sarah N. Roth, *Gender and Race in Antebellum Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2014).
[46] David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America* (Boston: Revised and Published by David Walker, 1830). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[47] This is according to Roth's Table (2.1) on *Slavery-Related Novels and Narratives, 1830s*—in which the author lists Jerome Holgate's *Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation* (New York: Published by the Author, 1835) as the first anti-abolitionist novel to use the "Savage Slave" trope. Roth, *Gender and Race*, 40-1.
[48] John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion. In Two Volumes* (Philadelphia: Carey, 1832). *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 17, 2015.

demonized to the extent of his successors.[49] On the contrary, Kennedy's character, Abe, once free from the restrictive confines and labor of the plantation, transcends his so-called brutishness to distinguish himself as a hero. The book's narrator establishes early on that the events he is recounting took place in 1829, two years prior to the slave rebellion that shocked the country, which may have been a conscious decision by the author to set his novel in a time preceding the chaos and fear incited by the bloody rebellion. Whether Kennedy penned Abe's character before or after Turner's Revolt is not known, but his attribution and acknowledgment of *heroic* traits in a *young* male slave marks the first, if not the last, appearance of such a character in antebellum pro-slavery literature.

The subgenre of "Savage Slave" fiction published throughout the 1830s[50] played upon the fears of the American public following Turner's Revolt by portraying black "savagery, carefully concealed from whites most of the time," but which, "could erupt without warning in disturbing episodes of violence."[51] The bold threats made against slaveholders that appeared in Walker's *Appeal*, and later, Martin Delany's *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1859),[52] chronicled the angst of black men in such a way that would not be seen again until a century later, when

[49] Although Kennedy's representations of slavery are whitewashed with sentiment and serve as the basis for many pro-slaver/apologist works, the author and former Secretary of the Navy (under President Millard Fillmore) eventually advocated for emancipation in Maryland in 1863, asserting, "This rebellion, and the disastrous civil war in which it has involved our country, having been instituted professedly for the purpose of protecting and perpetuating Slavery, and of extending it over the free communities of the National territory, has so utterly failed in its object, that now, after nearly three years of desolating warfare, characterized by such suffering and sacrifice as have scarcely a parallel in the annals of civilized nations, it has not only destroyed the guarantees which the Constitution of the union and the tolerance of public opinion had heretofore given to Slavery, but has, in fact, virtually abolished the institution, by forcing it into conditions that render it valueless to the slave-owner and an incumbrance [sic] to the society in which it exists. "Immediate Emancipation in Maryland. Proceedings of the Union State Central Committee, at a Meeting Held in Temperance Temple, Baltimore, Wednesday, December 16, 1863" (Baltimore: Bull & Tuttle, 1863), 15-6. *Internet Archive*, accessed May 6, 2016.

[50] See Roth's Table (2.1) on *Slavery-Related Novels and Narratives, 1830s* for a list of "Savage Slave" texts. Roth, *Gender and Race*, 40-1.

[51] Ibid, 38-9.

[52] Martin Robison Delany, *Blake, or The Huts of America*, ed. Floyd J. Miller (Boston: Beacon, 2000)

authors such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin re-integrated the figure of the aggressive young black man back into mainstream American literature and culture.

The publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852[53] likewise prompted a reactionary, pro-slavery subgenre: the "Anti-Tom" novel,[54] in which anti-abolitionists increasingly turned their narrative attention to aged slaves, and created aristocratic white protagonists who were generally much younger than the older white couples of Stowe's novel. This age reversal served to weaken public perceptions of black agency while simultaneously strengthening the pro-slavery resolve of younger/future generations of white southerners, who felt entitled to the same positions of privilege as their ancestors. Toward achieving this end, Anti-Tom authors quickly replaced the cruel deaths of the slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with the "Deathbed Aunty" trope, in which white slave owners demonstrated their devotion to their aged female slaves as they lay dying in their lowly cabins. In shifting the focus of sympathy from the male Uncle Tom to a series of interchangeable "Aunts," male pro-slavery authors avoided the perceived indignity of having their white characters kneel in sincere empathy to black men, while their female counterparts carefully circumvented any scenes of prolonged intimacy between their white female characters and dying black men, with whom any such familiarity or sentimental attachment was taboo. Additionally, making aged female slaves the focus of the obligatory death scenes of Anti-Tom novels allowed pro-slavery authors to declare open season on their Uncle Tom substitutes while still achieving the semblance of regard and solemnity for human life necessary to assuage the concerns of northern readers.

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[53] Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture Multi-Media Archive*, accessed May 18, 2016

[54] According to Sarah Roth, "Between 1852 and 1860, more than two dozen novels appeared as proslavery "answers" to Uncle Tom's Cabin. Sarah Roth, *Gender and Race*, 141.

Just as Walker's *Appeal* and Turner's Revolt affected literary representations of black masculinity in the 1830s, Stowe's characterization of the young female slave and beset mother, Eliza, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, likewise altered how pro-slavery writers depicted the female enslaved in their works. The plight of Eliza, and her subsequent flight from bondage in an effort to keep her child, resonated with female readers in such a way as to present a stumbling block to pro-slavery writers attempting to paint slavery as a beneficent institution. Thus, the "Deathbed Aunty" trope served a double purpose: it erased sentimental attachments between male and female whites and black men, and it effectively replaced Eliza's tale of woe with stories of enslaved women who lived contentedly into old age and died happily, surrounded by their "white children." Whereas Stowe's Eliza risks the death of her and her child to escape a lifetime of bondage and to prevent the forced separation of mother and son, apologist "Aunts" existed solely to raise and serve generations of other people's children. While Eliza's religious faith gives her the strength to save herself and her boy, the "Deathbed Aunty's" final moments are used to demonstrate the righteousness of slavery in converting "African savages" to "good Christians." Although the "Savage Slave" was primarily a pro-slavery trope, and the "Tragic Mulatta" was an abolitionist figure, the two presented myriad issues for writers wishing to present slavery in a positive and paternal light, as they each represented youthfulness and strength, as well as a readiness to either fight or die for freedom. In relying on depictions of old slaves allegedly past working age to people their works, pro-slavery writers were able to divert the focus away from the negative, truthful images of slavery, such as field labor, lashings, rapes, murders, and the auctions and sales that rent families apart. Nevertheless, it is evident that slavery's defenders could not attempt to justify the institution without depicting it, and to depict—realistically—any aspect of enslavement is to risk making its evils manifest.

In general, pro-slavery fiction is an admixture of racial offenses presented in a seemingly-sunny package, and many modern readers, like their nineteenth-century counterparts, would not necessarily recognize the myriad overt and subtle manipulations and appropriations of black lives and culture that comprise these texts. Although there will always be those who, unfortunately, remain willfully blind to blatant acts of racism, there are surely readers—likely those who claim *not* to see race—who genuinely think "plantation school" writing faithfully depicts the lives of the enslaved and their relationships to/with the people who owned them. This contentment, or gratification on the part of their readership was the clear aim of apologist writers, who, following "Savage Slave" fiction, crafted their works to conform to popular, contemporary subgenres—most notably, travel writing in the antebellum period, and local color and southern humor in the postbellum era—in order to mask the darker aspects of their narratives.

Nehemiah Adams's *A South-Side View of Slavery; or, Three Months at the South, in 1854*, preaches the morality of the paternalistic "contracts" between master and slave, in which "perpetual service" begets "perpetual maintenance." The author also claims, in the text's title, no less, that he was swayed to advocate for slavery after only a three-month visit to the south, which is indicative of a larger trend in apologist fiction (masquerading as non-fiction), in which a northerner, with an eye toward abolitionism, is converted to the southern slaveholder's cause after a brief sojourn below the Mason-Dixon Line.[55] Such texts are a blending of "plantation school" whitewashing and travel writing, in which the author, narrator, or protagonist claims to have experienced nothing short of an epiphany regarding the morality of enslavement—a revelation most often facilitated by docile and loving elderly-enslaved characters/caricatures. This rhetorical approach sought to convince northern readers that, should they travel south into

[55] This is discussed further in Chapter One.

"the land of Magnolias," they, too, would see a pastoral scene, filled with old black minstrels and storytellers, and grey-haired Aunts and Uncles doting on their "white families." Antebellum texts that borrowed from the travel-writing genre encouraged readers to experience a threatened way of life through the perspective of those allegedly past working age. Surely, the images of old black men[56] fishing, singing, and talking, rocking in their chairs and smoking their pipes, had a negative effect on some northerners' views concerning the ills of slavery and the need for emancipation.

The characterizations of the contented elder(ly) enslaved that made for persuasive pro-slavery travel writing translated seamlessly into local color and southern humor writing after the war. Although many of the characteristics of local color—regional settings, customs, character stereotypes, and speech patterns, or dialect—are prominent in some of the earliest "plantation school" fiction, such as John Pendleton Kennedy's *or Swallow Barn, or, a Sojourn in the Old Dominion*,[57] published in 1832, "it was the Civil War and its tumultuous aftermath that furnished the historical crucible that molded those elements into a distinct genre, one that proved profoundly useful in the post-war reconstruction of national identity."[58] The apparent scarcity of literacy amongst the elder enslaved populations—demonstrated by the lack of primary materials dictated or written by the aged enslaved, and a gap in knowledge concerning slavery from an elder's point of view—is manipulated in postbellum apologist works through the use of "slave" or "Negro dialect." Regional dialect is one of the hallmarks of local color writing, and southern

[56] I distinguish "old black *men*" here because, as will be discussed later in the introduction, and over the course of multiple chapters, the majority of antebellum aged female characters are limited to their deathbeds or their delusions, so the fictional "lives of leisure" lead by old black men in apologist works would have been the image most likely to induce the envy of white male laborers (and voters).
[57] John Pendleton Kennedy. *Swallow Barn, or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion. In Two Volumes*. *Vol. I.* Philadelphia: Carey, 1832. *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 17, 2015.
[58] Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke. Introduction to *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender*, ed. Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2002), xix.

apologist authors popular in the 1880s and 90s, such as Katherine McDowell (pseudonym, Sherwood Bonner), Thomas Nelson Page, and Joel Chandler Harris, filled their works with old "Aunts" and "Uncles" speaking in broken English as a means of representing African Americans as ignorant and mentally inferior to whites. The continued use of slave dialect in white-authored stories of the south served to infantilize the aged enslaved; and, since most black characters in southern fiction were elder(ly), the manner in which they were represented had a negative effect on the African American population as a whole. With the majority of black characters coming out of a specific region—namely, the south—being depicted as idle, unintelligent, and incompetent, readers likely applied these false characterizations to all black peoples of all ages. Thus, in focusing on a sole characterization of only one faction of the enslaved population, apologist authors employed the humor of local color writing to mitigate the sentimental racism of their antebellum predecessors, and the harsher, postbellum racism of their own works. However, in attempting to describe the life of a slave, pro-slavery authors actually had to *attempt to describe life as a slave*, and were not able to do so without revealing its shameful depths. Despite the racial mire of these texts and the apologists' intentions, a slippage exists between their "happy" fictions and the appalling realities of slavery, wherein ugly truths and acts of resistance surface. Often, the result is a confusion of words and actions that contradict the racist characteristics they are meant to embody.

Both antebellum and postbellum apologist authors hedged their literary bets on the figure of the aged slave, whose purpose within a multitude of texts was to illustrate, by the very nature of the character's advanced years, that slavery was a beneficent institution. Concurrently, however, white and African American writers of non-fiction and fiction refuted and countered these racist stereotypes with elder black characters that demonstrated agency, subverted

authority, voiced their autonomy, and reunited their families following Emancipation. It is clear when reading pro-slavery nonfiction alongside biographical narratives of the formerly enslaved (and later, black-authored fiction) that there is an argument taking place between the two positions, with apologists ever-devising new strategies to demonstrate the alleged contentedness of those held in bondage, and African American writers preempting and disavowing the supposed proof of apologists that that enslaved had no need or desire for freedom.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Although Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) is not discussed at length until the final chapter, myriad antebellum and postbellum pro- and anti-slavery texts, as well as myriad racist stereotypes in popular culture, were responses to the overwhelming popularity of the novel. As such, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is referenced throughout this project to illustrate both the adherences to and departures from the seminal text, though Tom, being a middle-aged man in Stowe's novel, is not a prolonged focus in any of the chapters. I have worked from African-American authored fiction whenever possible, as a large part of this project is concerned with the ways in which black writers, in particular, responded to, complicated, and redeemed the figures of the slave "Aunt" and "Uncle" ubiquitous in apologist fiction. I do, however, incorporate Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, due to its influence on and importance to nineteenth-century fiction and culture, as well as Mark Twain's, "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It" (1874),[59] which combines black-authored nonfiction and white-authored fiction in one

[59] "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It." *The Atlantic Monthly* 34 (Nov. 1874), *Documenting the American* South, accessed May 18, 2016.

complicated narrative.[60] Although the majority of nineteenth-century non-fiction dealing with the elder(ly) enslaved has already been laid out in the introduction as a starting point for analyzing the fictional representations that follow, I do intersperse narratives of the enslaved and other non-fiction texts where they are particularly relevant or useful in considering how fiction writers were responding to contemporary debates on race and enslavement.

The organization of the chapters by sex might seem an odd arrangement, yet it reflects nineteenth-century literary trends, particularly regarding pro-slavery texts, which often depicted "Aunt" and "Uncle" characters/caricatures as separate from one another in order to demonstrate their supposed reliance on and dedication to their "white families." Because these writers isolated their elder characters by sex, the responses to their stereotypical "Aunt" and "Uncle" tropes tend to be parceled out in a similar fashion. Additionally, the decision to structure the chapters as a dialog between the pro- and anti-slavery representations of the aged enslaved is an attempt to mimic the reactionary and/or combative nature of nineteenth-century race literature.

Chapter One analyzes the "Uncle" caricature of antebellum and postbellum apologist fiction as a symbol of contentment; yet, the authors' rhetorical aims for this walking, talking stereotype, and what *actually* occurs within the narratives do not always align. The emasculation of black men in the nineteenth century was due in large part to the happy "Storytelling Uncle" figure, represented as little more than a grown child. Despite the absurdity attributed to old black males through racist popular culture, William Gilmore Simms's Tom, from *The Sword and the Distaff* (1852),[61] Edward A. Pollard's Uncle Junk, from *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey*

[60] That Stowe and Twain are the only two white writers examined at length in the pro-equality, counter-narrative chapters, and that they both appear in the "Aunt" discussion, reflects the disproportionate number of black male to female writers in the antebellum period and the decades following the end of the Civil War.
[61] William Gilmore Simms, *The Sword and the Distaff: Or, "Fair, Fat, and Forty." A Story of the South, at the Close of the Revolution* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852). *Internet Archive*, accessed July 15, 2015.

Homes of the South (1859),[62] Thomas Nelson Page's Ol' Stracted, from *In Ole Virginia; or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (1887),[63] and Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus (1879), all demonstrate the slippage that resulted from authors attempting to stifle and/or control the voices of elder black men by highlighting their orality.

Chapter Two analyzes fiction that defies the silencing, damaging stereotypes of the pro-slavery "Uncle" by revealing the power and agency of their words. William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853), Frederick Douglass' "The Heroic Slave" (1853),[64] and Martin Delany's *Blake, or The Huts of America* (1859),[65] are the focus of the first part of the chapter, although the discussion of *Blake* is more substantial that that of the first two texts, due to Delany's employment of aged men and women throughout his novel. A publishing gap in African American fiction in the years preceding and following the Civil War prompted a brief section titled, "The Missing Years," in which I account for the chapter's chronological leap from 1859, with *Blake*, to Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* in 1892.[66] It was no easy task refuting apologist stereotypes and essentially reprogramming an American public that had been inundated with the "Storytelling Uncle" caricature since the mid-to-late 1820s. Nevertheless, African-American writers had to instruct readers without seeming to preach at them; otherwise, they risked alienating the very audiences they were aiming to enlighten. Despite such difficulties, the fiction of Frances Harper, with Uncles Daniel and Ben in *Iola Leroy*, and

[62] Edward A. Pollard, *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Pudney, 1859). *Internet Archive*, accessed August 24, 2015.
[63] Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia; or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[64] Frederick Douglass, "The Heroic Slave," *Autographs for Freedom*, ed. Julia Griffiths (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853). *Documenting the American South*, accessed August 22, 2016.
[65] Martin Robison Delany, *Blake, or The Huts of America*, ed. Floyd J. Miller (Boston: Beacon, 1970).
[66] Frances E.W. Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (Boston: Earle, 1892). *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.

Charles Chesnutt, with Uncle Julius in *The Conjure Woman* (1899)[67] and Uncle Peter in *The Colonel's Dream* (1905),[68] succeeds in restoring humanity, agency, and voices to their elder male characters.

Chapter Three analyzes what I term, the "Deathbed Aunty" trope, in which pro-slavery writers silenced elder black women by making their dying "Aunts" spokespeople for enslavement as they lie dying. The love and devotion these caricatures espoused for those who had grown fat on their milk and rich by their labor(s) posited aged black women as "Mammies" "past their prime," whose roles within the narratives was to die with white praise on their lips. Simultaneously desexualized by their advanced age, and hypersexalized in requisite references to breastfeeding, antebellum "Mammy," "Aunty," and "Granny" caricatures represent women whose selfhood, womanhood, and fertility were abused and exploited to people slave labor camps and nurse generations of white children at the expense of their own children's nourishment and nurturing. Authors of plantation literature made it a point to emphasize the presumed intimacy between their white characters and the old slaves they claimed to love; yet, when applied to the "Aunt" caricature, this pathos assumed a morbid vantage point not often seen in representations of old, male slaves. Mary H. Eastman's Aunt Peggy, from *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852),[69] Baynard R. Hall's Mammy Dinah, from *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop* (1852),[70] John W. Page's Aunt Dinah, from *Uncle Robin* (1853),[71] and Edward A. Pollard's Marie, from

[67] Charles Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman* (Boston: Houghton, 1899). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.
[68] Charles Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 1905). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.
[69] Mary H. Eastman*, Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[70] Baynard Rush Hall, *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop: A Tale* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[71] John W. Page, *Uncle Robin, in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without One in Boston* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1853). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.

Black Diamonds (1859) all die very public deaths designed exclusively for deathbed proclamations of loyalty and contentment.

The second half of Chapter Three explores the contradictions of this so-called regard as embodied in the figure of the "Distracted Aunty"—a term which is a bit of a catchall, as it encompasses mental instability as well as the infantilization and irrationality used to imply that the words and protests of elder black women were of no consequence. Although not all "Distracted Aunties" are "crazy," most of the apologist "Aunt" caricatures discussed in the latter half of Chapter Three have undergone traumas stemming from slavery and racism. In framing their difficulties and pain as southern humor and regional "local color," however, apologist writers were able to discount the words and woes of aged black women they claimed to love *prior to* Emancipation. Sherwood Bonner's Aunt Anniky and Diana, from *Dialect Tales* (1883),[72] and Joel Chandler Harris's Crazy Sue, from *Daddy Jake* (1889),[73] and Aunt Minervy Ann, from *The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann* (1899)[74] illustrate that, without the ability to enforce the "bodies, beds, and private lives"[75] of black women in real life, apologists were determined to do so in literature, even if it meant revealing, and in some cases, highlighting, the very cruelties and traumas antebellum authors were so careful to avoid.

Chapter Four highlights fiction that breaks the silence imposed on elder(ly) black women in pro-slavery texts by making them—and their words—the centers of the black community. These narratives position aged "Aunts" as elders who not only maintain African cultural traditions such as doctoring and conjuring, but whose "Speaking" reunites black families after

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[72] Sherwood Bonner, *Dialect Tales* (New York: Harper, 1883). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.
[73] Joel Chandler Harris, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark* (New York: Century, 1889).
[74] Joel Chandler Harris, *The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899). *Internet Archive*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[75] Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: the Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007), 45.

Emancipation, and whose services and sacrifices leave no doubt as to the agency of so-called "Aunts." Whereas pro-slavery authors would have readers believe that black women were content to be objects for sexual and maternal consumption, and that they preferred white children to their own, Prue—the abused alcoholic and former "breeder" from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)—shatters both of these myths by speaking her pain for all to hear. Likewise, Aunt Rachel, from Martin Delany's Blake, is an accomplished conductor for the Underground Railroad who subverts chattel slavery every chance she gets by helping fugitive slaves to escape. In the postbellum era, the ingratiated "Aunty" trope is similarly refuted by Mark Twain's Aunt Rachel, from "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It" (1874), Victoria Earle's *Aunt Lindy* (1893),[76] and Charles Chesnutt's Viney, from *The Colonel's Dream* (1905), who asserts herself through "strategic silence."[77] The "Aunts" of these stories are not passive stereotypes, contented to be abused and exploited, and to speak of the benefits of enslavement on their deathbeds; nor are their words discounted or dismissed as laughable, such as with the "Distracted Aunty" trope. On the contrary, their speech and actions openly reject the commodification of black womanhood and the trivialization of female trauma that comprised the whole of aged, black femininity in pro-slavery literature.

The Conclusion extends the conversation of nineteenth-century representations of aged African Americans into the twentieth century with F.C. Campbell's 1966 work, "An Ontological Study of the Dynamics of Black Anger in the United States (or Rage, Rage, Rage Against the Coming of the White: An Essay in Three Acts)."[78] Campbell's essay, which reads very much

[76] Victoria Earle Matthews, "Aunt Lindy: A Story Founded on Real Life." New York: J.J. Little, 1893. *Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library*. Accessed May 18, 2016.
[77] See DoVeanna S. Fulton, *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006).
[78] F.C. Campbell, "An Ontological Study of the Dynamics of Black Anger in the United States (or Rage, Rage, Rage Against the Coming of the White: An Essay in Three Acts)," *New South* 21 (1966).

like a play, is a visceral reaction to the "Storytelling Uncle" caricature that was ubiquitous in American literature and culture from mid 1820s through to the 1950s. Written amidst the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement, Campbell's essay is overflowing with rage, grief, *and* peace, like the mid twentieth-century African Americans who are its subject. The author and Morehouse College professor passionately articulates the pain and brutal injustices inflicted on the black race by modern white Americans who expected and/or demanded that black citizens play the parts of nineteenth-century plantation stereotypes. Thus, a brief look at Campbell's essay seems a fitting way to end the discussion of how pro-slavery writers used aged-slave caricatures to silence black Americans for over a century. The conclusion also points to other avenues of study regarding the elder(ly) enslaved, and how the relatively unexplored appropriations and manipulations of "Aunt" and "Uncle" figures in American history and popular culture are vital to our understanding of racial privilege and violence in contemporary society.

Chapter One

Silenced Through Storytelling: The Pro-Slavery "Uncle"

The plantation-school genre of nineteenth-century literature has, understandably, received relatively little critical attention in the humanities since the Civil Rights Movement. In studying literary representations of the aged enslaved and former enslaved, however, apologist fiction is useful because the genre relies so heavily on these figures to further the pro-slavery cause. Countering abolitionist works with a "slavery as it is" approach, antebellum and postbellum apologists disseminated literary renderings wherein the elderly enslaved were made the unwitting stars—a tactic that kept images of field laborers, lashings, and families rent apart "offstage." Although apologists manipulated the lives and experiences of aged slaves to depict a carefree existence and twilight years of leisure, resistant orality is ubiquitous in representations of the "happy south." Within such texts, what is meant to pass as entertaining fodder by the infantilized "Storytelling Uncle" trope often reveals—unintentionally, to be sure—the inherent orality and rhetorical skill of the elder black males the caricatures were (at least in part) based on. Consequently, many apologist works demonstrate the unavoidable schism that arose from using the alleged garrulousness of old black men to attempt to silence them.

Pro-slavery fiction writers consistently appropriated and tried to erase the oral culture of the aged enslaved by misrepresenting their trauma for socio-political and economic gain, and by spreading the word that *their* words were unimportant. The apologist texts examined here are formulaic in their attempts to reinforce the notions of racial superiority and sexual dominance

held by young and middle-aged white men—the authors, narrators, and primary audiences of such works—by making *older* black men the focus of their narratives. However, approached with an eye toward race *and* age representation, a pattern emerges amongst apologist caricatures of aged "Uncles" wherein their dialog and actions conflict—either with one another, or with the presumed function of the caricature within the text. What I hope to accomplish in this discussion is an in-depth consideration of the ways in which white, male authors[1] employed the figures of aged, male slaves to not only justify slavery, but to metaphorically castrate them in the eyes of the American public. By transforming/deforming aged-slave men into infantilized caricatures, pro-slavery writers discredited the experiences and stifled the voices of a large faction of the slave population. The "Storytelling Uncle" of plantation-school literature was first and foremost, an entertainer; thus, the highly-successful trope suggested to readers that the words of aged black men were not to be taken seriously, and that they had no ambitions beyond fast talking and easy living.

As more enslaved people escaped to the north and disseminated their narratives through abolitionist platforms (e.g., meetings, pamphlets, newspapers, and full-length publications), the American literary market of the mid-nineteenth century became inundated with both abolitionist and apologist narratives—all claiming to provide a first-hand glimpse into the "peculiar institution." Plantation literature of the antebellum period presumed that white masculinity was under constant attack, and apologists apparently believed that the most effective means of reinforcing the collective status of their peer group was to represent black males as dependent, effeminate, eccentric, and frail. However, using the "Uncle" trope to suppress black agency and diminish the idea of black masculinity did not result in the social and racial harmony depicted in

[1] Although female authors were active in the apologist genre, their works tend not to focus at length on male slaves, possibly to avoid any insinuations of intimacy between the white author and her black subject.

apologist works. On the contrary, it positioned all non-elderly black men as threats to whiteness—a move that had, and continues to have—deadly consequences for African American families. The "Uncle" trope was intended to illustrate the ways in which the enslaved *wanted*, *needed*, and after Emancipation, even *missed* slavery, yet it succeeded in doing much more damage by convincing the Civil War and postbellum-era public that any black man who did not meet the parameters of this simplistic, jolly, elderly stereotype was likely a deviant or rebel, whose words, actions, and passions must be suppressed at all costs.

This chapter is concerned with apologist texts that attempt to systematically silence aged male slaves through the trope of the "Storytelling Uncle." To this end, I have chosen particular works by notable antebellum pro-slavery writers, such as John Pendleton Kennedy, William Gilmore Simms, and Edward A. Pollard, as well as their postbellum successors, Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, to examine the various strategies they employed in their attempts to discredit the orality of elder black men. The oral skill of the aged enslaved, however, often materializes in spite of the caricatures and didactic racism of apologist, plantation-school literature.

THE ANTEBELLUM "PLANTATION SCHOOL" PROTOTYPE

John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn; or, a Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832),[2] widely regarded as the prototype for the pro-slavery plantation romance, dismisses the notions of equality and emancipation while simultaneously highlighting the abilities of black men. Borrowing from the popular travel-narrative genre, the book's narrator, Mark Littleton, cousin to the residents of Swallow Barn plantation, arrives from the north with beliefs about the ills of

[2] John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion. In Two Volumes* (Philadelphia: Carey, 1832). *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 17, 2015.

slavery, but leaves a southern sympathizer—a trope repeated often by later apologists.[3] Littleton begins with an "Introductory Epistle" to a friend, wherein he provides context for the narrative that follows. The epistolary motif draws readers into the "reality" of the authors' representations through (alleged) personal letters[4] that privilege white literacy over black oral testimony, thus silencing the voices of experience in favor of penned adaptations of them. As Heather Tirado Gilligan asserts, "unlike the literature of abolition, the novel offered readers a doubly authenticated narrative; it gave not just the eyewitness testimony of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the slave narratives, but testimony that was both eye-witnessed and told from the point of view of an outsider who is persuaded to ideological transformation by the social scene before him."[5] This tension between the written and spoken word reflects the disparate lives of young, white, educated authors such as Kennedy, and the old, black, uneducated people whose stories and traumas they appropriated as fodder for their pro-slavery fictions.

The timing of the 1832 publication of *Swallow Barn* is significant, in that the novel followed on the heels of Nat Turner's Rebellion, which had taken place in August of the previous year.[6] Despite the intense fear that Turner and his men had awakened in southern slaveholders, Kennedy's text includes a rebellious and heroic young slave named Abe, who is shockingly *not* depicted as a blood-thirsty black villain. As literary historian, Jean Fagan Yellin

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[3] The converted-northerner motif can be found in the following: Caroline E. Rush, *The North and South, Or, Slavery and Its Contrasts: A Tale of Real Life* (Philadelphia: Crissy, 1852), *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, accessed Sept. 26, 2015; Rev. Baynard R. Hall, *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop* (New York: Scribner, 1852), *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016; Martha Haines Butt, *Antifanaticism: A Tale of the South* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1853), *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016; and Caroline Lee Hentz, *The Planter's Northern Bride* (Philadelphia: Peterson, 1854), *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.

[4] "Anticipating a key strategy of later local colorists, Kennedy presented his narrator as a visiting New Yorker, possibly modeled on [Washington] Irving, Kennedy's friend and a frequent visitor, but also emulating popular travel books about the South." Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke, Introduction to *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender*, ed. Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke (Athens, U of Georgia P, 2002), xvi.

[5] Heather Tirado Gilligan, "Reading, Race, and Charles Chesnutt's 'Uncle Julius' Tales." *ELH* 74. no. 1 (2007): 200.

[6] Paul Christian Jones, *Unwelcome Voices: Subversive Fiction in the Antebellum South* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 12.

notes, "it is strange that in the first important book to celebrate the antebellum South, the closest approximation to a true hero is a rebellious slave."[7] Indeed, *Swallow Barn* might very well be the *first* and *last* instance in which a "rebellious" male slave, or indeed, any young-to-middle-aged slave, is positioned as a hero—or even a character of any significance—within a pro-slavery work. Remarkably, the inclusion of Abe is not the only racial characterization in *Swallow Barn* seemingly at odds with Kennedy's pro-slavery beliefs.

As *Swallow Barn*'s narrator writes, a young slave named Abe had "molested the peace of the neighbourhood by continual broils; was frequently detected in acts of depredation upon the adjoining farms; and had […] join[ed] a band of out-lying negroes, who had secured themselves, for some weeks, in the fastnesses of the low-country swamps."[8] After Abe's owner "saves" him from lynching, or "public justice,"[9] the slave is sent to work as a seaman on the Chesapeake. Once free from the restrictions of the plantation, Abe thrives and achieves a name for himself, thus fulfilling the promise that Frederick Douglass covets in his soliloquy about the boats on Chesapeake Bay, which are "'loosed from your moorings, and are free," and "move merrily before the gentle gale […] freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world."[10] Prior to Abe learning he is to be sent away, Littleton explains how the enslaved are reluctant to leave their birthplaces because of "a strong attachment to the places connected with their earlier associations,—what in phrenology is called inhabitiveness," which he believes is the result of "the pride of remaining in one family of masters, and of being transmitted to its posterity with all their own generations."[11] Strangely, Kennedy's own character, Abe, seems to disprove this

[7] Quoted in Jones, *Unwelcome* Voices, 147.
[8] Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, Vol II*. 240-1.
[9] Ibid, 241.
[10] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 64.
[11] Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, Vol II*, 243.

pseudoscience, both through his initial rebellions, and his success upon leaving the plantation that stifled him.

The theory of inhabitiveness is not only unsubstantiated by the narratives of former slaves such as Douglass, William Wells Brown, Henry Bibb, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Jacobs, it is directly contradicted by their determination to flee the bondage of their "nativity" for unfamiliar lands full of uncertainty, and to record and share their experiences with others once they achieved freedom. In promoting *inhabitiveness*, Kennedy seeks to assuage the fears of white slaveholders concerning the possible uprisings and retribution of those held in bondage. Inhabitiveness not only assured troubled readers and reassured confident ones that the enslaved were content with their lots, but that they would not stray from them if given the opportunity. Such assertions lessened the perceived threat of physical danger to whites while also providing solace in the widespread belief that their slaves would never leave, and likewise, would never cease caring for them or supplying their needs.[12] In transforming the "lawless" Abe into a hero, Kennedy implies that the young slave's previous faults were the result of the system in which he was raised, which inadvertently lends support to both Abe's rebellions and the anti-slavery arguments of the day.[13] Although Kennedy devotes ample space to Abe's story, most future apologists—especially following the influx of freedom narratives written by young, male, runaway slaves, altogether ceased including any admirable traits in their young black male characters. In turning their attentions toward superannuated slaves, such writers could effectively erase young African Americans from their literary genre, and with them, the passions they believed were inextricably tied to black youth. By focusing on elderly "Aunt" and "Uncle" characters, mid-century apologists also sidestepped having to figure out how to devise plots

[12] This eventually becomes a common device in postbellum apologist fiction, wherein former slaves stay, and continue to care and provide for their former owners long after Emancipation.
[13] Ibid, 241.

where the younger generation—Douglass's generation—of slaves would be *believable* in their expressions of appreciation for the system and people made rich by their labor and misery.

Despite the assumed superiority of youth over old age and the written over the spoken word, one of Kennedy's central characters, an aged slave named Carey, disproves the widely-held belief that the un[der]educated word of an old slave has no influence. Carey is an antagonistic man who tends the horses and stables, amongst other duties, and is the resident minstrel at Swallow Barn. Carey is known for his dry wit and combativeness, which push the boundaries of what was considered acceptable behavior, even for an older slave. However, in the paternalistic world Kennedy creates at Swallow Barn, it is clear that Carey need not worry about the cruel punishments suffered by millions of enslaved people in real life.

Carey regularly argues with his owner, Frank Meriwether, over "the affairs of the stable, [and] in such a sagacious strain of equal debate, that it would puzzle a spectator to tell which was the leading member in the council."[14] Carey asserts his superior knowledge of the subject, demanding, "Who sot you up, Master Frank, to tell me how to fodder that 'ere cretur, when I as good as nursed you on my knee?"[15] Here, the old slave raises the point that as the one who has done the work every day for decades, he has more first-hand experience regarding the needs of the horses than the one who owns them.[16] Once Carey plays the "I nursed you from a baby" card, Meriwether admits defeat, and, walking away, attempts to save face, saying, "a faithful old cur,

[14] Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, Vol I*, 31.
[15] Ibid, 32.
[16] This debate parallels that of southerners who presume to *know* the whole of the black race because they own slaves. Furthermore, in her discussion of enslaved black horsemen, Katherine C. Mooney writes, "Victory in competition belonged not only to the man who owned the horse. It surely belonged as well to the trainer because of his intimacy with the animal." Mooney's argument extends to grooms such as Carey, who doubtless feels as much pride and responsibility for the accomplishments of "his" horses as the men who race them. Mooney continues, "A white man might legally own the bodies of both man and animal, but ownership might not have been the first feeling of a black man in the winner's circle. A white man could enjoy the control of a great horse by proxy, but the black man still enjoyed it in fact." Since Meriwether is not heir, but executor to Swallow Barn, his situation is especially relevant to this notion of success "by proxy," whereas Carey, working with the horses every day would have felt their successes "in fact." See Mooney, *Race Horse Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014), 52-53.

too, that licks my hand out of pure honesty; he has not many years left, and it does no harm to humour him!"[17] Meriwether maintains Carey's faithfulness at the same time he is admitting that the only way to "keep him" is to keep him happy by listening to him and staying out of his way. In order to avoid further debate with the old man (which he knows he will also lose) the slaveholder appropriates Carey's assertiveness and repackages it as his own benevolence. Although Kennedy acknowledges the wisdom of the old slave, Carey's ability to openly declare his venerability and defend his expertise without fear of violent reprisal is indeed the stuff of fiction.

Meriwether's non-reaction to Carey's claims of authority at Swallow Barn is the exact opposite of what Douglass describes in his 1845 *Narrative* as the cruel and fickle temperament of his owner, Colonel Lloyd, who delights in the physical torture of his grooms, old Barney and young Barney. Unlike the fictional Frank Meriwether, "Colonel Lloyd could not brook any contradiction from a slave. When he spoke, a slave must stand, listen, and tremble."[18] Whereas Kennedy allows Carey to "sass" his owner without rebuke, in reality, Lloyd punished the his two grooms mercilessly, and without impunity for a litany of "the slightest inattentions" to his horses, for which "no excuse could shield them."[19] Not only were old and young Barney prohibited from speaking in their own defense, they received much harsher punishment if they did so. Douglass lists the offenses charged against the two grooms at length, stating it was not unusual for Lloyd to whip old Barney, "at fifty or sixty years of age," thirty or more lashes at a time. Additionally, since the two Barneys were father and son, their mutual inability to help the other throughout years of physical and mental abuse resulted in a constant cycle of violent emasculation.

[17] Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, Vol I*, 32.
[18] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 17.
[19] Ibid, 16.

Not only is Carey *not* punished for scolding Meriwether over who knows more about thoroughbred horses, Kennedy allows the aged slave character similar license when he taunts the man who technically owns him, Ned Hazard.[20] Although Carey's performance is supposed to be reminiscent of the minstrel stage, wherein black men were both ridiculed and silenced by white men attempting to assert their racial and sexual dominance through caricature,[21] his humanity—both as lover and a man who resists categorization and complacency—conflicts with the literary aim of the stereotype. Whereas the expectation is that Carey will sing of the renown of his southern aristocrat owners, "like the ancient jongeleurs [sic]," [22] his musical oration riles, rather than soothes his listeners. Kennedy compares him to the jongleurs of old in an attempt to minimize the fact of Carey's enslavement, and to highlight that the elder's responsibilities on the plantation are more artistic (i.e. indulgent) than the brute labor he could be forced to perform. Depicting the character as artistic might also have been Kennedy's attempt to desexualize him by positing him, not as a man of action, but as a minstrel, whose job it is to memorialize the actions of famous (white) men. Again, Kennedy's characterization of the old slave's orality is at odds with what the reader expects from the stereotype. Rather than reinforcing through song the ascendancy of Hazard, his legal owner, Carey mocks him by suggesting his love might marry his rival. Upon seeing that his lyrical arrow has hit its mark, Carey discontinues his song, walks toward the subject of his ridicule, and, "putting his hand on Ned's breast" exclaims with mock pity, "'Ah! That makes you very sore there, master Ned Hazard.'"[23] Kennedy supported chattel slavery, which held that blacks did not form familial bonds in the same way as whites, yet the

[20] Meriwether is Hazard's brother-in-law, and looks after the plantation because Hazard does not want the responsibility. Interestingly, the character Ned could practically be a prototype for the lazy, garrulous "Storytelling Uncle" trope that develops in the 1850s in response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
[21] See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).
[22] Ibid, 111.
[23] Ibid.

author makes Carey the prophetic voice of Hazard's narrative on the subject of romantic love. Clearly, Kennedy, as well as the pro-slavery writers that follow him, was unable to successfully depict slaves as both happy *and* inhuman.

When another guest requests, "'Sugar in a Gourd,' or 'Jim Crow,'" and "'none of your d—d cantabiles,'" Carey answers instead with a song about his dream, frustrating his listeners—and likely Kennedy's readers—who both expected and desired to hear a stereotypical, black-faced minstrel performance.[24] Although Carey is supposed to offer simple entertainment for Kennedy's readers, the slave makes fools of the white men who try to bend him to their will. Perhaps the slippage between the roles Carey is supposed to play and what actually appears on the page were not problematic for pro-slavery readers because they did not try to read anything more into the aged slave character, and simply laughed of his small rebellions like Meriwether does about the horses. It might also be due to the fact that early nineteenth-century apologist texts such as *Swallow Barn* contain less inflammatory rhetoric than subsequent texts, as their authors were attempting to persuade anti-slavery readers of the benefits and wholesomeness of the institution.

LASHING OUT AT UNCLE TOM

Following the unparalleled success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852,[25] "Anti-Tom" texts flooded the literary scene, many of which were much bolder in their racial offenses than anything that had appeared in Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* twenty years

[24] Ibid. It is humorous to note that, prior to Carey's performance, this same guest who requested "Jim Crow" had attempted a parlor melodrama in burnt cork with Ned Hazard, in which Carey was to produce the sound effects for rain by frying bacon in a hot pan. When the rain ceases to fall, Ned's demands for "more rain!" are met with Carey's retort that "it's no use; the frying pan's got cold," which effectively ends the blackface play. Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, Vol. I*, 108.

[25] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture Multi-Media Archive*, accessed May 18, 2016

earlier.[26] With apologists eager to publish their whitewashed accounts of the slave experience, surrogate caricatures of Uncle Tom[27] became a go-to source for novels and satires claiming to depict slavery as it *really* was. Although they acknowledged the great deal of responsibility and accountability that aged male[28] slaves were subject to on the plantation, apologists nevertheless depicted them as simple-minded and childlike at every opportunity, rarely affording them the sterling reputation that Tom had earned for himself in Stowe's novel. One such author was William Gilmore Simms, a South Carolinian with a prolific literary career and an especially provocative (i.e., highly-disturbing) perspective on master-slave relationships. Simms's 1852 *The Sword and the Distaff: Or, "Fair, Fat, and Forty," A Story of the South, at the Close of the Revolution*[29] was published in response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and stands as a shocking example of the lengths apologists went to persuade readers that slavery was a paternalistic institution beneficial to both master and slave.

As the title relates, Simms's novel takes place at the end of the Revolutionary War, yet the relationship depicted between the corpulent, debt-ridden, planter's son, Porgy, who serves as a Captain in the Continental Army, and his old slave Tom, Porgy's attendant and the regiment's cook, is very much concerned with nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding the tenuous future of slavery in the south. Although Tom is not a storyteller, Simms imbues the character with all the other traits of the "Storytelling Uncle" trope. Tom's thick dialect implies an infantile intelligence, he is acknowledged as exceedingly faithful, and his white owner emasculates him

[26] Joseph V. Ridgely, "Woodcraft: Simm's First Answer to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (*American Literature* 31.4, 1960), 425.
[27] Tom is middle-aged in Stowe's novel, but the paratexts accompanying the novel were prolific, and Tom transformed into an elderly man seemingly overnight in the advertisements and adaptations that followed his literary debut.
[28] I specify "male" here because elder females are treated much differently in apologist works, as they are often praised as saintly servants who keep the whole of the plantation running and in check.
[29] William Gilmore Simms, *The Sword and the Distaff: Or, "Fair, Fat, and Forty." A Story of the South, at the Close of the Revolution* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852). *Internet Archive*, accessed July 15, 2015.

repeatedly in the most disturbing of ways. Strangely, in an atypical racial role reversal, Simms makes Porgy the one who speaks often and at length about how he cannot bear to be away from his slave, instead of the other way around, as one would expect. And it is actually what Tom *refuses to say* that makes him an intriguing pro-slavery aged-slave caricature.[30]

As in many abolitionist texts, the subject of selling and collecting slaves as payment for outstanding debts[31] arises in relation to Porgy, who claims, "'I love Tom. Tom is virtually a free man. It's true, being a debtor, I cannot confer his freedom upon him […] He shall never fall into the hands of a scamp. I'll sacrifice him as a burnt offering for my sins and his own. Tom, I'm thinking, would rather die my slave, than live a thousand years under another owner.'"[32] Because Porgy's debt is more than the sale of all of his slaves and his mortgaged plantation combined, he knows Tom is liable to be taken as payment toward the debt, yet he goes on to say that as long as he is able to eat, Tom will be the one to cook for him. Porgy continues to assert that, even if he loses everything else, as long as Tom remains, "'It is still possible for me to live.'"[33]

When Tom is complimented on his cooking, he mentions an acquaintance of Porgy's, whom he claims with pride would do nearly anything to steal him away from his owner. Tom's boast prompts an impassioned and disturbing speech in which Porgy reiterates his earlier promises/threats concerning his favorite slave and cook, and in which he makes the additional vows: "'I will neither give you, nor sell you, nor suffer you to be taken from me in any way […] Nothing but Death shall ever part us, Tom, and even Death shall not if I can help it. When I die, you shall be buried with me. We have fought and fed too long together, Tom, and I trust we love

[30] The only character who actually calls him "uncle Tom" is Pomp, a young slave. Tom appears to take offense to the moniker at one point, saying, "'Don't you uncle me, you chucklehead!'" Ibid, 200.
[31] Most notably, this is what prompts Mr. Shelby to sell Uncle Tom and Eliza's son Harry in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
[32] Ibid, 124.
[33] Ibid, 125.

each other quite too well, to submit to separation.'"[34] Porgy's insistence that they remain side-by-side in life *and* interred together in death has queer connotations, and goes well beyond the "normal" same-sex parameters of the owner/slave "relationship."[35] Although it is unmistakable that he finds Tom's services valuable, to what extent he *values him* is less clear. Is it as an attentive subservient? A life-long companion? A lover? Tom is already a feminized character,[36] and Porgy's morbid sexual aggressiveness is all-consuming. In their respective studies of Simms, Masahiro Nakamura asserts that the author "reveals himself to be ambivalent to miscegenation in his essays as well as his fiction,"[37] while Susan J. Tracy claims his works "publicly acknowledge miscegenation, but argue it was a consequence of youthful indiscretion, overseer and poor-white male profligacy, or the 'slave wenches'' own seductive desires."[38] It is clear that nothing will appease Porgy but acquiescence from Tom that he desires to be buried (in the same coffin?) with his owner, even though his entreaties are suggestive of amalgamation. Simms, apparently more accepting of miscegenation than other pro-slavery writers, emasculates and silences Tom through the power of sexual innuendo.

Porgy is unyielding in his demands of Tom, and his belief in his own power and influence are palpable when he declares:

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[34] Ibid, 203-4.

[35] As Craig Thompson Friend writes, "Until the mid- to late-nineteenth century, language exchanged in male homosocial friendships was often indistinguishable from the idiom and images of love relationships" (259). He continues, however, asking, "…where was the line between homosocial intimacy and homoerotic interests drawn?" 259. In a "master-slave" relationship, the "master" drew the line (not that all slaves adhered to it), and we should not be so naïve as to ignore the fact that male slaves were also forced to commit sexual acts by those who owned them. See Friend, "Sex, Self, and the Performance of Patriarchal Manhood in the Old South." *The Old South's Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress*, ed. L. Diane Barnes, Brian Schoen, and Frank Towers (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 246-65.

[36] Sarah N. Roth discusses how, as a cook, "Tom's manhood was symbolically submerged beneath a load of women's implements," citing Tom's own admissions that he had "a hundred poun' of pot and kettle on [his] t'ighs!" and a gridiron "well-strapped to his member!" 150. See Roth, *Gender and Race in Antebellum Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2014).

[37] Masahiro Nakamura, *Visions of Order in William Gilmore Simms: Southern Conservatism and the Other American Romance* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2009), 176.

[38] Susan J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995), 144.

> "Yes, Tom! you shall never leave me. I will put a brace of bullets through your abdomen, Tom, sooner than lose you! But, it may be, that I shall not have the opportunity. They may take advantage of my absence—they may *steal* you away—coming on you by surprise! If they should do so, Tom, I rely upon you, to put *yourself* to death, sooner than abandon me, and become the slave of another. Kill yourself, Tom, rather than let them carry you off. Put your knife into your ribs, any where, three inches deep, and you will effectually baffle the blood-hounds!"[39]

The romantic language[40] Porgy uses to try and convince Tom to murder himself rather than be taken is more than a slave owner demanding obedience from a slave; it is one man pleading for another to voice his willingness to extend his love and subservience into the afterlife. As Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke write in *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender*, "In defending his portrayals of mixed-race relationships, Simms insisted that literature must resist polite hypocrisies and depict the natural passions shared by all, regardless of race."[41] Simms's concentration on Porgy's passion for his slave certainly does call attention to the miscegenation of free whites and black slaves, but it also incorporates queer components that further complicate the author's resistance of "polite hypocrisies." For Tom to comply with his owner's unusual demands would result in Porgy essentially owning the old man "body and soul," a matter which held great significance for the enslaved, as evidenced by the common use of the fearful phrase in both slave narratives and abolitionist works. Additionally, Porgy, like many of

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[39] Simms, *The Sword*, 206.

[40] According to Friend, "Premodern Americans had constructed masculinity as a status more than as a gender […] they defined it in opposition to childhood and, more specifically, to those who were childlike—dependents." "Sex, Self," 261. Porgy's poetic speech, in which proclaims his love and loyalty to his male friends, is that of a Revolutionary-War era American, and is therefore consistent with the speech of premodern American males, yet his insistence of devotion from Tom—who he considers a childlike dependent—exposes both his strengths and weaknesses.

[41] Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke, Introduction to *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender*, ed. Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2002), xix.

Simms's readers, does not believe that a "faithful" or "devoted servant" has any desires beyond serving his owner (ignoring the distinguishing factors between servitude and enslavement), or that aged slaves were anything but elated to take care of generations of their "white families" after years of having been deprived of their own. And yet, Tom, the supposedly faithful caricature, remains strategically silent,[42] and refuses to give his consent.

In Porgy's ideal scenario of their death, he dies first, and Tom, like a Shakespearean lover, kills himself rather than live without his mate. If Porgy, jealous at the thought that any other man should ever own his slave, has his way, Tom's life will end when his does. Porgy never considers manumitting his faithful slave upon his death, as he believes their bond to be strong enough to last beyond death. In rejecting any scenario in which Tom is not by his side for eternity, Porgy ensures that Tom stays in what Porgy believes is his "proper place." According to Laura Ganus Perkins, "Simms understood social and religious development to be contingent upon a people having a permanent home and believed that African Americans were natural-born wanderers who would establish a permanent location only when forced."[43] Porgy forces Tom into "a permanent location" by discounting any possibility of separation during their respective lifetimes; however, to require this permanency in death amounts to nothing short of obsession. When Tom, less than thrilled at the idea of committing suicide, tries to explain to Porgy, "'Wha'! me, maussa! kill mese'f! Me, Tom! 'Tick knife t'ree inch in me rib, and dead! Nebber, in dis worl (world) maussa!'"[44] Porgy's monomania leads him to challenge Tom's manhood, although paradoxically, through queer appeals, declaring, "'I thought you were more of a man—that you had more affection for me! Is it possible that you could wish to live, if separated from me?

[42] See DoVeanna S. Fulton, *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006).
[43] Laura Ganus Perkins, "An Unsung Literary Legacy: William Gilmore Simms's African-American Characters" (*Studies in the Literary Imagination* 42.1, 2009), 84.
[44] Simms, *The Sword*, 205.

Impossible, Tom! I will never believe it. No, boy, you shall never leave me."[45] Although Porgy is aggressive in his attempts to emasculate his slave, his pleas are submissive and reactionary. In reality, Porgy, like many slave owners, relies upon forced labor for nearly everything. Unable to complete the most basic tasks (such as dressing himself), due to his rich man's affliction of extreme obesity, Porgy cannot function without Tom's assistance.[46] Porgy is sedentary, ineffectual, and childlike in his tantrums and tirades, and is no model of masculinity. Rather, Porgy needs Tom to sacrifice all opportunities of a better life—or any life—to validate his vanity and sense of self-worth, and to allow him to situate himself as the dominant one of the two men.

Finally, in order to wholly convince Tom that there is no escaping his fate, and that the slave must remain his cook in the afterlife, Porgy uses the stereotype of slave superstition against Tom, who by this time is beyond frightened: "'If you are not prepared to bury yourself in the same grave with me when I die, I shall be with you in spirit, if not in flesh; and I shall make you cook for me as now. […] I shall cry out, at your elbow, 'my coffee, Tom!' in a voice that shall shake the very house!'"[47] Here, Porgy threatens that there is no escape—either by the death of Porgy or the death of Tom—from the master-slave power dynamic he is subject to; furthermore, he describes a domestic partnership in which Tom is posited as a wifely figure expected to take care of Porgy indefinitely.

Although it is possible that Porgy's obsession is due in large part to Tom's culinary skills and Porgy's massive appetite, it is evident from the constant attestations concerning his old slave that he not only expects, but also yearns for Tom's utter submissiveness, and will stop at nothing to assert his dominance. Porgy makes it clear that his greatest fear is to be without Tom, whom

[45] Ibid, 206.
[46] This reliance/helplessness is reiterated by Thomas Nelson Page in the story, "Polly: A Christmas Recollection," wherein a white Colonel relies on his slave, Drinkwater Torm, to tie his shoes. Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 188. *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[47] Simms, *The Sword*, 206.

he speaks of as his temporal partner and spiritual savior, exhibiting the latter when he asserts, "'I'll sacrifice him as a burnt offering for my sins and his own.'"[48] Based on Porgy's many morbid declarations regarding Tom, Simms's own proclivities toward racial sexual-sadism as the means of ultimate masculine dominance are called into question. The desire of white men to "master" black bodies is a reoccurring theme throughout pro-slavery and abolitionist literature, yet the morbid depths of Porgy's obsession with Tom goes far beyond any other apologist text discussed in this monograph. Simms's white protagonist is both maniacal and deviant, as whites and blacks were rarely, if ever, buried together in southern cemeteries, let alone in the same casket. The mere suggestion of such everlasting racial mingling would have been an affront to most white readers, which begs the question as to why Simms took his fictional domination so far—a question I do not have an answer for. Tom never agrees to kill himself, or to be buried with his owner, who so adamantly demands it, so again, there is a slippage between the apparent purpose of Tom's character and what he says—or in this case, what he does not say.

As a white man, Porgy can threaten Tom into "loving" him (or into *acting* like he does), but he cannot guarantee to what lengths his old slave will remain faithful to him—the possibility of which plagues the security of his white male privilege. Moreover, in trying to force Tom to voice his compliance, the aged slave offers silence instead. Thus, if Simms's old slave character is intended to prove the love the enslaved had for their masters and the necessity of keeping them close for "their own good," he misses the mark. What *is* clear, both from Porgy's obsession and Tom's silence, is that the slave is not the one in need of a caretaker…literally, Porgy cannot even dress himself. Instead, these scenes from *The Sword and the Distaff* illustrate an absurd dependency by whites on slave labor for anything and everything in daily life, and the tendency to presume that aged slaves, having given their blood, sweat, tears, and children to the plantation

[48] Ibid, 124.

system their entire lives, had no living left to do. Such overt dependence on slave labor disproves the touted "cradle to grave" policy of pro-slavery advocates, illustrating that it was the forced labor of supposedly "retired" slaves that sustained whites from birth until death.

STORYTELLING & SIGNIFYIN(G) BEFORE THE WAR

As the likelihood of war between the north and south increased, slave owners felt their way of life continually threatened. Afraid of being reduced to the childlike, submissive position ascribed to blacks via paternalism, apologists reacted by devising elderly black caricatures to contrast with the youth and vitality of their white characters, and to act as spokespeople for the institution. Edward A. Pollard, a southern journalist and writer most active in the southern literary scene of the late 1850s and 60s (and who wrote on the politics of slavery, the nationwide advantages of reopening the slave trade, and the state of the Confederacy and its leaders during and after the Civil War), peoples his book, *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (1859),[49] with elderly slaves. The letters that comprise the work are all addressed to a "Mr. C," or, David M. Clarkson, Esq.[50] of Newburgh, New York, whose beliefs on slavery and the slave trade purportedly contrast with the author's. None of Mr. C's letters are included, making the collection function as one sustained argument by Pollard, interjected with, but hardly interrupted by the unseen objections of Clarkson. In the first letter of the collection, Pollard explains that his intent is to provide "sketches, which may amuse you, may correct the false views of others, derived, as they chiefly are, from the libels of Northern spies, who live or travel here in disguise,"[51] which he intends to publish. In providing his sketches of "happy" slaves,

[49] Edward A. Pollard, *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Pudney, 1859). *Internet Archive*, accessed August 24, 2015.
[50] Likely a reference to English abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson.
[51] Pollard, *Black Diamonds*, 19.

Pollard completely ignores the young and middle-aged, focusing solely on the elderly: Uncle George (also called "Old Bones") and his wife, Aunt Belinda, Uncle Jeamus (or Jimboo), Pompey (a "Guinea negro"), Aunt Judy, Uncle Nash, Aunt Marie, and Uncle Junk.

Knowing that the racial power structure forced the enslaved to stifle their opinions/beliefs in order to comply with whites, what bell hooks describes as "the capacity to mask feelings and lie" that serves as "a useful survival skill for black folks,"[52] apologists employed the presumably innocuous elderly-slave population to demonstrate the ways in which whites and their slaves "loved" one another. Even anti-slavery proponents such as Horace Greeley praised these works in print for their (alleged) intimate and "authentic" descriptions of plantation life. In the foreword to *Black Diamonds*, Pollard "pulls a Walt Whitman,"[53] by including an Editorial written by Horace Greeley to the *New Orleans Delta* testifying that the book provides "enkindling recollections [of] boyhood and youth," and of "[t]he negro, who, in his true nature, is always a boy, let him be ever so old," and who is "better understood by a boy, than by a whole academy of philosophers."[54] Pollard follows this inclusion of praise with a "Letter of Thanks from the Author to Horace Greeley, Esq.," dated June 20, 1859, writing:

> I was aware that the subject of my little book (the 'almighty nigger') was a tender one with you. I had, I must confess, also heard among the miserable, ignorant people of the South many bad accounts of you. You had been represented to me as a curious old man, doting on 'niggers,' and deriding all white persons who fancied themselves superior to your idols.[55]

[52] bell hooks, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem* (New York: Atria, 2003), 55.
[53] A reference to Whitman's inclusion of a private letter of praise from Ralph Waldo Emerson in the second edition of his poetry collection, *Leaves of Grass* in 1856.
[54] Pollard, *Black Diamonds*, ii.
[55] Ibid, i.

At this point, one cannot help but wonder if Greeley regretted putting his initial praise in writing and making it public. In the case of Pollard's text, Greeley's literary clout set the stage for the subsequent narrative, and thus encouraged the stereotypes that these characters came to embody within the cultural memory of America.

Pollard's collection of letters focuses most predominantly on the aged slaves he supposedly knew and came into contact with over a lifetime spent in the south. Although "Diamonds" in the title refers to cultural gems "Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South," it can be interpreted as alluding to the monetary worth of the slaves, as well as the longevity and hardness/durability of his aged-slave subjects. That any person could live to be seventy or eighty-years old under the yoke of chattel slavery suggests immense physical and mental fortitude and/or creativity in acting the dehumanizing parts demanded of the enslaved on a daily basis. However, to Pollard and the other apologist writers who depicted the aged-slave population as representative of sincere faithfulness and natural (racial) resilience, the adaptive strategies of the enslaved—unlooked for and unrecognized as such—often found their way into pro-slavery depictions despite the author's best attempts to mask them as humor.

With the exception of Uncle Junk (discussed at length later on), most of the anecdotes relating to the slaves of *Black Diamonds* are exactly what one would expect from someone who is not only making a prolonged argument in defense of slavery, but is using the enslaved themselves as his primary argumentative support. Never one to miss an opportunity to reiterate his love for his family's slaves, *especially* the elderly ones, Pollard claims he "was trained in an affectionate respect for the old slaves on the plantation," and "was permitted to visit their cabins, and to carry them kind words and presents"; on occasion, he was also "soundly and

unceremoniously whipped by the old black women for [his] annoyances."[56] He describes Uncle George, the Pollard family's head gardener, who the children teased and traded with to their alternating disadvantage, as one who had "grown old gently," "had never seen any hard service," and who, "with that regard commonly exhibited toward the slave when stricken with age," "had every attention paid him in the evening of his life."[57] Despite the great lengths Pollard's family supposedly took to care for George in his old age, Pollard initially introduces him as "a very genteel beggar," who "has the ugly habit of secretly waylaying [visitors], and begging them to 'remember' him."[58] In Letter II, Pollard writes that after returning home after several years' absence, George called him to his cabin, where he promptly fell to his knees and held fast to Pollard's legs, as if to keep him from leaving again. Ostensibly overwhelmed by the emotional recollection of this act, Pollard continues, "this poor old man was 'a slave,' and yet he had a place in my heart, and I was not ashamed to meet him with tears in my eyes. Miserable abolitionists! You prate of brotherly love and humanity. If you or any man had dared to hurt a hair of this slave, I could have trampled you into the dust."[59] Here, Pollard uses George's advanced age to substantiate the slave's presumed helplessness against the predatory nature of abolitionists, who were vilified and demonized in apologist works as (ironically) self-serving whites who would kidnap and harm blacks if given the opportunity.

For all his attestations that the aged slaves of his acquaintance were living in comparative leisure and luxury, Pollard contradicts this when he writes in Letter VII of Nash, who he refers to as "the old black patriarch" who "fell in harness, and died with on [*sic*; no] master but Jesus to relieve the last mysterious agonies of his death."[60] Pollard recalls "the

[56] Pollard, *Black Diamonds*, 49.
[57] Ibid, 32.
[58] Ibid, 31.
[59] Ibid, 33.
[60] Ibid, 88.

excitement of the search for Nash, and the shock to my heart, of the discovery, in the bright morning, of the corpse lying among the thick undergrowth, and in the whortleberry bushes of the wood."[61] Given Pollard's description of George's "retirement," Nash was also at the age where he should have been excused from field labor, yet he "fell in harness" the same as any animal worked to death. Thus, despite the oft-delusional perspectives of Pollard and other pro-slavery advocates, the deadly realities of the system are evident in their own contrived narratives. Although some slave owners realized it was counter-productive to cripple their assets and workforce, it remains that others did not, and the poor enslaved belonging to such owners were worked or beaten to death. Certainly, the argument that old slaves were generally "retired" from hard labor is proven false by Pollard's inclusion of the circumstances of Nash's death. The truth is that the old slave dies alone in a far-off field where he spent his life enriching his owners and their estates—*not* in the relative comfort of a fire-lit cabin, as so many apologist narratives depicted the deaths of aged female slaves.

Although Pollard writes of many elder(ly) slaves, his narrative of Uncle Junk—a carefree storyteller, supposedly unaffected by his position as the property of another—is the most prolonged and in depth. And yet, upon closer inspection, Junk contradicts the author's apparent aims, as the old slave's clever form of sedition, cloaked in wild stories and little white lies, shows him to be the opposite of a man tempered by time into accepting his lowly position. In Letter IX, Pollard writes that he has "purposely avoided contentious arguments about slavery,"[62] claiming, "these pictures have been intended rather as amusements than as lessons."[63] Although Pollard is responding to a letter from Clarkson, he is also writing to his intended/future readers, and with a clearly defined socio-political agenda, despite his repeated pretenses toward casual

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid, 98.
[63] Ibid, 99.

discourse. Letter IX continues with a detailed account—the longest Pollard devotes to any of his aged-slave cast of caricatures—of Junk, a "most distinguished palavarer [sic], romancer, diplomat, and ultimately a cobbler of old shoes."[64] According to Pollard, "Junk had not always been a cobbler. To believe his own narrative, he had been a circus-rider, an alligator hunter, an attaché of a foreign legation, and a murderer," "stained with the blood of innumerable Frenchmen, with whom he had quarreled when on his European tour."[65] Pollard explains that Junk's owner had once intended to take his slave with him to Europe on a work trip, but upon further deliberation (and mounting fears that his slave might be persuaded to run away by abolitionists abroad) he left Junk at home, forcing him to merely imagine, rather than experience, the possibilities of such an excursion. Junk's imagined experiences, devised by Pollard as proof of his harmlessness, actually suggest more about the selective listening of whites than it does the supposed senselessness of an old slave's speech.

Pro-slavery writers often claimed that living in or visiting the south at length provided them with insights regarding the inner workings of the system and the "true nature" and/or character of the black race in general; yet, many slave narratives reference the myriad ways in which slaves *performed* the racial expectations of whites as a means of survival—often through orality. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s theory of "Signifyin(g),"[66] or, the performing of an ascribed racialized identity, positions the black speaker within the contextual confines of slavery as one who employs the rhetorical techniques of a trickster to simultaneously persuade and mislead the intended audience. Signifyin(g), or performing blackness in ways that seemed to validate notions of white racial superiority, helped the enslaved to survive by masking their resentment and

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, 99-100.
[66] Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

agency. Although Pollard's characterization of Junk is supposed to demonstrate the tendency of aged "Uncles" to fabricate stories and humorously inflate their own importance, he instead provides an example of Signifyin(g), in which an old slave passes off his desire to kill white men by playing into the vanity and nationalism of white southerners. Furthermore, Pollard inadvertently demonstrates the importance of oral culture within the slave community, both as a momentary distraction from the drudgeries of enslavement, and as a coping mechanism through which African Americans reimagined their world.

In Pollard's narrative, the fact that Junk never made it to Europe did not hinder him from creating the experience for himself and sharing it with his fellow slaves as gospel. Fixated on France, Junk made the country, its people, and its language the focus of many of his stories. Positing Junk as a hegemonic voice rather than himself, Pollard writes that Junk's stories "represented [the French] as a good-for-nothing set, much below the standard of nigger civilization, a sort of puny barbarians, who regarded an American darkey as a being of great majesty. Junk had slain Frenchmen, had treated the little, barbarous nigger-worshippers[67] with disdain, and had received from them tokens of great distinction."[68] In the tales Pollard contrived for Junk, the slave not only lived in France, but spoke the language and felt what it was like to be in a position of privilege and superiority over white men. Beyond devising a place where black men, women, and children were not bought and sold, denigrated and beaten, or raped and murdered by their professed mental and moral betters, Junk's narrative is one in which he can brag about killing white men—because they were *French* men, and largely disliked by southerners—without fear of punishment.

[67] Pollard's own disdain for the French is obvious in the this passage, and it should be stressed that it is he, not Uncle Junk, who viciously denigrates them as being "little, barbarous nigger-worshippers."
[68] Pollard, *Black Diamonds*, 101.

When one young slave repeatedly challenges the validity of Junk's stories and makes fun of the old cobbler's boots, Junk chalks up another imagined white body (and threatens to chalk up a black one) to his list of alleged victims, claiming, "he had once killed a certain small Frenchman who had insulted his boots"[69] (which, understandably, would have been a likely source of pride for a cobbler). From Pollard's descriptions, it is clear that the enslaved *want* to believe the fantastic stories of exotic travel and unpunished violence against whites. Pollard wants his readers to buy into the "Storytelling Uncle" stereotype Junk is meant to embody, yet the content of the old man's tales is hardly in keeping with the faithful slave mythos. By and large, the members of the slave community venerate Junk, defend him, and "crowd around him on every possible occasion, as he dispensed the eventful experiences of his pilgrimage."[70] Despite a few detractors, Junk is "the especial object of the admiration of the house,"[71] but not because he is the laughable or groveling stereotype his white owners think him to be. Rather, he is esteemed because he does for his fellow slaves what few can: he provides them with what Joel Chandler Harris later calls a "laughin'-place"—a suggestion for white children in Harris's context, but a necessity for the enslaved because it provided an escape from the unmitigated miseries of their reality.[72] Even Pollard recognizes why Junk continues to tell his story, when he proclaims, "Poor Junk! His travels were never more extended beyond the slopes of the Green Mountain. He was settled down as cobbler for the plantation; unable to revisit, except in fancy, the beautiful world he had traversed as diplomat, man-slayer and circus-rider."[73] These outlandish and accomplished deeds were meant to be absurd to the point of hilarity, yet Pollard's own character adamantly embraces the possibilities opened up by a different kind of world order.

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[69] Ibid, 102.
[70] Ibid, 101.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Joel Chandler Harris, *Told by Uncle Remus: New Stories of the Old Plantation* (New York: McKinlay, 1905), 56. *Internet Archive*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[73] Pollard, *Black Diamonds*, 104.

Although Pollard likely did not intend it, the character of Junk accomplishes much more beyond inventing entertaining stories; he conceives experiences full of dangerous thrills, far-off adventures, racial power shifts, and violent retribution, all of which allow his listeners to live vicariously through him. Thus, through an eager application of mental and emotional distancing from present woes, Junk provides himself and his fellow slaves mental mobility where no physical travel is possible. Pollard's inclusion of Junk's wild tales was likely meant to function within the pro-slavery narrative as a means of both discrediting the old storyteller as a liar, and discounting the slave community as naïve for believing him. The alleged tendency toward fantasy and gullibility that Junk and his audience represent were designed to infantilize all the enslaved (regardless of age), and to imply that they were unfit to govern themselves. However, it remains that Junk's stories come off as both aspirational and inspirational, and his preoccupation with exacting vengeance on whites is anything but infantile contentedness and elder faithfulness.

"If it Ain't Broke": Postbellum "Storytelling Uncles"

After the end of the war in April 1865, the "Negro Question," or "Negro Problem," as the plans for the future of African Americans were then termed, was addressed by nearly every major pro- and anti-slavery figure of the day, including Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, Harry Stillwell Edwards, Anna Julia Cooper, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, Charles Chesnutt, and Ida B. Wells. Nevertheless, by donning the guise of nostalgia and preying upon an American public still traumatized by a war in which brother fought brother, apologists carried on the legacy of their antebellum antecedents by continuing to employ the "Storytelling Uncle" trope to argue that African Americans—especially the elderly—had been better off under

enslavement. Unfortunately, the postbellum perpetuation of antebellum stereotypes made it that much easier for those in power to argue the alleged unintelligence and untrustworthiness of the new black citizenry, and to implement Jim Crow legislation to restrict the newly-liberated race as they had been during enslavement.[74]

Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus, who first appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1876, and who rose to fame following the publication of *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* in 1880,[75] was a white man's version of the griot—a historian, philosopher, and keeper of African folklore and culture,[76] whose well-preserved traditions were considered quaint entertainment by his white audiences. Purportedly based on stories told to him by slaves during his four-year stint (1862-1866) at Turnwold plantation as a "printer's devil" for Joseph Addison Turner's newspaper, the *Countryman,*[77] Harris's appropriations helped him to "produce the first major black character in American literature since Uncle Tom,"[78] and to re-solidify the "Storytelling Uncle" stereotype in the collective mind of white nineteenth-century readers.[79] Following the *first* of Remus's animal tales in 1879, the character that would define Harris's literary career quickly became America's (and then the world's) go-to source for descriptions of an idealized plantation past in which the war and the much-debated "Negro Problem" of Reconstruction did not exist. To give an idea of the idealistic south Harris created and

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[74] "Asking readers to sympathize with the plight of southern characters across the color line as unified in their loss of the idyllic antebellum days of slavery had profound political implications, including a shift in the perception of both the war and the status of African-Americans before it, which resulted in an according shift in the perception of current political events." Gilligan, "Reading, Race," 199.
[75] Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings: The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation* (New York: Appleton, 1881)*, Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[76] Armistead Lemon, "Summary of *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings: The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation*," *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 17, 2015.
[77] R. Bruce Bickley, Jr., *Joel Chandler Harris: A Biography and Critical Study* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 18.
[78] Thomas P. Riggio, "Uncle Tom Reconstructed: A Neglected Chapter in the History of a Book" (*American Quarterly* 28.1, 1976), 60.
[79] This includes national and international readerships, as Harris's Remus books were translated into almost thirty different languages. See Bickley, Jr. "Uncle Remus Tales," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed April 15, 2015.

maintained throughout his works, he begins *Plantation Pageants* (1899) by stating, "General Sherman had done the best he could for the Abercrombie place. He had waved his hand, and grim War shrunk away out of sight; […] Everything was in its place; so far as the eye could see, [and] war had forcibly taken no tolls from the plantation."[80] Thus, four years later, in *Told by Uncle Remus* (1903), the gregarious old man asks permission to return to the idyllic Doshy plantation after growing "tired of the dubious ways of city life."[81]

Unlike Stowe's Uncle Tom, whose plight sparked heated household debates and ignited national controversy, Uncle Remus's "ole timey" contentment appeased southerners and northerners by offering a nostalgic view of a past that never really existed—one where black men and women preferred the "protection" and "relative comfort" of slavery to freedom and equal rights under the law.[82] Harris's idyllic Doshy Plantation leads readers to believe that Remus is considered one of the family—after all, he has been "Uncle," and often, a surrogate father figure to at least two generations of Doshy boys: first to the unnamed "little boy" from *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings* (1880)[83] and subsequent works, and later to the boy's son in *Told By Uncle Remus* (1903), and the posthumously-published, *Uncle Remus Returns* (1918).[84] Additionally, Harris's focus on the relationships between a black man and white *boys*

[80] Joel Chandler Harris, *Plantation Pageants* (New York: McKinlay, 1899), 1. *Internet Archive*, accessed July 15, 2015. According to Neal Gabler's, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 2006), Disney brought in Maurice Rapf as assistant writer on *Song of the South* (1946)—the studio's mixed live-action/animation film adaptation of Harris's Remus and his animal tales—in order to temper lead writer, Dalton Reymond's "southern boy" views. Rapf left in part because the film featured the Reconstruction-era southern plantation untouched by the war or time, and the wealthy, white Doshy family still clearly in a position of power over their slaves-turned-sharecroppers. Rapf felt that the house and family (specifically, their clothes) should show signs of the war and its aftermath (434).
[81] Joel Chandler Harris, *Told by Uncle Remus: New Stories of the Old Plantation* (New York: Grosset, 1905), 3. *Internet Archive*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[82] Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus and His Friends; Old Plantation Stories, Songs, and Ballads, with Sketches of Negro Character* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), iv. *Internet Archive*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[83] Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings: The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation* (New York: D. Appleton, 1881). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[84] Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus Returns* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), *Internet Archive*, accessed May 6, 2016.

eliminated the concerns of miscegenation prompted by scenes of Uncle Tom and Eva reading together,[85] in which they exhibit a physical closeness that made many segregationalists uncomfortable. In *His Songs and His Sayings*, Remus explains to a new-comer to the Doshy plantation that "'all Ole Miss's chilluns call me daddy,'"[86] and in *Told By Uncle Remus*, he goes on at length about how his newest fan—the original boy's son—has not had a proper childhood growing up in the city, and, as a result, has grown to be unnecessarily serious and effeminate—issues which Remus takes upon himself to correct in the absence of the boy's actual father.

Although pro-slavery writers often avoided depicting their caricatures as fathers—an attempt to infantilize black men and place them on par with the children they supposedly do not have—it was common for them to depict old male slaves as companions and protectors of white boys. Remus's comparatively "good" treatment on the plantation is due in large part to his value as a readily available entertainer and babysitter/surrogate father figure. All together, Harris wrote enough Remus stories to keep the old man spinning yarns for generations of Doshys (and his readers) for over forty years. In all that time, Remus was depicted as elderly and infantile, but rarely as a man with a life of his own; indeed, Remus was married, or at least he mentions his "ole 'oman," on rare occasions, yet she remains ever out of sight and out of mind in Harris's books. It is strange that Harris even scripts a female counterpart to Remus, as aged slave couples were a rarity for apologist writers, who often isolated their aged "Aunts" and "Uncles" from one another to downplay slave relationships and familial love, and to infantilize and desexualize both figures more completely. Although the author "grants" Remus a wife, she might as well not exist, given the scarcity of references made to her. Harris undoubtedly wanted the focus to be on

[85] Robin Bernstein discusses the suggestive arbor scene of Tom and Eva as a ubiquitous tableau in nineteenth-century literary and material culture. Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).
[86] Harris, *Uncle Remus, His Songs*, 181.

Remus's relationship with/to the white children, which is why she never seems to be in the cabin on the many occasions when he is there telling stories. Moreover, had Harris acknowledged her beyond the occasional mention, he would have forfeited his primary means of infantilizing the old black man, and of prompting him to relate so many animal tales: his seemingly insatiable appetite and reliance on the Doshys for food scraps.

Despite his talents as both a sage and entertainer, Remus is not protected against the ubiquitous concern of hunger raised in myriad narratives of slavery. In "How the Birds Talk," Remus goes to the "big house," and, upon entering, asks humbly, "'Miss Sally, you ain't got no cold vittles, nor no piece er pie, nor nuthin', layin' 'round' yer, is you? Dat ar Tildy gal say you all have a mighty nice dinner ter-day."[87] Despite his protest that he "ain't never 'grudge w'at dem po' little chillun gits […] dey looks so puny en lonesome,'"[88] he takes the leftover potatoes that have been set aside for them, and later on, accepts gastronomic tribute from the young boy after he reminds Remus, "'you told me that you'd sing me a song every time I brought you a piece of cake.'"[89] Although he overestimates his value as monitor and protector of the estate's many interests, Remus delights in his status as the plantation's chief elder, and like Charles Chesnutt's conjure woman, Aunt Peggy, he expects remuneration for his services. Throughout *The Conjure Woman* (1899),[90] the eponymous character receives pay her for her conjures in the form of a basket of chicken and pound cake, a bottle of scuppernong wine, ten dollars, a ham, a Sunday head-handkerchief, a silver dollar, and a silk handkerchief. Similarly, the young boys of

[87] Joel Chandler Harris, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark* (New York: Century, 1889). 110.
[88] Ibid, 111.
[89] Ibid, 118.
[90] Charles Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman* (Boston: Houghton, 1899). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.

the Uncle Remus books often pilfer pieces of mince-pie and other such dainties from the house as payment for the venerable old man's sagacious entertainment.[91]

Although Harris depicted Remus as simple, childlike, lazy, and easily contented, the character's constant preoccupation with securing his next meal inadvertently exposes anxieties shared by many former slaves following Emancipation, particularly, the elderly. If Harris's representations of slaves were based in reality as he claims, then he must have heard a lot of slaves complaining of hunger and food insecurity. In *His Songs and His Sayings*, Remus is fishing for dinner when he tells Brer John Henry, "'Mars John and Miss Sally, dey done bin gone down unto Putmon County fer ter see dere kinfolks mighty nigh fo' days, an' you better b'leeve I done bin had ter scratch roun' mighty lively fer ter make de rashuns run out even.'"[92] Although the old man does forage for his own food on occasion, the repeated references throughout Harris's Remus books to the elder agreeing to tell stories in exchange for his meals implies an absolute control over when and where the he divulges African American folktales. Reinforcing the notion that his aged-slave character is dependent on whites for a basic necessity such as food was surely Harris's less than subtle way of validating the much-touted "cradle to grave" assurances of antebellum apologists.

In reality, the elder enslaved often relied on their own communities for their support and wellbeing once their owners saw them as financial burdens. Thus, Remus's reliance on the Doshy's leftovers as a major food source not only portrays the old man as a child or expectant pet at dinnertime, it removes him from sharing in communal meals with his black friends and family. Although Remus's animal tales are not the focus of this analysis, Bernard Wolfe's,

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[91] The idea of exchanging goods for knowledge has a long tradition in American storytelling, particularly in Native American oral tradition. The Seneca, "Origin of Folk Stories," describes the journey of Gaqka, or Crow, an orphaned outcast who rises to social prominence as the keeper of culture after a grandfather spirit—embodied in a high cliff of rock—tells him the "legends" and "adventures of the old time people" in exchange for offerings of tobacco. Arthur C. Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1989), 97-100.
[92] Harris, *Uncle Remus, His Songs*, 227.

"Uncle Remus & the Malevolent Rabbit" considers the importance of gastronomy within Brer Rabbit's community—which is often read as a metaphor for the slave community—arguing, "Without food-sharing, [there can be] no community."[93] In the same way that orality relates memory, food transmits cultural tradition, which is why the two pair together so nicely. Community meals are not only about the food, but the conversations and stories that accompany them. By placing Remus at the disposal (or mercy) of the Doshys for his sustenance, Harris shuts the old man off from his own people and monopolizes his orality to entertain white audiences.

In the titular story from Joel Chandler Harris's *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark* (1889),[94] the author takes a brief break[95] from his (in)famous Uncle Remus to tell the story of Jake, a hard working and "faithful" slave owned by the Gaston family, who runs away after a new overseer strikes him and he strikes back. Although the title character himself is initially referred to as "Uncle Jake," and Harris mentions he is over fifty years old, the story revolves on what happens in his absence; hence, his character does not provide much in the way of analysis. The story does include, however, a brief conversation between two elder slaves that is worth a short discussion because it further reveals the slippage between the nostalgic "happy slave" representations

Figure 4: "The Youngsters saw Daddy Jake, and went running after him." Full-page Illustration from Joel Chandler Harris's, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark.* New York: Century, 1889, 9.

[93] Bernard Wolfe, "Uncle Remus & the Malevolent Rabbit," in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrell: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore,* ed. Alan Dundes (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 528.
[94] Joel Chandler Harris, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark* (New York: Century, 1889).
[95] I say "brief" because Remus's "Brer" stories appear later in the collection.

Harris was known for, and the resistant orality that sometimes appears in his attempts to script black discourse.

Following the flight of Jake, the story's two young protagonists, Lucien and Lillian, take to the river in search of their family's most loyal slave. As is made clear, the two are not trying to find him because they love him, or even because they wish to honor their mother's affinity for the old man, who "was a fixture in the lady's experience."[96] For them, being deprived of their favorite "Uncle" was "a personal loss. While Uncle Jake was away they were not only deprived of a most agreeable companion, but they could give no excuse for not going to bed. They had no one to amuse them after supper, and, as a consequence, their evenings were very dull."[97] Lucien and Lillian are only concerned with how they have been inconvenienced, and the privileged children never stop to think about Jake's family, whom they also know well, and who are bereft and fearing for his life in his absence.

While everyone on the plantation is frantically trying to figure out how to find Jake—not to punish him, of course, but to bring him and the missing children home—two old slaves named Sandy Bill and Big Sam have a conversation that exposes the hypocrisy of the aged "Storytelling Uncle" stereotype Harris helped revive through his postbellum "southern humor." When Sandy Bill admits to Big Sam that he knows where the children are, Sam is shocked that he would ever hesitate to make their whereabouts known to their owner. Bill explains his secrecy, stating that although he feels bad for Gaston, "'t'er folks got trouble too, lots wuss'n Marster.'" When Sam asks, "'Is dey los' der chillum?'" Bill replies matter-of-factly, "'Yes—Lord! Dey done los' eve'ybody. But Marster ain' los' no chillum yit.'"[98] Although Harris does not have him spell out what he means, Sandy Bill is referencing the sales, rapes, and murders of the enslaved. He is not

[96] Harris, Daddy Jake, 8.
[97] Ibid, 9.
[98] Ibid, 34.

concerned with the fates of their owner's two children because he knows that some of the people who are hiding alongside Jake have suffered much worse than Gaston could imagine, and therefore deserve protection.[99]

As Bill quietly discloses to his friend and former slave, he not only directed Jake to the cane-break in the first place, but also knows the other runaways who are hiding there. Justifying his silence to Sam, he clarifies, "'ef I 'd 'a' showed Marster whar dem chillum landed, en tole 'im whar dey wuz, he 'd 'a' gone 'cross dar, en seed dem niggers, an' by dis time nex' week ole Bill Locke's nigger-dogs would 'a' done run um all in jail […] He think kaze he treat his niggers right dat eve'ybody else treat der'n des dat a-way.'"[100] Harris's characterization of Sandy Bill is one who is absolutely loyal, but not to his owner, or even his owner's innocent children, but the communities of the enslaved who live in the surrounding areas. Through the hushed exchange, Harris does not reveal a caricature, but a character—a rarity for the author, given his career-long reliance on the most loquacious "Uncle" of apologist fiction. Rather than protecting the interests (and children) of his owners, let alone the monetary interests of the neighboring slaveholders who are seeking to reclaim their "property, Harris maintains Bill's silence. The reason Harris opts *not* to have the old man disclose what he knows is that it is in Harris's best interest (as well as his white readers') to have Jake come home willingly and bring the children with him. However, Harris's focus on demonstrating the faithfulness of Daddy Jake to his owner's family does not resolve his inclusion of Sandy Bill's silent rebellion, which argued that two white children—like so many of Harris's young readers—were not worth the lives of the dozen or so fugitive slaves hiding in the swamp.

[99] This decision as to who was *worth* worrying contradicts the faithful slave narratives in which black elders, especially women, favored their "white children" to their own.
[100] Ibid, 36.

Harris's contemporary, Thomas Nelson Page, was another of the most popular authors of plantation-school fiction in the late nineteenth-century. Page was a Virginia-born writer, of formerly affluent, but nevertheless respected stock, whose 1887 collection, *In Ole Virginia, or Marse Chan and Other Stories*[101] illustrates the desolation of the war that Harris eschews in his Remus tales. *In Ole Virginia* depicts Page's vision of the traumas suffered by whites and blacks following the war, although the two are vastly different experiences. In the story, "Meh Lady: A Story of the War," Page imagines white trauma as having to work to live, which is evident when the remnant of a once powerful family pleads with her elder former slaves to stay and take care of their (former) young mistress, to which they agree to "'not le' her wuck so hard.'"[102] While the thought of a young, aristocratic woman working is apparently Page's (and his readers') definition of white suffering at its worst, he presents black pain and trauma as ridiculous.

In the collection's most unsettling story, the eponymous, "Ole 'Stracted," Page confesses the great wrongs of the institution and acknowledges the depths of despair experienced by the enslaved, yet he presents the psychological ramifications of slavery as abnormal rather than traumatic. Ole 'Stracted—called such because he is *distracted* as a result of his suffering—is depicted as delusional because he believed the word of a white man. The former slave is an outcast from both white and black society, whom the author portrays as a mere eccentric, rather than considering the deeper implications of his own character. According to Page, 'Stracted:

> …was unable to give any account of himself, except that he always declared that he had been sold by some one other than his master […] that his wife and boy had been sold to some other person at the same time for twelve hundred dollars (he was particular as to the

[101] Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia; or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[102] Ibid, 120.

amount), and that his master was coming in the summer to buy him back and take him home, and would bring him his wife and child when he came.[103]

Ole 'Stracted spends forty years telling and retelling this story to anyone who will listen. Although the forced separation from his family breaks him mentally, the repetition of his narrative and the hope he finds in retelling it sustains and heals him emotionally. This may not have been Page's intent for the character, but 'Stracted's orality and insistence upon being reunited with his family has more in common with post-Reconstruction fiction by African-American authors than it does with typical apologist fiction. The old man's narrative differs from these, however, in that he is not concerned with making friends and family out of the community of former slaves who live nearby. Instead, 'Stracted exerts all his energy on preparing for the long-awaited homecoming of the family he was helpless to protect during enslavement.

The aged outsider is, however, fond of his neighbor's children, who "steal down to his house, where they might be found any time squatting about his feet, listening to his accounts of his expected visit from his master, and what he was going to do afterward. It was all of a great plantation, and fine carriages and horses, and a house with his wife and the boy."[104] By linking his family's return with the return of his former owner, Page tries to make it seem as if Ole 'Stracted focuses all of his energy and efforts toward the past, when the exact opposite is true of the character, just as it was with countless emancipated slaves in real life. According to Page, "Everything since that day was a blank to ['Stracted], and as he could not tell the name of his master or wife, or even his own name, and as no one was left old enough to remember him, the neighborhood having been entirely deserted after the war, he simply passed as a harmless old

[103] Ibid, 153.
[104] Ibid, 154.

lunatic laboring under a delusion."[105] The deteriorated state of the old man's mental faculties makes him pitiable in the eyes and hearts of his neighbors, yet for him, the delusion functions as a coping mechanism, without which he may not have survived as long as he has. With each retelling, 'Stracted reassures himself that the homecoming he has been imagining for decades is not only possible, but is nigh at hand. His obsession with regaining what was lost leaves no room for the old man to think on or of anything else; thus, he lives near the site of the traumatic separation, in a "ruinous little hut which had been the old man's abode since his sudden appearance in the neighborhood a few years after the war,"[106] and earns whatever anyone will pay him to cobble shoes.

The imagined reunion of 'Stracted with his family, the lives and livelihoods of his caretaker neighbors, Polly and Ephraim, and everyone else who lives on the grounds of the old plantation are threatened when a new landlord takes ownership of the property. The carpetbagger demands immediate mortgage payments in full or expulsion from the property, which Polly and Ephraim agree will kill 'Stracted, who relies on their charity to meet many of his basic needs, and who, fearful of missing his family's return, "'ain' nuver stay away from dyah a hour sence he come heah.'"[107] While darning his shirt, which 'Stracted wants mended for when he meets his family, Polly explains that 'Stracted "'Say he marster 'll know him when he come—ain' know de folks is free; say he marster gwi [sic] buy him back in de summer an' kyar him home, an' 'bout de money he gwine gi' him. Ef he got any money, I wonder he live down dyah in dat evil-sperit hole."[108] When Polly and Ephraim visit the cabin-shanty to deliver the finished shirt, 'Stracted tells them through his death throes that he has saved twelve-hundred dollars—the

[105] Ibid, 153.
[106] Ibid, 152.
[107] Ibid, 150.
[108] Ibid, 144.

purchase price of his wife and son—and has hidden it away to buy them back upon their return: "'I been savin' it ever sence dee took me 'way. I so busy savin' it I ain' had time to eat, but I ain' hongry now; have plenty when I git home.'"[109] Thus, it is evident that Ole 'Stracted had sacrificed decades of his own comfort to nourish his life's one expectation.

Whereas forty years of unrelenting toil and unrealized prospects would surely have defeated weaker, less determined individuals, 'Stracted finds a constant strength through his unshaken faith in a man's word and his own hopeful outlook on life. In this way, the elderly man is not "distracted" at all; on the contrary, his determination compels him to survive, helps himself and younger generations to dream, and ultimately accomplishes in death what he cannot in life, as the money he leaves behind will provide a home and financial security for the long-lost son he had sought for so many years—his neighbor, Ephraim. To Page, 'Stracted's many retellings of his history made for compelling fiction about a slave's love and trust for their masters; hence, the author does not assume within the story any responsibility for the loving husband and father having suffered under the delusion of a happy reunion for so many years. Page appropriates black orality and spins it as nonsense, and in doing so, the author effectively silences the character of 'Stracted by positing his only means of re-membering his family as proof of his insanity. The ways in which Page makes light of the traumas of enslavement and attempts to discount the orality of elder African Americans stays true to the trope of the "Storytelling Uncle"; however, if the tale of Ole 'Stracted is meant to be humorous, it fails.

Although antebellum plantation-school fiction is very much a precursor to the local color genre, postbellum apologists such as Page and Harris made the trauma and difficulties stemming from enslavement appear as part of the natural landscape of the Deep South. What Page's "Ole 'Stracted," in particular, demonstrates, is the tendency of southern, postbellum apologists to

[109] Ibid, 159.

disguise the racist and violent pro-slavery roots of their work by presenting it under the guise of quaint local color. By framing black trauma as an inconsequential and/or humorous aftereffect of enslavement, apologist writers appeased northern and southern readers by masking the suffering of African Americans with nostalgia for the past, wholly inequitable race relations of pre-Civil War America. However, what readers from both regions failed to recognize about the popular plantation-school texts of the late nineteenth century—and which is illustrated in local color representations of the violence and pain inflicted on African Americans—was the extent to which the barbarities of chattel slavery affected southern conceptualizations of normalcy.

Each of the fictional works examined here attempts to silence or control the orality of elder black males; yet, despite their confidence that elderly-slave caricatures would convince readers of the contentedness of those in bondage, their "Storytelling Uncles" do not hold up any more than the "singing slave is a happy slave" myth shattered by Douglass in his 1845 *Narrative* and reiterated by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903 in *The Souls of Black Folk*.[110] Where John Pendleton Kennedy would have antebellum readers view Carey as a recalcitrant know-it-all, he does, in fact, have more knowledge about the successful operation of his duties and romantic love than the two white men who own him and treat him as if *he needs them*, and not the other way around. William Gilmore Simms, taking it much, much further, would have abolitionists and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sympathizers alike believe that a slave's love for his "master" would lead him to suicide, when again, it is Simms's white slaveholder Porgy that cannot and will not live with his slave. Edward Pollard's epistolary novel depicts the death of an aged slave in harness, and the outlandish stories of an "Uncle" named "Junk," as if everything he said was to be swiftly

[110] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: McClurg, 1903).

discarded—the first of which disproves "cradle to grave" paternalism, and the second of which glosses over the murderous desires that he himself wrote into Junk's "unbelievable" tales, and which the slave community uses to live out their own thrilling fantasies.

Postbellum apologist writers sought to continue the silencing of black men after Emancipation by perpetuating the "Storytelling Uncle" trope in their southern humor fiction. Joel Chandler Harris's widely popular Uncle Remus books helped the "Uncle" caricature to thrive as a mouthpiece for antebellum nostalgia in the Post-Reconstruction era; however, in attempting to script black dialog, Harris often exposes schisms between the pro-slavery biases of apologist writers and the words their caricatures actually speak. Similarly, Thomas Nelson Page's plantation stories often acknowledge the desolation left by the war, but use humor to mask the tragedies of enslavement and deny African Americans the right to grieve their overwhelming losses and suffering. Both Harris and Page have been lauded as maintaining the plantation-literature genre that began with antebellum texts such as George Tucker's, *The Valley of Shenandoah: Or, Memoirs of the Graysons* (1825),[111] and John Pendleton Kennedy *Swallow Barn* (1832). However, in many cases, the southern local color tradition of postbellum apologists is often far more violent and extreme—mocking and making light of the sufferings of those they claimed to be nostalgic for and in reverence of—than those of their antebellum predecessors who were writing to *keep* slavery. What this shift exhibits is the tendency of antebellum pro-slavery writers to use aged slave characters to paint enslavement as pastoral, and how, after Emancipation, postbellum apologists attempted to recoup some of these literary losses by making black trauma the favorite subject of their new brand of "southern humor."

[111] George Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah: or, Memoirs of the Graysons. In Three Volumes* (New York: Wiley, 1825). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed July 14, 2015.

Chapter Two

The "Storytelling Uncle" in Pro-Equality Fiction

Nineteenth-century African American writers fortunate enough to find publication outlets for their works were tireless in their efforts to refute the sentimental depictions of slavery in popular plantation literature. Although contemporary readers familiar with the slave narrative genre are well-acquainted with the significance of slave testimonies, both written *and* spoken, as counter-narratives to both the inflammatory and paternalistic arguments of pro-slavery advocates, they may be less informed as to the ways African-American fiction writers responded to the major apologist texts addressed in the previous chapter. In studying representations of superannuated slaves in white- and black-authored texts from the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, however, the following becomes clear: 1) black writers recognized that the elderly of their race were being appropriated and silenced as apologists symbols for the alleged benefits of slavery, and 2) in response, those writers crafted narratives highlighting the intelligence, agency, and orality of their elders to counteract the damage of the ubiquitous black-geriatric stereotypes prevalent in American popular culture.

There are a limited number of fictional works by African American writers in the antebellum period, and refining the focus to an analysis of representations of the aged enslaved narrows the selection even more. William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or The President's Daughter*

(1853),[1] the first novel by an African-American author, is more concerned with the fate of the young than the old. Brown does use an old slave named Uncle Simon to dispel the idea that the bible is limited to the "slaves obey your masters" content that is hounded into them, but his appearance in the text is brief. Frederick Douglass's novella, "The Heroic Slave" (1853),[2] also contains a short, yet nevertheless heartrending passage about an unnamed old man the narrator spies praying for his freedom. Martin Robison Delany's 1859 novel, *Blake, or The Huts of America,*[3] however, is comprised primarily of aged "Aunts" and "Uncles," and thus provides ample representations of the oral skills and traditions black elders put to work for their communities.

In the postbellum era, particularly post-Reconstruction, African-American authors became increasingly prominent on the literary scene, although their numbers were still relatively low as the race struggled to advance in the world of Jim Crow. Frances E.W. Harper's novel, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892)[4] emphasizes the strength, commitment, and skill of the aged enslaved who protected each other during enslavement, and reunited black families after Emancipation. Charles Chesnutt, who published an impressive body of fiction in only six years (from the publication of two short story collections in 1899, to the last novel he published in his lifetime in 1905), included touching and illuminating representations of "Aunts" and "Uncles" in nearly all of his works, which is why several of his books are discussed here (as well as in the discussion of pro-equality "Aunts" later on in Chapter Four). Chesnutt was not born into slavery, but he put faces to the devastation caused by enslavement—black, white, old, young, male, and

[1] William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London: Partridge, 1853). *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 14, 2015.
[2] Frederick Douglass, "The Heroic Slave," *Autographs for Freedom*, ed. Julia Griffiths (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853). *Documenting the American South*, accessed August 22, 2016.
[3] Martin Robison Delany, *Blake, or The Huts of America*, ed. Floyd J. Miller (Boston: Beacon, 1970).
[4] Frances E.W. Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (Boston: Earle, 1892). *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.

female faces—Chesnutt described each and every one of them in great detail, which is perhaps why he understood so well the important role that elder black men and women would need to play in helping future generations rise above the mire of racism in America.

"…To God's Ears": Elder Entreaties

One of the primary means through which pro-slavery writers sought to convince their southern and northern readers that enslavement was a beneficent institution was by highlighting the "Christianization" of black people—an apologist argument that William Wells Brown and Frederick Douglass each dismiss in their fictional representations of aged male slaves. John C. Havard credits the emergence of African-American fiction in the mid-century to black authors eschewing "the pressure they felt to hew closely to verifiability"—the alleviation of which was largely motivated by "African American authors [who] refused to grant Stowe and other white abolitionists the sole right to tell the story of slavery in novel form."[5] Both Brown and Douglass, in *Clotel* and "The Heroic Slave" respectively, take advantage of the benefits of historical fiction in order to transition more seamlessly from the absolute verisimilitude of their freedom narratives to the indulgence of their more creative sides.[6]

In his novel, *Clotel* (1853), Brown describes a typical plantation church service, wherein the preacher reiterates the same pro-slavery script he teaches every week, a scene described often in both narratives of the enslaved and Post-Reconstruction African-American fiction. The preacher in *Clotel* closes his sermon with a series of nineteen questions addressed to the gathering of slaves, who answer with rote memorization the degrading "religious" instructions

[5] John C. Havard, "Slavery and the Emergence of the African American Novel," *The Cambridge Companion to Slavery in American Literature*, ed. Ezra Tawil (New York: Cambridge UP, 2016), 88.
[6] Ibid, 91. As Havard notes regarding Brown's Clotel, it "inspired contentious debate regarding the work's status as a novel" due to it being "a notoriously hybrid text in which Brown compiled numerous [historical] documents and narratives."

they have been made to learn. All of the questions are designed to elicit affirmations of complete submission from the enslaved, such as in the following example: "'*Q.* When the servant suffers *wrongfully* at the hands of his master, and, to please God, takes it patiently, will God reward him for it?—*A.* 'Yes.'"[7] As the enslaved congregation disperses, an old man named Uncle Simon explains to those around him that there is more in the bible than the passages they are inundated with, which only serve to reinforce the notion that God demands their racial subservience and degradation. Although Brown's description of the scene is brief, he employs Simon to enlighten those around him as to the deception of the brand of Christianity they are taught, thereby demonstrating the underestimated intelligence of African Americans, as well as the tendency of black elders to share their knowledge to benefit their communities. Simon's insistence that he has heard parts of the bible that contradict the limited scope of the sermons addressed to the enslaved confirms what the others already suspect to be true: that the institution of slavery is *not* for the Glory of God or to serve *His* will, but to line the pockets and maintain the racial power structure imposed by whites.

Whereas Brown's Uncle Simon condemns the highly-selective religious instruction of the enslaved based on what he has previously heard read aloud from the bible, the author does not take the conversation any further before moving on to the next scene. However, in Frederick Douglass's 1853 novella, "The Heroic Slave"—the only work of fiction the prolific writer and orator ever published—Douglass takes a bit more time to demonstrate the *true* religion of the enslaved through an aged, but unnamed character. Loosely based on the 1841 revolt of Madison Washington and 18 other slaves aboard a ship headed from Virginia to Louisiana,[8] Douglass named his fictitious "heroic slave" for the real-life rebel who played an important role in "one of

[7] Brown, *Clotel*, 98.
[8] Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, ed. Robert S. Levine, John Stauffer, and John R. McKivigan (New Haven: Yale UP, 2015), xi.

the most successful slave revolts in North America."[9] In the novella, Madison Washington relates his time as a fugitive, going into great detail about one old slave in particular, whom he spied while hiding in the woods. As Washington explains, at one point during his escape to freedom, several slaves came to chop wood near where he was hiding, and when they finished, one man stayed behind and sat solemnly with his head down for a long time. High in the canopy and looking down from above, the fugitive slave did not immediately recognize the man's advanced age until he stood up and removed his hat to reveal "a man in the evening of life, slightly bald and quite gray."[10] Kneeling, the old man began to pray "the most fervent, earnest, and solemn" prayer Washington had ever heard. After supplicating himself to God and asking for strength, the old slave then pleaded for a release from his enslavement, crying, "'O deliver me! in mercy, O God, deliver me from the chains and manifold hardships of slavery! […] thou didst say of old, 'I have seen the affliction of my people, and am come to deliver them,'—Oh look down upon our afflictions, and have mercy upon us.'" [11] Through Washington's account of the man's painful utterances, Douglass depicts the elder as a *true* Christian (who does *not* speak in dialect), refuting the pro-slavery "Aunt" and "Uncle" caricatures that used their prayers to thank God for their "masters" and "white families" rather than praying for their own deliverance from bondage.

Douglass's unnamed elder in "The Heroic Slave" not only dispels the belief that black people actually accepted the types of pro-slavery sermons Brown describes in *Clotel*, he also demonstrates that members of the downtrodden race embraced Christianity because they identified with the Jewish slaves of the bible, and held out hope that God would send a redeemer to deliver them from their earthly bondage as well. Additionally, Douglass imbues his character

[9] Ibid.
[10] Douglass, "The Heroic Slave," 197.
[11] Ibid, 198.

with an intimate knowledge of the bible that suggests the old man *read* it, since the quote he includes in his prayer refers to God as the liberator of slaves, and would not have been included in a plantation sermon. He is fully aware of his unholy degradation, and takes the opportunity of presumed isolation to shout it out before God so that He might hear him and act. Significantly, this scene parallels one earlier in the novella where a white man similarly witnesses Washington voicing his own angst in the woods, and is so touched that he declares himself an abolitionist on the spot. Douglass describes Washington's sylvan speech as a series of "Scathing denunciations," "heart-touching narrations," prayers, and the "presentation of the dangers and difficulties of escape."[12] When Washington ultimately determines to strike out for freedom, the white man secretly watching him, a Mr. Listwell, notes how "the very repetition of [his resolution], imparted a glow to his countenance."[13] Similarly, the old man's pleas are his means of catharsis and spiritual survival. Indeed, as Douglass demonstrates in both woodland scenes, opportunities for the enslaved to speak openly and honesty about their sorrows and hopes were so rare that when a moment of privacy presented itself, they readily unburdened their souls.

When Washington departs after his own speech, Listwell contemplates the lot of the young man so enraged by the injustices of enslavement that he felt compelled to take to the woods and air his grievances to the wind. Unlike the devout, aged man Washington overhears, Listwell notes that Washington seems to have little interest in the church or its teachings, given that "the religion of his times and his country can neither console nor relieve."[14] This rejection of "Christian morality" is present in much of Douglass's writings, particularly in the appendix to

[12] Ibid, 180.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid, 181.

his 1845 narrative.[15] As the author later demonstrates in Washington's chance meeting with the elder, religion does not safeguard even the aged from brutality, nor does it stay the white brute's hand. When Washington enlists the old man's aid, the fugitive unintentionally brings a brutal sentence down on the elder that no amount of piety can help. As a result, Washington, again hiding high in a tree, is forced to watch powerlessly as several white men strip the old man and tie him to a tree to whip him. As Washington describes, "My own flesh crept at every blow, and I seem to hear the old man's piteous cries even now. They laid thirty-nine lashes on his bare back, and were going to repeat that number, when one of the company besought his comrades to desist."[16] The beating does not stop because the mob believes the aged man has been thoroughly punished for his supposed offense, or because they are morally conflicted in any way, but because it is likely he will not survive another thirty-nine lashes. And, as one of them apparently realizes before it is too late, even an old slave is worth more than a dead one.

In making the woodland scenes of Madison Washington, and later, the unnamed elder in "The Heroic Slave" so incredibly similar, Douglass establishes that the desire for freedom and the drive to voice one's agency belongs to the old as well as the young.[17] Additionally, his description of the old man being savagely beaten so soon after praying for God's mercy flies in the face of apologist assertions that the aged enslaved were retired and pampered after decades of labor, and that one of the primary benefits of the institution was religious conversion. This latter

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[15] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston: Published at the Antislavery Office, 1845), *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.
[16] Douglass, "The Heroic Slave," 200.
[17] Ultimately, however, Washington does not pray for deliverance, but seizes it for himself through violent means, thus subverting the pro-slavery "Savage Slave" trope of the 1830s that posited young and middle-aged black men as the ultimate threat to white masculinity and white, feminine virtue. See Sarah N. Roth, *Gender and Race in Antebellum Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2014). Although there is no author listed, the summary of "The Heroic Slave" on the University of Virginia's *Uncle Tom's Cabin in American Culture: A Multi-Media Archive* posits that the unnamed elder Washington meets in the woods is Douglass's rejection of the pious Uncle Tom of Stowe's novel. The old man's prayer deeply touches Washington, yet he does not believe that religion (or the religiosity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) is a viable solution to slavery; thus, the summary states, Douglass abandons the elder character and "to put in his place a well-spoken black man who fights and kills for his freedom."

argument implied that slavery induced black people to happily abandon the "pagan" religion(s) of Africa in exchange for the "civilized" religion of America. In reality, however, many enslaved people adopted Christianity as a coping mechanism and survival tactic—*not* because an abysmal plantation sermon, such as the one Brown depicts in *Clotel*, had persuaded them. In the recently-released cultural and critical edition of Douglass's novella, the editors acknowledge the author's increasing belief that "Effective abolitionism required rebellion plus truth-telling eloquence."[18] This statement not only applies to Madison Washington (and Douglass himself), but the author's characterization of the old man as one who is full of faith, but who is anything but a "faithful slave."

DISCONTENT AND DEFIANCE: ELDERS FLIP THE SCRIPT

One of the earliest examples of African-American fiction to not only contradict apologist versions of slavery, but also urge organized rebellion against those who benefitted from slave labor, is Martin Delany's *Blake, or The Huts of America* (1859).[19] Born to a free mother in West Virginia in 1812, Delany succeeded in multiple careers, working as "An abolitionist, editor, doctor, novelist, political and racial theorist, inventor, explorer, orator, and judge."[20] Delany co-edited Frederick Douglass's abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, from 1847-1849,[21] and eventually came to be known as "The Father of Black Nationalism."[22] An outspoken opponent of

[18] Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, xxx.
[19] Part One of *Blake* was published serially in *The Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859, and later, in *The Weekly Anglo-African* in 1861-1862. Although the first forty chapters of Part Two were published in 1970, it remains unclear as to whether Delany ever completed the novel. "Stand Still and See the Salvation." *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. *University of Virginia*, accessed Sept. 26, 2015.
[20] Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1997), 3.
[21] Eleanor Stanford, "Martin R. Delany (1812–1885)." *Encyclopedia Virginia* (*Virginia Foundation for the Humanities*), accessed Nov. 1, 2015.
[22] Levine, *Martin Delany*, 2.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's seemingly contented, pacifistic slave characters,[23] Delany's novel is the story of Blake (born Carolus Henrico Blacus, and renamed Henry Blake and Henry Holland while enslaved), the free, educated son of a wealthy Cuban merchant, who is kidnapped and sold into slavery in America. When, some years later, Blake returns home one day to find his wife has been sold, he leaves the plantation, but not the south; on the contrary, he navigates the dangers of numerous slave-holding states in order to create a slave-rebellion network. As Grégory Pierrot writes, "He travels throughout the U.S. South, imparting to select slaves his 'plan for a general insurrection of the slaves in every state, and the successful overthrow of slavery!'"[24] Although Pierrot highlights Blake's selectiveness regarding those he trusts to spread the message of rebellion, he glosses over who, exactly, comprises this "select" few.

During the course of his journey, Blake traverses nearly a dozen slave-holding states,[25] interviewing the enslaved and documenting the severity of their treatment, and igniting a spirit of hope within the various slave communities he encounters. What is most significant to this discussion, however, lies with the aforementioned select few, nearly all of whom are elder(ly) slaves, overjoyed by the possibility of organizing and taking their freedom. Although Blake certainly fits the "black avenger" trope theorized by Pierrot, his strategy goes beyond "the individual against the mass, the courageous prince against the cowardly common slave,"[26] as Delaney's approach to Blake's fictive rebellion not only requires the aid of the "common slave,"

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[23] Delany also took issue with the amount of attention and money a white author and her publisher were receiving from a book about black slaves. Levine, *Martin Delany,* 224.
[24] Grégory Pierrot. "Writing over Haiti: Black Avengers in Martin Delany's Blake," *Studies in American Fiction* 41, no. 2 (2014): 177.
[25] Harry Stillwell Edwards's 1919 *Eneas Africanus* reads like a warped apologist's retelling of *Blake*, as the title character spends years travelling the very same states as Henry in an effort to get back to his owner—despite the fact that it is after Emancipation and Eneas is a free man. Additionally, Henry often escapes suspicious whites by pretending to be a loyal slave in search of his master's racehorse, whereas Eneas uses his (former) master's mare, Lady Chain, to finance his travels and return to the plantation. Harry Stillwell Edwards, *Eneas Africanus* (New York: Grosset, 1940).
[26] Pierrot, "Writing over Haiti," 176.

but the oft-overlooked aged slave, whom few would suspect of seditious scheming, let alone actual implementation.

Blake decides to run away and organize his fellow enslaved after learning that his wife has been sold away from him and their infant son in Mississippi to a family moving to Cuba.[27] When he tries to convince his in-laws, Mammy Judy and Daddy Joe, to run away with him, the old couple express their concerns regarding the two to three thousand miles their son-in-law says it will take to reach Canada, but also admit they are afraid that if they escape to the north and are unhappy, they will be unable to return. Instead, Judy and Joe offer Blake ample prayers, advising him to remain patient and trust in the Lord's will. Blake, however, views such religiosity as an opiate, meant to keep the enslaved content to await deliverance in the afterlife instead of claiming it in the present. Although the couple is initially unwilling to leave the plantation with him, they do not hesitate in offering Blake their life savings of $250 to aid him in his plans. When Blake eventually returns to Mississippi after spreading the word amongst the slaves to "scatter red ruin throughout the region of the South,"[28] he finds that Judy and Joe—faced with the fate of being sold to a trader, and realizing that the community they were afraid to leave is already breaking apart—are finally willing to make their escape. What is most remarkable about the couple's decision to take their chance at freedom is their admission that it was not their advanced age or ill health, or even the daunting journey that prevented them from leaving in the first place, but a fear of being displaced with no community, a detail that speaks to the priorities of black elders during enslavement. The myriad foreseen and unforeseen difficulties of the journey north paled in comparison to the thought of being without the extended family they had come to love and depend on throughout years of hardships.

[27] Henry's wife, Maggie, is sold away by her owner/biological father for refusing his sexual advances and for the intimate relationship (she is a favorite) she shares with his wife.
[28] Delany, *Blake*, 128

Throughout his travels, Blake meets with a number of aged slaves, often married couples, who do not consider old age a factor in their agency or abilities. Delany's decision to depict aged married couples is itself counter to most apologist narratives, which tend to portray aged slaves in isolation or without lifelong partners, so as to keep the focus on the "master-slave relationships." After leaving Texas for the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations in Arkansas, Blake continues through the state and is readily admitted into the cabin of Aunt Rachel and Uncle Jerry. When Blake asks why they welcome him without knowing him, they respond that they had learned of his coming from a group of slaves who regularly sneak off to Indian country, and who regularly transmit information gathered during their travels. In this way, Delany emphasizes the significance of word-of-mouth networks in and around slave communities, while implying that black elders play an important role in establishing and maintaining them. Impressed by the slaves' stealthy and effective means of communication, Blake exclaims, "'Why that's the very thing! you're ahead of all the other states. You folks in Arkansas must be pretty well organized already.'"[29] Although the old people do not initially comprehend Blake's talk of organizing, when he describes it as "'a good general secret understanding among yourselves,'"[30] Rachel divulges that runaway slaves come and go safely from their cabin regularly. When Blake voices concern for the old couple's safety in sheltering strangers, Rachel all but chastises him for not giving them their due credit. As seasoned protectors of fugitive slaves, she reminds him, they were already aware of his coming. Well-connected, and with their ears to the ground, Rachel and Jerry are just two of many elder slaves within Delany's narrative who risk their lives to aid their fellow bondsmen and women. Rachel, "by mutual consent being the [couple's] mouthpiece,"[31] talks of how they navigate the risks of aiding runaways, and in so doing, provides Blake the

[29] Ibid, 89.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, 89.

same advice for avoiding discovery that she gives all the enslaved fugitive who pass through her home trying to claim their freedom.

Rachel is indeed the mouthpiece for the two, but Jerry does speak when his knowledge and expertise are necessary, particularly when Rachel brings up slave-catching dogs. With the mention of the dogs, Jerry enters back into the conversation, inquiring whether the visitor has ever charmed such ferocious animals. When Blake says he has experience with "'the mixed bull, but not the full-bred Cuba dog,'"[32] the old man warns that the patrollers keep both, promising, "'fo' yeh go, I lahn yeh how to fix 'em all!'"[33] Jerry concedes that his wife is the better speaker, but he is confident in his ability to charm the dogs he is supposed to fear, and is excited to share what he knows. When Blake signals he wants to speak about *why* he has come, the old couple systematically secure the cabin from prying eyes and ears. Upon hearing Blake's mission of organized rebellion, Jerry is prompted to shout of God "'strik[ing] off de chains dat dy people may go free!'" while Rachel proclaims, "'Tang God fah wat I seen an' heahn dis night! dis night long to be membed! Meh soul feels it! It is heah!'"[34] Having helped other slaves to freedom for years, the old couple cannot contain their joy at the thought that their race will organize and finally emancipate themselves.

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[32] "Cuba dog" refers to Cuban Bloodhounds (believed to be a mixture of Mastiffs, Bulldogs, and Great Danes), which were bred in Cuba and used by the British to hunt runaway slaves in Jamaica in 1655-1737 and 1795-96, during the First and Second Maroon Wars. Since the dogs were credited with quelling the rebellions in Jamaica, General Zachary Taylor received permission in 1838 to purchase thirty-three Cuban bloodhounds at $151.72 each to use in the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). The American military's decision to purchase man-hunting dogs was highly criticized (especially in political cartoons of the day), as it was deemed unnecessarily cruel, and more significantly, abolitionists viewed the hounds, not as tools for fighting the elusive Seminoles, as the military claimed, but as a means of reclaiming runaway slaves who had escaped into the Florida swamps. James W. Covington, "Cuban Bloodhounds and the Seminoles," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1954): 111-19. The breed's infamy grew when it became associated with performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although no such breed exists in Stowe's novel, broadsides and newspaper advertisements for *UTC* troupes began boasting "genuine" Cuban and Siberian Bloodhounds around 1879. The hounds were added to heighten the sense of danger, particularly during Eliza's escape across the icy Ohio River, and became fixtures in nearly every major late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century adaptation of *UTC*, including stage, film, and even cartoon adaptations.

[33] Delany, *Blake*, 90.

[34] Ibid, 91.

While passing through the swamps of North Carolina, Blake encounters a group of (in)famous rebels who have been in hiding for decades. Among them are Gamby Gholar, "a noted high conjurer and compeer of Nat Turner,"[35] Maudy Ghamus, "an old man stooped with age, [and] having the appearance of a centenarian"[36] who fought in the Revolutionary War, and other "High Conjurors" comprising a "supreme executive body called the 'Head.'"[37] The "Head" are a group of seven men, advanced in years, experience, and wisdom, who train new conjurers and restore the strengths of others, and in so doing, provide a meager, but manageable existence for the slaves taking refuge in the swamps. When Maudy Ghamus reminisces about fighting in the war, Blake asserts that the same fighting spirit is what is necessary to win the war for black independence, to which Ghamus responds that there are enough good fighting men in the swamps to conquer the entire country. The elder's faith in the fugitive community is absolute, as is his confidence in their ability to spread the word and rally everyone together. Before Blake leaves the noted group of elders to continue on his mission, they insist on anointing him as a conjurer to aid him in his efforts, explaining that the ritual is less about the ability to conjure magic than it is to influence the slaves who believe in such power. In bearing the title of conjurer, they argue, Blake will have more success persuading slaves to fight for their freedom. The meeting in the swamp not only continues Blake's pattern of enlisting the elder(ly) in his bloody rebellion, it pays homage to previous slave uprisings, acknowledges the unrewarded patriotism of African Americans, and further strengthens Blake's resolve to finish what those before him started.

Delany's inclusion of such details as "The Head" of venerated elders in the North Carolina swamp demonstrates the importance of oral tradition in bringing together and protecting

[35] Ibid, 112.
[36] Ibid, 113.
[37] Ibid, 114.

the enslaved, and highlights the continual sacrifices they made to protect their own. Throughout his journey, Blake interviews slaves from each state about their treatment, and in so doing, encourages them to testify on their own behalves as to whether they consider their condition a fortunate one (hint: they *do not*). The author's use of aged slaves as agents of change becomes increasingly apparent when Blake begins to note the highly advanced ages of many of the slaves he meets. Additionally, Delany's focus on superannuated slaves insists that their thirst for freedom never abated; they did not, as pro-slavery writers argued, become contended with time. In Richmond, Uncle Medly, at ninety-four years old, is more than willing to do his part, claiming, "'Ef I do noffin' else, I pick up dirt an' tro' in der [their masters'] eye!'"[38] Medly's wife, at ninety years old, is also ecstatic at the prospect of an uprising, affirming and punctuating her husband's sentiments with the cry, "'Glory to God!'"[39] In northern Virginia, Blake finds a highly organized group of slaves, the majority of whom are elderly. Upon learning that Blake is the same rebel leader the slaves have been whispering about, Uncle Talton, at eighty-nine years old, "straightened himself up to his greatest height, resting on his staff, and swinging himself around as if whirling on the heel as children sometimes do, exclaimed in the gladness of his heart and the buoyancy [sic] of his spirits at the prospect of freedom before him."[40] Full of feeling for the "poor old time and care-worn slave, whose only hope for freedom rested in his efforts,"[41] Blake says a tearful goodbye to Uncle Talton, Uncle Ek, Uncle Duk, and the other aged slaves in attendance, so that he can continue into West Virginia. This gathering reveals the physical and mental effects of the idea of "freedom" on the enslaved—such as Talton, who stands tall and erect at the mere thought—and it also reflects the vitality and sense of kinship that thrives when

[38] Ibid, 117.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid, 121.
[41] Ibid.

the oldest members of the slave community get together and talk with one another. Thankful that a savior should arrive in their own lifetimes, the old slaves are understandably sad to see Blake go; however, knowing all too well the importance of the young man's mission, they send him on with their prayers. Although Blake is not overly religious, many of the elders he encounters are, yet their Christianity does not sedate them into accepting that their race should dictate their lot as chattel. Like the unnamed elder from Douglass's "The Heroic Slave," the men and women of Delany's novel put a lot of faith in God, but they differ in that they are organized and ready to take up arms against their oppressors as soon as someone gives the word.

An outspoken critic of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Delany "regarded Stowe's novel as the work of a racist colonizationist"[42] (although he himself later championed colonization), and in many ways, *Blake* is a precursor to the twentieth-century Anti-Tom works of authors Richard Wright and James Baldwin.[43] Like Stowe's George Harris, Blake is an intelligent man spurred to action when his family is threatened. Blake, however, not only anticipates helping his own wife and child by his actions, but the whole of the American and Cuban slave populations. Likewise, his aged-slave characters do not go gently into the good night; rather, they *own* the night. It is through the clandestine efforts of the elder(ly) that Henry is able to traverse the slave states without being captured, and it is through them that he spreads the word of rebellion. Unlike Stowe's Uncle Tom, who prays for relief, but dies having never tried to take it,[44] Delany's aged slaves defy both the humble servitude of Stowe's Tom, as well as the docile, nonsensical caricatures of apologist literature. By using slave cabin settings (referred to as "Huts" in the title), not as backdrops to tell stories to white children of privilege, such as Joel Chandler

[42] Levine, *Martin Delany*, 6.
[43] See Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940); *Uncle Tom's Children* (New York: Harper, 1969); and James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon, 1955).
[44] The reliance on prayer and deliverance from God is one of Blake's main criticisms of Mammy Judy and Daddy Joe at the beginning of the novel. It is not until the old couple learns they are to be sold that they take their freedom.

Harris's Uncle Remus, but as sites rife with seditious elders, the author designates the lowly slave cabin as the birthplace of a revolution. Delany's cast of octogenarian and nonagenarian slaves are the heart, mind, legs, arms, and most importantly, the mouths of Blake's rebellion precisely *because* they are presumed to be the most contented and the least contentious members of slave society. Having been largely written off as "faithful" and/or "harmless" by their owners, slave elders, as Blake surely recognizes, would have been in one of the best possible positions to help their fellow slaves escape to freedom—a fact that is well-documented in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).[45]

POSTBELLUM AFRICAN-AMERICAN FICTION: THE "MISSING YEARS"

Abolitionist works and narratives of the enslaved published in the early-to-mid 1860s, such as William and Ellen Craft's *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860)[46] and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* (1861), were largely overshadowed by the outbreak of the Civil War in April, 1861, and therefore received little attention with the country's collective focus preoccupied. Texts authored by African Americans became relatively scarce while the battles raged on, and following the war's end in 1865, traditional slave narratives, which illustrated first-hand the indignities and inhumanities of slaveholding, had lost their urgency, and hence, their place, in America's literary culture. As Charles J. Heglar writes, "Unlike the antebellum period the postbellum period produced no best-selling slave narratives, that is, narratives that emphasized freedom from slavery. Instead, postbellum narratives tended to center on some distinctive act by

[45] Jacobs's grandmother was able to hide her granddaughter in the garret of her cabin for seven years. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861, c1860). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[46] William and Ellen Craft. *William Craft Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; Or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London: Tweedie, 1860). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.

the narrator after emancipation."[47] Two texts that illustrate the shift from discussions of life under slavery and the realization of freedom to narratives detailing the author's abilities and achievements, are Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (1868),[48] and Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1900).[49] The nearly thirty-year gap between the publication dates of Keckley's and Washington's autobiographies is significant in that it is indicative of a larger trend in postbellum publishing, where few major works by African Americans, particularly fiction, were published prior to the 1890s. Noted African-American literature scholar, Frances Smith Foster, offers insight into these "missing years" in which she explains, "After the grim reality of the American Civil War, the emancipation of the slaves and Reconstruction, the primary concerns of slave narratives had only historical value. The slavery issue, in the opinion of the reading public, had been settled, and the wounds were too fresh for objective contemplation."[50]

Foster's assertion that postbellum readers no longer saw the value in reading texts about slavery is corroborated by the popularity of a new niche of non-fiction narratives that flooded the literary market following the war: memoirs by Civil War soldiers. Accounts of Union prisoners-of-war were widely published, outraged readers with corroborating reports of the inhuman treatment and living conditions of the infamous prison camps of the confederacy, including Danville and Belle Isle Prisons in Virginia, the Savannah, Charleston, and Columbia Prisons in South Carolina, and most notably, Libby Prison in Virginia and Andersonville Prison in Georgia. Such memoirs—literally, dozens of them—were in constant publication from 1865 through the

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[47] Charles, J. Heglar, *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 12.
[48] Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G.W. Carleton, 1868), *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[49] Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1901). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[50] Quoted in Heglar, *Rethinking the Slave Narrative*, 12.

end of the century, with publications of recovered prison diaries continuing into the early twentieth century. This trend demonstrates that although the general, postbellum public were past reading about slavery, they were very much intrigued by the stories coming out of the war—which, ironically, contained many of the same issues (starvation, sickness, physical restrictions, and being hunted by "slave dogs") that had been chronicled in antebellum slave narratives. According to Benjamin G. Cloyd's research on Civil War prisons, the northern soldiers subjected to these pitiable conditions blamed their captors, their own leadership, and the slaves themselves for their suffering. Cloyd writes that Union prisoners "bitterly complained of the injustice imposed on them in order to protect the rights of African Americans," as their situations "defied many prisoners' racial logic and tested their loyalty that, as white men, they should have to endure captivity for the cause of African American freedom."[51]

The view that slavery was no longer a topic of interest may well have contributed to a blanket resistance concerning all African-American literature, and likely discouraged the formerly enslaved who wanted to share their stories from doing so. Additionally, considering that many former slaves were still working toward literacy in the decades after Emancipation, it took time for the narratives of black writers to shift away from enslavement to new subject matter that publishers would accept. When fiction writers such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page reverted to tales of plantation life in the 1870s and 80s, however, they provided readers with the familiar plantation local color of antebellum apologist fiction, and reinforced the notion that although the black race may have been freed, the power dynamics of the color line would remain intact. Thus, with plantation literature revived and Jim Crow tightening its grip on the south, the "new" subject for ambitious African-American writers

[51] Benjamin G. Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2010), 19.

became evident: their talents and efforts were needed to voice the concerns of their race, which, although free, remained shackled by demeaning stereotypes, racial injustices, and the burdensome legacy of slavery.

WRITING THE WRONGS OF THE PLANTATION SCHOOL

While Martin Delany crafted *Blake* to confront the "faithful slave" stereotypes touted in antebellum literature and culture,[52] black writers in post-Reconstruction America were compelled to resume this work when the plantation genre and its inherent racism continued to thrive through postbellum local color and southern humor. Shortly after the end of Reconstruction in 1877, apologist writers began disseminating a new image to illustrate the supposed loyalty of slaves to their masters—that of old, faithful slaves who rushed into the woods to hide their owners' valuables, rather than to voice their pain and pleas to God. In Thomas Nelson Page's story, "Meh Lady: A Story of the War" from *In Ole Virginia* (1887),[53] a woman entrusts an old slave with her diamonds to pass on to her daughter upon marriage, and in Henry Stillwell Edwards's *Eneas Africanus* (1919), the author offers up a protracted, exaggerated example of the lengths a "faithful" slave would go to ensure that white southern traditions (again, related to marriage[54]) endured. African American author, Frances E.W.

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[52] Micki McElya's *Clinging to Mammy: the Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007) is an excellent study of the misappropriation of the Mammy figure.

[53] Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.

[54] George R. Lamplugh, "The Image of the Negro in Popular Magazine Fiction, 1875-1900," *The Journal of Negro History* 57. no. 2 (1972): 180. In his discussion of stereotypical representations of African Americans, George R. Lamplugh asserts, "This process of delineating the Negro was a continuing one. Each author further refined the efforts of his predecessors, until their black cardboard creation moved with the precision of a skillfully-fashioned puppet from one ludicrous or sentimental situation to another."[54] If apologist aged-slave characters were reduced to "cardboard" by the end of the 19th century, by the time Edwards published *Eneas Africanus* in 1919, they had become akin to cellophane: impossibly thin and completely transparent. Additionally, the presence of "family slaves" at a southern, aristocratic wedding disguised the fact that slaves could no longer be handed down from parents to children as a part of their inheritance or dowry.

Harper's, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), on the other hand, contains aged-slave characters who at times protect white interests, but who are multidimensional, and assert themselves and their agency in unexpected ways.

In Chapter Three of *Iola Leroy*, titled, "Uncle Daniel's Story," a group of slaves are meeting under the guise of a "prayer-meeting" for a "sick sister" [55] to discuss running away to a Union camp stationed several miles away. The highly respected Uncle Daniel and Uncle Ben both disappoint their younger, fellow slaves by refusing to claim their freedom by fleeing the plantation. The reasoning behind their respective decisions, however, is difficult to argue with when age is a major consideration, and when they articulate their logic so effectively. Although Uncle Daniel's explanation does contain an element of loyalty for his owner, Harper frames it in a different way than in Page's "Meh Lady," and other stories where the devotion of aged slaves for their former owners is all-consuming. Daniel describes how his owner, about to leave for war, "'called me into his room and said to me, "Uncle Dan'el, I'se gwine to de war, an' I want you to look arter my wife an' chillen, an' see dat eberything goes right on de place." An' I promised him I'd do it, an' I mus' be as good as my word."[56] Daniel then acknowledges that he has a strong paternal attachment for him, explaining, "'I used to nuss Marse Robert jes' de same as ef I were his own fadder. I used to fix his milk, rock him to sleep, [and] ride him on my back."[57] Although the old slave makes it clear that he enjoyed nurturing the white child, the reason becomes clear when he talks of his own baby: 'It was de dearest, cutest little thing you eber did see; but, pore thing, it got sick and died. It died 'bout three o'clock; and in de mornin', Katie, habbin her cows to milk, lef her dead baby in de cabin. When she com'd back from milkin' her thirty cows […] some one had been to her cabin an' took'd de pore chile away an'

[55] Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 24.
[56] Ibid, 19.
[57] Ibid, 21.

put it in de groun.'[58] The old man feels he owes his owner, not because of the strong paternal attachment he has for him (although it likely plays a part in his decision), but because he purchased Daniel's wife Katie when her vindictive mistress had their child buried without letting her say goodbye. Daniel continues his discourse to the gathering of the enslaved, stating that a fear of the unknown Yankees also makes him wary of leaving his home and community. This does not stop him, however, from encouraging the others in their plans.

Uncle Ben, who is known to have no love for either his owners or the system of slavery, also cites old age as his reason for staying, yet it is not his own advanced years that prevent him from claiming his freedom. Like Daniel's devotion to his wife and the man he credits for finally bringing them together, Ben's familial ties are so strong he cannot sever them: "'My mother, [...] That is the only thing that keeps me from going. If it had not been for her, I would have gone long ago. She's all I've got, an' I'm all she's got.'"[59] Ben's loyalty and concern for his aged mother trumps his own burning desire for freedom, and denotes the sacrifices slaves made to keep their families and communities together. Ben is willing to give up the freedom he desires so much because he is unwilling to risk the chance that something might happen to his mother on the way to the Union camp, several miles away. Obviously disappointed, but firmly resolved not to flee with everyone else, Ben concludes by saying, "'I wish, from the bottom of my heart, I could go. But I can't take her along with me, an' I don't want to be free and leave her behind in slavery. I was only five years old when my master and, as I believe, father, sold us both here to this lower country […] It's no use talking, I won't leave her to be run over by everybody.'"[60] Harper's inclusion that Ben's owner was likely his father is common in antebellum narratives of

[58] Ibid, 27.
[59] Ibid, 30.
[60] Ibid, 31.

the enslaved—most notably, in Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative*.[61] Ben's admittance that his enslaved mother bore him by her owner intimates the rape so prominent on southern plantations, while his acknowledgement that he was five years old when he and his mother were sold conveys the betrayal and cruelty of the institution that made it legal for men to sell their own children.

Harper's characterization of Daniel and Ben offers an alternative to the apologists' loyal "Uncles" by demonstrating the many difficulties real aged slaves faced during and after the turmoil of the Civil War. Strange forces sweeping south, the uncertain futures of familial and community connections, and issues of age and limited mobility are all legitimate concerns for elder(ly) people facing an alternative way of life after so many years. However, both Daniel and Ben make clear through their stories that their only objectives are to maintain the familial connections that are all but absent in apologist fiction. Neither Daniel nor Ben actively seeks freedom for himself and/or his loved ones *during* the war, but they also do not, as in Edward's *Eneas Africanus*, resign themselves (let alone their free-born children) to lives of voluntary servitude after freedom comes.[62]

REMUS GETS REPLACED

At the close of the nineteenth-century, Charles Waddell Chesnutt's short story collections, and later, his novels—which often centered on the physically-blurring, yet ever socially-defining color line—made him one of the most famous African American authors in the

[61] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Published at the Antislavery Office, 1845), *Documenting the American South*, accessed August 25, 2016.
[62] After years wandering in search of his plantation home after the war, Eneas arrives just in time to bestow the silver "Bride's Cup" to his former master's daughter on her wedding day, and in addition to the cup, he exclaims, "'I done brought you a whole bunch o' new Yallerhama, Burningham Niggers, Marse George! Some folks tell me dey is free, but I know dey b'long ter Marse George Tommey, des like [the horse] Lady Chain and her colt!'" Edwards, *Eneas Africanus*, 36.

country. By depicting the lives, trials, and successes of a diverse cast(e) of characters, Chesnutt's narratives provide nuanced portrayals of all facets of African American life, pre- and post Emancipation. For example, contrary to Joel Chandler Harris's Doshy Plantation,[63] which the author explains was miraculously left untouched by Sherman's invading army, Chesnutt begins his second published story, "Uncle Peter's House" (1885),[64] with an immediate reference to the substantial changes that have taken place regarding the physical and social landscape of the south following the war: "Ever since the broad column of Sherman's army swept through Central North Carolina, leaving the whites subjugated and impoverished and the blacks free and destitute, it had been Peter's dearest wish to own a house—a two-story white house, with green blinds."[65] Peter's life goal is to achieve the status of homeowner, and yet, he does not want just *any* home. He has a vision of a house that, to him, represents affluence, posterity, achievement, and security, all of which were denied him during slavery. Peter persists in his upward mobility until the time of his death—despite the determination of whites and the Ku Klux Klan to undermine his successes—to build his dream with his own two hands.

Like Peter, Chesnutt wanted to build a legacy for himself and his race by depicting the formerly enslaved and young generations of free African Americans struggling to realize their potential in a society set against their best efforts. Chesnutt is famous for having enumerated his literary and social aims in his journal while a young man, declaring:

> I shall write for a purpose, a high, holy purpose, and this will inspire me to greater effort. The object of my writings would be not so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites, —for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious

[63] The Doshy Plantation, located outside Atlanta, Georgia, is the setting for most of Harris's Uncle Remus tales.
[64] "Uncle Peter's House," long thought to be Chesnutt's first published work—and still considered his first adult work—appeared a decade after the author, at age 16, published "Frick's First Rat" in the Fayetteville *Educator*. Charles Chesnutt, "Uncle Peter's House," *Charles Chesnutt Digital Archive*, accessed July 20, 2015.
[65] "Uncle Peter's House." *Charles Chesnutt Digital Archive*, accessed July 20, 2015.

> as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism—I consider this a barrier to the moral progress of the American people; and I would be one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it.[66]

Chesnutt began his "crusade" when the failures of Reconstruction and the restrictions of Jim Crow were most evident, and when the African American race was in dire need of voices that could and would speak on their behalf. At a time when Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus was dominating the literary market's plantation niche, Chesnutt offered up the literary antithesis to Remus with Uncle Julius McAdoo, whose stories comprise Chesnutt's first story collection, *The Conjure Woman* (1899).[67]

As Chesnutt was well aware, the progression of the century had not signaled the progression of American society, as whites across the country continued to cling to the belief that theirs was a naturally superior race, entitled to better lives and conditions than people of color. One of the signifiers of the alleged inferior intellect of African Americans was "slave dialect," which was immensely popular in apologist texts, but which remained "a white myth of black language, substituted for a true understanding of the black vernacular and its impact on white language and culture."[68] In an 1889 letter to journalist Walter Hines Page, then editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Chesnutt acknowledges what he believes to be another "barrier" to his high moral objective: his distaste for slave dialect. Chesnutt explains, "it is almost a despairing task to write it," clarifying, "The fact is, of course, that there is no such thing as a Negro dialect; that

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[66] Charles Chesnutt, *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 139-40.
[67] Charles Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman*. ed. and Introduction by Robert M. Farnsworth (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1969).
[68] Gavin Roger Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999), 115.

what we call by that name is the attempt to express, with such a degree of phonetic correctness as to suggest the sound, English pronounced as an ignorant old southern Negro would be supposed to speak it."[69] Despite his aversion to it, the popularity of dialect stories garnered much of his initial readership, and so it is present in most of his works. Chesnutt's use of dialect is likely due to the expectations of readers who may not have purchased his books otherwise; yet, it also confronts head-on the aforementioned stereotype, as his black characters—especially the elders—are anything but ignorant. Richard H. Brodhead writes in his introduction to *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt* how "uneducated rural blacks seem[ed] […] profoundly *other* to this writer," who was "estranged from the black community by the superiority of his education—and no doubt by the attitude of superiority he derives *from* his education."[70] Using dialect may have been a concession for Chesnutt, but, as is evident in the highly diverse cast of characters that people his works, he nevertheless recognized that all ages, classes, and castes of African Americans deserved a voice and an ally for social and political justice, as well as fair representation in the nation's literature.

If Chesnutt was to accomplish his stated goal of reaching and teaching white readers through his narratives, he would have to also address the poor and uneducated classes of black people that he did not personally associate with. That Chesnutt adapted his point of view and concepts of racial identity so completely in order to honorably represent those he felt he had little in common with speaks to his narrative craft,[71] and to his determination to construct faithful

[69] Charles Chesnutt, *To Be an Author: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt, 1889-1905*. ed. and Introduction by Joseph R. McElrath and Robert C. Leitz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997), 105.
[70] Richard H. Brodhead, Introduction to *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 14, 25.
[71] For a fascinating and comprehensive analysis, see Charles Duncan, *The Absent Man: The Narrative Craft of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1998).

portraits of a complex range of African American characters and experiences as no such writer of the nineteenth or early-twentieth centuries had done before.

Many nineteenth-century readers would have initially aligned the 1899 *Conjure Woman* with Harris's Uncle Remus books because of the similarities in their storytelling characters, their frame-narrative structures, and the use of dialect. However, as William L. Andrews asserts of Chesnutt's literary aims and racial agenda, he was the "first African-American writer of fiction to enlist the white-controlled publishing industry in the service of his social message."[72] In a less-than-subtle strategy of using Remus's popularity to sell Chesnutt's book, his publisher, Houghton Mifflin, even placed a caricature of Uncle Julius flanked by two white rabbits on the cover of the first edition, making it more likely that people who expected something akin to Harris's books would purchase it before realizing its author was a black man. Those who had not previously read Chesnutt's work in *The Atlantic Monthly* or *Overland Monthly* likely got more than they bargained for with *The Conjure Woman*—that is, if they were astute enough to realize that his "Storytelling Uncle," Julius, and his entertaining tales are fashioned to compel white readers to confront their explicit compliance in previous literary whitewashings of the slave experience.

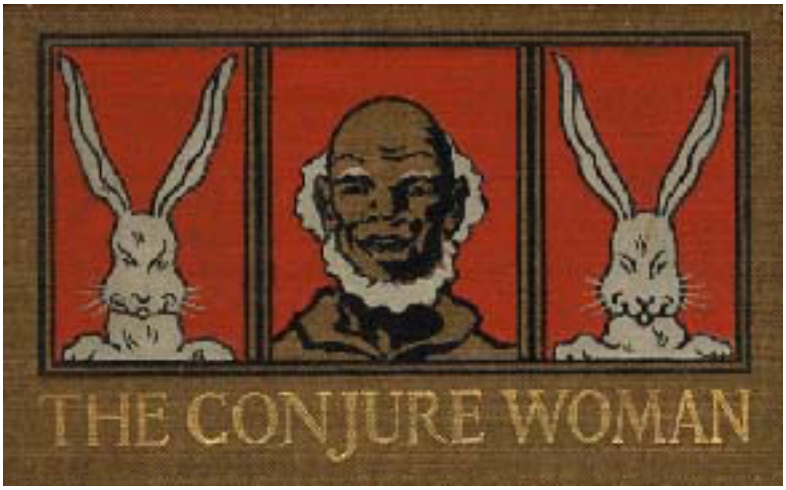

Figure 5: Front Cover of Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*. Boston: Houghton, 1899.

A significant difference between Remus and Julius is Julius's tendency to situate himself

[72] Charles Chesnutt, *Conjure Tales and Stories of the Color Line*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Penguin, 2000), 499.

within his own narratives, whereas Remus's involvement is usually conversational filler meant to illustrate the contentedness of the enslaved and introduce the animal tales Harris had appropriated from them.[73] Additionally, Remus's tales are folklore, and often take place in an unnamed time, whereas Julius time-stamps his stories in relation to one another for his listeners, the recently-transplanted northerners, John and Annie, so that they can piece together and attempt to understand the local black community's collective past. For example, in the 1899 edition of *The Conjure Woman*, which contains three, possibly four different conjurers, Julius includes narrative details about each conjurer that helps construct a likely chronological order for the stories he shares. Likewise, he provides markers, although sometimes rather vague, for when, where, and under what circumstances each story occurred. By using a self-referential storytelling strategy, Julius affirms his part in the larger narrative of slave trauma he exposes in his tales. And in asserting his narrative authority and focusing on the actual, rather than the abstract, Julius imparts to his listeners the sense of urgency underlying the slave experience of which they are wholly ignorant.

In "The Goophered Grapevine," which begins *The Conjure Woman*, northerners John and Annie, along with the reader, are introduced to "Uncle Julius" McAdoo, who wastes no time in educating the newly-arrived couple as to the physical and psychological scars left upon the local black community by slavery. "The Goophered Grapevine" illustrates the uncertainty of the slave's lot through the story of Henry, who eats "goophered" grapes out of his owner's field, and consequently finds his age and health waxing and waning over the course of the year, perfectly in sync with the state of the vines. Mars Dugal' McAdoo sees a cash cow in Henry's oscillating vitality, and commences to sell him in the spring when he is healthy, and repurchase him at a

[73] In Joel Chandler Harris's, *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings: The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation* (New York: Appleton, 1881), *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016. Remus does mention in passing that he has an "'ole 'oman,' but does not discuss her or their relationship.

discount in the winter when he is sickly. According to Julius, Mars Dugal' "'tuk good keer uv 'im dyoin' er de winter, —give 'im w'iskey ter rub his rheumatiz, en terbacker ter smoke, en all he want ter eat, —'caze a nigger w'at he could make a thousan' dollars a year off'n did n' grow on eve'y huckleberry bush.'"[74] Dugal McAdoo makes enough money off Henry to buy another plantation, but when the vines finally die and Henry dies with them, McAdoo's scheme ends. Julius describes Henry's demise as being intimately tied to the vines that had effectively dictated his life and death: "'he des pined away, en pined away, en fine'ly tuk ter his cabin; en when de big vime whar he got de sap ter 'n'int his head withered en turned yaller en died, Henry died too, —des went out sorter like a cannel.'"[75] Henry's situation symbolizes the greed of slave owners, the used-up lifespans of slaves, and the indifference with which slaves were bought and sold. A direct contradiction of "cradle to grave" paternalism, Henry lives, grows old, and dies by the crop he has been forced to work—one commodity sacrificed for another. In using this tale to indoctrinate John and Annie to the south, Julius is impressing on them the ways in which the lives and blood of the formerly enslaved are tied to the land they want to purchase.

In the story, "Po' Sandy," Julius presents a more sobering depiction of the link between commodities in the south and the lives and deaths of the slaves who produced them. When his owner, Mars Marrabo McSwayne makes the decision to split Sandy's time, "'Sandy did n' hardly knowed whar he wuz gwine ter stay fum one week's een' ter de yuther.'"[76] Sandy's solution to ensure he is no longer loaned out is to allow his wife, Tenie, to conjure him into a *pine* tree,[77] but the plan backfires when the tree is cut down in order to build a new kitchen on the McSwayne property. Julius describes the sounds of the wood at the mill as a "'sweekin', en

[74] Chesnutt, *Conjure Tales*, 27.
[75] Ibid, 31-2.
[76] Ibid, 42.
[77] That Sandy is transformed into a "Pine" tree is significant, as Julius repeats that Henry "pined away" in "The Goophered Grapevine, and it foreshadows the painful longing due to absence that occurs in "Poor Sandy."

moanin', en groanin,'"[78] and explains to his listeners how the eerie sounds continued once the kitchen was built, prompting McSwayne to take down the kitchen built *of* a slave *by* slaves and repurpose the lumber for a schoolhouse, the same which Annie plans to reuse in [the novel's] present day to build a kitchen. When Julius ends the sad story of "Po' Sandy," Annie responds, "'What a system it was […] under which such things were possible!'"[79] Despite her husband's incredulous response to what he believes is sheer gullibility on her part, Annie decides she does not want to use the lumber, reasoning, "'I know the story is absurd […] and I am not so silly to believe it. But I don't think I should ever be able to take any pleasure in that kitchen if it were built out of that lumber."[80] Later, she tells John that she has donated the use of the schoolhouse to members of Julius's church who had recently split over a temperance debate, leaving John (and the reader) in awe regarding Julius's abilities as a storyteller, teacher, and master manipulator. As Chesnutt makes clear using Julius as his mouthpiece, there is nothing on or near the southern plantation—whether it be the grapevines or the wood used to construct the buildings—in which the suffering of the enslaved did not play a part.

As numerous Chesnutt scholars have discussed,[81] Julius's tales in *The Conjure Woman* most often end up serving himself, his family, or his community in some way, making him—and by extension, Chesnutt—trickster figures, in the tradition of scrappy individuals who use their words to outwit their nemeses and achieve their ends. In "The Conjurer's Revenge," Julius secures himself a new set of clothes; in "Mars Jeem's Nightmare," a job for his grandson; and in "Po' Sandy" the meeting house, and so on. In addition to meeting his needs and those of others, Julius is an elder who transmits the legacy of his community by sharing their lives and lore to

[78] Ibid, 55.
[79] Ibid, 60.
[80] Ibid, 61.
[81] See Farnsworth's and Brodhead's respective introductions to *The Conjure Woman*, Duncan's *The Absent Man,* and McElrath's and Leitz's introduction to their edited collection of Chesnutt's letters, *To be an Author.*

educate his audience. As Kai Erikson writes, "trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can. There is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed."[82] Doubtless, many late-nineteenth-century readers looked to Uncle Remus's myriad tales to (re)kindle their fond, prejudiced memories of a time and lifestyle they felt had been taken from them; however, given that Remus's tales take place in the animal world, and because the frame narratives are often only brief segues into the tales, Remus, the face and voice of the "specimens"[83] of folklore Harris collected from African Americans is quite limited. Conversely, in reclaiming and repurposing the slave "Uncle" to tell a more truthful (albeit fantastic) story of slavery's detrimental legacy—one which the teller has been personally involved in and affected by—Chesnutt challenges the stereotype of aged slaves as mouthpieces for white history and the paternalistic notion that they had no desires or lives of their own to speak of.

Julius is most personally connected to/involved with the subject of the story, "The Conjurer's Revenge," in which he is sought out and then undermined before he can even begin his tale. John, who introduces the context for Julius's tales, explains that he and Annie are spending a boring day on the porch, and having just "thrown [his] book aside in disgust,"[84] Julius walks up and is encouraged to join them. Chesnutt, in having John forego the written word for the spoken, privileges Julius's orality over conventional literacy. When John says he is thinking of purchasing a mule, Julius asks if they have seen a club-footed slave around, who they will

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[82] Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. ed. and Introductions by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 186.
[83] In 1883, Harris wrote newspaperman R.W. Grubb, asking, "Can't you get some one, who has the knack, to get in with some old negro, male or female, and secure me a dozen or more specimens?" Jennifer Ritterhouse, "Reading Intimacy, and the Role of Uncle Remus in White Southern Social Memory," *The Journal of Southern History* 69. no. 3 (2003): 603.
[84] Chesnutt, *Conjure Tales*, 104.

hardly believe, was once a mule. Annie, proclaiming Julius's declaration to be "'ridiculous nonsense!'" offends the old man, and "reduce[s] him to silence."[85] After some cajoling by John (what he refers to as "diplomacy") he entices Julius to continue, as "The prospect of a long, dull afternoon was not alluring, and I was glad to have the monotony of Sabbath quiet relieved by a plantation legend."[86] In a quick turn around from the tossing of his book, John here dismisses Julius's previous stories as meaningless, thus "testif[ying] to his own limitations and to the white world's fumbling inability to appreciate the wisdom, humor, and heart of a black man's experience," an action which stands as "a hauntingly familiar projection of the white response to America's racial problem."[87] Instead of the quaint "plantation legend" John and Annie are expecting, Julius takes his listeners back to his youth when he used to visit a woman he was courting on Jim McGee's plantation. It was there that Julius became acquainted with a slave named Primus, a man who was "dange'ous w'en he got in dem stubborn spells,"[88] and whose transformation from man to mule by a vindictive conjure man—and the subsequent havoc he wreaks on the plantation in his altered form—are the subjects of the story.

When Julius's tale comes to a close, Annie denounces it, saying, "'That story does not appeal to me, Uncle Julius, and is not up to your usual mark. It is n't pathetic, it has no moral that I can discover, and I can't see why you should tell it. In fact, it seems to me like nonsense.'"[89] Noticeably hurt by her harsh review, Julius responds, "'I'm sorry, ma'm,' he said reproachfully, 'ef you doan lack dat tale […] but I'm tellin' nuffin but de truf. Co'se I did n' see de cunjuh man tu'n 'im back, fer I wuz n' dere; but I be'n hearin' de tale fer twenty-five yeahs,

[85] Ibid, 107.
[86] Ibid, 108.
[87] Farnsworth, Introduction to *The Conjure Woman*, xvii.
[88] Chesnutt, *Conjure Tales*, 108.
[89] Ibid.

en I ain' got no 'casion fer ter 'spute it.'"[90] Julius's frustration with his listeners is due in part to his own involvement in the tale, as he prefaces the story with his personal connection to it. Annie assumes that because she cannot find a moral in the tale, that none exists, but for Julius and Chesnutt's astute readers, the story is about a headstrong slave who (albeit in mule form) runs amuck in the tobacco field, gorges on barrels of wine, and rages against the insecurity of slave marriages—actions that would have been severely punished for as a (black) human.[91] In essence, Primus uses his alternate form to do the unimaginable: he dares to consume the fruits of his own labor and rebels against the system that effectively broke up his marriage.[92] Likewise, the slave's lot, both as a mule and a man, are not his fault and are beyond his control. Primus has no more power to change his life than the mule does; they are both beasts of burden with no rights or recourse. Thus, Julius's story of Primus, though fantastic, is his way of depicting the realities of slave life in a way that will not turn off his listeners—in the same way that Chesnutt's Julius stories enabled the author to put his subtly-subversive "Uncle" in competition with Harris's Uncle Remus. Hence Julius's closing assertions that "'Dey's so many things a body knows is lies, dat dey ain' no use gwine roun' findin' fault wid tales dat mought des ez well be so ez not,'" and "'ef a man can't b'lieve w'at 'e sees,'" (keeping in mind that Julius already admitted he was not an eye witness to the events of the story), "'I can't see no use in libbin'—mought 's well die

[90] Ibid, 127-8.
[91] As is evident in the collection's first story, "The Goophered Grapevine," in which Mars Dugal has his grapevines conjured to keep his slaves from eating them.
[92] Ibid, 117. A month after Primus goes missing, his wife Sally takes up with a new man named Dan. Because slave marriages were not legally binding, and husbands and wives could be sold away or forced to partner with other slaves at any time, there was no security for those living under such tenuous circumstances. Additionally, Dan makes a comment to Sally—in front of the mule/Primus—about how he is "'a better man dan dat low-down runaway nigger Primus dat you be'n wastin' yo time wid.'" Dan's claim makes it clear that, as a man with a reputation for being dangerous, everyone, including Sally, assumed Primus had made a break for freedom; this provides another reason why she moved on from her marriage quicker than Primus had expected, as he had not abandoned her.

en be whar we can't see nuffin.'"[93] In other words, Julius does not have to see something to believe in it, and Chesnutt extends this illustration to his readers, emphasizing that, like John and Annie, northern audiences should not have had to witness slavery first-hand to believe the testimonies of those who survived it.

Julius is prompted to relate "The Conjurer's Revenge" to ease the boredom of John and Annie, and in the story that follows, titled, "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," John begins by explaining that his wife has become "the victim of a settled melancholy, attended with vague forebodings of impending misfortune."[94] Julius's advanced age makes him an unlikely physical threat to the northerner, thus John continually encourages the old man's close proximity and his sometimes entertaining, yet always didactic tales. John admits that his attempts at lifting Annie's spirits, which have included reading to her and having "the hands on the place come up in the evening and serenade her with plantation [read *minstrel*] songs,"[95] have not improved her melancholy disposition. Consequently, when Julius strolls up with a lucky rabbit's foot in hand, John and Annie, as before, use him to liven up their day. And, just as in the preceding story, they quickly write off his belief in luck and conjuring as "ridiculous."[96] Again, Julius defends himself while chiding the couple, saying, "'Law, suh! you doan hafter prove 'bout de rabbit foot! Eve'ybody knows dat; leas'ways eve'ybody roun' heah knows it. But ef it has ter be prove' ter folks w'at wa'n't bawn en raise' in dis naberhood, dey is a' easy way ter prove it.'"[97] Again, Julius voices his annoyance that the two regional outsiders continue to ask him to speak, only to promptly chastise him for doing so. The proof the old man speaks of lies in the tale of 'Sis Becky, whose husband is sold away, and who is later traded away from her child, Mose, in exchange for a

[93] Ibid, 128.
[94] Ibid, 132.
[95] Ibid, 133.
[96] Ibid, 135.
[97] Ibid, 136.

racehorse. Aunt Nancy, the nurse who takes care of Mose with his mother gone, enlists the aid of the conjure woman, Aunt Peggy, who transforms Mose into a hummingbird, and then a mockingbird, so that he can fly away to visit his mother. Aunt Peggy ultimately works her conjure so that Becky and the racehorse are swapped again, and so the mother comes home to her son.[98]

Despite the fact that "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" contains the same unbelievable animal transformations as "The Conjurer's Revenge," John remarks, "My wife had listened to this story with greater interest than she had manifested in any subject for several days. I had watched her furtively from time to time during the recital, and had observed the play of her countenance. It had expressed in turn sympathy, indignation, pity, and at the end lively satisfaction."[99] When John thanks Julius for "a very ingenious fairy tale," Annie chastises her husband, claiming, "'the story bears the stamp of truth, if every a story did.'"[100] Writing off the impossibilities of the tale, Annie states matter-of-factly, "'those are mere ornamental details and not al all essential. The story is true to nature, and might have happened half a hundred times, and no doubt did happen, in those horrid days before the war.'"[101] Thus, in this moment, Annie becomes the acculturated convert that Julius—and Chesnutt—had worked for. The very same things that displeased her in Primus's story are considered of no consequence when the subject of the tale is a woman robbed of everyone she loves. Through the power of Julius's "amusing" stories, Annie not only learns how to empathize with the helpless lot of slaves (especially of slave women), she realizes how little her own depressive moods matter when compared to the very real traumas suffered by

[98] Chesnutt's acknowledgment of black female elders in this story is reminiscent of much of the African-American authored fiction of the late nineteenth-century, in which authors such as Chesnutt, Frances E.W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, and Victoria Earle Matthews all emphasized the power and importance of the orality of black women, particularly the aged (discussed at length in Chapter Four).
[99] Ibid, 158.
[100] Ibid, 159.
[101] Ibid.

enslaved men and women.[102] Annie's health and mental state begin to improve immediately after this epiphany, and subsequently, John finds Julius's rabbit's foot in her pocket, thus signifying the elder's success in training her to delve deeper than her initial assumptions and knee-jerk rejections allow. The frame narrative of "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," through which readers see Annie learn how to empathize with the difficult lives and experiences of her new African-American neighbors, demonstrates the change Chesnutt wants to see in American society—a change he hopes Julius's words will help to achieve. After all, Remus may have founded Rome, but Julius ruled it.[103]

LAYING THE "UNCLE" TO REST

The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot—the only successful governmental coup d'état in U.S. history—occurred one year previous to the simultaneous publications of *The Conjure Woman* and *The Wife of His Youth*,[104] prompting Chesnutt to write the dramatic and controversial allegorical novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*,[105] published in 1901. In a letter dated November 11, 1905, Chesnutt references a December 1901 review by William Dean Howells, in which the highly-regarded writer and editor said of *Marrow*: "The book is, in fact, bitter, bitter. There is no reason in history why it should not be so, if wrong is to be repaid with hate, and yet it would be

[102] As Heather Tirado Gilligan writes, "Annie's depression is alleviated consistently only by Julius's recitations and her reaction to his tales. Annie's gratification, in the form of emotional engagement, comes, however, at a price. Julius is not a mere dispenser of folktales; he demands that Annie shift into a different way of thinking before she can engage with his stories." Heather Tirado Gilligan, "Reading, Race, and Charles Chesnutt's 'Uncle Julius' Tales" (*ELH* 74.1 (2007): 205.
[103] A reference to the myth of the twins, Romulus and Remus, who supposedly founded Rome, and Julius Caesar, the Roman dictator who changed the face of the Roman empire.
[104] Charles Chesnutt, *The Wife of His Youth, and Other Stories of the Color Line* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.
[105] Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.

better if it was not so bitter."[106] Although Howells's review went on to address the power of Chesnutt's literary indictment of white mob violence and the ever-present threat of lynching, his comment that the work was "bitter" was still on Chesnutt's mind four years later when he wrote in the aforementioned letter: "The book was received by the public with respect, but not with any great enthusiasm. By the public I mean the great reading public whose opinion is reflected by the newspapers and magazines which reflect public opinion. It had a fair sale, but was criticized as being bitter. I did not intend it to be so. Nor do I think it was."[107] Chesnutt originally envisioned *Marrow* as having the literary success and social effect of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and he communicated such hopes to Booker T. Washington in a letter dated October 8th, 1901, in which he designates *Marrow* his best work to date, explaining that the book "discusses, incidentally, miscegenation, lynching, disfranchisement, separate cars,[108] and the struggle for professional and social progress in an unfriendly environment […] It is, in a word, our side of the Negro question, in popular form, as you have presented it in the more dignified garb of essay and biography."[109] Hence, when Chesnutt published *Marrow*'s follow up, *The Colonel's Dream*,[110] in 1905, Howells's 1901 review was still haunting him.

In "W.D. Howells and Race: Charles W. Chesnutt's Disappointment of the Dean," Joseph R. McElrath refers to *The Colonel's Dream* as the book that "ended [Chesnutt's] career as a professional novelist."[111] Indeed, the book's bleak realism, which "revealed that his enmity had

[106] Quoted in Farnsworth's Introduction to *Marrow*, xv.
[107] McElrath and Leitz, *To Be an Author*, 234.
[108] Here, Chesnutt is referencing the 1896 court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which the federal government legalized racial discrimination through "separate, but equal" laws that would remain in place until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, by which *Plessy* was overturned and public schools were desegregated.
[109] McElrath and Leitz, *To Be an Author*, 160.
[110] Charles Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 1905). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.
[111] Joseph R. McElrath, "W.D. Howells and Race: Charles W. Chesnutt's Disappointment of the Dean." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51, no. 4 (1997): 476.

become so strong that it could no longer be contained,"[112] leaves the reader feeling utterly defeated and hopeless for the future of black Americans in a society set firmly against their progress and equality. The Colonel's dream is devastated when his young son and his aged, former slave are killed, and shattered when their integrated grave is desecrated. Unable to fight the rampant racism and corruption of the Jim Crow South, where the youth (black and white) are stunted, and long lives of forced enslavement count for nothing, the Colonel flees the nightmare that is his "old Southern home."

Although pro-slavery writers rarely presented their southern settings as anything but idyllic, Chesnutt exposed the domino effect of racial injustices—such as limited access to education, fewer employment opportunities at lower wages, and legalized slavery through peonage—yet another shameful practice flaunted in the Deep South. The issue of education is especially important, as white authors used slave dialect in their works to try and persuade readers that blacks were simple, childlike, unable to be educated, and therefore *needed* "masters" to oversee and/or dominate them. William Dean Howells, the arbiter of literary realism in nineteenth-century America, wrote positive reviews of texts such as E.A. Pollard's *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (1859)[113]—a pro-slavery epistolary novel that mingles aged-slave appropriation with elements of local color. Howells's own view of realism[114] was affected by his penchant for dialect, the use of which he "advocated […] in fiction as a matter of aesthetic and political principle, arguing that familiarity with regional linguistic

[112] McElrath and Leitz, *To Be an Author*, 19-20.
[113] Edward A. Pollard, *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Pudney, 1859), *Internet Archive*, accessed August 24, 2015.
[114] As Henry B. Wonham writes in *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), "Howell's evolutionary account of the rise of a realist sensibility in America during the latter half of the nineteenth century is complicated by the simultaneous emergence of an outlandish ethnic iconography, which often competed with realist fiction for space in the nation's leading periodicals" (44).

idiosyncrasies would promote a spirit of national unity."[115] Postbellum narratives containing the "slave dialect" Chesnutt scorned sought to reconnect northern and southern audiences through nostalgic renderings of aged slaves and slavery, much in the way "comic darky" minstrel caricatures had been used before the war.[116]

Both the north and south profited from slavery and the labor exploitations of African Americans, and being in the north was no guarantee that blacks would receive equal treatment, or would even be welcome amongst whites. One thing that connected northerners and southerners was a general longing for the seeming simplicity of life before the war, a void that was in part filled by popular literature and entertainment. Howells had supported Chesnutt early in his career—just as he had "famously championed many of the most controversial dialect writers of the period"[117]—when Uncle Julius's dialect still cloaked the author's underlying moral and social agenda. However, when Chesnutt's works became graver in their representations of important racial issues, the "spirit of national unity" Howells was trying to accomplish was jeopardized. As editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* from 1871-1881, Howells published and became well acquainted with some of the best authors of the nineteenth century, including Mark Twain, Sarah Orne Jewett, Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Charles Chesnutt, among others. The majority of these authors were white, and therefore their themes and literary aims played well together in Howell's estimation. Likewise, Dunbar, who used slave dialect in many of his works, was not as controversial and confrontational in his discussions of race as Chesnutt, making the indignities and injustices

[115] Ibid, 47.
[116] Minstrel shows and "compromise" versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stage adaptations were prolific in the free state of New York before the war, and continued to be popular with northern audiences well into the twentieth century.
[117] Wonham, *Playing the Races*, 47.

extant in *Marrow* and *Dream*—when compared to "the drama of a broken teacup"[118]—seem all the more drastic, or "bitter."

In Chesnutt's final novel, *The Colonel's Dream*, the author transferred Howells's perceived black bitterness onto a host of southern white characters who frustrate all attempts at Reconstruction that are equitable or beneficial to blacks—never minding that they would help the struggling members of the white community as well. Chesnutt's own concern with *Dream* was to try and steer clear of "the didactic side, to which the theme gives constant temptation; for I realize that preaching is not art, and as a matter of personal taste I shrink from the sordid and brutal, often unconsciously brutal side of Southern life."[119] Every time the novel's protagonist tries to teach by example, however, his lessons are rebuffed by a rural southern public who will not be swayed; thus, although Chesnutt's aim is to expose readers to the "unconsciously brutal side of Southern life," the didacticism he says he is trying to avoid is palpable throughout the work. *Dream* chronicles the return of Henry French from the bustling business world of New York to his sleepy boyhood home in Clarendon, North Carolina, following the death of his wife and doctor's orders that a southern climate will improve the health of his young son, Phil. Upon his homecoming, the people of Clarendon automatically fall into calling him "Colonel French," in keeping with the southern manner of showing reverence for Confederate veterans. For French, such traditions are pointless and antiquated, as he thinks to himself, "How far away it seemed […] the time when he had thought of the Confederacy as his country!"[120]; yet, knowing he

[118] Naturalist writer Frank Norris criticized Howell's brand of Realism as "the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, [and] the adventure of an invitation to dinner" in *The Responsibilities of the Novelist: And Other Literary Essays* (London, Richards, 1903), 215. *Internet Archive*, accessed August 24, 2015.
[119] McElrath and Leitz, *To Be an Author*, 234.
[120] Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 46.

cannot fight this engrained southern tradition, he acquiesces and re-acclimates to the honorable moniker.

Soon after their arrival, French takes his son to visit to their ancestral graveyard, and young Phil is quickly indoctrinated in the southern tradition of reverence and awe for his white elders. There they find Uncle Peter, once a slave of the French family, maintaining the plots of his long-deceased, and seemingly long-forgotten owners. As the narrator explains of the "Uncle," "Peter was really not many years older than the colonel, but prosperity had preserved the one, while hard luck had aged the other prematurely."[121] Here, Chesnutt carefully notes the damaging physical effects that enslavement had on black bodies, and the relative lives of ease afforded to whites. The young boy becomes enamored with all the "old" man knows, and eagerly listens to his history, tales of his father's boyhood adventures, and stories of the once-powerful Frenches. According to Laurie Maffly-Kipp, white authors in the postbellum era "were doing all they could to define the negro as degraded, inferior, and historyless," yet in this case, it is Phil who feels he has no family (other than his father) and no history to connect to. Peter relates a difficult history, but he also has no family, and delights in igniting and sharing in Phil's enthusiasm.[122] Peter's story is far different than avuncular caricatures of apologist writers, who feared little in their old age but rheumatism. During the graveyard reunion, Uncle Peter informs Colonel French regarding all that has transpired in the decades since they last met. Initially, the narrator's summation of their conversation reads as apathetic, yet Chesnutt is clearly responding to the "Uncle" caricatures of his apologist contemporaries when he writes: "Peter's story was not a thrilling one; it was no tale of inordinate ambition, no Odyssey of a perilous search for the

[121] Ibid, 25.
[122] Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010), 232.

prizes of life, but the bald recital of a mere struggle for existence."[123] Rather than depicting his "Uncle" as comfortable in his old age and shielded from harm by a benevolent former owner, Peter was forced to work jobs that resulted in exposure, fever, and ultimately, a serious axe wound that made him a non-competitor against younger men vying for the same jobs. Through the sadly-realistic chronicling of Peter's difficult life and current condition—which represented the fates of thousands of black men in his unfortunate position—Chesnutt furnishes background information on a major character in the book while providing an introduction to a frightening reality facing black men after Reconstruction: the all-too-likely possibility of being arrested for vagrancy and being (re)sold as plantation labor to the peonage/debt slavery system.

Shortly after his reunion with Colonel French, a town constable finds Uncle Peter singing and playing the banjo (a clear nod to minstrelsy) and arrests him, saying, "'you ain't done nuthin' fer a month, but loaf aroun'. You ain't got no visible means of suppo't, so you're took up for vagrancy.'"[124] In the utterly-unjust fashion of the "southern judicial system," Peter's "time" is put up for auction early the next morning before anyone can be contacted to pay his fine—despite his protestations that he has done nothing wrong, and that "'ef I kin jus' git wo'd ter deright w'ite folks, I'll be outer here in half a' hour.'"[125] When Colonel French is notified of Uncle Peter's arrest and impending sale, he decries the vagrancy law for effectively allowing "Men [to] be tried without jury and condemned to infamous punishments, involving stripes and chains, for misdemeanours which in more enlightened States were punished with a small fine or brief detention […and for which] the heaviest punishment might be inflicted, at the discretion of the judge, for the least offense."[126] Due to the nature of the peonage auction system, in which the

[123] Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 28.
[124] Ibid, 57.
[125] Ibid, 57-8.
[126] Ibid, 228.

winner of each auction is the man who pays the prisoner's fines in exchange for the *least* amount of time to be served, Peter's advanced age and subpar health both work against him. Since the labor of younger, stronger men is considered much more valuable, Peter is viewed not as cheap labor, but as an economic drain on the purchaser.[127] Consequently, in order to drum up interest in the sale of Peter's fines and the purchase of his time, the magistrate promotes Peter as "'left over from befo'' the wah; not much for looks, but respectful and obedient, and accustomed, for some time past, to eat very little. Can be made useful in many ways—can feed the chickens, take care of the children, or would make a good skeercrow.'"[128] Like many elderly slaves, Peter is believed to have little to offer beyond acting as a babysitter or child's plaything, but what is far worse than this blanket underestimation is the suggestion that he would be a good scarecrow, implying that he may be of use alive or dead—a "black bod[y] swinging in the southern breeze."[129]

The amount of Peter's fines is only $24.50, but due to his age, he faces years—and possibly, the rest of his life—of indentured servitude to whoever pays his debt. When one man bids tens years, another suggests that Peter will die in five and have to be buried at a cost, prompting the first man to withdraw his bid. Colonel French, arriving just in time to save Peter from a two-year sentence, is told he cannot simply pay Peter's fine, but must bid for his time. As the magistrate explains, "'I beg yo' pahdon, suh, but that wouldn't fulfil the requi'ments of the law. He'd be subject to arrest again immediately. Somebody must take the responsibility for his keep.'"[130] Although Peter has managed to provide for himself for years following Emancipation, he is prone to arrest because he has no steady means of employment—as if anyone would hire

[127] This is reflective of the way many slaveholders viewed their aged slaves before Emancipation, and why many manumitted them to be rid of the expenditure.
[128] Ibid, 66.
[129] From "Strange Fruit," performed by Billie Holiday and written by Abel Meeropol (Commodore, 1939).
[130] Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 68.

him. As one man in attendance asserts, "I buy niggers to work, not to bury."[131] When the two-year bid is withdrawn in lieu of French's interest in the old man, the Colonel pays Peter's fines with the understanding that he is buying his time "'for life.'"[132] In rescuing Peter from spending his final years as the property of another (*again*), French fulfills the obligation he feels toward the man whose lot it once was to serve his family as a slave—essentially announcing his belief that black lives have value beyond their capacity to serve and enrich whites. In so doing, however, the obviously "Yankee-fied" Mr. French makes enemies of all the local men who take advantage of the peonage system to people their plantation workforces. Showing any kindness to a black man is viewed as a moral and masculine weakness, and an affront to whiteness. In undercutting their process for securing (nearly) free, forced labor, French is calling into question the southern means of maintaining economic and social dominance over blacks—an outrage they do not forget.

Literally indebted to French for (his) life—although the Colonel does not acknowledge this contract or consider it a factor in his behavior—Peter begins working for the family once again, with the task of looking after Phil as he did his father when he was a boy. On Sundays, the three visited the cemetery, where the old man would regale Phil with glorious accounts of his ancestors. With no wife or family of his own, Peter lived a meager, somewhat isolated existence for years, working odd jobs and relying on charity to sustain him. Thus, when Phil begins speaking to his father about where he and *his* future son will be buried in the family plot, the subject of Peter's eventual interment also comes up:

> "Nem mine me, honey," said the old man, "dey can put me somewhar e'se. Hit doan mattuh 'bout me."

[131] Ibid, 68.
[132] Ibid.

"No, Uncle Peter, you must be here with the rest of us. For you know, Uncle Peter, I'm so used to you now, that I should want you to be near me then."

Old Peter thought to humour the lad. "Put me down hyuh at de foot er de lot, little Mars' Phil, unner dis ellum tree.

"Oh, papa," exclaimed Phil, demanding the colonel's attention, "Uncle Peter and I have arranged everything. You know Uncle Peter is to stay with me as long as I live, and when he dies, he is to be buried here at the foot of the lot, under the elm tree, where he'll be near me all the time, and near the folks that he knows and that know him."[133]

Peter humors Phil by agreeing to be buried near him, but of course, the old man does not consider this a real possibility, as he knows the people of Clarendon would never permit such a gross violation of the color line.

Phil's desire to have Peter buried in the family plot is significant for several reasons when taking apologist plantation fiction into consideration. Most importantly, Phil is a child, and is therefore not held to the same standards as an adult, so his request is not disturbing in the same sense as Porgy's from William Gilmore Simms's *The Sword in the Distaff* (1852),[134] who demands that his slave, Tom, kill himself if he should die first so they will be buried together; or as Mrs. Flint's notion from Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*, that "it would be a beautiful illustration of the attachment existing between slaveholder and slave, if the body of her old worn-out servant was buried at her feet."[135] Moreover, young Phil is a northerner, and is not acquainted with the south, the realities of slavery, or his own family's role in it, so when he says Peter is to live with him as long as *he* lives, he is likely envisioning Peter as a friend, not a servant.

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[133] Ibid, 144-5.
[134] William Gilmore Simms, *The Sword and the Distaff: Or, "Fair, Fat, and Forty." A Story of the South, at the Close of the Revolution* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852). *Internet Archive*, accessed July 15, 2015.
[135] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 221.

Additionally, unlike Lucien and Lillian from Joel Chandler Harris's *Daddy Jake the Runaway* (1889),[136] who seek their father's old runaway slave simply because they are bored without him, Phil values Peter as more than entertainment. His pure intentions are clear when he says Peter "must be here with the rest of us […] near the folks that he knows and that know him." Phil's desire to include the former slave in the resting place of the French ancestors he has come to revere *through* Peter is the honest reaction of a child whose worldview has not been tainted by hyper-aggressive racism. Phil does not likely know—nor would he likely understand—the details surrounding Peter's lack of familial ties, so when he declares Peter needs to be put to rest in the company of friends, it is because he believes the old man has no "people." With his mother dead and his father's focus turned toward revitalizing the town, Peter becomes a constant in Phil's life, performing at once the role of teacher, playmate, guardian, and friend. In caring for Phil, Peter finds secure and meaningful work in his old age, but in placing all his parental duties on the former slave, French falls back into privileged custom, and pays the ultimate price for it.

After Colonel French has watched his enemies (and the enemies of progress) repeatedly defeat his efforts to provide jobs and education for all the people of Clarendon, he turns his attention to what is left: his family and personal relationships. Sadly, like everything else, French sees these taken from him as well before he flees the south forever. Like Uncle Remus, Peter indulges himself and Phil by telling tales of animals and "ha'nts," or, the "'spirits er dead folks, dat comes back an' hangs roun' whar dey use' ter lib.'"[137] One day, Phil believes he spies the black cat from one of Peter's stories and takes off in hot pursuit of the animal. Peter, whose job it is to look after him, follows Phil to the train tracks, where he fails, despite his shouts and flailing arms, to capture the attention of the train's brakeman. As Chesnutt writes, "Just before the two

[136] Joel Chandler Harris, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark* (New York: Century, 1889).
[137] Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 148.

cars came together, Peter threw himself forward to seize the child. As he did so, the cat sprang from the truck bar; the old man stumbled over the cat, and fell across the rail. The car moved only a few feet, but quite far enough to work injury."[138] A crowd quickly assembles at the site of the accident, and, acknowledging Peter's sacrifice, lifts his body "as tenderly as though it had been that of a beautiful woman."[139] While Phil lay injured in his room, Peter's body is brought to the house, where the Colonel orders him to be laid out in the parlor as a show of gratitude and respect. When Phil asks after Peter only to find that his friend has died saving him, he makes his father remember his promise to bury them near one another, in case he should die as well.

Phil's own death follows swiftly behind Peter's, and the Colonel, having lost his boy and his boyhood companion, blames himself for having "neglected his child, while the bruised and broken old black man in the room below had given his life to save him."[140] Helpless to reverse the tides of his tragic misfortune, and unable to express his love for Phil and his appreciation of Peter's sacrifice, Colonel French determines to focus on what he can control. Realizing there is no one he can atone to for Peter's death, he decides to "lay his child's body in the old family lot in the cemetery, among the bones of his ancestors, and there too, close at hand, old Peter should have honourable sepulture. It was his due, and would be the fulfilment [sic] of little Phil's last request."[141] Carrying out Phil's dying wish requires his father to cross the steadfast color line and upset the southern code of decorum, as it was unheard of for blacks and whites to even be laid out together in death (which the Colonel commanded of the coroner who wanted to move Peter's body to another room), and it was simply unthinkable that a black person could be buried in a "whites only" cemetery. When the coroner expresses his concerns about the arrangements for

[138] Ibid, 258.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid, 261.
[141] Ibid.

interment, the Colonel tells him to send anyone who complains directly to him, asserting, "'The lot is mine, and I shall do with it as I like. My great-great-grandfather gave the cemetery to the town. Old Peter's skin was black, but his heart was white as any man's!'"[142]

After the Colonel's intentions reach the rest of the town, the staunchest opponents call a private meeting with the mayor and the trustees of the cemetery. As Chesnutt explains, the more blacks and whites were set on equal footing, the more whites resented and rejected the forced proximity of the races, writing of the offended white townspeople, "The very word 'equality' was an offense."[143] Ultimately, the two are given a joint funeral at the Episcopal Church, in which, "Peter had, for the first time, a place on the main floor, a little to one side of the altar, in front of which, banked with flowers, stood the white velvet casket which contained all that was mortal of little Phil," and where "The same beautiful sermon answered for both."[144] Following the funeral, "Simultaneously both bodies were lowered to their last resting-place. Simultaneously ashes were consigned to ashes and dust to dust."[145] Chesnutt's repetition of "same" and "simultaneously" suggests the closest thing to equality the town of Clarendon has likely ever seen. The fact that Peter gave his life for the child, and that they are to be buried in a private family plot is of no consequence; the townspeople are too "offended" to *not* react.

French decides to devote his life to bettering the damaged society that Phil and Peter were too good for, vowing to "lay wide and deep the foundations of prosperity, education and enlightenment, upon which should rest justice, humanity and civic righteousness […] Patiently would he await the results of his labours, and if they came not in great measure in his own

[142] Ibid, 262.
[143] Ibid, 263.
[144] Ibid, 270.
[145] Ibid, 271.

lifetime, he would be content to know that after years would see their full fruition."[146] The Colonel's lofty goals are a reiteration of Chesnutt's own aforementioned literary aims—what he referred to in his journal as his "high, holy purpose." Hence, what follows in the narrative (and effectively brings about the nightmarish end of *The Colonel's Dream*) is an especially hard blow for both Colonel French and the reader, and indicates Chesnutt's despondency with a readership and society that refused to surrender the "unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism."[147]

Two days after the burial of Phil and Peter, Colonel French is called downstairs at dawn to find that which he should have expected: "A handsome mahogany burial casket, stained with earth and disfigured by rough handling, [which] rested upon the floor of the piazza, where it had been deposited during the night."[148] Nailed to Peter's casket, so rudely disturbed from its resting place, was a note, reading, "*Kurnell French:* Take notis. Berry yore ole nigger somewhar else. He can't stay in Oak Semitury. The majority of the white people of this town, who dident tend yore nigger funarl, woant have him there. Niggers by there selves, white peepul by there selves, and them that lives in our town must bide by our rules. By order of CUMITTY."[149] Here, Chesnutt trades in the slave dialect he abhors for the equally disparaging dialect of poor, uneducated, southern whites, and in so doing, prompts white readers to decipher and digest the inferior intellects that exist within their own race. The Colonel, leaving Peter's casket on his porch as testament to the atrocious acts of the town's citizens, goes to visit the defiled burial site, where his "heart hardened as he stood by his son's grave," and where "he took a long lingering

[146] Ibid, 279.
[147] Chesnutt, *Journals*, 139.
[148] Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 281.
[149] Ibid, 281.

look at the tombs of his ancestors and turned away with an air of finality."[150] From the moment Colonel French sees the desecrated casket of the man who gave his life to save his son, all his aspirations for the future of Clarendon vanish. Even when Phil died, the Colonel had managed to retain hope for a brighter future, but the virulent racism of his neighbors and their readiness to desecrate the (theoretically) final resting places of the dead makes it painfully clear that he will never succeed in his dream for a better south.

The bereaved Colonel French wastes no time in making arrangements to transport the bodies of Phil and Peter to New York to be buried near his wife, where they will remain safe from further disturbance, and where "the body of the faithful servant rests beside that of the dear little child whom he unwittingly lured to his death and then died in the effort to save."[151] The claim that Uncle Peter inadvertently "lured' Phil "to his death" by telling him stories is Chesnutt's final critique of nostalgic "Uncle" caricatures such as Uncle Remus, and the detrimental effects of such stereotypes on white audiences who viewed them as "southern humor."[152] Like America's obsession with slavery-era folklore, Phil becomes fixated on Uncle Peter's Remus-esque animal tales, a fact that sets in motion a chain reaction of horrific events. As the sad fates of Chesnutt's characters demonstrate, the worlds of Remus and other apologist Uncles are illusory, as being a longtime servant and entertaining storyteller do not preclude the

[150] Ibid, 282.
[151] Ibid, 290.
[152] Interestingly, in Disney's *Song of the South* (1946), little Johnny is nearly killed by a bull when he tries to pass through its pen to catch up with Uncle Remus, who is leaving the plantation. Remus's decision to leave is prompted by Johnny's mother, who has forbidden him to tell any more stories to the boy. Although she recognizes the possible dangers of the influence of folklore, Johnny's near-death experience brings Remus, feeling he has nearly killed the boy through his stories and their friendship, back for good to continue his storytelling function. Thus, the film version of Harris's Remus addresses the same issue as Chesnutt's *Dream* regarding the influence of racialized folklore, yet immediately abandons it in favor of a happily-ever-after plantation companionship between Remus and Johnny. *Song of the South*, directed by Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson, perf. James Baskett, Hattie McDaniel, and Bobby Driscoll (Walt Disney, 1946).

defilement of Peter's body, nor does the legacy of the aristocratic French family name protect him against the persistent prejudices of whites of all classes.

The counter-narratives of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries had the difficult task of enlightening readers without offending or alienating them through racial didacticism. Writers such as Frances Harper revealed diverse forms of agency in the "Uncle" stock character, and illustrated the ways in which slaves, despite their inhumane treatment in daily life, managed to assert their autonomy and maintain their integrity as people—people who lived, mattered, felt, acted, and *spoke* on their own behalves. In crafting her characters in the shadows of stereotypes, Harper was able to surprise readers all the more when her black characters diverted from the norm that readers had come to expect from apologist texts; hence, her subtlety helped transform Negro caricatures into African-American characters right before the reader's eyes. Charles Chesnutt's later works, on the contrary, and particularly, his novels, were not especially successful in staving off pushback from his opposition, but they confronted and problematized the caricatures and stereotypes of aged black men solidified in the mind's eye of the American public by an unwavering obsession with entertainments and past times centered on denigrating the black race.

The work then, of black authors who sought to correct the egregious, yet nevertheless, socially engrained narratives of black life penned by white apologists, was considerably more difficult than any of the efforts that produced plantation literature. Many white Americans refused to listen to what black authors and their narratives had to say and teach, despite the half a century interim between the end of Civil War and the early-twentieth century texts discussed here. And although it would be wonderful to tell Chesnutt and his Colonel, were they here, that their visions and dreams for Black Americans were finally realized, we find ourselves in present

day battling the same racial concerns and injustices. As Chesnutt makes clear in the title, *The Marrow of Tradition*, these habitual views and beliefs run so deep they are in our very bones. Nevertheless, the narratives discussed here stand as some of the earliest black-authored fictional indictments of plantation fiction, and the detrimental racist traditions promoted and continued therein. However, to fully comprehend the corrective efforts of these major nineteenth-century African American writers is to have read some of the antiquated works they are responding to—not *in spite of*, but *because* these works shock our modern sensibilities into confronting how the paternalistic and antagonistic racism of slavery persists in America's collective memory and thrives in its contemporary culture.

CHAPTER THREE

DEATHBED DIDACTICISM AND FEMALE TRAUMA: SILENCING THE "AUNTY"

Nineteenth-century apologist writers misappropriated the elderly slave population *specifically* to illustrate the supposed ineptitude of the black race and to praise the paternalism of white slaveholders. Representations of aged male slaves, or "Uncles," as childlike and contented, emasculated and effectively neutered old black males in popular opinion, and promoted the misconception that slaves could not provide for themselves, nor did they want to. The innocuous and faithful "Storytelling Uncle" was one of the most utilized stock characters in apologist literature, and eventually became one of the most circulated images in nineteenth century print culture thanks to the sustained popularity of minstrel shows derived from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[1] Although pro-slavery authors rarely portrayed aged female slaves as living the same "carefree" lives as their male counterparts, the "Aunt" caricature nevertheless played an important role in apologist fiction and the perpetuation of plantation mythology. Simultaneously hypersexalized and desexualized,[2] the "Mammy," "Aunty," and "Granny" caricatures represent women whose selfhood, womanhood, and fertility were abused and exploited to people slave labor camps and nurse generations of white children at the expense of their own children's nourishment and nurturing. Authors of plantation literature made it a point

[1] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly*, 2 vols. (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture Multi-Media Archive*, accessed May 18, 2016

[2] As Micki McElya asserts, "There is an easy slippage […] between mother, the enslaved mammy, and that other symbol of selfless, unending, and markedly nonsexual maternal affection, the Virgin Mary." *Clinging to Mammy: the Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 2007), 43-4.

to emphasize the presumed intimacy between their white characters and the old slaves they claimed to love; yet, when applied to the "Aunt" caricature, this pathos assumed a morbid vantage point not often seen in representations of old, male slaves.[3]

Apologist authors rarely created any central female-slave characters who were not old enough to have earned the moniker, "Mammy," "Aunty," or "Granny," reinforcing the argument that pro-slavery writers preferred using aged-slave stock characters to people their fictional plantations due to a perceived lack of agency associated with advanced age. Slavery's sympathizers often interpreted these familial and mature titles (grown women were rarely referred to as "girl" in the way old black men were commonly called "boy") as evidence that slave-owners loved and venerated their slaves—especially their female caretakers—like kin.[4] And yet, if this claim had any basis in reality, slaves of all ages would be present in apologist texts, and with more substantial roles than local color backdrop. To have been called by any of the above referents did not necessarily imply a fondness or esteem for the "character model" as much as it did an inability or unwillingness of whites to view slave women as anything other than or separate from breeders, wet-nurses, and hypersexualized objects made to take abuse. Thus, "Mammy" et al. became a sign of recognition by the speaker of how the black woman's bodily functions both define and embody her function in the world.[5]

Unable to see black women without sexualizing them, these referents center on the productive capabilities of slave women in a way that is wholly different from the practice of

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[3] One exception, which is discussed in Chapter One, is William Gilmore Simms's *The Sword and the Distaff: Or, "Fair, Fat, and Forty." A Story of the South, at the Close of the Revolution* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852). *Internet Archive*, accessed July 15, 2015.

[4] Ibid, 9. As McElya points out, "identifying some slaves as being *like* family members denied the fact that many indeed *were* the biological children of owners and overseers."

[5] Ibid, 44. In her discussion of postbellum apologists Thomas Nelson Page and Gertrude Langhorne, McElya writes, "Despite long-standing protestations that the mammy was a completely nonsexual figure, there is sensuality approaching the erotic in both Page's and Langhorne's descriptions of the physical intimacy and racial role reversals in their experiences of black caretaking."

emasculating grown, and even elderly male slaves by referring to them as children. In addressing slave men as "boys," whites were attempting to weaken who they believed to be the greatest threats to their wealth and way of life. Slave women, however, were not normally addressed as "girls," because to do so would have been to force one's self to ignore their biological roles as "prolific mothers of [a] redundant brood."[6] Although apologist authors attempted to show some reverence for the elderly slaves within their works in order to appease northern readers, *real* enslaved women were rarely afforded any such sentiment—an indication that whites nursed by slaves (ironically) resented having to "share" their "Mammy" with her actual children. Omitting a slave mother's children from her narrative enabled antebellum pro-slavery authors to forego having to tell the story of how her children were sold away, and it also acts as a marking of territory for whites who wanted to present grown slaves as wholly devoted to generations of their "white families."[7] Antebellum apologist fiction writers further exaggerated and silenced elder black women through the highly-sentimentalized "Deathbed Aunty" trope that proliferated in Anti-Tom literature in the 1850s. These caricatures embodied the tension between hyper-sexuality and old age, professing their undying love and devotion to those who had grown fat on their milk and rich by their sex and labor(s) as they lay dying on the bed where it likely all began. The sexual and psychological trauma suffered by female slaves is acknowledged matter-of-factly in pro-slavery arguments, and is not confronted or examined in any way that might interfere with the author's literary and social aims of demonstrating that the love white families bore for their aged slaves made up for their lifetimes of servitude, suffering, and loss.

[6] John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion. Vol. II* (Philadelphia: Carey, 1832), 225. *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 17, 2015.
[7] When a "Mammy's" or "Aunty's" children do appear in an apologist text, she is often cruel to them—berating and beating them until they leave her so she can attend to her white "children."

Following Emancipation, the resentment at having lost such "devoted" female slaves resulted in a shift in representation. Whereas the antebellum "Deathbed Aunty" was provided for, loved, and was content to die with words of thankfulness on her lips, she is virtually non-existent in the postbellum apologist imagination.[8] No longer needing to censor all the tragic realities of enslavement from their work, southern humor writers such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page worked slave trauma into their narratives as a continuation of antebellum, pro-slavery "local color." Although Page's character, Ole 'Stracted, from the 1887 collection, *In Ole Virginia; or Marse Chan and Other Stories*, is represented as an old man who speaks nonsense due to decades of grief stemming from slavery, the "Distracted Aunty" trope is more common in postbellum apologist literature, due in large part to the nineteenth-century sentimentalism that posited mothers as feeling the most grief at losing family—specifically, their children. In devising the "Distracted Aunty" to replace the "Deathbed Aunty," postbellum apologists continued to silence aged black females by positing that their words were to be discounted as meaningless.

THE "DISTRACTED AUNTY" ANTECEDENT

John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn, or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832) is widely considered "the prototype" of the "southern plantation tradition,"[9] and is the first text of many to include a prolonged description of the quarters inhabited by a plantation's slave population. Near the end of the novel's second and final volume, the head of Swallow Barn

[8] Sherwood Bonner, *A Sherwood Bonner Sampler, 1869-1884*, edited by Anne Razey Gowdy (Knoxville, U of Tennessee P, 2000), 235. Sherwood Bonner (pen name for Katharine McDowell) includes both the act of preserving white heritage (the Gran'Mammy bestowing "your dead mother's weddin' slippers" to her young mistress) *and* the "Deathbed Aunty" trope in her 1875 story, "Gran'Mammy Tales," a character for which she became highly-regarded as a postbellum local color writer.

[9] Charles H. Bohner, *John Pendleton Kennedy, Gentleman from Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1961), 73.

plantation, Frank Meriwether, takes his visitor, the novel's narrator, Mark Littleton, to "The Quarter" to see where and how the slaves live, and it should come as no surprise that Littleton "pronounce[s] them a comparatively comfortable and contented race of people, with much less of the care and vexation of life than […] other classes of society."[10] In the chapter that follows, however, titled, "A Negro Mother," Meriwether introduces Littleton to Lucy, a slave in her sixties who relies on her daughter as her "sole attendant."[11] Although the presiding "Aunty" trope in antebellum pro-slavery literature is most certainly the "Deathbed Aunty," Kennedy's foundational apologist novel depicts an old slave woman driven to insanity by grief over the loss of her son, Abe. And, as was discussed in Chapter One, Kennedy's *Swallow Barn*, being the first of its kind, represents its slave characters in somewhat of a better light than its predecessors reacting to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the 1850s, although, as Gavin Jones and Judith Richardson write of pro-slavery novels, "The fact that their voices crack is, finally, what allows them to speak meaningfully, both to and beyond the limits of a failed ideology."[12] Although Lucy has delusions, and can be considered a prototype of the "Distracted Aunty" that appears in postbellum apologist fiction, Kennedy does not write off her grief, but highlights it—and not to be humorous. An in-depth look at how Kennedy characterizes Lucy (like her son Abe in Chapter One) gives an idea as to where plantation and local color fiction started, but more importantly, it reveals the drastic changes and heightened rhetoric that took place in apologist fiction as the Civil War drew closer, and after Emancipation for African-Americans had become a reality.

The reader (and the novel's narrator) are introduced to Lucy as she sits by a fire in her cabin, smoking her pipe with one hand and clutching a handkerchief in the other, "and, in the

[10] Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*, *Vol II*., 227.
[11] Ibid, 232.
[12] Gavin Jones and Judith Richardson, "Proslavery Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Slavery in American Literature*, ed. Ezra Tawil (New York: Cambridge UP, 2016), 112.

weak and childish musings of age, was beating one foot upon the floor with a regular and rapid stroke, such as is common to nurses when lulling a child to sleep."[13] The suggestion of the old woman as being lost in the musings of young motherhood sets the tone for the chapter, although it is not yet clear as to whether she is thinking of the white children she nursed when younger—as is so common in the mid-century pro-slavery novels that follow—or is remembering her own sweet babes. The narrator's first impression of Lucy is therefore an immediate reference to both motherhood and nursehood, which, in Lucy's case, has a detailed and understandable explanation: having suffered the loss of a child (albeit a grown one), Lucy is mentally and emotionally suspended in time.

When Lucy realizes she is not alone, it becomes clear that she is outside of reality more often than not. Speaking of herself in third person and believing *someone other than herself* to be Lucy, she explains that "Lucy's" time is short, as "'They are a-coming for her:—they tell me every night that they are a-coming to take her away.'"[14] When her owner asks *who* is coming, the old woman replies, "'They that told the old woman, […] that they buried his body in the sands of the sea.'"[15] Holding up the handkerchief clutched in her hand, she momentarily switches back to an acknowledgment that *she is* Lucy, explaining that the ones coming are the same who "brought me this [handkerchief] in the night."[16] Lucy's third-person referencing is Kennedy's way of indicting the severity of her fragile mental state, and it becomes apparent that the displacing of her trauma onto another woman functions as a coping mechanism through which she finds solace and hope. In believing in a better future for herself and her loved ones, she stays the emotional and spiritual grief that effectively broke the "other" Lucy.

[13] Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*, *Vol II*, 233.
[14] Ibid, 234.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

In the chapter titled, "Abe," Lucy's owner, Meriwether, relates the story of her youngest child, Abraham, or Abe, who he had sent to work as a seaman after he was nearly lynched for behavior that had "rendered him offensive to the whole plantation."[17] As Littleton explains, the impending separation from her youngest had the effect of making Abe flawless in his mother's eyes, and Lucy spent the remainder of their time together utterly doting on him. Excited by the prospect of adventure on the open water, Abe accepts his fate, while his mother is overcome by his impending departure. When the time comes for Abe to leave the plantation, his mother composes herself enough to take a small purse of silver from her bosom, only to have her son replace it, saying, "'I would rather have the handkerchief you wear around your neck, than all the silver you ever owned.'" [18] In response, Lucy removes the cloth and hands it to him to tie about his own neck. In this way, the rope that may have ended his life by the lynch mob is replaced with a symbol of his old mother's love.

After settling in to the ropes of his new profession, Abe excels as a sailor, but amidst turbulent Chesapeake waters, his boat disappears, with all save one of her crew. Upon receiving word that Abe and the other sailors have been lost, Lucy flatly denies the possibility of his death and continues to await her child's return. After a year and several months have passed, Lucy still has not given up hope that her son lives, and when Meriwether's wife gives her a mourning gown in an attempt to help her accept reality, Lucy asserts, "'I will never put on that dress […] because it would be bad luck to Abe. What would Abe say if he was to catch mammy Lucy wearing black clothes for him?"[19] Following this conversation, Lucy begins talking and singing to herself, and wandering the woods at night, with the weight of her grief notably bending her frame. On the third anniversary of his departure, to which Lucy has paid special attention, the old

[17] Ibid, 240.
[18] Ibid, 248.
[19] Ibid, 264.

woman rouses the quarters, shouting of her son's return. When the startled slaves follow her to her cabin, she invites them in to "'see how he is grown!'"[20] and to partake of the feast she has prepared for his long-awaited homecoming. The aged mother proceeds to talk to and dote on the empty chair next to her, and then shoos everyone out of the cabin so that the delusion may rest. Following this general confirmation of Lucy's descent into madness, some of the community:

> hoping to remove the illusion that Abe was still alive, brought her a handkerchief resembling that which she had given to him on his first departure; and, in delivering it to her, reported a fabricated tale, that it had been taken from around the neck of Abe, by a sailor who had seen the body washed up by the tide upon the beach of the sea, and had sent this relic to Lucy as a token of her son's death.[21]

Too far gone in her alternate reality, the appearance of the handkerchief does not have the desired effect, and only serves to lend "a more sober tone to her madness."[22] Some two years later, when Lucy shows the handkerchief to Meriwether and Littleton in her cabin, she states that she knew the supposed proof of death was a lie when they brought it to her, and maintains that her son still lives. With hope and disbelief, she tells them it has been "'Five years last February'" since Abe left Swallow Barn, and then, addressing Meriwether, she asks, "'How many years, honey, do you think a ship may keep going steady on without stopping? —It is a right long time, —isn't it, honey?'"[23] This question, followed up immediately with her own satisfactory answer that the boat is likely to continue on for years to come, mirrors Lucy's mental state. She, like the millions of bereft black mothers robbed of their children both during enslavement and long after, finds a way to live through her sorrow by allowing for the possibility that her child still lives—

[20] Ibid, 265.
[21] Ibid, 267.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid, 234.

somewhere, anywhere. By disavowing what everyone else considers fact, Lucy, like the version of Abe's boat that exists in her mind, is able to "keep going steady on."

Lucy's story and that of her son, Abe, are situated at the end of the second volume of *Swallow Barn*, as though the characters and their tragic stories may have been an afterthought—which they may very well have been, given the feudal focus of the rest of Kennedy's novel. And yet, in writing of Lucy and her grief, the author concedes the old mother's broken heart, and thus acknowledges—intentionally or not—a humanity in her that is routinely denied of younger slaves. In the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*[24] (1850), the former slave talks at length about the lifelong sorrow suffered by her parents after the repeated sales of their many children, and in *Twelve Years a Slave*[25] (1853), Solomon Northup chronicles the mental and physical decline of the slave Eliza, whose has been compelled to live with her owner and the father of her youngest child under the promise of manumission. When Eliza and her children are sold to a trader by her owner's daughter[26] and then forcibly separated, she, like Lucy, cannot and will not have them absent from her thoughts; and, like Lucy, she only knows peace when conversing with her dead.

As Northup explains, the once lovely and healthy Eliza wastes away to "a thin shadow of her former self. Her face had become ghastly haggard, and the once straight and active form was bowed down, as if bearing the weight of a hundred years."[27] With her heart broken and her spirit crushed, her body follows suit, and Eliza is "bartered for a trifle" to a cruel owner who "could not whip back the departed vigor of her youth, nor straighten up that bended body to its full

[24] Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828*. (Boston: Printed for the Author by J. B. Yerrinton, 1850), *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[25] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River, in Louisiana* (Auburn, NY: Derby, 1853), *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[26] Eliza and her children become subject to sale when their owner's daughter marries and inherits them as her portion of her father's estate.
[27] Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 159.

height, such as it was when her children were around her."[28] Sadly, the author reports that the "desolate and distracted mother,"[29] "utterly helpless, for several weeks lying on the ground floor in a dilapidated cabin, dependent upon the mercy of her fellowthralls for an occasional drop of water, and a morsel of food," [30] died alone, having never been reunited with her children. Northup's story of the slave mother's demise is in direct opposition to the paternalism touted in the pro-slavery narratives that follow *Swallow Barn*, as there is no gathering of anyone, let alone whites, to Eliza's side as she lay dying. There is no one praying for her and speaking of the joys awaiting her in heaven, and her deathbed is not in a "quaint and comfortable" cabin—it is not even a bed, but a cold, dirt floor in the last place that would tolerate her existence. As one can imagine, Eliza's story was not unique; indeed, if the aged "Aunts" of Anti-Tom fiction are any indication, the authors readily admitted that slave mothers were affected body, mind, and soul by the regular sales and mistreatment of their children. And yet, suffering mothers of Eliza's age are not generally seen in apologist texts. Rather, such trauma is reserved for elderly characters, who, as their advanced years presumably argue, have managed to grow old under slavery despite any perceived mistreatments. The plight of a younger enslaved character, perhaps illustrated best by Stowe's Eliza, would have stirred sympathy among female readers, whereas the miseries of old women were considered beyond help, and not in need of immediate, or even prolonged attention.

The Antebellum Debut of the "Deathbed Aunty"

After the resounding success of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, pro-slavery authors began to feature superannuated slave characters that were extremely religious, allowing authors to

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid, 51.
[30] Ibid, 160.

claim Christian conversion as the primary motive and positive outcome of slavery. Often, these apologist caricatures claimed to be happy to be enslaved, as it enabled them to be "saved from paganism." Virginia writer, Mary H. Eastman, author of *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life as it Is*[31] (1852)—one of the earliest and most commercially successful Anti-Tom texts, published just months after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—wasted no time communicating her pious stance on slavery. Commencing the novel's preface with the following religious justification, she writes, "A writer on Slavery has no difficulty in tracing back its origin. There is also the advantage of finding it, with its continued history, and the laws given by God to govern his own institution, in the Holy Bible."[32] Eastman's preface reads like the typical, antebellum pro-slavery sermons William Wells Brown refutes a year later in his novel, *Clotel*,[33] with the author citing the sins of "a child dishonoring an aged father"[34] and the first murder as the reasons slavery exists—adding that since major Biblical figures such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob owned slaves, human bondage is sanctioned by God. Eastman likewise touts the paternalism of Christian conversion in her book of Dakota folklore, *Dacotah, or Life and Legends of the Sioux Around Fort Snelling*[35] (1849), which she begins with a letter to Minnesota House Representative, Henry Sibley, "a friend and mentor [of Eastman's], as well as the source of information and anecdotes about the Dakota."[36] Mary Eastman and her husband, Seth—whose first military post was at Fort Snelling in 1830,[37] and who served there again as a commanding

[31] Mary H. Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[32] Ibid, 11.
[33] William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London: Partridge, 1853). *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.
[34] Ibid, 12.
[35] Mary H. Eastman, *Dahcotah; or, Life and Legends of the Sioux around Fort Snelling* (New York: John Wiley, 1849). *Internet Archive*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[36] Rhoda R. Gilman *Henry Hastings Sibley: Divided Heart* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2004), 90.
[37] A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff, "Eastman's Maternal Ancestry: Letter from Charles Alexander Eastman to H. M. Hitchcock, September 8, 1927," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 17.2 (2005): 10.

officer throughout most of the 1840s—both held Sibley in high esteem, and in Mary's letter to him, the author writes of their shared beliefs in "promoting the good of our fellow-creatures," her confidence in Sibley's desire to "assist and protect the Indian," and proclaims the aim of her work is to "excite attention to the moral wants of the Dahcotahs."[38] In comparing Eastman's language regarding the two racially-subjugated groups, it is evident that she retains empathy for Native Americans and Dakota culture (at the same time she is trying to eradicate it via religious assimilation), but not for enslaved African Americans. One cannot help but wonder if she would have regarded Natives in the same (relatively) positive light had she been "aware that both Sibley and her own husband had Dakota daughters," of which "the fact [of her knowledge] is not recorded,"[39] and that Seth's own grandson would become one of the most famous Native Americans of the early twentieth century.[40]

As the title of *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* suggests, Eastman was not aiming for subtlety in her "*as It Is*" counter-argument to Stowe's depiction of slavery, and although her religious-conversion rhetoric is similar to that found in *Dahcotah*, the novel's mocking representations of blacks and callous tone regarding slavery are in stark contrast to the more positive—albeit denigrating—moralizing she uses to introduce her appropriation of Dakota folklore. Two of *Aunt Phillis's* three aged-slave characters, Uncle Bacchus and Aunt Peggy, are highlighted early on, while the third, Bacchus's wife, the eponymous Aunt Phillis, is not introduced until several chapters later. Aunt Peggy is one of the first, if not *the* first, "Deathbed Aunties" to appear in Anti-Tom fiction; yet, unlike like Kennedy's somewhat tame depiction of Lucy as a "Distracted

[38] Eastman, *Dahcotah*, 3.
[39] Gilman, *Henry Hastings Sibley*, 90.
[40] Eastman's husband Seth had married a Dakota woman and fathered a child, Winona, with her when he was first stationed at Fort Snelling in 1830, but left them when he was reassigned to Louisiana in 1833, likely to help with the removal of the Seminole Indians from Florida. Winona went on to have five children, dying shortly after the childbirth of her youngest, Charles Eastman, who later became the first Native American to receive a medical degree in the United States, a noted author of several memoirs and books on Native life and culture, and who helped found the Boy Scouts of America. Ruoff, "Eastman's Maternal Ancestry," 10-11.

Aunty" in *Swallow Barn* (which apologists represent much more disparagingly after Emancipation), Eastman's inaugural "Deathbed Aunty" is combative and assertive to the point that the Anti-Tom writers following her lead revised the trope to be utterly docile and contented.

At one point in the novel, Aunty Peggy's owner, Weston, walks in to find the old woman berating Phillis's husband, Bacchus. As his name suggests, the old man is prone to getting drunk, and Peggy makes clear that she has no time or sympathy for such a man. Peggy verbally assaults Bacchus, pointing out that she had already "worked [her] time,'" and calling him a "good-for-nothing, lazy wagabond [sic…] not worth the hommony [he] eats."[41] The old woman unknowingly stokes the ire of her owner by failing to notice his appearance and continuing on with her tirade. When Weston declares that Peggy's advanced age and many years of service are the only things preventing him from punishing her for her conduct, she turns her wrath upon him instead. The slaveholder instructs Peggy to set a "good example" and be quiet, or leave the kitchen and not come back, to which the old woman retorts, "'Don't be afeard, master, I can stay in my own cabin. If I has been well treated, it's no more den I desarves. I'se done nuff for you and yours, in my day; slaved myself for you and your father before you. De Lord above knows I dont want ter stay whar dat ole drunken nigger is, no how."[42] Peggy shatters whatever myths or delusions Weston might have about the supposed "tie between master and slave"[43] as she believes her decades of forced toil for others have earned her the right to make *them* remember that *she* remembers. Consequently, what Eastman intends as an example of the general recalcitrance of slaves and the need for a paternalistic, cradle-to-grave institution ends up being a victory for the defiant old woman. It is this boldness and sense of self-possession that other Anti-

[41] Ibid, 48.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid, 47.

Tom writers feel compelled to correct within their own "Aunty" caricatures, as Peggy is too headstrong and too confident to be an effective symbol of slavery's benefits for northern readers.

Eastman's narrative solution for "dealing with" her recalcitrant "Aunt" is to forego further discussion of her "sass," and to highlight instead the benevolence of slave owners. The author employs her narrator to expose the tension between the pro-slavery message of the novel and the obviously anti-slavery character, Peggy, prompting him to ask, "But, what will the Abolitionist say to this scene? Where were the whip and the cord, and other instruments of torture?"[44]—as if *not* physically torturing an elderly black woman is the benchmark of southern slaveholding achievement. The narrator closes the chapter, not by claiming that Peggy and others actually appreciate their enslavement (which becomes the standard in the fiction of Eastman's apologist contemporaries), but with the religious rationalization that slavery brings Christianity, and, as such, there should be steamers from every port "bearing our colored people to their natural home!"[45] Thus, Eastman uses Peggy's harsh speech as evidence that she needs religion to successfully silence her—a pro-slavery torch that other Anti-Tom writers pick up and run with.

Eastman goes into great detail describing Aunt Peggy's appearance and cross demeanor, her capture and crossing of the Middle Passage, the night of her death, and her funeral. The author positions Aunt Phillis as the equivalent to Stowe's pious and selfless Uncle Tom, and as the antithesis to Peggy, who "cared nothing about religion."[46] As the narrator explains, "When employed in the family, she had been obliged to go sometimes to church," yet in her old age, "she had never gone […] as far as they could judge."[47] Despite Peggy's abrasive deportment, Phillis, concerned with the fate of her soul, stops by her cabin one night. Peggy claims that death

[44] Ibid, 50.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid, 147.
[47] Ibid.

is near, but that it comes for children and young people more often than the elderly, and that it has likely not come for her. Although Peggy is confident that she need not fear death, she nevertheless passes in her sleep the same night, and is discovered by Phillis the next morning.

Notwithstanding Aunt Peggy's general dislike for everyone, white *and* black, her funeral is presented as a large affair—a literary display of the supposed esteem slaveholders had for their human property, and which also becomes the norm in antebellum apologist fiction. The plantation's slaves are given the day off to attend the service and burial, and Weston arranges for the Episcopalian clergyman, Mr. Caldwell, to conduct the service. Not surprisingly, Caldwell's sermon focuses on "the will of God, which had placed them in a condition of bondage to an earthly master; who had given them equal hope of eternal redemption with that master."[48] In closing, "He pointed to the coffin that contained the remains of one who had attained so great an age, as to make her an object of wonder in the neighborhood. […] God had given her a long time of health to prepare for the great change; he had given her every opportunity to repent, and he had called her to her account."[49] Through the minister, Eastman uses Peggy's impending, yet ultimately unlooked-for death to warn the enslaved of dying with their souls tarnished and unprepared. Because she came directly from Africa, many of the slaves believed Peggy "to have the power of foresight in her old age,"[50] and some feared she was a witch. In her death-night conversation with Phillis, Peggy talks of her abduction from Africa and her traumatic voyage to America, and it becomes clear why the old woman refuses to play the part of the grateful and faithful slave. Peggy remembers every detail of her capture and subsequent enslavement, and refuses to pretend that she has been happy to live as a slave simply because whites told her that *their* God had ordained it.

[48] Ibid, 156.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid, 147.

Peggy not only speaks of the African man (Eastman is sure to note thatPeggy was initially enslaved by another black person) who attacked her as a child and threatened to "'smash my brains out if I made a sound,'" she describes the inhumanity of the Middle Passage. As she explains, they "'Tied me to a woman, and den untied me to fling her into de sea—dead all night, and I tied to her. Come long, cross de great sea; more died, more flung to de sharks. No wonder it thundered and lightened, and de waves splashed in, and de captain prayed. Lord above! de captain prayed, when he was stealin and murderin of his fellow-creeturs.'"[51] Peggy ends her devastating captivity narrative by saying she was forced to work day and night ever since, to which Phillis offers the paltriest of responses, declaring, "'You never worked a bit in the night time, Aunt Peggy […] and you know it.'"[52] Despite Phillis's wishes, Peggy does not embrace religion or repent before she dies, as she has endured too much, and has no faith in the God of her enslavers. Thus, one wonders how Peggy would have reacted to hearing Caldwell preaching faithfulness to one's master and preparing for judgment day at her funeral. Although Eastman crafts the details of Peggy's life, death, and funeral to impress upon readers the righteousness of slavery, her characterization of the old woman actually exposes the argumentative smokescreen that slavery and forced religiosity "saved the slaves from themselves."

ANTI-TOM REVISIONS OF EASTMAN'S "DEATHBED AUNTY"

Philadelphia preacher, teacher, and proponent of colonization, Reverend Baynard R. Hall, principal of the seminary that would become Indiana University,[53] and author of the Anti-Tom

[51] Ibid, 148.
[52] Ibid.
[53] See Gil R. Stormont's "Indiana University History Sketches " for an interesting take on Hall's time at the Seminary, in which the author claims Hall's "vindictive spirit" caused "troubles [that were] detrimental to the College." Although Hall resigned, Stormont's account asserts, "it was some time before the College recovered from the effects of the troubles caused by the factional differences of the faculty, and was restored to the promising

novel, *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop: A Tale*[54] (1852), discusses at length the African upbringing of his primary "Aunt" character, Mammy Dinah, so as to provide a more compelling illustration of the power of conversion and the blessed paternalism of the institution of slavery. Whereas Stowe had her ultra-religious (and middle-aged) Uncle Tom die a premature death, far from his wife and children, Hall's Dinah, at over one hundred years old, is so valued (the antithesis to Eastman's unpopular Aunt Peggy) that everyone close to her, white and black, flocks to her side at her death. Hall names a chapter after the "Death of Dinah," in which the old slave is "calmly, joyously, yes triumphantly, awaiting the death-slumber!"[55] And although Dinah's death scene is bookended with her devout Christianity, the majority of the narration is regarding her African beginnings. The centenarian is described as "a native African," whose "face and arms were scarred and seamed with sacred marks, by which her regal ancestors were distinguished and known as children of the gods!"[56] As Dinah told it, her father was a king and great warrior of the Gold Coast, where he captured, sacrificed, and sold many prisoners of war. She fell in love with a prince her father captured, and, after freeing him, she was taken captive while he died fighting. Like an elderly poster-child for pro-slavery conversion narratives, Dinah laments how she once felt proud to witness a "'hunder black man took into to de bush for make sacrifice—But I, poor blind hethun—I know now de cross of Christ!—I's differunt now—I could

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prospects of its beginnings." *Indiana University Alumni Quarterly* 7.1 (1920): 555. *Google Books*, accessed April 5, 2016.

[54] Baynard Rush Hall, *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop: A Tale* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.

[55] Ibid, 118.

[56] Ibid. Hall's depiction of Dinah is an elongated version of the one he penned under the pseudonym, Robert Carlton, in *Something for Every Body: Gleaned in The Old Purchase from Fields Often Reaped* (1846), in which Maria, the narrator's mother's nurse, is explained as "a genuine African; and doubtless, also, once a zealous idolater; for when brought o America her face was gashed and scarred according to some pagan superstition," Robert Carlton, in *Something for Every Body: Gleaned in The Old Purchase from Fields Often Reaped* (New York: D. Appleton, 1846), 85. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.

die for de poor black man now!'"[57] The inclusion of slavery within African tribes is a common fallback argument for pro-slavery advocates, who believed it justified enslavement in America. Dinah's religious conversion is highlighted through her story, as she recounts how she initially "'had much big sorrow, dear massa!'" but concludes that her enslavement was a good thing, "case here I find Jesus; and 'de lite affliction work out de 'ternal glory!'"[58] Dinah, whose dialect sounds more like a Native American stereotype than a person of African descent, claims that her enslavement is but a light burden to bear when weighed against the glory she has been promised by white religion. Her affirmations regarding Christianity are supposed to mean all the more because she is a "genuine African," illustrating another reason why younger women were not included as main characters in these mid-nineteenth century pro-slavery texts: they would have been presumed too young[59] to "appreciate" the role slavery played in bringing them from Africa to America.[60]

Figure 6: "Death of Dinah." Full-page Illustration by Rush B. Hall for Baynard R. Hall's *Frank Freeman's Barbershop: A Tale*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1852, 120.

Members of Mammy Dinah's black and white families, including her great-great grandchildren, Carrie and Joe, and her owners, Mr. and Mrs. Leamington, surround her deathbed. The idyllic scene, so different from the relatively

[57] Ibid, 118.
[58] Ibid, 119.
[59] The Slave Trade Act of 1807 abolished the importation of new slaves into America, yet Africans were smuggled into the country for decades afterward, so a percentage, albeit not an especially large one, of middle-aged slaves living in the mid-nineteenth century could have attested to their abductions from their homes and their experiences in/with the Middle Passage.
[60] Reference to Phillis Wheatley's poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," from *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London: A. Bell, 1773). *Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Digital Collections*, accessed April 5, 2016.

unattended death of Stowe's Tom, prompts the narrator to exclaim, "None thought of color in that hut! Christ was there! Solemnity reigned, and without terror! The dying saw no darkness in the valley she had now entered! and the stream beyond was calm, its waters bright with gleamings from a glory partly revealed!"[61] When Dinah calls her owner to her side to say farewell, his wife begins to sob, to which the dying woman responds, "'Missis! Miss Mary! I hear—I no see you! I nursed your mudder! I nursed you, missis! Your mudder angel now! I go see old missis!—glory!—I go—now.'"[62] Hall emphasizes Dinah's death scene in order to illustrate the alleged familial bond the narrator early defines when he declares, "If implicit confidence can be found reposed in any, it is by southern parents in old family slaves that have buried their mothers and nursed the children's children! Meet a bear robbed of her whelps; but attempt not to tear away the white babes from the black woman's heart! She would rend you, as if she were a raving maniac!"[63] In having Dinah—in her death-throes, no less—proclaim that she nursed both Mrs. Leamington and her mother, Hall is reinforcing his claim that the enslaved themselves value whiteness more than their own race.[64] With her biological family also present, Dinah's focus on the generations of white children she nursed, nurtured, and raised detracts from the consideration of her actual family, and how they were denied her time and attention in life, and now, in death.

The entirety of Dinah's deathbed speech is focused on *whom* she served and *how* she served them. As the old woman lie surrounded by her owner's family, with her own standing silently and passively in the background, "A sigh quivered from the half-parted lips! A smile

[61] Ibid, 120.
[62] Ibid, 121.
[63] Ibid, 15.
[64] For another example of a slave family's preoccupation with their white owners, see J. Thornton Randolph's (pseudonym for Charles Jacobs Peterson) *The Cabin and Parlor; or, Slaves and Masters*, particularly the conversation between the elderly couple, Uncle Peter and Aunt Vi'let (Violet) in Chapter Two, "The Negro Quarter" (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 1852), *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture Multi-Media Archive*, accessed April 5, 2016.

fixed on the stiffening features!—then, was the hush of death!'" Hall's account of Mammy Dinah's final moments is rather grotesque and arguably perverse, yet the reader is supposed to find comfort in the old slave's passing, as is evident by the immediate narrative observation that sums up the majority of such deathbed plots: "An idolator [sic] was saved! A slave was free!"[65] Thus, a lifetime of enslavement is the price Africans and their descendants must pay for the religion forced on them, and death their only release from the unsought debt.

Because of her advanced age, Dinah's funeral, like Aunt Peggy's from Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*, is an event. Because she is so beloved, however, hers is described as "a kind of national funeral"—for which all work is called off so that everyone on the plantation can attend.[66] The only notable difference between the two is that, unlike Hall's Mammy Dinah, Peggy was disliked to the point that Eastman's narrator describes (at her memorial, no less) how "no one had loved her in life," and how it took "The first hard clod [of dirt] that rattled on the coffin"[67] for her fellow slaves to reproach themselves for not extending any kindnesses to the hardened woman. Though their personalities and outlooks on slavery are in stark contrast to one another, Peggy and Dinah share the experience of having been born and raised in Africa, kidnapped by slavers, and sold as plantation labor in America. Peggy's abrasive nature causes the younger slaves around her to associate her African heritage with witchcraft, and to fear her even more. And, since Peggy was not a religious woman, her funeral sermon is more a lesson to the other slaves on "righteous conduct" than it is a reflection of how she lived, disproving Eastman's argument that slavery was a positive institution for all involved due to religious conversions. On the contrary, Dinah's fellow slaves view her connection to Africa with reverent awe, not with fear, as "They were going to lay in the grave one that had known their fathers'

[65] Hall, *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop*, 121.
[66] Ibid, 122.
[67] Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*, 158.

fathers—that had looked on their ancestors beyond the ocean—that had outlived the ancients—and that had heard the boat songs of the dead!"[68] Because Hall's Dinah is a devout religious convert, there is no need to express white fears of her paganism through the stereotype of black superstition; instead, the thoughts of whom she had known and where she had been prompts differing veins of reflection from the two races.

Although the funeral's black attendees are focused on Dinah's link to distant ancestors and recent family members, the white attendees associate the old slave's African birth with how it once served to amuse them—but only after another breastfeeding reference. To the whites Dinah raised, the slave's past belongs to and revolves around them, as:

> The negress that played in youth with the early lords of the islands—that had nursed their own mothers, and fondled and protected themselves in infancy—that told them fearful tales of her own early life in the idolators' land, and terrified them with legends of witchcraft and incantation,—imitating the look and howl of conjurors and priests—that could give chronicles of the long past, and had history of their kith and kin—aye—that had dropped tears on the faces of their own dead.[69]

Hall continues to situate Dinah's owners, and not her descendants, as the funerary focal point when scores of white "gentlemen and ladies" lead the way to Dinah's gravesite, followed by the "chief mourners," among which are Dinah's great-grandchildren, who, "having adopted their grandmother's white children, each held one by the hand."[70] This unifying gesture is meant to signify the compliance of slaves, both young and old, in a system of forced servitude that demands absolute compliance and a denial of selfhood—demonstrated most clearly by Dinah's descendants "adopting" the white family that had exploited their elder kinswoman for a lifetime.

[68] Hall, *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop*, 123.
[69] Ibid, 123-4.
[70] Ibid, 124.

To reiterate this underlying and obscured fact, the narrator admits that although "The proper place for Dinah's grave was on a far distant island; for there lay the negroes that had been her youthful companions," "the great inconvenience made it necessary that she should lie among the dead of a new generation"[71] And with that, all culpability of those who enslaved her for over half a century is avoided, as is any sense of responsibility concerning her burial "among the dead of a new generation," which refers to a generation of human beings who died just as Dinah had: removed from their families, homes, heritage, and a world away from the lives they should have had.

By the time John W. Page published *Uncle Robin, in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom Without One in Boston*[72] in 1853, more than a half-dozen Anti-Tom novels had already been released,[73] and inventive plotlines had apparently become a thing of the past. The pro-slavery signature death in *Uncle Robin* is that of Aunt Juno; yet, given that her character model had died several high-profile deaths by this time,[74] the scene reads as comical rather than tragic. A major contributing factor to this less serious tone is Juno's barely-coherent minstrel show dialect, juxtaposed with the overly-formal language of her owners, Dr. and Mrs. Boswell. When Aunt Dinah (distinguishable character names, like inventive plots, were also abandoned in the Anti-Tom subgenre) wakes Dr. Boswell to tell him that Juno's health is worsening, he goes to attend to her. Seeing she is not likely to recover, he asks if she is ready to join her heavenly father, to

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[71] Ibid, 124-5.
[72] John W. Page, *Uncle Robin, in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without One in Boston* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1853). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[73] See Sarah N. Roth, *Gender and Race in Antebellum Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2014). Roth's Table (5.1) on *Anti-Uncle Tom Fiction, 1852-1860*, lists seventeen Anti-Tom texts published in this time period, along with the geographic affiliations of the authors, 143-45.
[74] Another Anti-Tom text featuring the death of a slave "Aunt" is Martha Haines Butt's *Antifanaticism: A Tale of the South*, in which the aged Aunt Nelly dies while Dora, one of the youngest generations of Nelly's "white children" is away at school. When Dora returns home, she grieves at Nelly's grave, only to reassure her mother soon after that her melancholy is "only momentary, and I do not intend to get in any such moods again; I am going to banish it altogether." (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1853), 246. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016.

which the old slave responds in broken, infantile language: "'Yes, massy, Juner glad—Juner gwine—Juner gwine meet dat Man old missy tell Juner 'bout—say die for Juner—Juner be happy in hebbin—Juner no farder here; no moder here; no broder here; no sisser here'"[75] Although Page is mindful to have Juno affirm her love for her owners, she also speaks to her loneliness and disconnectedness from her real family, which has not abated over the course of her long life. Boswell's patronizing response to her pain is to ask leadingly, "'But you have kind friends here; haven't you?'" [76] which, when paired with Juno's particular style of dialect, conjures images of a man comforting a child rather than one speaking to an elder. When the doctor returns to his wife with the news of Juno's inevitable passing, their mutual tone is not overly-sentimental, as in the previously-discussed deathbed scenes, but is contrived to the point that it is almost laughable.

After relating the bad news to his wife, Dr. Boswell rationalizes, "'I am much pleased to find that she is aware of her situation, and that she is perfectly willing to go. She is a child of God, snatched from heathenism by his grace vouchsafed to the pious labours of my dear mother'"[77] Apparently pleased that Juno has accepted her logical fate, Mrs. Boswell responds, "'My dear husband, what a beautiful thought it is that a poor African, once condemned to be eaten by cannibals, should be now on her death-bed, in a Christian country, surrounded by Christian friends, and rejoicing in the assurance of eternal salvation.'"[78] Mrs. Boswell's belief that being born and raised in Africa equates to guaranteed death by cannibalism only serves to emphasize the absurdity of their conversation—and, by proxy, all religious justifications for enslavement that the "Deathbed Aunty" espouses.

[75] Page, *Uncle Robin*, 135.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid, 136.
[78] Ibid.

One begins to wonder why Page bothered to include the death of Juno, considering the quickness with which he moves through the old slave's death and burial. Whereas Eastman and Hall devote a good deal of attention to the final moments and funerals of their respective "Aunts," Page does not—nor does he depict the white slave owners as being much involved in the burial preparations or service of their long-time servant. When the narrator states, "The Doctor sent for Robin, and gave orders for a pine coffin,"[79] it is not clear whether he is paying for a coffin for Juno, or whether it is to be made by his other slaves; either way, his contribution requires no personal effort. Page does explain that the female slaves laid Juno's body out and stayed with it over night, "singing hymns as a requiem to the dead,"[80] but there is no mention of the owners grieving the loss of the slave who had, by all accounts, faithfully served generations of their family. There is likewise little discussion of Juno's burial, which is summed up thusly:

> The next morning the corpse was carried to Uncle Robin's cabin, where several funeral hymns were sung, and an address delivered by a coloured minister of the neighbourhood, from the text, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth," &c. After the services were ended, the corpse was carried to the plantation burial-ground; and in the grave of Aunt Juno was mingled the dust of two continents.[81]

Page's representation of a "beloved Aunt's" death glosses over the details pertaining to the death and burial that previous Anti-Tom authors had included in order to show the benevolence of their cherished system of chattel slavery. The conversations regarding Juno's illness are coarse compared to the sentimental portraits of the deaths of Hall's beloved Mammy Dinah, and even Eastman's unpopular Aunt Peggy; additionally, it is the slaves, not the deceased's "white family" who attend to the burial rites of their elder. Also surprising is Page's

[79] Ibid, 137.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid, 138.

authorial decision to quickly "wrap up" the sanctity of the funeral service by using an ampersand to summarize the black preacher's chosen bible verses, instead of using the opportunity to highlight the religiosity of slaves in order to argue Christian conversion as a positive effect of slavery. Page closes with the fact that, "in the grave of Aunt Juno was mingled the dust of two continents," but, as illustrated by Dr. and Mrs. Boswell's comments about cannibalism in Africa and Juno having been "snatched from heathenism," there is no reverence or esteem extended to the continent of her birth. The sad reality is that, despite the sentimental reinforcement of slave/master relationships central to pro-slavery literature, the death of a single slave—especially one past working age—would have had little impact when so many more remained.

Although the majority of Anti-Tom novels were published soon after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, the genre reemerged in the years preceding the war, often in epistolary form, wherein authors packaged their pro-slavery arguments in supposed first-hand accounts in order to privilege white literacy over black orality. Edward A. Pollard's *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South*[82] (1859) is a series of letters to an anti-slavery friend that focus almost exclusively on elderly slaves. Pollard writes of an old, female slave named Aunt Marie in the context of "the first scene of death I ever witnessed," the impression of which, "can never be erased or wholly overcome."[83] Unlike Page, Pollard relishes the sentimentalism of the "Deathbed Aunty" trope, describing "the death of her who had held a place in my boyish heart, second only to the beautiful and lasting love we draw from community of blood—the death of a poor, old, black-skinned woman."[84] Although he is praising her as an angel of sorts, he ends by presenting the reader with a rather grim picture of Marie. His sentimentalism heightens to seeming titillation

[82] Edward A. Pollard, *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Pudney, 1860), *Internet Archive*, accessed August 24, 2015.
[83] Ibid, 92.
[84] Ibid.

as he continues, "The angel of terrors struck her in age, disease, and feebleness; and yet the scene of the parting of the spirit was one of the most mysterious and appalling struggles that ever yet appealed to my eyes."[85] In a gothic-influenced retelling, Pollard writes, "Well do I recollect the night of gloom and storm, when the all-visiting messenger of death came in the darkness to the little log hut, and stood by the old straw couch, to demand the fleeting spirit of the old, worn slave."[86] In his letter, Pollard writes how he braved a thunderous night to be by Marie's side, and how Mother Nature reminded him of the helplessness of humanity against merciless, omnipresent forces such a death.

After reaching the cabin, he describes how he approached her bedside "with a strange curiosity," finding the old slave "out of her senses," with her "soul wandering forth in a dark and terrible delirium."[87] Pollard's language becomes even more intense, as he recounts:

> Horror-struck, I gazed upon the scene of death, and yet curious, eager to note every sign of the awful change, stretching forward to see each token of agony and each print of death. For twelve hours I witnessed that scene, during which time the dying old slave was in the pains of dissolution, and never can I forget that long spell of utter heart-broken agony, mingled strangely with the most mysterious caprices of thought and fancy.[88]

Pollard's preoccupation with what Juno looks like and experiences while dying is a scrutinizing, methodical examination couched in sentiment. Having explained that Marie's death was the first he ever "witnessed," the author's fascination seems more focused on the act of her dying rather than on the dying person he claims to have loved. Additionally, Pollard's dark, descriptive language (e.g. "angel of terrors," "messenger of death," and "merciless, omnipresent forces")

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid, 93.
[88] Ibid, 93-4.

suggests that a visit from the grim reaper was inevitable for Juno (and by extension, all Africans), thus further emphasizing Pollard's imagined sense of virtue and sacrifice in making the inconvenient journey to her deathbed.

Pollard asserts in his letter that he was "eager to note every sign of the awful change," and that he "stretch[ed] forward to see each token of agony and print of death," over the course of her twelve-hour demise. Even as he states that Marie was in a great deal of pain, he admits that his focus was on the visible marks left by that pain, making her and her death the sole object of his gaze. He describes what he calls "the curious psychology of the soul," or, the "thoughts of utter levity and recollections of rude mirth, that intrude even while the broken spirit bewails its loved and lost by the couch of death, or in the last heart-rending but beautiful office of the burial."[89] With seemingly more delight than horror or grief, Pollard tells how he watched Marie die, "watched it all — the writhing of those lips, the gaze of dumb terror in those eyes as they looked upon the hidden spectres and the weary reaching out of the arms above the head."[90] Similar to Hall's description of Aunt Dinah's last quivering sigh from her "half-parted lips," Pollard's depiction of Marie's last moments concentrates on the "writhing" of her lips and her "gaze of dumb terror," with which he is enamored.

When the doctor says Marie likely died without feeling pain, Pollard questions how one can be sure, but finds solace in the fact that her last act before her "body stretch[ed] out, sharp, rigid, [and] dead," was to join her hands in prayer, surrounded by the minister and "white faces wet with tears."[91] Although he is initially preoccupied as to the level of her suffering, he eventually shifts focus from the grotesque gestures of Marie's death throes to the white faces within the cabin. Pollard abandons his morbid curiosity with the old woman's death, and

[89] Ibid, 94.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, 95.

seamlessly transitions into the wholly predictable, holy influence of the "cradle-to-grave" institution, claiming, "seldom is it, that the slave is left to meet his death as the white pauper in his rags and desolation. His master and mistress and the white family are always by to visit him in this great need of humanity."[92] Although Page's account of the death of Aunt Juno shows a much more perfunctory approach to the death of a long-time slave, Pollard asserts that elderly slaves with long-lasting ties to one family are treated especially well, maintaining that he often sees Marie, "with love-lit eyes […] beckoning to me from Heaven."[93] However, Pollard's concentration on the minutiae of Marie's death conjures images of the thousand-plus people who paid P.T. Barnum to watch the autopsy of his sideshow slave, the aged Joice Heth.[94] The author's focus is so intent on *how* Marie is dying, he ends up eroticizing and objectifying the very woman he professes to love as a second mother—the same of which could be said for all the Anti-Tom authors who felt compelled to have their "Deathbed Aunties" reference breastfeeding as they lie dying. When Marie is at her most vulnerable, Pollard's interest lies in satiating his morbid curiosity upon one who cannot object to his callous ogling. Although Pollard claims he rushed to Marie's deathbed to comfort her and say his goodbyes, his excited descriptions of her final hours suggest that he went to her, not to ease her suffering, but to witness, study, and document it.

Narratives of the formerly enslaved, such as those by Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Solomon Northup, and Harriet Jacobs, chronicled the many abuses levied at female slaves, including beatings and lashings, rape (or the constant threat of it), forced "marriages," the selling of their children, and the possible replacement or turning out of these same women upon reaching old age. Pro-slavery narratives, not surprisingly, tended to avoid all discussion of these

[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid, 97.
[94] Barnum promoted Heth as the 161 year-old slave woman as the wet-nurse of baby George Washington. See Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001).

tragic realities, instead presenting readers with numerous illustrations as to how these women loved, and were loved by, their "white families" (often more so than their own). However, the roles these aged, "Deathbed Aunties" play within pro-slavery texts is minimal. Other than dying, these women serve little narrative purpose other than as tools for pro-slavery authors to argue the paternalism and religiosity of chattel slavery through their final testimonies. With the exception of Eastman's Peggy, the words these elder(ly) women speak are dripping with devotion for their enslavers. Pro-slavery writers make it clear that the values of the women these caricatures were based on lie solely in the eyes of white beholders; meaning, their existences are deemed worthwhile only in terms of services rendered to whites. To dare to live for themselves or their own people, and especially to nurture their own children at the expense of the attention paid to the white children in their care, was considered a *distraction* from a black woman's primary duties and perceived as an assault on whiteness. As pro-slavery fiction in the postbellum era demonstrates, albeit inadvertently, the intimate relationships black women managed to sustain with their husbands and children were resented by the class of whites who had convinced themselves that their "Mammies" and "Aunties" had preferred them to all others. This resentment is palpable after considering but a few postbellum apologist works in which the authors make it clear that their aim is to silence elder black women by any means necessary.

POSTBELLUM RESENTMENT AND THE "DISTRACTED AUNTY"

Before the war and Emancipation, detailed descriptions of "Aunty" death-scenes were intended to convince northern readers that slavery was a kindly institution that provided for its elderly after their many years of enslavement. Furthermore, the "Deathbed Aunty" trope

provided apologist writers the perfect vehicle to place words of praise for enslavement in the mouths of elder(ly) dying women. Since it no longer served postbellum authors to kill off aged female characters to garner sympathy for the supposed kinship of the enslaved and their owners, the genre's literary focus became increasingly centered on "Uncle" caricatures as a means of attacking black masculinity in post-Emancipation society. In addition to metaphorically neutering their black male characters, postbellum apologists psychologically crippled their older male and female characters through the debilitating traumas their antebellum counterparts generally avoided or flat-out denied. For their aged female characters in particular, the narratives of their traumas are, like the many deathbed references to nursing, simultaneous acts of hypersexualization and desexualization. These elder women are hypersexualized in that they are nearly always referenced in relation to nursing—most often their "white children," their own having died or been sold away long ago—and desexualized in that the long passage of time since their respective losses implies post-menopausal women who, in ceasing to bleed and produce milk, no longer hold the same value to their white owners as when they were "breeders" and wet-nurses. Being "past their prime," these women were often left to live out their days, bereft of the many children who would have loved and cared for them in their old age.

Many twentieth-century white Americans, particularly women,[95] felt they were denied their entitlement to a "Mammy" (or "Aunty") that would live just for them—which was the message pro-slavery literature disseminated. As Micki McElya asserts in her analysis of apologist literature and culture, "Claiming a connection to a mammy, no matter how tenuous or commodified, was soothing to whites. The mammy narrative confirmed not only their racial

[95] "Since its inception in antebellum proslavery literature, white women had a special connection to the mammy figure. They were, in fact, the country's primary producers and consumers of the faithful slave narrative." McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 39.

superiority but also their desires for higher rank and social worth."[96] Additionally, McElya claims that white "longing for access to black women's bodies, beds, and private lives" increased dramatically in the early twentieth century, especially as the "private lives" of black women were "now concealed from them in segregated black neighborhoods and institutions."[97] Again, with the "Deathbed Aunty" of antebellum fiction dead and buried, whites could not vicariously experience unrestricted access to women's bodies, beds, and homes; thus, southern writers punished their beloved antebellum "Aunties" by describing in detail—not with pity or empathy, but with jollity and callousness—the attending tragedies and aftermath of enslavement that further distanced them from "respectable society" and personhood. No longer writing with an aim toward maintaining slavery, postbellum apologists replaced the contented and sentimental "Deathbed Aunty" with the southern humor figure of the "Distracted Aunty." Through the latter caricature, southern local color writers confirmed long-standing accusations of the brutalities of enslavement, yet ultimately owned up to nothing, and continued to advertise their stories as light-hearted family entertainment that kept African Americans under close scrutiny and in lowly positions of servitude.

Through the tragicomic figure of the "Distracted Aunty," apologist writers were able to effectively silence their elder black female caricatures in myriad ways, including discounting their protests, infantilizing them past all reason, plaguing them with delusions, and positing them as angry and irrational. Apologist authors Katherine S. McDowell (who wrote under the pseudonym Sherwood Bonner) and Joel Chandler Harris reacted to the "lost cause" by further trivializing the torments of chattel slavery in an attempt to stagnate the progress of a new black citizenry. Under the guise of innocuous local color writing, postbellum apologists disguised their

[96] Ibid, 72.
[97] Ibid, 45.

narratives and systematic silencing of black elders as regional (southern) humor, and thus concealed the subgenre's antebellum, pro-slavery roots. In positioning the eldest of the race as either nostalgic for their enslavement or as incapable of navigating and surviving in "civilized" society, these authors effectively neutered and discredited elder black Americans in order to legitimize the violation of black rights through Jim Crow legislation.

Mississippi-born writer, Katharine Sherwood Bonner McDowell, who penned her most popular works under the gender-swapping pseudonym, Sherwood Bonner, was known as an early feminist who, nevertheless, built her literary career on the exploitation of the aged slaves of her youth, most notably, her old nurse. As John B. Padgett writes, "Bonner's Gran'mammy tales appeared in publication from 1875 to 1880," and were "based on Molly Wilson, the black matriarch who had nurtured Bonner's family for three generations before the war."[98] Bonner's local color stories "were among the first and most popular black dialect tales published in northern magazines following the Civil War,"[99] preceding the popular dialect tales of more notable postbellum apologists such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page. Like her later male counterparts, Bonner claimed to draw her inspiration from an affection for the aged enslaved in particular, and, not surprisingly, her tales are equally fraught with contradictions of this so-called regard that expose the underlying callousness and indifference with which whites viewed black lives.

The collection, *Dialect Tales* (1883),[100] one of Bonner's final works, features a narrator named Ned Merewether,[101] who, as in many antebellum apologist texts, chronicles his

[98] John B. Padgett, "Katherine Sherwood Bonner McDowell," *Mississippi Writers Page* (U of Mississippi). *Mississippi Writers Page*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Sherwood Bonner, *Dialect Tales* (New York: Harper, 1883). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.

experiences in/with southern life in a series of observations and anecdotes that most often center on the formerly enslaved. In the story "Aunt Anniky's Teeth," the title character is rewarded with a set of dentures after nursing an ailing white woman back to health. In what is supposed to be a comical set of circumstances, an old black man named Uncle Ned destroys Anniky's new teeth, and the white patriarch decides that the best resolution is for the two elderly people to be married and so combine their interests. The proposition is not only a preposterous attempt at compromise and compensation, as the two do not even like one another, it implies that free blacks had no qualms with whites arranging their marriages as they had during slavery. Additionally, it assumes that Anniky and Ned would rather bind themselves to one they dislike rather than give up what each are trying to secure: Anniky, a second set of teeth, which she has been promised by their white mediator as a wedding present, and Ned, his pigs, which he was to have paid to Anniky in exchange for nursing him, and for subsequently destroying her prized pair of dentures. The entire scenario is doubly discouraging when considering that the two old people are simply trying to protect what little they have, but have been instructed that in order for both to win, they must each lose their individual freedom. Ultimately, the marriage does not take place, but the fact remains that the entire plot revolves around two elder persons having their lives and futures dictated to them as if they were children. Anniky and Ned both voice their protests against one another, but offer no such criticisms to the man who presumes to dictate what is in their "best interest." As Bonner's story demonstrates, former slave owners cared much less about the actual desires and souls of black folk than they did maintaining control over black bodies and voices as they had before Emancipation.

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[101] Possibly a reference to John Pendleton Kennedy's pro-slavery novel, *Swallow Barn* (1832)—in fact, the line following his introduction contains the word "swallow"—in which two of the main characters are named Ned Hazard and Frank Meriwether.

The disregard of black protests and the insensitivity toward black lives and personhood demonstrated in "Aunt Anniky's Teeth" is tame compared to the indifference and inhumanity illuminated in the collection's first story, "The Gentlemen of Sarsar," in which a young black man is paid to impersonate a fox during a hunt. It is difficult to understand how that which is professed as reverence can be so distorted as to represent the most cruel outrages against humanity, but this is exactly what Bonner does in her all-to-convincing depiction of the sport made of black youth and maternal grief. Sarsar is a remote settlement full of rugged individuals, the foremost of which is Andy Rucker. The narrator, Ned Merewether, in attempting to collect a debt from Rucker on behalf of his father, is manipulated into a grand jest in which is he lead to believe he has shot and killed a black man named Bud Kane. Rucker embroils Merewether in Sarsar's "'grand sport,'" explaining, "'our Christmas frolic, is a nigger hunt,'" in which the town's "Gentlemen" hunt the prisoners they allow to escape from their acknowledged "'ram-shackle'" jail.[102] Rucker declares Kane to be a vagrant hog thief on the run, when, in reality, Rucker has paid Kane to act the part of the besieged animal in what he claims to be a foxhunt. The two hunts collide when Merewether's gun accidentally goes off and Kane is pronounced dead. As the reader eventually learns, Kane's death is a farce and the joke is on Merewether, as he is forced to pay restitution to half the people in the community who are in one way or another affected by Kane's death.[103] As it turns out, the only person in the town *not* in on the prank is Bud Kane's old mother, Aunt Diana, who truly believes her son has been killed, and who becomes another unwitting victim of the basest kind of jest.

[102] Sherwood Bonner, *Dialect Tales*, 15.
[103] Rucker encourages Merewether to settle multiple debts left in the wake of Bud Kane's death, informing him, "'I am bound to tell you that you are in some danger. The negroes here are a wild lot, and, backed by certain lawless white men I could mention, would just as soon lynch you as not.'" Ibid, 28.

Bonner's description of the old slave mother is exactly what one would expect from an apologist, "southern humor" tale. Finding her at her cabin and in the process of doing her hair, he claims, "Anything more uncanny and witch-like than her appearance cannot be imagined. On one side of her head her hair stood out like an electrified mane, evidently fresh from a vigorous carding; on the other it lay flat in little snaky cotton twists. Her eyes rolled till they seemed all white."[104] This frightful depiction of Diana is more akin to Medusa than her virgin-goddess namesake—unapologetically inspired, as it most certainly was, by the Roman goddess of the *hunt*. When Diana is told of her son's death, she rebuffs Merewether's apology, asserting, "'Sorrow don't butter no corn-pone […] I mistrusted sompen wrong yesterday when Mars' Andy Rucker wus here persuadin' Bud ter take part in his onmannerly, onchristian rampage'"[105] With bold defiance, she swears, "'*I'll* have de law of you. Dis ain't nuthin' short of murder, it ain't.'"[106] Although Bonner "allows" Diana to voice her anger, she very quickly shifts the old woman's priorities to a loss of financial stability, rather than the painful loss of a child. Diana states, "'Jes' put it to yourself, sir. Don't you think if you wus tore away from your pa, an' his ole age left widout support, he would ax a purty high

Figure 7: "Dis ain't nuthin' short of murder, it ain't." Full-page Illustration from Sherwood Bonner's *Dialect Tales*. New York: Harper, 1883, 25.

[104] Ibid, 23-4.
[105] Ibid, 24. In exchange for his services in the "frolic," Rucker promises to pay Bud Kane five dollars and a quart of rum, which his mother claims he deemed well worth the risk.
[106] Ibid, 27.

figger to cover de loss?'"[107] Here, Diana focuses on the immediate repercussions of her son and primary caregiver's death, and although it is logical that a destitute woman in her advanced state of life should be worried, the manner in which the author expeditiously bypasses her character's grief in lieu of a monetary settlement is repugnant. In transforming the black mother's loss into a transaction, Bonner downplays the senseless murder of Kane to the trivial level of a death in the henhouse.

In answer to Diana's question about what *his* death would be worth to his own father, Merewether says sulkily, "'if my father could see me at this moment he would think twenty-five dollars a high value for my head.'"[108] Bonner downplays both the worth of Kane's life and Diana's sense when she represents the old woman as completely ignorant. In reply to Merewether's self-deprecating underestimation, she answers, "'Well, gimme dat, marster, an' I'll be satisfied.'"[109] That Diana would accept such a paltry sum in exchange for her son's life posits her as a child who does not understand the concept of currency or its buying power when, in reality, any formerly-enslaved person would have known all to well how black lives had been valued when bought and sold as chattel. As Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke note in the introduction to the collection, *Southern Local Color*, after Emancipation, "Former slaves demanded respect and proper compensation for their labor while former masters tried to reimpose their own notions of control and market value."[110] Diana's meager settlement implies that she does not properly value her son (monetarily or maternally), and that she is not fit to navigate the world on her own—both of which harken back to antebellum apologist motifs designed to illustrate the necessity of white oversight. This same paternalism is called into

[107] Ibid, 28.
[108] Ibid, 27.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke, *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2002), xx.

question, however, when Merewether, knowing his self-estimate of twenty-five dollars was a hyperbolic reduction of his life's worth, pays her the sum he made in jest with no guilt or afterthought regarding his having robbed her a second time.

Merewether and Rucker depart from Diana's cabin accompanied by the sound of "her distracting screams" upon the arrival of her son's body. The reader, however, like Merewether, does not find out until the end of the story that Bud Kane's death and all that follows is "a harmless jest."[111] The adjective "harmless" applying, of course, to everyone *but* the person who mattered most, and who was profoundly, if momentarily, affected by the prank: Kane's mother, Diana. As Rucker states in a letter of confession to the object of his "jest," "I must do myself the justice to say that I had nothing to do with Mother Kane's onslaught; that was unpremeditated and original."[112] Rucker places Kane in mortal danger, and even invites the innocent man's death by forcing him to dress in a fox skin during a hunt, never considering how the loss would affect the old mother whom he has known for years. Diana's grief, whether permanent or not, was real, and Bonner's transformation of her grief into a financial transaction is a despicable farce on par with Rucker's cruel prank. Although Diana is a fictional character, the endangerment of black children for white sport was a reality, such as in the barbaric practice of using black children as live bait.[113] According to the article, "Babies Used as Alligator Bait In State of Florida," which appeared in the *Atlanta Independent* on October 11, 1923, "The price reported as being paid colored mothers for the use of their babies as alligator bait, is said to be two dollars."[114] The language used to describe the practice makes it sound as if black women were not only willing to

[111] Sherwood Bonner, *Dialect Tales*, 28.
[112] Ibid, 36.
[113] See Franklin Hughes, "Alligator Bait." *Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia*, accessed April 5, 2016. Hughes cites a dozen articles from historic newspapers discussing or referencing the practice. Additionally, images of black children and alligators proliferated in early twentieth-century advertising and on material culture items such as postcards and cast iron toys and sculptures.
[114] Ibid. Hughes references and provides a link to the article, "Babies Used as Alligator Bait In State of Florida," published in the *Atlanta Independent* on October 11, 1923.

loan their children out as helpless human bait, but that they did so regularly for profit. Both the article and Bonner's story shift the attention from the inhumanity of whites to the supposed indifference and greed of black mothers, when the probability is that, like Diana, the mothers of these children were helpless against the men armed with guns who came to their door demanding live bait. The article also illustrates just how little whites valued black lives once they were no longer free labor; perhaps Diana knew this when she accepted twenty-five dollars for the life of her boy.

SILENCING "CRAZY SUE"

Reminiscent of John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832), wherein the author penned the tale of the old slave, Lucy's, decent into madness following her son's disappearance at sea, postbellum author Joel Chandler Harris used the trauma suffered by female slaves as what can only be described as an attempt at racist vindication, or racist filler without forethought, as his tales often verify the cruelty of slavery that nostalgic renderings of the antebellum south normally eschewed for "happier" subjects. Like Kennedy's Lucy, whose heartrending story is included as typical of life in the slave quarter, Joel Chandler Harris's character, "Crazy Sue" is tragedy personified. In the titular story of the collection, *Daddy Jake the Runaway*[115] (1889), the "faithful slave" Daddy Jake strikes a new overseer with an axe handle and then flees the plantation to avoid the gamut of punishments awaiting a slave who strikes a white man. Jake's owner's children, Lucien and Lillian, pursue him in an effort to bring their resident entertainer home, but after falling asleep in the boat they have taken to find him, they drift into a cane break. The children wake to an old, black woman looking over them, saying, "Don't be skeerd er me. I

[115] Joel Chandler Harris, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark* (New York: Century, 1889).

ain't nigh ez bad ez I looks ter be.'"[116] When Lucien first sets eyes on Crazy Sue, he immediate notes "the hideous ugliness of the woman," which "was caused by a burn on the side of her face and neck."[117] After breakfast, Lucien observes that Sue has been sitting "with her head covered in her arms" for quite a long time, and approaches her to ask what is the matter. Sue claims she "'wuz des a-studying' 'bout folks, an' 'bout how come I whar I is, w'en I oughter be somers else,'"[118] and then proceeds to describe her painful past. As Sue explains, she was one mother to twin babes many years ago, until "One time I wuz settin' in my house nursin' un um, an' while I settin' dar I went fast ter sleep […] when I woked up, marster wuz stan'in' in de do', watchin' me.'"[119] Despite the many generations of white babes nursed at black breasts (and the many literary corroborations of it), whites had little love for (and were often jealous) of a black mother dared to nurture or dote upon her own children—a fact that Sue learns in the worst way possible. Additionally, Sue's claim that she woke to find her owner watching her feed her children suggests that he was eroticizing the act, and that his anger was due, at least in part, at having been caught ogling her.

Figure 8: "Poor old Sue tells her story." Full-page Illustration from Joel Chandler Harris's, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark.* New York: Century, 1889, 63.

[116] Ibid, 38.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid, 43.
[119] Ibid, 44.

Sue's punishment for falling asleep while nursing is to be sent into the field to work while her two babies are left within sight, but outside of her power to help them. As she tells it, "'all day long, whiles I wuz hoein' I kin year dem babies cryin'. Look like sometimes dey wuz right at me, an' den ag'in look like dey wuz way off yander. I kep' on a-goin' an' I kep' on a-hoein', an' de babies kep' on a-famishin'. Dey des fade away, an' bimeby dey died, bofe un um on de same day. On dat day I had a fit an' fell in de fier, an' dat how come I burnt up so.'"[120] Harris's inclusion of the forced neglect (read: *murder*) of slave children and the trauma it caused black mothers is hardly the stuff of regional local color, but when disguised as southern humor, the author was able to pass it off in a children's book without pushback from his publisher.

Sue continues her heartbreaking tale by providing the explanation behind her callous moniker: "'look like I kin year dem babies cryin' yit, an' dat de reason folks call me Crazy Sue, kaze I kin year um cryin' an' yuther folks can't. I'm mighty glad dey can't, too, kaze it 'ud break der heart.'"[121] As Cathy Caruth explains in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available."[122] Although Sue is a fictional character, her recounting of her story is her attempt to make people hear her and understand the source of her pain, and it is a story the children are only exposed to because they have wandered away from the sheltered safety of their parents' home. Caruth continues, "What returns to haunt the victim […] is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known."[123] In the world of white privilege—the world of many of Harris's

[120] Ibid, 45.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 4.
[123] Ibid, 6.

readers—the trauma experienced by slaves such as Sue was both unimaginable and disbelieved, despite the fact that postbellum writers began to integrate the real traumas of enslavement into their works.

Like most southern authors who penned counter-narratives to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and attempted to refute Stowe's negative portrayal of slavery, Harris claimed that his stories drew on his own experiences on the plantation. It never seems to have occurred to these writers that, even if the slaves had been especially nice to them, fear and self-preservation were the likely motivators for their conduct, and not an all-consuming affection for whites. If Harris's inspirations for Remus were indeed the storytelling slaves he met while working on the Turnwold Plantation's newspaper, *The Countryman*, then it stands to reason that the tragedies experienced by his slave characters were also based, at least in part, on something he heard—or at the very least, something that seemed plausible within the slave system he claimed to be so well acquainted with. Although it is unclear why Harris includes Sue's story in the tale of Daddy Jake, what *is* clear is how the reader is expected to respond to it, as Harris provides Lucien's and Lillian's reaction—or lack thereof—as a model to follow. At the conclusion of Sue's story, the children offer no words of remorse, empathy, or solace for the inhuman acts committed against Sue and her children, nor do they make any equation between themselves and the two babies taken from her. Rather, as soon as Daddy Jake puts in an appearance, Harris is careful to note how "the children soon forgot Crazy Sue's troubles, and began to think about going home."[124] Without so much as a word for the woman who looked after them in the strange place, and had, with understandable concerns for the their safety, refused to let anyone else hold the little girl, Lucien and Lillian practically jump at the chance to forget both Sue and her woes, and to return to a world of privilege where they can pretend such distasteful things do not exist.

[124] Harrs, *Daddy Jake*, 45.

Harris's tale of Crazy Sue, specifically, the circumstances surrounding the death of her babies, are grounded in reality, as the danger of leaving helpless infants without a protector is substantiated in the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself*[125] (1846). Bibb relates that slave mothers, rarely allowed time during the day to nurse their children, had "to carry them to the cotton fields and tie them in the shade of a tree, or in clusters of high weeds about in the fields, where they can go to them at noon, when they are allowed to stop work for one half hour […] they are often found dead in the field and in the quarter for want of the care of their mothers."[126] That the cruel and needless deaths of infants should occur to anyone as an appropriate tangent for a children's story is appalling enough, but the manner of their deaths, with Sue hearing their cries and forbidden from attending to them, is reprehensible precisely because it was a reality of plantation life. The warm climate of the south, Bibb explains, exposes field hands to constant irritation by insects, but more importantly, it supports an ecosystem of dangerous reptiles. Bibb clarifies that although he has not witnessed the following hazards of infancy-in-slavery first-hand, many other slaves attest to helpless children, "set on the damp ground alone from morning till night, exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, liable to be bitten by poisonous rattle snakes […] or to be devoured by large alligators, which are often seen creeping through the cotton fields going from

Figure 9: "Oh my child my child." Image from *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. New York: Author, 1849, 115.

[125] Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: Published by the Author, 1849). *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.
[126] Ibid, 116.

swamp to swamp seeking their prey."[127] Harris conceivably included Sue's story in the narrative of Daddy Jake, Lucien, and Lillian to add another example in which an aged slave is seen doting over white children; however, it is a particularly callous parallel that the author makes between the old woman's dead twins and the arrival of the two pampered children. Sue, who heard her babies crying for her as they lay dying, and who hears them still decades after, nurtures and protects Lucien and Lillian, not because they are white and are therefore superior,[128] but because there is no one around to prevent her from doing what she longed to do for her own children.

Harris's inclusion of Sue and her tragic history in *Daddy Jake* not only demonstrates the cruelty of slavery and disproves the much-touted paternalism of antebellum apologists, it offers an explanation as to why black women and men may have "taken to" white children. Although pro-slavery advocates wished the public to believe that the slaves themselves valued white lives over black, in Sue's case, her nurturing of the children is a coping mechanism through which she attempts to supplement her loss. Sue may very well have been an afterthought in the story—her character certainly reads as one—but her words resonate regardless. In passing her off as "crazy," Harris aims to discount the validity and power of Sue's words, and although it works on

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[127] Ibid. Bibb's text includes an illustration for this description with the caption, "Oh my child my child," in which one woman works in the field with her small child on her back, and the other, persecuted by the overseer's whip, weeps for her baby, who lies naked in the grass, entangled by a serpent set to strike.

[128] In Robert Carlton's (pseudonym of Rev. Baynard R. Hall) *Something for Every Body: Gleaned in The Old Purchase from Fields Often Reaped* (1846), the narrator claims that once his mother's nurse, Maria, "in her mistaken zeal, […] interfered with necessary regulations, till force was used to tear us apart!" Robert Carlton, *Something for Every Body: Gleaned in The Old Purchase from Fields Often Reaped* (New York: D. Appleton, 1846), 85-6. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed April 5, 2016. In Sarah J. Hale's *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments* (1853), the author writes of a slave named Keziah, whose mother took such delight in abusing her that she had "twice been prevented by her master from killing her own child, having hung her up once with her head down, and at another time being caught dashing her up and down against a pile of bricks." Sarah J. Hale, *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments* (New York: Harper, 1853), 27. *Internet Archive*, accessed April 5, 2016. Finally, in Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854), an old slave purportedly asserts, "I wouldn't have left my master and mistress for all the freedom in the world. I'd left my own father and mother first. I loved 'em better than I done them. I loved their children too. Every one of 'em has been babies in my arms--and I loved 'em a heap better than I done my own, I want to stay with 'em as long as I live, and I know they will take care of me when I get too old to work." Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* (Philadelphia, T.B. Peterson, 1854), vii-viii. *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 6, 2016.

the two children, it stands out as incongruous with apologist intentions and egregious to the modern reader looking back at the fact that Harris's work is deemed quaint "southern humor."

LAUGHABLE IGNORANCE

Harris's recognition of the barbarities of enslavement via the character of "Crazy Sue" is a perplexing addition to what one expects from regional local color writing; yet, the author's racist and sadistic sense of "humor"—and that of his loyal readers—is clearly evident in the first story of *The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann* (1899),[129] "An Evening with the Ku-Klux." Described as a descendant of African royalty, Aunt Minervy Ann's great-grandmother was said to have lived to 120 years old, and the narrator credits the Aunt's "bad temper" and "fierce and fearless"[130] disposition to this proud lineage. Minervy Ann is cantankerous, but loyal to the family she serves, and in return for her high estimation of them, their patriarch, Major Tumlin Perdue, treats the possibility of her husband's murder at the hands of a lynch mob as a great joke. When her husband, Hamp, joins "the secret political societies, strangely called 'Union Leagues,'" and is elected to the Legislature,[131] the Ku Klux Klan makes a plan to "'sa'nter down and yank that darned nigger from betwixt his blankets, ef he's got any, and leave him to cool off at the cross-roads.'"[132] Minervy Ann's employer, learning of the Klan's intended target, withholds the information from the old woman and then teases her about it in her ignorance, saying she should make snacks for Hamp's trip to the cross-roads, as "'the boys will feel a little

[129] Joel Chandler Harris, *The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899). *Internet Archive*, accessed April 5, 2016.
[130] Ibid, 3.
[131] Harris makes it clear that Hamp is elected because "the negroes said they preferred their own color," and "nearly all the whites who would have voted had served in the Confederate army, [and] were at that time disfranchised." Ibid, 7.
[132] Ibid, 15.

hungry after the job is over,'" while "'Hamp won't want anything.'"[133] Minervy Ann, still unaware of the grave circumstances surrounding the Major's jest, believes he is referring to a type of initiation, stating, "'Nobody ain't never tell me dat de Legislatur' wuz like de Free Masons, whar dey have ter ride a billy goat an' go down in a dry well wid de chains a-clainkin'. I done tol' Hamp dat he better not fool wid white folks' doin's.'"[134] Like Bonner's crude joke in naming Bud Kane's mother, Diana, goddess of the hunt, Harris names his aged female caricature after the roman goddess of wisdom in order to highlight of her ignorance.

Major Perdue continues to take his lynching "jokes" even further, and although there can be no confusion about what he means, Harris keeps his aged black caricature steeped in obliviousness. Perdue tell the old woman, "'Only the colored members have to be initiated,'" stating, "'they take 'em out to the nearest cross-roads, put ropes around their necks, run the ropes over limbs, and pull away as if they were drawing water from a well'"—all so they can "'see which'll break first, the ropes or the necks.'"[135] *This* is the character Harris pens as his hero: a man who is so insensitive to the torture and murder of black men (and the effect of their deaths on black women) that he flaunts the horrific threat in front of the innocent man's wife, a woman who has served his family for years. Harris expects his readers to believe that, despite his very clear and disturbing description of the intended murder, Minervy Ann is completely unaware of lynchings and mob violence. She knows of the Klan, but believes they carry their heads in their hands like otherworldly creatures, when the reality is, African Americans living in the Post-Reconstruction south unfortunately knew all to well the acts of terror committed by the Klan against the black race. Like Crazy Sue from *Daddy Jake*, Minervy Ann is more a plot device than a character, despite the fact that the book is a collection of stories about her. Like Uncle

[133] Ibid, 20.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

Remus, whom Harris relied upon for years to relate the animal tales he appropriated from the enslaved and formerly enslaved, Minervy Ann is a vehicle for Harris's social aims The author writes of the dangers faced by African Americans at the hands of the Klan in the Jim Crow south, yet simultaneously dismisses them as harmless, improbable, and even laughable. Of course, Minervy Ann has no such certainty regarding her husband's safety—she cannot, as experience had already taught black Americans that Klansmen (and before Emancipation, whites in general) do not spare the lives (or even grant quick deaths) to the poor souls they terrorize.

As Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke write in their introduction to *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender*, "Southern local color served both the implicit racism of Page and the unsettling complicity of the white Harris's Uncle Remus or Bonner's Gran'mammy."[136] This critique of the apologist agenda is a far cry from Wade Hall's, *The Smiling Phoenix: Southern Humor from 1865 to 1914*, which was published in 1965 at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. An Alabama native and southern history and culture scholar, Hall dedicates a chapter section to "*The Freedman*," yet the entirety of the section discusses the Ku Klux Klan. He commences by claiming, "Some of the most amusing incidents in postwar humor relate to the Negro and the Ku Klux Klan,"[137] and continues on to say that although the Klan was frightening to those they came after, their acts and secret rites were humorous to whites. Hall eventually references Harris's story, stating, "A Klan visit not quite so terrible but just as effective is recorded by Joel Chandler Harris in *The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann*," claiming, "The Klan's call was made to suggest that [Hamp] be a little more humble in his speech and actions."[138] Despite the sixty-six year gap separating Harris's story and Hall's "criticism," Hall's racially biased oversimplification of the plot of "An Evening with the Ku-Klux" posits the racial

[136] Ewell and Menke, *Southern Local Color*, lxv.
[137] Wade Hall, *The Smiling Phoenix: Southern Humor from 1865 to 1914* (Gainesville, U of Florida P, 1965), 95.
[138] Ibid, 97.

terrorism of the Klan as comedic, just as Harris intended. Hall's mid-twentieth century analysis reveals the overwhelming influence that sentimental, pro-slavery local color stories had on the American public, and how the stereotypes comprising these texts continued to thrive in a new age where African Americans were once again fighting to establish and protect their rights as citizens.

Antebellum pro-slavery literature routinely situates aged "Aunts" and "Uncles" in their slave cabins or working elsewhere on the plantation, mirroring the limited range of motion the enslaved were permitted before Emancipation. In postbellum pro-slavery literature, these boundaries remain fixed, implying that little has changed since enslavement, and that black bodies are still subject to white control. The postbellum, tragicomic "Distracted Aunties" are an array of infantilized, traumatized, and irrationally-ignorant caricatures, and their words often make little to no difference within their respective narratives. Although authors scripted these women to voice their opinions and make their thoughts known, their words are readily dismissed as senseless and/or delusional, rendering them as passive players in their own life stories. Out of the four characters discussed at length regarding the postbellum "Aunt" figure: Anniky, Diana, Sue, and Minervy Ann, three of the women remain tied to their domestic quarters as they had been during enslavement. Only Sue exists outside of the plantation, and she is a runaway, who will be promptly returned if caught. Although Harris wrote an entire collection of Minervy Ann tales where the old woman ventures outside of the domestic sphere, she is always eager to return to her subservient station. Enslaved or free, elder black women were relegated to the confines of the cabin (or an employer's kitchen) for over a century in literature and popular culture in an attempt to render them ineffectual in the eyes of the public.

What the texts discussed in the second part of this chapter illustrate is that, without the ability to enforce the "bodies, beds, and private lives"[139] of black women in life, apologist writers were determined to do so in literature, even if it meant revealing, and in some cases, highlighting (or making light of) the very real traumas antebellum apologists were so careful to avoid in their works. The slippage between antebellum, pro-slavery local color writing and postbellum southern humor—both of which focus on distinct regional settings and dialect to present a "simpler" time to their readers—enabled racist writers to mask the hardships, suffering, and mortal danger of African Americans through sentimentality and attempts at comedy. Like blackface minstrelsy, southern local color writing often stifled black voices, subverted black agency, and concealed the traumas of enslavement through the guise of "southern humor." The effect of this representational silencing and erasure was the white rebranding of troubled race relations in America as mere nostalgia.

[139] McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 45.

CHAPTER FOUR

AGED "AUNTS" STAND AND DELIVER

As discussed in the previous chapter, pro-slavery writers tried to wall off their "Aunt" characters through the "Deathbed Aunty" trope, which restricted them not only to the boundaries of the plantation, but to the confines of their cabins and beds—sites where they were desexualized due to their advanced ages, but also hypersexualized through the focus on their beds and constant references to breastfeeding their "white children." When the pathetic caricature of the "Deathbed Aunty" no longer served the interests of pro-slavery writers following Emancipation, postbellum apologists devised the "Distracted Aunty" trope as a type of melancholy backlash against the perceived theft of the southern "Mammy." These writers often placed their "Distracted Aunty" caricatures *outside* of domestic spaces by positing them as mentally unstable outcasts who were berated by whites, and set apart from their black communities through their altered mental states. Although the "Deathbed Aunties" had plenty to say, the content of their speeches contained only that which whites wanted to hear. The "Distracted Aunties," on the other hand, spoke openly about their desires, difficulties, and the traumas they suffered both during and after enslavement; yet, like Cassandra of Greek mythology,[1] their words and pain were dismissed as the inconsequential rants and ravings of

[1] In Greek mythology, Cassandra was the daughter of Priam, king of Troy. Gifted with the ability of foresight by the god Apollo, he later punished Cassandra with a curse, making it so that no one would ever believe her prophecies, no matter how hard she tried to convince them, or how many times her prophecies turned out to be true.

madwomen.[2] Additionally, these figures were employed in the popular "family" literature of Sherwood Bonner, Thomas Nelson Page, and Joel Chandler Harris as mainstays of "Deep South" local color. The employment of these caricatures as humorous regional backdrop not only demonstrates the callousness with which southern whites viewed the black women they used and abused to build and maintain their fortunes, it stands as another literary attempt to silence and suppress them.

Like many literary and cultural productions of the mid-nineteenth century, the origin of the pro-slavery "Deathbed Aunty" trope resides in the reactionary genre of "Anti-Tom" fiction that flourished in response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852.[3] Tom's cruel and needless death at the novel's end devastated empathetic readers; therefore, it is a reasonable argument that the "Deathbed Aunty" was crafted (at least in part) in response to Tom, who was murdered far from his home and family. I contend, however, that pro-slavery writers more likely contrived the trope as a reaction to the death of Prue, the elderly woman whose murder shocks the sensibilities of (the white) Ophelia and Eva St. Clare, and which stands as a pivotal plot point in the novel. Prue speaks openly about the litany of offenses whites inflict on enslaved women—all of which are later denied in the racist caricature of the "Deathbed Aunty." Moreover, Prue's habit of getting drunk causes both whites and blacks to dismiss her testimony as mere rambling, much like the "Distracted Aunt" trope of postbellum apologist fiction.

Scholars of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature, performance, and popular culture have long acknowledged the unparalleled popularity and significance of the

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[2] See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 14. They write, "a final paradox of the metaphor of literary paternity is the fact that in the same way an author both generates and imprisons his fictive creatures, he silences them by depriving them of autonomy (that is, of the power of independent speech) even as he gives them life."

[3] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly*, 2 vols. (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture Multi-Media Archive*, accessed May 18, 2016

novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which generated nearly a century of literary, stage, film, and television adaptations—some of which stayed true to Stowe's intent, but many of which appropriated her abolitionist characters and transformed them into racist caricatures. Revisionist versions notwithstanding, the undeniable success of the novel as an anti-slavery tool made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a model for writers of sentimental fiction and social reform literature. In the post-Reconstruction era, it became an "important precursor of the African-American novel,"[4] although it was useful more as a starting point than an end point, as black post-Reconstruction writers used their works to craft "significant revisions of Stowe's discussion of race and gender, as well as her use of sentimentality."[5] Thus, the works discussed throughout this chapter are inextricably linked to one another, as they are either building on or reformulating aspects of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or are refuting the stereotypes of pro-slavery "Aunty" tropes that were likewise created in response to the novel.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a limited number of African-American authored fiction from the antebellum era, and the focus on representations of aged "Aunts" narrows this field even more. As a result, my discussion of representations of elder(ly) black women in the postbellum and post-Reconstruction eras is substantially longer than that of the antebellum period. Despite the relative shortage of pre-war fiction that coincides with the subject of the aged, female enslaved, I have chosen two texts, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Martin Delaney's *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1859)[6] to argue the significance of considering, not only how black women engaged with, or employed speech and oral tradition in mid-nineteenth

[4] Harryette Mullen, "Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Nig*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and *Beloved*." *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 244.
[5] Venetria K. Patton, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction* (New York: SUNY, 2000), xvii.
[6] Martin Robison Delany, *Blake, or The Huts of America*, ed. Floyd J. Miller (Boston: Beacon, 1970).

century literature in the years preceding the Civil War, but how advanced age figures into the equation. As both Stowe and Delaney argue, elder(ly) enslaved women were not only *not* contented with enslavement, as the apologist "Deathbed Aunty" reiterated to readers, but used their voices to actively rebel against it. Delany's *Blake* is especially significant, however, because the author, like many modern critics, took issue with Stowe's characterizations of African Americans that relied on and perpetuated racist stereotypes. Whereas Stowe appealed to white readers through sentimental depictions of besieged slaves, Delaney emphasized the cleverness and strength of African Americans of all ages by creating black characters who do not wait for white aid to secure their freedom, but who speak their worth and claim it for themselves and others.

I begin the discussion of postbellum-era pro-equality fiction with Mark Twain's somewhat problematic, "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It" (1874), wherein he relates the chastisement that Mary Ann Cord (whom he characterizes as "Aunt Rachel") exacted on the author when he suggested the former slave had lived a carefree life. Although scholars have criticized Twain's fictionalization of Cord's history as racial stereotyping, I argue that the issues with Twain's written transmission of Cord's oral testimony should not preclude it from analysis, as his shortcomings do not discount the power of her words and performance. The significance of orality to elder black women (and the public's recognition of it) is a prevalent theme throughout post-Reconstruction era works of African-American fiction writers. In their efforts to counter and correct the antebellum "Aunt" and "Uncle" stereotypes that continued to thrive even after Emancipation, black authors reclaimed the voices and volition of their previously-silenced elders by endowing their characters with the traits and talents denied their pro-slavery counterparts. Frances E.W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Victoria Earle Matthews, and

Charles Chesnutt were very much concerned with rewriting the racial wrongs of plantation-school literature, as well as exposing the underlying racism and stereotyping in white-authored anti-slavery works such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Whereas apologists systematically silenced their representations of aged slaves and former slaves through infantilization, de-sexualization, and assertions of blind religious and racial devotion, the post-Reconstruction "Aunts" of pro-equality fiction stand and bear witness to the atrocities of enslavement. By sharing their vast, accumulated knowledge, and continuing the oral traditions of their forebears, the elder black women of these works assert their autonomy in their old age, and facilitate the re-membering of their families and communities through their personal testimonies.

Enslaved "Aunts" as Antebellum Agitators

The cruelties and sexual barbarities committed against the female enslaved were well-documented in the pre-war male-authored narratives of Frederick Douglass in 1845, and Solomon Northup in 1853, yet it was Harriet Jacobs's 1861 autobiography[7] that substantiated—and expounded upon in great detail—the daily threats posed to enslaved women by predatory owners and their vengeful wives. In addition to the horrors of rape, many female slaves were forced to have children—to breed, as if they were animals—to increase the fortunes of slaveholders. Douglass records this atrocity in his narrative when he relates how the slave-breaker, Covey, purchased a woman named Caroline as a breeder, amassing his workforce and wealth directly from her unfortunate offspring. The constant assault *of* and *on* black women's

[7] See Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Published at the Antislavery Office, 1845), *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015; Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River, in Louisiana* (Auburn, NY: Derby, 1853), *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015; and Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861, C. 1860), *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.

bodies under slavery was a reality for millions, yet most writers eschewed portrayals of the violent sexual acts that resulted in involuntary pregnancies and perpetuated enslavement.[8] Antebellum fiction writers turned their attentions to the aftereffects of slave pregnancies, depicting heartrending scenes of children torn from their mother's arms to best illustrate the inhumanity of the institution. In Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the character Eliza flees north when her child is to be sold, and the image of the slave mother with her babe in arms crossing the icy Ohio River became so popular it was reproduced more than any other scene from the novel.[9] However, in addition to the famed plight of the young mother and child, Stowe's novel depicts the fate of women who do not escape enslavement, as well as what becomes of beset black women when they are no longer sexually desirable or maternally viable.

The character of Prue in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* embodies many of the tragedies of enslavement, particularly those suffered by black females. Prue sells bread for her owners in exchange for tickets that local families purchase in advance, a system designed to discourage Prue from taking the earnings and using them to get drunk. Prue is vocal about her drinking, and makes no attempt to hide it. Prue also readily admits that she would, indeed, take the money to drink, as it is her coping mechanism for dealing with, or momentarily forgetting, her many woes. When Prue arrives at the kitchen of the St. Clare's plantation, her first words are that she wishes she were dead so that her misery would be over. When she says this, Jane, "a spruce quadroon chambermaid," proudly playing with a new pair of earrings, makes a snide remark about her drinking. Prue gives her a dirty look and warns, "'Maybe you'll come to it, one of these yer days.

[8] This is due to the slave-state laws that all black children—even those with free black or white fathers—followed the condition of their mothers; meaning, if a mother was enslaved, all of her offspring were born into enslavement. It is this law that enabled men such as Covey, from Douglass's narrative, to people their plantations and amass their fortunes with the children of a few female slaves.

[9] See Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing* American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

I'd be glad to see you, I would; then you'll be glad of a drop, like me, to forget your misery.'"[10] Prue, having lived long enough to know the horrible fates of enslaved women prized for their beauty, foresees a future for the young chambermaid similar to her own, as if she has seen it happen many times. When Prue claims that her owners "'half kills'"[11] her when they beat her, Jane, ignoring the old woman's previous admonition, announces that Prue deserves the beatings—the scars from which are so bad that she can barely get her dress over them. As Prue stands up to leave, she looks directly at Jane, declaring, "'Ye think ye're mighty fine with them ar, a frolickin' and a tossin' your head, and a lookin' down on everybody. Well, never mind,—you may live to be a poor, old, cut-up crittur, like me. Hope to the Lord ye will, I do; then see if ye won't drink,—drink,—drink,—yerself into torment; and sarve ye right, too—ugh!'"[12] Prue is living proof within Stowe's novel of the many ways in which enslavement commodified and spent black female sexuality without so much as a second thought, which is why she is unwilling to tolerate such abuse from one who knows comparatively little of the tragedies and sorrows of enslavement, and who might one day find herself in the same lowly and hopeless position. Prue's words are a warning to young Jane, but also a demand that she acknowledge her experiences and take her pain seriously.

The young maid is unrelenting in her cruelty to Prue, either because she is too young and inexperienced to see her future in the pitiable old woman, or because she knows her fate will be similar, and abuses Prue for reminding her of how her own story will likely end. Kathleen Woodward asserts that such ageism, or the distancing of and scorn for the aged, can be "a horrible self-fulfilling prophecy," particularly for women, who are "in effect […] turning against

[10] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Vol. I*, 308.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid, *Vol. I*, 309.

their very future selves as older women."[13] This is exactly the point that Prue is trying to impress upon Jane, in all her pride and ignorance. An old, alcoholic slave, Prue is scorned, scoffed at, and even pitied, but rarely, if ever, is she given the respect so often afforded to elders. Jane's cruelty toward the old woman is also due in part to racial difference. The young woman's quadroon status comes up repeatedly, and throughout the novel, she tends to berate the darker-skinned slaves who do not work in the house. Her callousness is also due to the large age gap that divides the two women, as Jane is wholly invested in her beauty, youth, and vitality, and therefore views Prue as the antithesis of everything she admires about herself. In many ways, old Prue is the realization of every slave woman's fears.

In the exchange between Prue and Tom that immediately follows her visit to the St. Clare's, the old woman divulges her tragic history after Tom asks her where she was raised. Although his question seems innocuous on the surface, Prue links being "raised" to being sexually abused and exploited. Thus, her answer to Tom's question includes a geographic locale and an enumeration of the personal tragedies she associates with the place where she was "raised" like livestock. "'Up in Kentuck," she begins, "A man kept me to breed chil'en for market, and sold 'em as fast as they got big enough; last of all, he sold me to a speculator, and my Mas'r got me o' him."[14] That her mind connects being "raised"—a term many associate with adolescence and early adulthood—with the years she was forced to breed children to line her owner's pocketbook, implies that she was raped and abused from a very early age, as the context frames them as some of her earliest memories. Still very much a child herself, Prue was forced into a cycle of rape, pregnancy, childbirth, and child-theft. Endlessly pregnant, but never allowed

[13] Kathleen Woodward, introduction to *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999), xiii.

[14] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Vol. I*, 312.

to raise her children, Prue was sold to a speculator once she was no longer valued as a breeder. It is for these reasons that Prue drinks, and why she tells Jane that, despite her good looks and sense of superiority, she may find herself in Prue's position, drinking away the emotional pain of years of rape and stolen children, and numbing the physical pain of a lash freely applied to a former prize turned financial burden.

In reaction to Prue's story, Tom offers up a weak and worthless response, which is conceivably Stowe's attempt at illustrating the frequency with which the female enslaved were sexually abused, and the extent to which males—white and black—were desensitized to it. Prue's time as a human slave factory does not make much of an impression on Tom, who follows up her statement about where she was "raised" by asking what lead her to drink. This time, Prue answers Tom with a much lengthier description of her troubled life, maintaining that although she had hoped to keep the child she bore after being purchased by her latest owner, it too, was taken from her, but in a wholly different, and perhaps crueler manner…and by a fellow female, no less. As Prue tells Tom, her baby was happy and healthy until the mistress fell ill and Prue was forced to nurse her back to health. In nursing the grown woman, however, Prue herself became sick, her milk dried up, and consequently, she was unable to nurse the defenseless child who was in dire need (and actually deserving) of her maternal care. After losing the ability to lactate, Prue's mistress refused to purchase milk, opting instead to let the baby of her savior slowly starve. The old woman recounts how her baby, without proper nutrition, cried incessantly, and pined away to nothing as she sat helpless. The mistress, insisting the baby was merely being difficult, "'wished it was dead, she said; and she wouldn't let me have it o' nights, cause, she said, it kept me awake, and made me good for nothing. She made me sleep in her room; and I had to put it away off in a little kind o' garret, and thar it cried itself to death, one night. It did;

and I tuck to drinkin', to keep its crying out of my ears!'"[15] Prue readily admits that stealing her owner's money to drink will land her in hell, or "torment," as she calls it (not knowing much about Christianity), but says she does not care, as she is already perpetually tormented. When Tom tells her about heaven, Prue states matter-of-factly that if heaven is where white people go when they die, she would prefer to go to hell, after which she simply gets up walks away.

Prue's conversation with Tom is likely the last she ever had, as a new bread-seller shows up days later explaining that Prue had come home drunk after her last visit, upon which their owners took her down to the cellar, beat her, and left her there until the "'*flies had got to her*'"[16] Whipped to death, Prue's life ends in incredible pain and suffering, yet her pleas for an end to her torment are finally answered. The old woman's murder becomes a topic of conversation for everyone in the house, black and white. Ophelia is particularly upset upon learning the news, partially because she is a northerner, and unaccustomed to the frequency of such barbarities, but also because, as an older, single woman, also viewed as a burden by those who "keep" her,[17] she empathizes with Prue's position. Unmarried, childless, and dependent, at forty-five years old, Ophelia is a spinster. Thus, she seems to understand Prue's plight in a way she cannot understand Topsy's, the child who was well on her way to living an equally tragic life as the old woman. As the conduit for Stowe's white female readers, Ophelia's inability to practice what she preaches acts as a rather scathing indictment of the Christian public who turn a blind eye to the suffering of others. Ophelia is outraged that Prue has been beaten to death, yet she wants to whip Topsy when she does not act according to her wishes. Topsy repeatedly explains to Ophelia that she cannot help her actions because she is "wicked," which is the same word (with nearly identical

[15] Ibid, *Vol. I,* 312-13.
[16] Ibid, *Vol. II*, 7.
[17] Stowe writes that although Ophelia is the oldest of her many siblings, "she was still considered by her father and mother as one of 'the children,' and the proposal that she should go to Orleans was a most momentous one to the family circle." Ibid, *Vol. I*, 228.

phrasing) that Prue uses to describe herself to Tom in her final conversation before her death. The similarities between the young girl and the old woman serve to highlight the cyclical nature of enslavement, and the ways in which black females of successive generations were abused, used, dispatched, and forgotten. Although Stowe provides white conduits throughout the novel to aid her readers in empathizing with the plight of the enslaved, two of the youngest black characters, Topsy and Eliza's son, Harry, embody minstrel stereotypes much more so than her characterizations of the middle-aged and elderly, suggesting that the author herself may have found it easier to sympathize with the aged than the young.

Despite Prue's time as a "breeder," [18] the young maid and others are hardened to her sorrows because she is a coarse and masculine figure who does not conform to notions of "proper" white femininity, let alone "true womanhood"[19]—which is another reason why Ophelia *can* identify with her. Prue's advanced age, unattractiveness, and perceived masculinity make it easier for both whites and blacks to rationalize the abuse she receives at the hands of her owners. De-gendered in her old age, she reads like a stereotype, yet Stowe uses her character to impress on her female readers—be they mothers, spinsters, or children—the importance of sympathizing with the old as well as the young.[20] According to Stowe, the character of Prue was based on a real woman,[21] and although she might initially appear to play a minor role in the novel, much of

[18] "The depiction of female slaves as mere breeders, and not mothers, was just one manner of attempting to strip female slaves of their gender." Venetria K. Patton, *Women in Chains,* xv.
[19] In the nineteenth-century, particularly 1820-1860, the virtues considered necessary to be a "true woman" were piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1996), accessed August 19, 2016. This term, however, related to white women only, as women of other races were excluded from achieving this holy status due to the myriad racist stereotypes that denigrated women of color. Patton, *Women in Chains*, xvi.
[20] This is especially clear in "The Quaker Settlement" chapter, in which Stowe describes the character, Rachel Halliday, at length, and in extremely complimentary terms, claiming, "So much has been said and sung of beautiful young girls, why don't somebody wake up to the beauty of old women?" Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Vol I*, 197.
[21] As Stowe writes in her concluding remarks, "The story of 'old Prue,' in the second volume, was an incident that fell under the personal observation of a brother of the writer, then collecting-clerk to a large mercantile house, in New Orleans." Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Vol. II*, 311-12.

what is discussed and takes place in the St. Clare household following her needless death revolves around the old woman. Little Eva, having overheard the story of Prue's murder from her replacement, is burdened with the weight of it; indeed, the death of Prue is what effectively breaks Eva's spirit and causes her to waste away and perish from an apparent overabundance of empathy. Before she dies, however, Stowe has the angelic Eva discuss Prue with Tom, her mother, and her father, and so keeps the woman's tragic history ever-present in the reader's mind. By contrast, in the flood of antebellum Anti-Tom novels spawned by Stowe's text, pro-slavery writers sought to erase Prue's death in American memory by replacing her with the "Deathbed Aunty," who died in the relative comfort of her bed, surrounded by her "white family," happy having spent her long life nourishing and nurturing multiple generations of slaveholders.

In addition to the rewriting and erasure of black female suffering in antebellum apologist fiction following *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the maternal trauma and abuse that haunts Prue in her old age is revived by apologist writers of postbellum fiction as southern local color. Joel Chandler Harris's Crazy Sue, from *Daddy Jake the Runaway* (1889),[22] tells of her twin babies, who were left to die at the edge of the field, starved and baking in the hot sun, because she was prohibited from nursing and attending to them. Similarly, Prue was forbidden from feeding and caring for her last child—the only one she had been allowed to keep—and it[23] also died, its cries unanswered. As Prue says, she "'tuck to drinkin', to keep its crying out of my ears!"[24] and similarly, Harris's Sue still hears the cries of her poor children decades after their murders by

[22] Joel Chandler Harris, *Daddy Jake the Runaway and Short Stories Told After Dark* (New York: Century, 1889).
[23] Although Prue states that her child was pretty, she does not name the child's sex, and refers to it throughout the passage as "it." This may have been a conscious choice by Stowe to leave readers to imagine whichever gendered scenario would elicit the most personal responses, or, it may have been that Prue, once a breeder, had learned to distance herself from the losses of her children by not remembering them in specific, identifying terms.
[24] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Vol. I*, 313.

forced neglect. What the characters of Prue and Sue depict, regardless of authorial intent, is that the traumas and burdens of enslavement did not cease with old age, but only increased, as elders were forced to live with their sorrows and watch the horrors that had been inflicted upon them visited upon their biological and/or surrogate children, families, and communities. Stowe correctly assumed that her white female readers would empathize with the physical abuse inflicted on Topsy, the sexual abuse suffered by Cassy, and the (near) child-theft experienced by Eliza, which explains why the author chose to make the cruel and lonely death of the unloved elder, Prue, the incident that leads to Eva's death: Prue embodies all of these atrocities, while her advanced age also allows Stowe to expose the "cradle to grave" paternalism of slaveholders as the lifetime of pain and misery it really was.

In stark contrast to the feminized, sentimental appeals that comprise much of Stowe's celebrated novel, African-American author, Martin Delany, in *Blake, or The Huts of America* (1859), distances one of his most compelling characters from the sexualization and maternity so freely associated with the aged female enslaved in antebellum fiction. Likewise, his elder characters are not demented or delusional, but are highly intelligent and eager to use their years of experience to help others attain freedom. When Blake travels to Arkansas, spreading word of a slave uprising, he meets Uncle Jerry and Aunt Rachel, who are conductors on the Underground Railroad. Although it becomes rather evident to the reader, Delany confirms that Rachel is "by mutual consent […] the mouthpiece" and recognized leader of the couple.[25] Thus, as the keeper of knowledge and the collective voice of wife and husband, Rachel conveys the particulars of safe passage and issues the warnings necessary for fugitive slaves to successfully escape north. She informs Blake that such work is regular, to the point that Jerry can barely get in from work at

[25] Delany, *Blake*, 89.

night before someone shows up at their door. Rachel's comment that Jerry comes home from work suggests that she works in the home, and is therefore in the perfect position to act, as Blake says, as "the head of these secrets,"[26] without drawing suspicion. Viewed as the ideal, stereotypical "Aunty," local whites trust Rachel because they (want to) believe her to be nothing more than a simple woman who cooks good food. This seemingly innocuous caricature, however, is a carefully crafted performance through which Rachel encourages whites to underestimate her abilities and agency so that she might better protect those in her home from outside threats.

When white patrollers show up at her door,[27] "attracted to the place by the old people's devotion,"[28] Rachel is unflinching in her avowal that Blake is not a threat, but a slave from a neighboring plantation who is merely visiting to provide spiritual support. She skillfully uses the stereotype of aged-slave religiosity against the patrollers, claiming, "dis brotheh no preacheh; but 'e is 'logious, and come to gib us little comfit, an' bless God I feels it now; dat I does, blessed be God!"[29] Rachel's performance as a harmless, devout old woman wholly convinces the slave hunters, as she deftly plays the passive, gendered, racialized role they want and expect from her. In Micki McElya's study on the legacy of the nineteenth-century "Mammy" in twentieth-century culture, she writes, "White self-conceptions of superiority were nurtured, literally and imaginatively, in the everyday experiences of segregation, in the warm, affective folds where whites turned from the mammy's embrace to lynch her son or rape her daughter."[30] Even though the men are actively hunting enslaved men and women, they believe Rachel's explanation

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Among which are "principally business men, two of whom, being lawyers who went out that evening for a mere 'frolic among the Negroes.'" Ibid, 93.
[28] Ibid, 92.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Micki McElya. *Clinging to Mammy: the Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007), 161.

because they *want* to. Obsessed with their racial dominance and power, Rachel, like many enslaved people, easily manipulates the patrollers by telling them what they want to hear: that she has good food prepared, is a devout Christian, and is a "faithful slave" who "knows her place." Counter to the antebellum pro-slavery trope of the "Deathbed Aunty," who did and said nothing beyond what white writers and readers needed to reinforce their collective sense of superiority and argue the legitimacy of enslavement, Prue and Rachel represent the far ends of the aged "Aunt" spectrum, neither of which is consistent with the racist caricatures of apologist fiction.

TESTIFYING TRAUMA, HEALING OLD WOUNDS

Mark Twain's "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1874,[31] is a particularly interesting text to begin the discussion of postbellum neo-slave narratives, as the author's life and works offer no little amount of controversy regarding the author's own views on race and slavery, and his treatment of the subject in his work. Although Twain's reputation as a humorist might prompt readers to question the verisimilitude of the story's title and its subject matter, Twain's account of the woes of Aunt Rachel, a former slave, is the story of a woman named Mary Ann Cord.[32] On September 2, 1874, Twain sent the story to William Dean Howells, his editor at the *Atlantic Monthly* and lifelong friend, writing that it "has no humor in it," and "is rather out of my line," and that therefore, the magazine "can pay as lightly as you choose […] if you want it."[33] Twain goes on to say, "I *told*

[31] Mark Twain, "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It." *Atlantic Monthly* (Nov. 1874): 591-594. *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 18, 2016.
[32] According to Twain biographer Ron Powers, Mary Ann Cord was "a cook for Samuel Clemens's sister-in-law at Elmira, New York, in the 1870s, whose own story of separation burned itself word by word into his brain." Ron Powers, *Mark Twain: A Life* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 13.
[33] Mark Twain, "Letter to William Dean Howells, September 2, 1874." *Mark Twain Project*, accessed 29 May 2016.

this yarn to Hay & some company & they liked it. So I thought I'd *write* it."[34] Initially, this reads as if the author is saying that since the story was a hit with friends, it might do well with the *Atlantic*'s readers; likewise, his labeling of the humorless story as a "yarn" supports such an interpretation, as it trivializes Cord's pain and belittles her agency as the original speaker. Additionally, as DoVeanna Fulton notes, "Rachel's language and expressions" are meant to "elicit the audience's laughter" by reinforcing stereotypes that "ridicule slave women and diminish their humanity."[35] To be sure, these elements problematize the narrative, as the reader is left trying to make sense of the incongruity of such serious subject matter, combined with the minstrel components that Twain incorporated into his retelling. Twain's use of italics for "told" and "write," however, is significant, as it seems to imply a sarcasm that his friend Howells would likely have picked up on. If considered, not as a justification of the story's submission or as self-promotion, but as disappointment in his audience of friends, Twain suggests that the somber effect of Cord's narrative was lost in *his telling* of it, as evidenced by the positive response he received; thus, he felt he had to *write* it in order to properly convey his (and by proxy, his audience's) ignorance and misconceptions regarding the sufferings of the enslaved as told by Cord, and her literary surrogate, Rachel.

Despite the parts of "A True Story" that come off as a poor attempt at humor, there are performative elements to Twain's retelling of Cord's narrative that lend it an air of earnestness that should not be overlooked or denied. As the story's narrator, Aunt Rachel, unfolds the details of her life's sorrows, Twain interjects her dialog with her gestures, which are primarily directed at him, as it is his callousness that prompts her to educate him about the realities of enslavement. In recounting both her *words* and *actions*, Twain attempts to relate a genuine performance

[34] Ibid.
[35] DoVeanna S. Fulton, *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), 54.

devoid of minstrelsy, and in so doing, pass on Cord's depth of feeling to his readers. His use of dialect, however, so popular in his southwest humor and local color works, invokes the minstrelsy he admired as a boy, and therefore prompts readers to question whether his retelling of Cord's history is supposed to entertain, inform, or both. Nevertheless, Cord's testifying, or "the truth through 'story' […] a dramatic narration and communal reenactment of one's feelings and experiences,"[36] is rearticulated, and finds a larger audience through the character of Rachel. Although Fulton is skeptical of Twain's racial stereotyping, she writes, "Testifying as a method of resistance to objectification and injustice takes many forms. Whether through song, oral or written storytelling, or naming, testifying challenges racist assumptions and provides examples others can identify with and emulate. This resistance is subversive and empowering but dismissed, unrealized, and unappreciated by the dominant culture."[37] So as not to diminish Cord's words and agency by throwing her testimony out with the Twainisms, one can consider the possibility that the humorist, having undergone the powerful chastisement that was Cord's narrative, realized he was part of the problem, and thus transcribed her story to challenge the dominant culture's myopia in the same manner that Cord had challenged his.

Samuel Clemens—who names himself as such in his narrator's dialog—sets "A True Story" in motion by asking, "Aunt Rachel, how is it that you've lived sixty years and never had any trouble?"[38] As he records, she ceases laughing immediately and looks at him "without even a smile in her voice."[39] In this commencing instance, Twain shuns the laughing minstrel stereotype by emphasizing Rachel's absolute seriousness. Her grave disposition has a sobering effect on her listener, which only increases as she tells of her husband and seven children, sold and bought by

[36] From Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1986), 151. Quoted in Fulton, *Speaking Power*, xi.
[37] Ibid, xi.
[38] Twain, "A True Story," 591.
[39] Ibid.

flesh traders. As Twain describes it, she "had gradually risen, while she warmed to her subject, and now she towered above us, black against the stars"; thus, Rachel is as a towering colossus when she says, "Dey put chains on us an' put us on a stan' as high as dis po'ch—twenty foot high."[40] Rachel's physical proximity to her listeners is authoritative, as if she were defying the remembrance of the chains, and in comparing the porch to the auction block, she is indicting her white audience (and subsequently, Twain's) for their own racial sins, compliances, and prejudices. Additionally, she calls so-called Christians to task by speaking of her husband and children—sold away from her on Easter Sunday—and how she used the chains that held her in abject helplessness to fight the traders for her youngest son on the very day when the faithful were rejoicing in the return of God's son.

As Rachel explains, many years passed, and she eventually found herself cooking for the Union troops that had commandeered her most recent owner's plantation. Although she does not specify whether she was remunerated for this work, she is reunited with her youngest son, Henry, who had sworn to find her when they were parted on the auction block. On a night when the camp is having a party, a group of late-night revelers is disrupting her kitchen, and she emphasizes the fact that she stood high, dug her fists into her hips, and exclaimed, "'I wa' n't bawn in de mash to be fool' by trash! I's one o' de ole Blue Hen's Chickens, *I* is!'"[41] Rachel explains that her mother was raised in Maryland, and those native to the state use and view the phrase as a source of pride. One of the minstrel features of Rachel's story, however, is regarding the blue hen chicken, which is associated with Delaware, not Maryland. This mix-up carries all the hallmarks of minstrel jokes that posited black people as ignorant and unintelligent, and yet Rachel does not say her mother was born in Maryland, but *raised* there. It is therefore possible

[40] Ibid, 592.
[41] Ibid, 593.

that when her mother is asserting herself using this language, she is invoking her status as Delaware-born against Marylanders, and that Rachel (raised in Virginia) mistook which state she was referencing. Whether or not the subject of the unique phrase was an addition by Twain meant to elicit laughter, it is nonetheless explainable and ultimately unimportant, as the joke (if it was intended as such) does not compete with the gravity of Rachel's narrative. When she speaks her mother's words at the revel, one of the attendees, a young black soldier, is visibly struck by the phrase, and finds her early the next morning.

At this critical point in her oration, Rachel not only resumes her physical performance, she calls attention to it as a reiteration of the authenticity of her story. As she describes what happened in the moment her youngest son finally found her—as he promised he would when they were so violently separated—she executes the same actions she performed that day. To make her account even more vivid, she brings Clemens into the story as both a prop and surrogate for her son, an act that surely moved the father of four, especially since his youngest child and only son, Langdon, had died at two years-old, almost two years prior to Twain sending the story to Howells. Rachel explains that she was stooping for the stove, "'*jist so, same as if yo' foot was de stove*,—an' I'd opened de stove do wid my right han',—so, *pushin' it back, jist as I pushes yo' foot*.'"[42] Notably, in this instance, Clemens, a white man, is the object, while she, a black woman, is the social actor. She remembers how a young man's black face appeared below her bent head, "'de eyes a-lookin' up into mine, *jist as I's a-lookin' up clost under yo' face now* […] an' I grab his lef' han' an' shove back his sleeve,—*jist so, as I's doin' to you*,'"[43] Rachel shoves back his sleeve as if searching for a mark on his wrist, and although Clemens obviously does not bear the same mark, the force with which she gets in his face and alters his clothing

[42] Italics are my emphasis. Ibid, 593.
[43] Italics are my emphasis. Ibid, 593-4.

must have been a jarring racial and gender role reversal to the white man from Missouri. Perhaps it is for this reason that Twain omits whether Rachel used him as a surrogate to recreate the final act of verification: the maternally-intimate brushing aside of the man's hair, whereupon she recognized the scar of her son, Henry.

One of the most unexpected aspects of Rachel's story is not that Henry knows her after so many years by her unique way of declaring she is not a person to be trifled with, but that he remembers it as a family tradition, passed down from his grandmother. When Rachel first begins to tell her captive audience of her mother's heritage and pride, she states that repeating the phrase was second nature due to the frequency with which her mother said it, and because she ties it to one memory in particular—one that involves her youngest child, Henry. As Rachel tells it, her son sustained bad injuries to his wrist and head when he was little, and when no one reacted quickly enough to satisfy the boy's grandmother (and then dared to talk back to her chastisements), she let fly the comment about being "'one o' de ole Blue Hen's Chickens." Thus, Henry, like Rachel, either subconsciously or consciously links the speech to the two physical injuries/scars that prove he is his mother's son and his grandmother's youngest grandson.

Although it would be easy to discount Cord's oratory based on some of the questionable content added by Twain, "A True Story" remains *her* story, and is important as both nonfiction and fiction. Additionally, the performative elements of Cord's speech that Twain records in writing capture the earnestness of elder black women in communicating the injustices and traumas they suffered under enslavement, and emphasizes the importance of oral tradition and transmission within African-American culture. Aunt Rachel's real-life inspiration, Mary Ann Cord, was reunited with her son through the words of her mother, and in much of the black-authored fiction of the post-Reconstruction era, the speaking of female elders serves as a

(re)unifying force within black families and communities struggling to locate lost loved ones following Emancipation.

BLACK-AUTHORED FICTION IN THE POST-RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Writer, abolitionist, and women's rights advocate, Frances E.W. Harper, was born to free parents in Baltimore, Maryland in 1825, and dedicated her life to working and writing toward abolition, racial equality, and a variety of social reforms. Harper published her most famous work, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892),[44] when she was nearly seventy years old, and the sentimental narrative[45] features three generations from one family who find each other through the transmission of a mother's favorite hymn. When Iola is nursing wounded soldiers in a Union camp, she sings the hymn she learned from her mother to a man named Robert, who recognizes it immediately and begins to question her about where she learned it. The hymn is his mother's favorite, and the words give hope of a heavenly reprieve from earthly sorrows: "Drooping souls no longer grieve, / Heaven is propitious; / If on Christ you do believe, / You will find Him precious."[46] More than twenty years had passed since a ten year-old Robert last heard his mother sing those words, yet the connection he and Iola share as they sing and speak of the hymn produces a quick and powerful bond between the two orphans.

When Iola recognizes facial similarities between Robert and her mother, she shows him a picture of a woman who shares a beauty mark with his sister; he is unable, however, to say for sure that any *grown* woman could be her—frozen in childhood as she is in his memory. Robert is

[44] Frances E.W. Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (Boston: Earle, 1892). *Documenting the American South*, accessed July 15, 2015.
[45] According to Patton, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a "significant precursor of the African-American novel due to the popularity garnered by its sympathetic black characters." Additionally, "Stowe's success encouraged [black writers] by showing that it might be possible to use their writing as a means to change white attitudes toward blacks." Patton, *Women in Chains*, 38-9.
[46] Ibid, 140.

overwhelmed with grief when he speaks of the family separations and years of enslavement that make parents and their children unrecognizable to one another. It is for this reason that the orality of female elders is so vital to the sentimentality of nineteenth-century African-American fiction—it was the means through which families could reconnect in lieu of stable names and addresses, (reliable) documents and records, and even facial recognition.

When Iola and Robert are in church at the novel's end, he sings his mother's hymn and Iola joins in, prompting a "dear old mother"[47] to rise and speak. Harper uses the phrase, "dear old mother" several times in this passage, emphasizing the woman's age and influence, as well as her maternal care and persisting strength. Venetria K. Patton's *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction*, examines how nineteenth-century black women writers responded to and redefined the impossible standards that defined the cult of true womanhood—piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness—which pertained to and favored white women exclusively. According to Patton, "Harper and [Pauline E.] Hopkins address this omission by depicting their protagonists as mothers or mother figures, who by virtue of their maternity or maternal consciousness must be considered true women."[48] This revision of black motherhood and "true womanhood" is evident in *Iola Leroy*, which Patton analyzes extensively in order to parcel out the various maternal qualities of Iola, who has not yet had children by the novel's end. Yet, the impact of Harper's revisionist representation of black women and mothers in the novel resounds even further and deeper than the points Patton highlights in her argument—and which are illustrated by the author's "dear old mother."

As Patton asserts, Frances Harper devised alternative interpretations of motherhood that challenged the racial exclusionism of the cult of true womanhood. Hence, Iola did not have to be

[47] Ibid, 179.
[48] Patton, *Women in Chains*, 94.

a mother in order to prove a maternal, nurturing force in the black community. In reinterpreting the previously exclusionary definition of a "true woman" to include an intelligent, hard working, civically minded, outspoken, and "single" woman such as Iola, Patton argues that Harper knowingly extended the heretofore unattainable moniker to generations of black women who had been prohibited from "true womanhood" by the sins inflicted upon them, and which they were often unable to stay or combat. When the "dear old mother" speaks, she captivates the room with her devastating, yet all-too-familiar tale of a family torn apart, whereupon "Some of her hearers moaned, [while] others rocked to and fro, as thoughts of similar scenes in their own lives arose before them."[49] She explains how she was denied parental rights of a daughter, and then a son, whom her owner kept after selling her, and whom she used to sneak out to see and hold for a few precious hours[50] until she was sold away. Strong, faithful, and determined, however, the "dear old mother" declares that she has been through the flood, but not drowned, and she has been through the fire, but her garments are unscathed, and that she will see her children yet.[51]

From the moment she stands to speak, the words of the "dear old mother" captivate Robert, who, in listening to her story, is transported back to his own childhood. When she finishes enumerating her sufferings and articulating her hopeful vision of the future, she takes her seat, and it is Robert's turn to rise and speak. His account echoes the old woman's, and when they confirm that they are, indeed, mother and son, "An expression of wonder, hope, and love flitted over her face. It seemed as if her youth were suddenly renewed and, bounding from her seat, she rushed to the speaker in a paroxysm of joy."[52] With her child once again in her arms, Harper's "dear old mother" is the embodiment of the "true woman," as are all the other women

[49] Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 180.
[50] Frederick Douglass writes in his 1845 *Narrative* that his only memories of his own mother are a few stolen hours when she sneaked off her owner's property to visit him at night.
[51] Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 180.
[52] Ibid, 182.

in the church who were treated as genderless chattel under enslavement, but who rejoice in and live vicariously through the unexpected family reunion. At one point, Robert is in disbelief "that after years of patient search through churches, papers, and inquiring friends, he had accidentally stumbled on his mother."[53] Acknowledging the effectiveness of orality and communal gatherings over the more modern mode of print advertising, Robert also makes clear that he has visited numerous churches over the years hoping for such an accidental meeting. As Harryette Mullen writes, "the texts of nineteenth-century black women writers concentrate not only on reconciling the contradictions of disparate literary conventions, but also on grafting literacy onto orality. Their texts, by focusing on a continuum of resistance to oppression available to the illiterate as well as the illiterate, tend to stress orality as a presence over illiteracy as an absence."[54] Thus, despite Robert's best efforts, Harper ultimately chooses the remembrance of verbal communications between family members as the means through which his long search can finally come to an end.

In Victoria Earle Matthews's "Aunt Lindy: A Story Founded on Real Life" (1893),[55] however, an old mother is only afforded the means to reunite with her child after using her talents to heal—and then her voice to threaten—the man responsible for their forced parting. Like Harper, Matthews was a prominent activist in African American, women's, and children's reforms,[56] yet unlike Harper, Matthews was born into enslavement in 1861 in Fort Valley, Georgia, which serves as the setting for "Aunt Lindy." It is perhaps due to Matthews's

[53] Ibid, 181.
[54] Mullen, "Runaway Tongue," 245.
[55] Victoria Earle Matthews, "Aunt Lindy: A Story Founded on Real Life" (New York: J.J. Little, 1893). *Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library*, accessed May 18, 2016.
[56] "Matthews['s work] retraces the accomplishments of women whose roots stem from the soil of slavery and who, in spite of these degrading beginnings, can be credited with establishing Christian homes, contributing to economic stability and educational advancement, supporting black church memberships, and motivating a new generation of educated black women to organize." "Victoria Earle Matthews." *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century African-American Women*, Ed. and Introduction by Shirley Wilson Logan (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1995), 124.

experiences under enslavement that make her story so different than the fiction of her contemporaries, Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, and Charles Chesnutt—all of whom were African Americans born prior to Emancipation, but who were born to free parents, and thus never lived and suffered under enslavement.

The characters of Aunt Lindy, and her husband, Uncle Joel, remember and share the pains of enslavement together, as Matthews notes their sorrow over the "babes torn from *their* breasts and sold."[57] Although it might initially seem a small detail that the author includes Joel in the description of parental heartbreak, it is a notable departure from both pro- and anti-slavery fiction, wherein enslaved men are almost always excluded from portraits of parenthood. Pro-slavery writers sought to erase the image of the black patriarch by omitting scenes, or even allusions to black men having families, while sentimental, anti-slavery writing, which was primarily directed at white women, aroused increased sympathies from readers a predominantly female readership regularly depicting the plights of single mothers. Since the subject of besieged and abused black mothers was the driving sentimental force in abolitionist literature, and the "Deathbed Aunty" was the antebellum apologist poster child for black contentment under slavery, black male characters were rarely depicted as being fathers, let alone active partners in child-rearing. The lack of black father figures in postbellum, apologist fiction illustrates the success of early nineteenth-century racist stereotypes and caricatures that argued black men were little more than children themselves, and were therefore only fit to be sidekicks to white children, not parents. And, as this discussion demonstrates, even post-Reconstruction fiction dealing with race and enslavement deals more so with children reuniting with their mothers than with their fathers. This is not to suggest that postbellum African-American writers believed, or were substantiating the alleged absenteeism of black fathers; rather, it is more likely that they were

[57] Italics are my emphasis. Ibid, 9.

seeking to reclaim through their literature, just as the formerly enslaved had done in real life following Emancipation, the "Mammies" and "Aunties" whose time, devotion, and embraces they had been denied during enslavement. Matthews's "Aunt Lindy," on the other hand, emphasizes the lasting effects of chattel slavery on both aging parents, and thus includes Joel's trauma alongside Lindy's to accentuate the awful silence that pervades and overtakes a household robbed of children's laughter.

"Aunt Lindy" begins with the most devastating fire Fort Valley has experienced in generations, and which ignites "in the sampling room of the Cotton Exchange."[58] Matthews's inclusion of the precise locale of the fire's origin is significant, as it not only describes the nineteenth-century's (and slavery's) biggest cash crop going up in flames,[59] it names the sampling room specifically, wherein men scrutinized various cotton crops in the same manner as they did the slaves they purchased to plant and harvest it.[60] The Exchange fire destroys businesses and homes, and causes multiple deaths and injuries. Aunt Lindy, renowned for her skill as a nurse,[61] agrees to take in a "silver-haired"[62] stranger, as the local doctor believes he cannot heal properly in the house full of children where he has been staying. Ironically, as both Lindy and the reader learn, her home is void of the sounds of children *because* of the injured

[58] Ibid, 3.
[59] Walter Johnson names "the cotton trade" as "the largest single sector of the global economy in the first half of the nineteenth century." Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013), 10.
[60] Johnson writes, "By focusing on *exchange*, it illuminates a set of deep historical interconnections among the regions of the globe, among various was of organizing economic space and extracting profit. This emphasis on the question of exchange, however, creates the risk of providing a history of capitalism in which the mileposts unfold regardless of the sphere of production—in which the actions of merchants and bankers define the timeline, and those of slaves and wage-earning workers matter not at all." Ibid, 253.
[61] According to historian Deborah Gray White, "The slave woman's status in the slave community seems to have increased with old age as a consequence of her service as caretaker of children, nurse, and midwife. For many men this period was marked by decreased status because they no longer had the stamina and strength to perform physically demanding tasks and were sometimes reduced to doing such traditional female chores as spinning and child care. Many older craftsmen found themselves replace by younger, more energetic, and nimble slave artisans. Yet, as a woman aged she grew more knowledgeable in nurturing and "doctoring" and more experienced." Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985), 114-15.
[62] Matthews, "Aunt Lindy," 7.

man. Matthews writes how Lindy and Joel, "when work was done and the night of life threw its waning shadows around them," would cry "for the scattered voices"[63] of their lost babes.[64] Despite the immense pain the couple relives night after night, "they hid their grief from an unsympathizing generation, and the memory of their oppressors awoke but to the call of fitful retrospection."[65]

When Lindy learns that the man in her home is her former owner, and the one to blame for her family's misery, she refuses to hide her grief any longer, and a torrent of vocalized hellfire accompanies her wrath. Matthews describes the old woman's reaction as the violent eruption of a long-dormant volcano, writing:

> The quick, vengeful flame leaped in her eyes, as her mind, made keen by years of secret suffering and toil, travelled through time and space; she saw wrongs which no tongue can enumerate; demoniac gleams of exultation and bitter hatred settled upon her now grim features; a pitiless smile wreathed her set lips, as she gazed with glaring eyeballs at this helpless, homeless "victim of the great fire," as though surrounded by demons; a dozen wicked impulses rushed through her mind—a life for a life—no mortal eye was near.[66]

Lindy screams in his face, demanding to know where her children are, calling him a devil who sent them "'To de fo' win's ob de ear'fh.'"[67] Ready to attack him, she hears the prayer meeting

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[63] Ibid, 9.
[64] The silence of Lindy and Joel's home stands in stark contrast to that of Sojourner Truth's childhood, in which, as DoVeanna Fulton points out, Truth's parents kept their children's memories alive through her, and "would sit for hours, recalling and recounting every endearing, as well as harrowing circumstance that taxed memory could supply, from the histories of the dear departed ones." Quoted in Fulton, *Speaking Power*, 4-5. The two homes are distinguished from one another because Truth remained to bear witness to her parents' testimonies of their stolen children. Lindy and Joel, however, were unable to keep or remain close to any of their children, and thus have no eager young sibling to listen to and retell the histories, let alone carry on the names of lost brothers and sisters into future generations.
[65] Matthews, "Aunt Lindy," 9.
[66] Ibid, 13-4.
[67] Ibid, 15.

letting out and wanders to the door, where she hears, "'Vengeance is mine, ses de Lawd.'"[68] These words prompt her anger to give way to acceptance, and she resolves to nurse her former owner back to health, and so lets God decide his fate.

Once recovered, the stranger identifies the new prayer meeting leader, recently arrived in town, as Lindy and Joel's first-born child. Although they are informed that the rest of their children have passed, the elderly couple rejoices in the return of their son. Lindy not only fights the urge to kill the man who sold her children, she makes the conscious decision to nurse him as she would any one of them. The narrative wraps up swiftly after Lindy chooses mercy over vengeance, and although there is much more description regarding the feelings of hatred surging within her than there is her voicing of it, what she does say begins the process by which she, her husband, and their son, can rebuild their lives together. And, as bell hooks asserts, "true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless."[69] Lindy might not say much, but what she does say directly challenges the voicelessness she and Joel felt for so many years, as well as the namelessness that resulted from their having no children left to call by the names they gave them at birth. In giving voice to their pain, and in speaking their wrath, she relieves the burden of the silence that has overtaken their household, and in so doing, thrusts the elderly couple back into the world of the living. Like the "dear old mother" from Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Lindy passes through the fire, but comes out all the more pure and pious for having been tested, and for rising above the low standards of humanity set by her oppressors.

Like Twain's Aunt Rachel, Lindy voices her anger, yet works through it to teach and lead by example. In naming the abuses of whites and giving voice to their pain, the two characters

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[68] Ibid.
[69] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 8. Quoted in Fulton, *Speaking Power*, 18-9.

actively disprove the jolly "Mammy" and contented "Aunty" stereotypes attributed to middle-aged and elder black women. Refusing to remain silent any longer, they speak out and stand up for the older generations of former slaves attempting to re-assemble their families so they can re-build their lives, especially since "Reconstruction [could] only being after the reunion of families."[70] As the Maine-born African-American playwright, editor, and fiction writer, Pauline E. Hopkins illustrates in her novels, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900),[71] and the serially published, *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-1902),[72] elder black women were not only instrumental in re-membering black families, their accumulated knowledge—showcased through (figurative and literal) testifying—could be a formidable force in combatting white patriarchy.

As Fulton writes in *Speaking Power*, "passing on family history orally is a form of historiography that resists the dominant culture's efforts to negate African American identity,"[73] which is especially true of Hopkins's elder "Aunt" characters, who testify to and employ their historical knowledge, particularly regarding the genealogy of racist atrocities, to bring bad men to justice. In *Contending Forces*, it is the "poor, decrepit, half-blind centenarian,"[74] Lucy, a former slave of the doomed Montfort family, who relates the history and reveals the true identity of the novel's villain. Likewise, in *Hagar's Daughter*, Aunt Henny is the sole eyewitness of a modern-day murder, and her testimony in court includes details from decades past that no other person could have connected, and which formulates a historical timeline proving the innocence of a black man, as well as the repeated guilt of the white man who framed him. Lucy and Henny,

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[70] Patton, *Women in Chains*, 99.
[71] Pauline E. Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (Boston: Colored Co-operative Pub. Co., 1900). *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, accessed August 6, 2016.
[72] Pauline E. Hopkins, *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice*. *Colored American Magazine*, March 1901 - March 1902. *University of Pennsylvania Digital Library*, accessed August 6, 2016.
[73] Fulton, *Speaking Power*, 3.
[74] Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 380.

finally encouraged to share what they know after decades of being silenced, demonstrate the vast knowledge and impressive speaking power of elder black women.

"Strategic Silence" Speaks Volumes

Just as the orality of black women was often an act of resistance and an assertion of agency, *not* speaking, or what DoVeanna Fulton calls, "silent orality," was likewise a way to "substantiate Black femininity and masculinity and actively oppose racial violence and discrimination."[75] One of the most effective and memorable literary employments of strategic silence takes place in Charles Chesnutt's novel, *The Colonel's Dream* (1905). Although Chesnutt is male, his character of Viney aligns with Fulton's analysis of "strategic silence" in the works of black women writers, wherein she argues that although silence "is considered a condition of the powerless, the unidentified, the objectified," "strategically employed silence is a mute demonstration that can be used in both affirmation and protest."[76] Despite her silence, and eventually *because* of it, Viney proves to be one of the novel's most fascinating characters, as she not only defies gendered, racist stereotypes, she eschews all categorizations that whites would have found comfortable or comforting.

Described as a "wrinkled old mulattress," Viney is not only the housekeeper of her former owner, Malcolm Dudley, she is a silent, yet permanent fixture at his side. Her designation as a "mulattress," Dudley's status as an unmarried man, and the couple's decades-long isolation from other people all intimate early on that employment is not the reason they have continued their relationship following Emancipation. Chesnutt wastes little time in revealing that Dudley is devoted to Viney because, just prior to her going mute, his great uncle had confided in her the

[75] Fulton, *Speaking Power*, 66.
[76] Ibid.

whereabouts of fifty-thousand dollars in gold he had hidden on the property. Although she does not speak, Malcolm converses with her facial expressions, well acquainted with them as he is after twenty-five years. His obsession with finding the gold is well known within the region, and his seemingly one-sided conversations with Viney are a common sight, and how Chesnutt introduces the couple to the reader. When Dudley demands Viney tell him where the money is, she does not answer him, "but her faded eyes glowed for a moment, like the ashes of a dying fire, and her figure stiffened perceptibly as she leaned slightly toward him."[77] Pained by his frustration and impatience, he calls her a "hussy" and threatens to have her whipped, to which "The slumbrous fire in the woman's eyes flamed up for a moment. She rose, and drawing herself up to her full height, which was greater than the old man's, made some incoherent sounds, and bent upon him a look beneath which he quailed."[78] When Dudley threatens to have his old companion whipped as if she were still his slave, Chesnutt writes that "his voice rose to a shrill shriek," an emasculating detail that foreshadows the non-traditional power structure of his relationship with Viney.

Both during and after her time as a slave, Viney refuses to submit to the race and gender expectations thrust upon her. Most notably, during enslavement, she broke up Dudley's engagement to a white woman when she presumably told her of their taboo affair—a bold and dangerous act that flies in the face of all expectations of racial and gendered subservience. Enraged, Dudley ordered Viney whipped; and although he regretted the decision and tried to stop it, he arrived too late, and from that point on she remained mute. The fact that neither of them ever married, and that theirs is a lifelong relationship is mitigated in the eyes of the white public, however, because of what Viney knows. With a word, she can alter a declining family's fate,

[77] Charles Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 1905), 138. *Documenting the American South*, accessed May 06, 2016.
[78] Ibid.

which is why no one questions or shows disdain for the nature of her relationship to Dudley. Likewise, the power she yields over him defies gender expectations, as she not only refuses to be the submissive one, she is very clearly the more dominant of the two. The fire in her eyes and her superior stature unnerve Dudley, who immediately recants his threat, pleading, "'I know it was wrong, and I've always regretted it, always, from the very moment. But you shouldn't bear malice […] I was good to you before, Viney, and I was kind to you afterwards, and I know you've forgiven me, good Viney, noble-hearted Viney.'"[79]

According to Dudley's doctor, *his* father, who had tended to Viney after her stroke, "'always maintained that Viney could speak—if she had wished to speak.'"[80] And speak she does. Chesnutt reverses the pro-slavery "Deathbed Aunty" trope by positioning the white man, and not the aged black woman, as the waning individual seeking to tie up loose ends before death. Additionally, whereas "Deathbed Aunties" were limited to clichés of contentedness and nostalgia about their "white families," Viney denounces Dudley, who appears to be the closest thing she has to "family," for his past cruelty. As Dudley lie dying, and when their focus on each other is absolute, Viney breaks her long silence: "'You had me whipped,'" she said. "'Do you remember that? You had me whipped—whipped—whipped—by a poor white dog I had despised and spurned! You had said that you loved me; and you had promised to free me—and you had me whipped! But I have had my revenge!'"[81] With her words, Viney recreates the violent rhythm of the lashes she endured from a lowly man scorned, using the monosyllabic "whipped" in rapid succession to signify the crack of the whip on her flesh. Likewise, in the repeated phrase, "*you*

[79] Ibid, 138-9.
[80] Ibid, 275.
[81] Ibid, 273. Dudley's nephew, Ben, describes the effects of Viney speaking "as though a stone image had waked to speech." Since Viney resists the racist and misogynist molds that denied women of color equality and respect in the nineteenth-century, the description of her as a sentient statue is in keeping with white underestimations of black intelligence, yet differs in its depiction of her as a powerful, autonomous woman.

had me whipped," the first three words work up to "whipped" like a lash being raised so it can come back down. Chesnutt's repetition reenacts the violence and humiliation Dudley had inflicted on Viney, and with every mention of the pain she endured, she makes another, deeper cut in the man who said he loved her—and whom she holds responsible for it.

As Viney testifies, she regularly went out into nature to talk to herself so that she would not forget how, and risk the opportunity to exact her vengeance when the time came. That Viney continued speaking to herself over the last twenty-five years gives an indication as to her cleverness and fortitude, but more importantly, it demonstrates the vital importance of oral tradition to black women, as she was unwilling to sacrifice her words and abandon her voice entirely in her pursuit for revenge. The old woman explains to her dying companion how his relative came back for his gold soon after leaving it, "'but in that hour you had me whipped and for that you have spent twenty-five years in looking for nothing […] For twenty-five years I have watched you look for—nothing; have seen you waste your time, your property, your life, your mind—for nothing! For ah, Mars' Ma'colm, you had me whipped—*by another man!*"[82] The rhythm and repetition in this passage is nearly identical to the earlier one, excepting that in addition to the word, "whipped," "nothing" accentuates the sting of her words, linking the violent act committed against her to the void of Dudley's wasted life.

Dudley is shocked to learn that she has harbored such hate and animosity for so long, and dies with a chastisement of his own on his lips: "'Yes, Viney,'" he whispered, "'you have had your revenge! But I was sorry, Viney, for what I did, and you were not. And I forgive you, Viney; but you are unforgiving—even in the presence of death.'"[83] Thus, Viney has her long-awaited victory, but after the initial thrill of telling her secret, it rings hollow. Viney's reaction to

[82] Ibid, 274.
[83] Ibid.

Dudley's death demonstrates Chestnutt's narrative complexity, as the scene transforms from one of exacted revenge to a nuanced commentary on the personal relationships destroyed in, by, and because of racism and slavery. Viney, the long-silent and impressively resolute woman, is grief-stricken at the death of her lifetime companion, and when his last breath is gone, so is the oxygen she needs to fuel the fire of her hatred. Without the protective wall of her anger, which she had "labouriously maintained for half a lifetime in her woman's heart that even slavery could not crush," Viney experiences a "great and final flood [of] the pent-up passions of the past."[84] Just as she has not spoken for twenty-five years, it appears she has not cried for as long either. "Bursting into tears—strange tears from eyes that had long forgot to weep—old Viney threw herself down upon her knees by the bedside, and seizing old Malcolm's emaciated hand in both her own, covered it with kisses, fervent kisses, the ghosts of the passionate kisses of their distant youth."[85] Viney dies with her black hand holding fast to Dudley's white one, and their mutual passing signifies the devastation of a love tainted by racism, violence, and greed.

Chesnutt's employment of strategic silence in the character of Viney demonstrates the power, resolution, and moral agency that elder black women were capable of, as, in making *him* suffer, *she* suffers also. Sadly, the victorious effect of finally breaking her silence fades quickly when she realizes all that she could have said, and perhaps, all they could have done in a of a quarter century. Her silent orality is a brilliant act of protest through which Viney defends her dignity and purity (i.e. "true woman" status), and her persistence in maintaining it into old age illustrates the lengths black women were willing to go to assert their personhood and autonomy in a society that only saw value in their sexuality. Although Viney is a mulatto woman in a relationship with a white man, she defies the hypersexualized Jezebel stereotype when she

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

emphasizes Dudley's mistake in having *another man* whip her—an act of betrayal she equates with both prostitution and rape. Viney eludes to the beating as being akin to prostitution when she repeatedly stresses her anger and sense of violation at having been whipped—on her lover's orders—*by another man* whose sexual advances she had previously rebuffed.

The practice of sending enslaved women to professional punishers had been equated with sexual violence and humiliation long before Chesnutt penned Viney's words in *The Colonel's Dream* in the early-twentieth century. Over fifty years earlier, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe appealed to the modesty of her white, female readers by emphasizing the degradations suffered by female slaves who were sent off the plantation to be whipped: "it was the universal custom to send women and young girls to whipping-houses, to the hands of the lowest of men,—men vile enough to make this their profession,—there to be subjected to brutal exposure and shameful correction."[86] The woman who faces this cruel fate in Stowe's novel is Rosa, another quadroon housemaid who is constantly referenced in tandem with Jane, the maid who tells Prue earlier in the novel that she deserves every beating she gets. Thus, Prue's warning that all female slaves faced similar barbaric treatment, no matter how fair or how fine, is realized sooner rather than later. Like Jane and Rosa, who felt protected by their youth and beauty, Viney believed she was protected by the love Dudley professed for her. His words, however, proved false when he ordered her to be whipped, and so she sat silently by his side for twenty-five years to remind him of his betrayal.

The voices of elder black women resound in abolitionist works and post-reconstruction narratives of black and white writers of both sexes. There was clearly something particularly impressive and intriguing to these authors regarding the ways in which enslaved and formerly-

[86] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Vol II*, 148. This chapter is titled, "The Unprotected," which hints at the fact that even Rosa's beauty and "house slave" status are not protection from the violent cruelties of slaveholders.

enslaved "Aunts" employed speech acts to benefit themselves and others as they navigated the tumultuous social landscape of nineteenth-century America. In crafting nuanced, multi-faceted characters, these authors defied the stereotypes and tropes of racist, "plantation school" writers, and created a more introspective American literature. Authors such as Stowe, Delaney, Twain, Harper, Hopkins, Matthews, and Chesnutt confronted issues of race, slavery, gender, and social justice through their fiction, and frequently returned to these subjects so that the public would not only learn to *see* aged black women and men, but understand that they needed to *hear* and *listen* to their histories and testimonies if America was to have any hope for a more equitable and peaceful union.

CONCLUSION

THE DETRIMENTAL LEGACIES OF FALSE REPRESENTATION

Throughout this discussion, I have attempted to reveal the many ways in which nineteenth-century apologist writers sought to discount and silence the agency of African Americans by limiting their literary representations of enslavement to aged "Aunts" and "Uncles." Despite the many antebellum and postbellum pro-equality works that countered and corrected the happy caricatures of pro-slavery fiction by demonstrating the power of elder voices, the paternalism, Christianization, and infantilization of aged black characters in nineteenth-century apologist literature succeeded in stalling the racial progress of black Americans in the twentieth century and well beyond.

The damaging and lasting effect of aged pro-slavery caricatures is perhaps best illustrated in Morehouse College professor and writer, F.C. Campbell's 1966 piece, "An Ontological Study of the Dynamics of Black Anger in the United States (or Rage, Rage, Rage Against the Coming of the White: An Essay in Three Acts)."[87] Campbell published his essay (which reads like a play) exactly twenty years after Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus had been further immortalized in Walt Disney's 1946 mixed-media film, *Song of the South*,[88] and his angst and anger regarding the "Storytelling Uncle" caricature is palpable throughout—as is his acute awareness of the

[87] F.C. Campbell, "An Ontological Study of the Dynamics of Black Anger in the United States (or Rage, Rage, Rage Against the Coming of the White: An Essay in Three Acts)," *New South* 21 (1966).
[88] *Song of the South*, directed by Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson, perf. James Baskett, Hattie McDaniel, and Bobby Driscoll (Walt Disney, 1946).

intended purpose of the pro-slavery trope. The author writes of the "heavy-laden streets of the ghettos Atlanta, New York, Chicago-Watts the thousand Harlems where they are packed in their black passivity," and where the African American "is seen and not seen by those who pass him by […] Until the siren of the prowl car splits the subtle night apart and in a thousand bungalows in the suburbs, faces stir with a dreamy dread."[89] Campbell begins Act I by referencing the mood of race relations in America amidst the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement. He quickly pans back, however, from the sleepy suburbanites of twentieth-century America to the troubled dreams of the nineteenth-century slave owner who fears a noise in the night is "trusty Ben and faithful Sam and kindly Uncle Remus," "armed with a knife shaped like a phallus," and "coming to slay Ole Marse and do worse to Missie."[90] The slave owner, "lulled back to sleep with the memories of pillowing dark breasts which had once sustained him,"[91] is rudely awakened again by the names of famous slave rebels resounding in his dreams.

Whereas the figures of supposedly innocuous "Uncles" were meant to assuage white fears of violent black uprisings, Campbell employs them as the embodiment of white underestimations of black pain and agency. In essence, his depiction of "Uncle Remus with his white hair and his kindly ole smile dripping with gore" is Campbell's way of forcing modern white Americans to confront and question their beliefs that twentieth-century African Americans should behave like nineteenth-century stereotypes. Given the widespread and longstanding popularity of "Aunt" and "Uncle" caricatures in American literature and popular culture, it is hardly any wonder that readers of southern humor and Deep South local color fiction continued to project their expectations of subservient elders on to black men and women of all ages. As Campbell's essay demonstrates, the public's misguided belief in happy and harmless "Aunts"

[89] Campbell, "An Ontolgocial Study," 29.
[90] Ibid, 30.
[91] Ibid.

and "Uncles" did not provide white Americans with a blanket sense of security—a fact that *should* have made them realize that the representations they trusted to validate their racial superiority had no basis in reality. However, the primary focus of Campbell's "Ontological Study," as he clearly articulates in the title, is not the dismantling of black stereotypes, but "the Dynamics of Black Anger." The author's genuine concern for how African Americans react to and cope with the struggles of systemic racism in the twentieth century is evident when the slaveholder's nightmare of the murderous "Uncles" turns out to be the dream of another, presumably black man or woman, who wakes up holding their own throat.

Campbell's troubling dream sequence exposes white fears that even the most seemingly-inoffensive African Americans harbor a rage that cannot be quelled. Yet, throughout the text, the author demonstrates the many ways in which black men and women fear for their lives, families, sanity, and voices—and how they must protect themselves from the rage of whites as well as their own rage, which, if left unchecked, could swallow them whole for all they have suffered. The dreamer who wakes gripping his own throat, however, can still fashion when, where, and how he reacts to the hate that white society ceaselessly thrusts upon him, and can refuse to allow "the man to make him into the image of his worst self."[92]

Although F.C. Campbell's 1966 "Ontological Study" is just one man's attempt to grapple with the detrimental legacy of enslavement, his preoccupation with and problematizing of nineteenth-century stereotypes is profound—particularly his focus on the aged "Uncles" of plantation-school popular culture. A project such as this, concerned as it is with representations and employments of elder(ly) African Americans in the nineteenth- and early- twentieth centuries, could have gone any number of ways, including discussions of medical experimentation and technological innovation, poetry and periodical publications, minstrelsy and

[92] Ibid, 35.

parlor performances, early film and television, and the continuation of Deep South local color writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In bringing the subject of old age and aging into literary and cultural studies discourses, these fields can expand exponentially by revisiting familiar texts, cultural productions, performances, and critiques. My aim for this project is that the reader comes away with an understanding of the damaging effects the appropriation and silencing of black elders in apologist literature had, and continues to have, on how white Americans view their black brothers and sisters. Conversely, I also hope I have shown how pro-equality and African-American writers engaged with and confronted racist representations in their own works to show the country and the world that apologist caricatures *cannot* and *do not* speak for African Americans, nor do stereotypes of aged "Aunts" and "Uncles" in any way reflect the strength, pride, resilience, care, wisdom, and speaking power of our nation's black elders.

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