

Courting Communities

Black Female Nationalism and

“Syncre-Nationalism” in the

Nineteenth-Century North



Kathy L. Glass

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For my parents

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Introduction

Black women activists participating in racial uplift projects during the nineteenth century troubled the boundaries of race, space, nation and time, creating new cognitive mappings of community. Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Anna Julia Cooper and Frances E. W. Harper undermined traditional categories, transcending the limitations of liberalism and the narrowness of nationalism designed to deny African Americans rights and resources. Marginalized within black male collectivities due to their gender, trivialized within white feminist groups on account of their race, and unable to become U.S. citizens because of their race and their gender, Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper found it necessary to develop eclectic resistance strategies and unique forms of political alliance. Unable to ground themselves in any single pre-existing community of resistance, they took on the difficult and demanding work of “courting communities,” of calling collectivities into existence through diverse forms of subversive spiritual, political and cultural work.

The courting of communities by Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper manifested itself in what I call “syncre-nationalism”: a form of community building that operates both within and beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. A syncre-nation is the construct of an imagined community that operates primarily at the ideological, rather than the geographical or juridical level. Syncre-nations function as experimental spaces where traditional cultural and social divisions are transgressed, where people from different races, genders, religions, and cultures find common ground. The syncre-nationalism of Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper developed by necessity out of painful and unrelenting struggles for citizenship rights, recognition, and resources. Although these nineteenth-century activists were unable to produce a fully formed theory of syncre-nationalism, their creative efforts have much to teach us about the power and limits

of nationalism in the nineteenth century, about the legacy of that era's reform projects, as well as about the enduring struggle against the dominant constructions of individual and collective identity.

Theoretical concepts about nationalism advanced by Benedict Anderson and E.J. Hobsbawm help us to see how black activists Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper drew upon the complex intersections of race, class, and gender in their lives to go beyond proto-nationalism and nationalism to imagine communities based on syncre-nationalism. Anderson's work on the nation as an imagined community and Hobsbawm's identification of nationalism as the historically specific work of a particular era in human history provide us with indispensable insight into the activities of the women discussed in the following chapters. Yet the fit is not a perfect one. As many critics have argued, Anderson privileges print culture and literacy over other forms of cultural production and he does too little to help us understand the distinctly gendered importance of the concept of "manhood" within the ideology and iconography of nation-states and nationalism.¹ Similarly, Hobsbawm privileges the nation-state over other forms of nationalism, and he underestimates the roles played by race and ethnicity within national projects as ways of determining who will be included and who will be excluded from the national collectivity.

Anderson overestimates the importance of literacy and print culture, but it is possible to adapt his concepts to other forms of culture and community crafted by subaltern peoples. His framework contains a masculinist bias, but can nonetheless be altered and deployed anew to assess the imagining and building of communities by black women. Anderson's characterization of the soldier as the prototypical citizen, and of communities as fraternal,² functions in concert with Dana Nelson's argument illuminating race and gender as barriers to citizenship. According to Nelson, proponents of the Constitution in the post-Revolutionary era advanced an "ideal of a vigorous, strong, undivided manhood. . . . [A] manhood that could be claimed through patriotic incorporation."³ A heterogeneous population adopting this unifying ideology would serve to "reassure individual men not only about political discord, but [also] about other kinds of cultural and economic dislocations" in the new republic.⁴ But this theoretical "safety" from the dangers of uncertainty, offered in the framework of liberal democracy, operated less as a means to include citizens than it did to exclude them.

The "common manhood" constructed by the tenets of the Constitution extended only to men defined as "white," so that through the "bodily bond of whiteness, men learned to train their own class, regional, and political rivalries toward the 'managed' competition of the market economy."⁵

The fictitious equality of whiteness that men were to enjoy in the political sphere, while relegating their uniqueness to that of the personal, underscores the anomalous position of nineteenth-century black women who would have had to transform themselves into white males to assume full citizenship rights. Denied inclusion into the raced and gendered category of "citizen," many black women activists not only agitated for formal incorporation into the national community but, as we shall see, they also contested the very terms of citizenship and the racial state in which it was grounded.

In addition to revealing the inherently masculine nature of the nation-state, Anderson also highlights print culture, literacy, and simultaneity as the keys to consolidating collective national identities. It is possible to examine imagined communities that did not rely on print culture, however, which were in fact created by communities with and without literacy in the way it is commonly characterized. Forced to operate in marginalized national spaces because of their politics and their perceived social identities, Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary and others developed heterogeneous concepts of community. The efforts of Truth and Stewart, in particular, to trouble traditional understandings of time, communion, and community contain enduring importance precisely because they did not remain within the imagination of the nation as Anderson and Hobsbawm describe it.

Hobsbawm goes beyond Anderson's concept of the imagined community to explore the dynamics that unite individuals into groups.⁶ Particularly interested in the criterion of nationhood, he examines several types of community formations to determine whether they are legitimate "nations."⁷ His view is that neither ethnicity nor race is particularly relevant to the generation of nationalist sentiment. Communities devoid of constituted states fail Hobsbawm's litmus test for nationhood and fall into the category of "proto-nations," which manifest themselves in two forms.⁸ "Supra-local" forms of proto-nations connect people across geographic boundaries, resulting in forms of "popular identification which go beyond those circumscribing the actual spaces in which people passed most of their lives."⁹ To illustrate this phenomenon, Hobsbawm cites the way in which thousands are linked worldwide by their belief in the Virgin Mary, by the common denominator of religion. The second type of proto-nation, or potential nation, consists of populations fused by similar "political bonds" and "vocabularies," capable of "eventual generalization, extension and popularization."¹⁰ Land is a primary factor separating proto-nations from nations because proto-nations do not consistently affiliate their movements with specific territorial spaces.

Contrary to Hobsbawm's skeptical theory, a strain of Pan-Africanism indeed qualifies as "nationalist" in that it outlines a prototype for black liberation and solidarity, envisioning its fulfillment in the form of a nation-state. Indeed, the Pan-African perspective led to a discursive construction of a "world community of blacks" and the notion of a "single African people on the continent of Africa rather than that of a multitude of ethnic groups."¹¹ Consequently, Pan-African projects aspiring to form nation-states need to be seen as "nationalist," while groups that did not propose or attempt to form nation-states qualify as "proto-nationalist." While "proto-nation" is sufficient to characterize most entities not aspiring to form nation-states, another term is needed to describe movements that further complicate the nationalist paradigm. Since the "most decisive criterion" of proto-nationalism is "the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity,"¹² proto-nationalism is thereby uncritically situated within a nation-state paradigm. A "historical nation," past or present, is imagined as the state to which the population is connected. Proto-nationalism, thus situated within a teleological paradigm, becomes a lesser form of nationalism, deficient in its lack of territorial affiliation.¹³

What this term ("proto-national") fails to designate is those movements that invoke and yet challenge the conventional discourse of the nation-state. Although the term "proto-nation" characterizes, at some levels, the collectivities to which Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper belong and/or which they construct in their writings, I will use the term "syncre-national" as an additional category in order to stress these women's critiques of and consciousness about the U.S. nation-state. Unlike the conventional nation-state, the syncre-nation need not operate theoretically within specified national territories; in practice, however, community members in this study locate themselves on U.S. or Canadian soil. Syncre-nations may also function as experimental spaces in which traditional gender, cultural and social divisions are transgressed, linking people across boundaries of religion, ethnicity, culture and space. Syncre-nationalism, then, is meant to underscore and enable a critique of narrow definitions of the nation-state.

While all five women had nationalist tendencies, it is impossible to pigeonhole their activism in either the black or official nationalist traditions, as both of these "-isms," in their original formations, rely upon patriarchal assumptions and essentialist racial concepts. In *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925*, for example, Wilson Moses examines the projects of black male leaders who played a significant role in the formation of nationalist thought. The "nineteenth-century cycle of black nationalism," he notes, lasted from the "late 1700s to the early 1900s."¹⁴

Black intellectuals like Alexander Crummell, Edward W. Blyden and Martin Delany, for instance, believed that black men had a primary role to play in the uplifting of the uneducated black masses in both Africa and America. In particular, they believed that, “all black people could and should act unanimously under the leadership of one powerful man or group of men, who would guide the race by virtue of superior knowledge or divine authority.”¹⁵ The rhetoric of “Racial uplift, Negro Improvement, African Civilization, [and] race progress” emerged consistently in the cultural production of nineteenth-century black leaders who presumed that the civilization of the African continent would, by extension, hasten the liberation of blacks in America.¹⁶ These African civilizationists believed that not all blacks, but men, in particular, were deemed fit to uplift the masses.

Blyden, for instance, believed that “Providence” was “obviously calling the black men” of America in 1862 to “betake themselves to injured Africa, and bless those outraged shores, and quiet those distracted families with the blessings of Christianity and civilization.”¹⁷ Similarly, Crummell, pleased with the presence of such men in Africa, boasted that “thousands” of the missionaries in West Africa were “*American* black men, educated in the missions of Liberia.” With gratitude, he observed that “God ha[d] raised up, even in their lands of servitude, a class of black men who [had] already gone from America” to civilize the indigenous peoples of Africa.¹⁸ These nationalists, then, imagined implementing a three-part plan in which black Americans would not only “civilize” African natives by Christianizing them; they would also induct them into the world of commerce and cotton cultivation, thereby creating a class of black capitalists in Africa. While history remembers these nationalists as radicals, Carla Peterson reminds us: “if those black male emigrationists who were seeking to found a new ‘Negro nationality’ could be considered politically radical, they tended to be socially conservative. Their values were those of Western bourgeois capitalist society, firmly committed to class and gender hierarchies.”¹⁹ Given the sexually conservative contours of black nationalism, the women discussed in the following chapters would resist wholesale subscription to its tenets. Their syncre-nationalist dispositions prevented them from passively embracing traditional gender roles.

Socially marginalized within the wider society in which they lived, middle-class blacks reproduced, to some extent, the stratified gender relations that early American colonists had inherited from their ancestors in Great Britain. Rather than waning over time, inequitable relations between men and women increasingly structured the lives of white Americans. But the socio-economic status of black women differed greatly from that of Anglo-American women, who found themselves confined to the “woman’s

domain”²⁰ during the revolutionary period. Linda Kerber’s analysis of white women’s status in early America indicates that:

Women were thought to make their moral choices in the context of the household, a woman’s domain that Aristotle understood to be a non-public, lesser institution that served the polis. Having learned from Aristotle that politics was the affair of men, Americans continued to discuss political affairs in terms that largely excluded women, and that reflected the assumption that women were, as the political scientist Jean Elshtain writes, ‘*idiots* in the Greek sense of the word, that is, persons who do not participate in the polis.’²¹

Initially, then, Americans did not ascribe an explicitly political identity to female colonists. During the Revolutionary War, however, women provided “essential services for troops.”²² In the process of donating food and clothing for the patriots, women began to view themselves in political terms.²³ Nonetheless, they remained subordinate to men. Having inherited the British common law system of coverture, state legislatures in America required women to relinquish their property to their husbands. Since women, once married, could not exercise control over their own property, they failed to meet the republican standard of the self-reliant citizen, whose virtue lay in his independence. Not only did men deny women an active political role within the national community, but they also considered them to be the weaker sex, incapable of bearing arms on the nation’s behalf. Each of these factors confirmed the classical political assumption that women should not vote, hold office or sit on juries.

Despite this discriminatory tradition, women did create a political identity for themselves in the postwar nation-state. Educators such as Judith Sargent Murray and Susannah Rawson would soon demonstrate that the “Republican Mother” could infuse her domestic responsibilities with political values.²⁴ That is, these women’s advocates pressed for female education, on the grounds that it would benefit the republic at large. Once educated, so went the theory, women would be qualified to effectively raise their “public-spirited” male children, all the while infusing “virtue into the Republic.”²⁵ Although the concept of the woman’s domain worked to reproduce stereotypical assumptions about women’s inability to fully exercise the privileges of citizenship, republican motherhood would, in some sense, compensate for these limits by endowing women with a moral capacity exceeding that of men.

The syncre-nationalist activists discussed in the following chapters worked both within and against the assumptions of republican motherhood.²⁶ Clearly, there were limits to black women’s ability to confine their

labor to the home. Given the economic conditions that burdened free African-American women in early America, most worked both inside and outside of the domestic sphere, out of necessity. In addition to the economic barrier between black women and republican motherhood, ideological obstacles further separated the latter from the gender ideal. The imagined purity of the virtuous republican mother conflicted with the sexual immorality ascribed to black women by the dominant culture. Nonetheless, African-American women would insert themselves in this discourse, rework it to their advantage, and challenge its limits for political purposes. Conventional attitudes about women's idealized yet subordinate role to men persisted into the early 1800s, emerging from the pulpit and in the press throughout America. Not only white men, but also middle-class black men, as we shall see, displayed traditional gender views towards women. Black nationalist discourse, in fact, replicated the traditional view that relegated women to the domestic sphere.

Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper would formulate racial uplift projects that troubled the gendered and raced dimensions of classical black nationalism. Opposed to male-dominated back-to-Africa schemes, the antiracist activism of these women also rejects the black nationalist "commitment to the conservation of racial or genetic purity."²⁷ A variation of eighteenth-century European racial theory, black nationalist beliefs tended to reaffirm the link between national destiny and racial purity. In the writings of Crummell and Blyden, the philosophies of Johan Gottfried von Herder found political expression. While Herder imagined the nation not as a political entity but as a kind of "cultural community" bound by language in which the *Volk* prevailed, succeeding generations of philosophers would declare the political state to be "an instrument of divine purpose."²⁸ The writings of German Romantics would resonate with Blyden's supposition that "in each separate man, in each separate race, something of the absolute [was] incarnated."²⁹ According to his calculations, the unfolding of the divine plan would require the releasing of unique contributions by each separate race.

Ambivalent, if not at times hostile towards such conclusions, Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper each worked to de-link race from nation to varying degrees. Challenging race as a static concept accompanied by natural strengths and weaknesses, they deployed racial rhetoric strategically, alternately affirming and denying the significance of skin color in their lectures and writings. Responding tactically to their racially hostile environment, black women activists often represented blacks as a distinct people embattled in the struggle for civil and natural rights; at other junctures they painted blacks as indistinguishable from whites, downplaying differences in

pigmentation. The unstable constructions of blackness emerging in their syncre-nationalism ultimately run counter to both official and insurgent nationalist projects committed to perpetuating monolithic conceptions of nation and race.

Clearly, Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper drew selectively on nationalist themes: civilization, self-help and racial uplift emerge as key concepts in their cultural productions. They embody distinctly class-informed approaches to the issues of liberation, assimilation, social mobility, religion and community building, within existing nation-states. Although these female activists dedicated their lives to improving black women's conditions, they fashioned routes to reform that frequently diverge, overlap, and appear fraught with internal contradictions. Truth, for example, inhabits the working class and Stewart the middle, yet each politicizes religion in her uplift project. Religion frames Truth's approach, spiritual convictions motivate her activism and utopian interracial spiritual collectivities (as well as white suffrage groups) solicit her membership. In Chapter One, I argue that Truth affiliates herself with syncre-national collectivities that negotiate heterogeneous spiritual, cultural and racial elements: her ultimate goal is the formation of a politically integrated and economically autonomous black community. Situating her discourse within the Constitutional tradition of rights, Truth argues for the extension of citizenship to black Americans. Recognizing that formal equality before the law was insufficient to eradicate inequality in the civic sphere, Truth also encouraged blacks to become economically self-sufficient, and dependent upon themselves alone for employment and sustenance.

But idealism underlay this desire for property and economic independence. Truth, allied with black nationalists in her promotion of property ownership as African Americans' source of independence and solidarity, seemed not to emphasize the dividing language of the state (the "political form that protects and secures" man's right to own property)³⁰ which pitted light against dark, and capitalist against worker. In effect, the state functions, Karl Marx suggests, as the "abstract guarantor" of capitalist exploitation, protecting man's right, as articulated in the Constitution of the United States, to dispose "as he will of his goods and revenues, of the fruits of his work and industry."³¹ As free black communities did not exist outside of capitalist relations, the historical record shows that African-American property accumulation did not eradicate but merely perpetuated intra-group tensions, dividing communities along the lines of color, class, culture and gender.³²

Similar to Truth, Stewart's belief in God motivates her search for community, but her pragmatic uplift approach primarily targets black middle-class racial uplift collectivities. Chapter Two argues that Stewart uses her

writings to construct syncre-national communities in which women from different nations and cultural locations may find common ground; she further addresses issues of class, religion and gender in her texts. Her ultimate goal is an assimilated, upwardly mobile black collectivity. That is, Stewart encourages blacks to embrace bourgeois Victorian values rather than African tribal traditions. While she selectively celebrates aspects of African culture, Stewart rejects African tradition overall, as do other educated blacks, wedded to hegemonic, negative images of the so-called dark continent. As Stuckey indicates, many nineteenth-century black intellectuals, integrationist and separatist, were “convinced” by anti-African propaganda that African culture was of no value.³³ Distancing herself from manifestations of traditional African culture in America, Stewart purported to admire signs and symbols of Western progress. Simultaneously, she addressed African Americans as a distinct collectivity bound to release unique gifts in America. It is the westernized, educated black that will assist the masses to advance socially and politically, as so-called fully “civilized” peoples. This desire for group effort, rooted in non-egalitarian cultural assumptions, however, confounds Stewart’s sporadic support of liberal individualism. While linking her destiny to that of blacks, generally, Stewart also foregrounds hard work and personal effort as essential to individual success. Such warring impulses prevail in Stewart’s lectures and writings, merely hinting at the complexities involved in uplift activism, and reaffirming the fact that reform is not an homogeneous project. Stewart could not fully embrace liberal individualism, as racist and sexist state practices prevented black men and women from competing as equals with their white counterparts. Nor could she uncritically accept racial collectivism, which generally manifested itself in the nineteenth century as a masculinist and racially essentialist formation. Despite her conservative tendencies, Stewart’s uplift project proves unorthodox, as she not only argues for increased racial uplift activity among the well-to-do, but she also calls for expanded opportunities for black women.

Chapter Three foregrounds Shadd Cary, a figure of contrast, who displays an intellectual’s skepticism towards religion, rejecting it as contrary to the socio-political advancement of black Americans. Even more so than Stewart, Shadd Cary enjoyed economic advantages denied to the majority of nineteenth-century black women. Financial security afforded Shadd Cary the luxury of formal education, widespread travel, and the ability to “make independent choices about how to live her life.”³⁴ Shadd Cary emigrated to Canada in the 1850s, where she espoused a racial uplift discourse resonating with the liberal philosophy of self-help, natural rights and individualism. But complicating Shadd Cary’s project beyond the self-help rhetoric

that she directed towards blacks was her commitment to stoking antislavery sentiment flickering beyond the borders of the U.S.

In Shadd Cary's effort to mobilize Canada and England for the purpose of exerting external moral pressure on the U.S., her participation in the national project to end slavery became *internationalist* in scope. Opposed to African and Haitian emigration, which she assumed would subject black Americans to foreign religions and fatal diseases, Shadd Cary emigrated to Canada where she challenged the internationalist abolitionist community of Canadians and Americans to unite in its moral call for the abolition of slavery.³⁵ She therefore used her newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, to "create a sentiment in Canada, and out of Canada, that shall tell against Slavery."³⁶ Hoping to spotlight successful black and integrated communities in Canada, and encouraging blacks to shift their allegiance to the British Commonwealth, Shadd Cary's *Provincial Freeman* troubled the legitimacy of the U.S. racial state. Her internationalist discourse against the colonial system of slavery worked to de-naturalize the hierarchal relations existing within a purportedly democratic nation. At the same time, the *Provincial Freeman's* representations of politically active, hard-working blacks stood in distinction to black stereotypes. Syncretic collectivities manifesting themselves in Canada thus challenged the hegemony of white racism confining blacks to the status of sub-human slaves. Addressing gender, class and cultural themes in her paper, Shadd Cary's ultimate goal is the formation of an assimilated, middle-class black community.

While Shadd Cary did not advocate religion as a primary aspect of her racial uplift strategy, Cooper's faith in God figured prominently in her writings and lectures. More specifically, Cooper's religious convictions served as a springboard for her activism, influencing her attitude towards gender matters, race relations and social reform. She understood the black church, in particular, to be a possibly "civilizing institution,"³⁷ capable of effecting pragmatic change in the lives of uneducated and destitute blacks recently freed from slavery. In sharp contrast to Shadd Cary who, for the most part, viewed black churches as superstitious institutions that fostered black dependency, Cooper viewed the church as a potentially transformational site out of which much good could come.

A scholar, activist, educator and administrator, Cooper earned a doctoral degree at the age of sixty-seven. Although she socialized primarily within black middle-class circles, Cooper was ever mindful of, and devoted to, the poor black men and women of the rural South. Having worked as an educator in North Carolina and Washington, D.C., Cooper viewed teaching not as a mere job, but rather as "the noblest of callings." She further ruminated on an Oberlin College questionnaire: "I believe that if I

were white I should still want to teach those whose need presents a stronger appeal than money.”³⁸ Thus, teaching, for Cooper, provided an opportunity to be of service to the economically disadvantaged. In addition to working with students, Cooper became a nationally-known figure, participating in The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the American Women’s Suffrage Association; she also lectured at the Women’s Congress in Chicago in 1893, and served as an organizer of the Colored Women’s League of Washington, D.C. in 1892. Although the Colored Women’s League primarily consisted of well-to-do black women like Charlotte Forten Grimke, Mary Church Terrell and Josephine Bruce,³⁹ they organized for the purpose of serving those in need; specifically, they “instituted kindergarten teaching training for young women, rescue work among the city’s poor and indigent population, and classes designed to improve women’s industrial and homemaking skills.”⁴⁰

Much like Truth, Stewart and Shadd Cary, Cooper draws on multiple discourses in her cultural productions. The languages of nationality, Christianity, women’s rights, temperance and human rights appear frequently in Cooper’s collection of essays. I characterize her writings as syncre-nationalist in the sense that she embraces black nationalist principles, as well as feminist, antiracist and anti-imperialist sentiments. Her ultimate goal is the emergence of an educated, assimilated, politically-enfranchised African-American citizenry, and a fully educated and integrated America. In addition, Cooper strives to identify common political ground around which women from diverse backgrounds can rally, for the purpose of subverting the multiple manifestations of sexism, racism and imperialism.

Similar to Cooper in many respects, Harper benefited from educational opportunities and a middle-class upbringing. Even though the latter led a life of privilege, relative to that of the black masses, she too devoted her life to teaching, writing and lecturing so that she might, in some way, contribute to the racial uplift efforts begun by black men and women in the antebellum era. Driven by a desire for racial justice and human rights, Harper lectured throughout the northeast and Canada during the antebellum era, in an effort to strengthen antislavery sentiment. After the Civil War drew to a close, Harper continued to travel and lecture, making a stop in every southern state, with the exception of Texas and Arkansas.⁴¹ Keenly aware that the dissolution of the institution of slavery did not guarantee social and political freedom for black Americans, Harper devoted herself to lecturing on the topic of “reconciliation,”⁴² which must have been an unpopular theme among whites interested in maintaining the inequitable social relations that had existed under slavery.

Viewing social responsibility as a necessity rather than an option, Harper encouraged economically comfortable blacks to educate and reach out to the masses during the antebellum and postbellum periods. In an essay published in the *Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859, Harper made statements consistent with those espoused by other uplift activists: “We have money among us, but how much of it is spent to bring deliverance to our captive brethren? Are our wealthiest men the most liberal sustainers of the Anti-slavery enterprise?”⁴³ This sentiment roots Harper firmly in the tradition of activists like Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and other socially-conscious blacks who understood that the future of their own community was bound up with that of the masses. Although differences of color, region, religion, education and class prevent monolithic constructions of blacks as a “people,” all African Americans shared a common history of oppression. This understanding of unity informed the content of Harper’s writings.

A testimony to her versatility, Harper made use of multiple literary forms in her efforts to rewrite black women’s experience. A poet, lecturer, essayist and novelist, Harper is particularly well known for her novel *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), published during the same year as were Cooper’s essays.⁴⁴ Chapter Five focuses exclusively on this novel, the social “work” that it performed in the post-emancipation era, and its usefulness to contemporary scholars and activists. A reconsideration of *Iola Leroy* furthers the discussion of syncre-nationalist politics in that the novel functions as a creative response to issues of nationalism, sexism and community, while transforming restrictive constructions of subjectivity. In addition to imagining a community that resists regional boundaries and narrowly-defined identities, the novel also responds to the culminating influences of the cultural productions that precede it, such as the sermons, speeches and newspaper articles that I examine in the first four chapters. Harper’s novel, then, not only provides key insights into black women’s response within and against black nationalist discourse at the turn of the century; but it also helps to chart the progression and intertextuality of black women’s writing from the antebellum to the postbellum era. My re-reading of *Iola Leroy* attempts to link this cultural work to contemporary interrogations of nationalism and subversive constructions of identity.

My study begins in the 1830s because this moment marks the appearance of several black female activists on the historical stage, and it ends in 1892 because, by this time, black women had established an identifiable tradition of female activism. I recognize that this excludes works authored in the same period by Jarena Lee, Julia Foote and Ida B. Wells; nevertheless, I find these to be appropriate parameters because the texts examined in this

study effectively illustrate the complexity of syncre-nationalist practices in which black women engaged. A significant number of texts by black women emerged for the first time in the 1830s.⁴⁵ These early writings raise important questions about blackness, femaleness and national identity in the young republic. Transitioning from the antebellum to the postbellum period, I examine texts from the pre-Civil War years alongside those produced in the post-Reconstruction period. This significant moment in history witnessed a flurry of literary activity by black women writers, who built upon and responded to texts generated by African-American women in the antebellum era. Highlighting this particular time frame (1830–1892) enables me to study black women’s writings, in conjunction with their widening social roles and shifting political attitudes, across these historical moments. At the same time, I pay close attention to the evolution of syncre-nationalist politics, which was in constant dialogue with the evolving nation-state. As the concept of America, itself, shifted during the course of the Civil War and its aftermath, activists and writers necessarily tailored their discourse to better respond to the social, political and economic shifts of the moment.

Each of the figures discussed in this study engaged in a unique form of political resistance. Clearly, there are continuities that link the cultural production of these activists; according to dominant constructions of identity, each of them would have been classified as “black” according to nineteenth-century standards. All of these women lectured in public, voicing the needs, concerns and demands of African-American men and women. They also worked as educators, providing various forms of instruction to their charges ranging from reading, religion and writing to housekeeping. But the similarities between these women should not minimize their differences. I examine Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper in particular because these five women engaged in allied but distinct political projects. They illustrate the range of syncre-nationalist practices available to black women from the perspective of the illiterate, the partially-educated and the well-educated woman. These African-American activists occupied various socio-economic locations and drew on different religious traditions. Given these ruptures, the cultural productions discussed here help to illustrate the different ways that black women experienced community and communion in the nation-state.

Further distinctions between these women manifest themselves in the genres they used. If we understand genre to be not merely a literary matter but also an aesthetic form ripe with political implications,⁴⁶ we uncover the subversion inherent in the forms through which these women expressed themselves. Stewart, for instance, drew on the sermonic tradition, infusing

it with elements of the conversion and the domestic narratives. The conversion genre, which called attention to the author's capacity to evolve from a sinner into a God-fearing Christian, influenced Stewart's writings in that portions of her text trace the details of her own spiritual conversion. Her reliance on the language of domesticity paved Stewart's way to the public and political sphere. Aspects of the autobiographical genre also emerge in Stewart's speeches, wherein she calls attention to her uniqueness and representativeness as a historical subject.⁴⁷ This is a significant move for a black woman to have made in the nineteenth century, as Stewart's literary choice signifies her awareness of her personal worth despite the contrary assumptions embedded in the antiblack society in which she lived. Two decades later, Shadd Cary crossed the boundary of the U.S. nation-state and used the journalistic mode to convey her racial uplift ideas. Not only did she negotiate geographical boundaries, but Shadd Cary also negotiated social divisions in her paper, aiming articles at a range of audiences and political factions. Journalism enabled her to disseminate a wide range of views from an antiracist and antislavery perspective. After the Civil War drew to a close, Cooper used her essays and lectures to effect meaningful political change in the world. Drawing on the domestic tradition, Cooper often relied on sentimental portrayals of former slaves to evoke a social and political response from her readers. Similarly, Harper infused her full-length novel, *Iola Leroy*, with sentimental language, combining it with conventions of the romance and antislavery literary traditions. Unwilling to limit themselves to a single genre or literary convention, most of these women used a combination of forms in order to convey their syncretic political concerns. Others used a single literary mode to communicate an eclectic antisexist, antiracist message.

I situate this work among the scholarship of Carla Peterson, Frances Foster and Kevin Gaines. In "*Doers of the Word*," Peterson offers useful ways of theorizing black women's cultural work. In her discussion of black women's writings and speeches in the antebellum and postbellum eras, she argues that such women necessarily resorted to "'achieving' an additional 'oppression,' by consciously adopting a self-marginalization that became superimposed upon the already ascribed oppressions of race and gender."⁴⁸ That is to say, black women who consciously exposed themselves by lecturing in public and circulating their words in print merely compounded their status as racial and gendered Others. Asserting themselves publicly, as they did, these women took on the additional "oppression" that would result from violating gender proscriptions. Black women activists, then, found themselves in unique social and cultural locations, involved in alternative forms of social practice. Along these lines Peterson refers to the "betwixt

and between” positions that black women assumed.⁴⁹ She also describes their discourses as “hybrid” to capture their strategy of combining a variety of linguistic and cultural forms. In another seminal work on black women writers, *Written by Herself*, Frances Foster historicizes their cultural productions, arguing that “African American women’s literature is a concourse wherein merge traditions of African Americans, women, the Other, and western civilization in general.”⁵⁰ Continuing with the theme of plurality in black women’s work, Gaines refers to the fact that Anna Julia Cooper “produce[d] multiple and at times conflicting identities” in her writings. He also refers to the “multiplicity” of voices in her texts and the way in which she “both contested and reflected the assumptions of the black intelligentsia and black middle-class ideology.”⁵¹ *Courting Communities*, extending this line of thinking, builds on the work of these scholars. I give a name to the methodology of black women activists—syncre-nationalism—and under this umbrella term, I include not only the complexities referred to above, but also a variety of social practices which reflect this syncretic impulse. I pay special attention to what otherwise might be termed “inconsistent” or “contradictory” practices, link them to a broader political strategy, and connect this strategy to the five women discussed in this project. Not only does syncre-nationalism have utility in the discussion of nineteenth-century texts and politics, but, as we shall see, it remains useful to us today.

All of the women highlighted in this discussion have received less scholarly attention than their male counterparts and have been viewed as less important than the prominent male “nationalists.” Yet their story is significant precisely because it does not fit into the pre-established categories of nationalism, leadership, and uplift bequeathed to us from the past. As Kevin Gaines indicates,

The male-dominated gender politics of uplift posed difficulties for black women as race leaders. The defensive preoccupation with conformity to Victorian patriarchal conventions, as a reaction to minstrel, journalistic, and social science slanders of black families, militated, for example, against the political protest waged by black women leaders in the interests of black people.⁵²

Not only were black women “placed in the subordinate position of sacrificing gender consciousness . . . in the name of race unity,” but they were also marginalized because “male orientation affected how black oppression was theorized, emphasizing the victimization of black men. . . . and silencing the particular victimizations of black women.”⁵³ Gaines’s essential insights into

the patriarchal underpinnings of postbellum racial uplift work open a door to more focused inquiries into the obstacles facing antebellum black women activists. Had they succumbed to the urgings of male leaders to eschew public activism in accordance with Victorian ideals of modesty, Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary and many others would have forfeited the critical opportunity to voice their concerns as ministers, lecturers, and writers in their communities. But, as Lora Romero has observed, the bravery emboldening black women to protest injustice in public has nonetheless been minimized in the annals of African-American history. Pointing out the “difficulty involved in rendering women’s presence in nationalist movements audible,” Romero argues that, “[w]ith respect to gender, contemporary cultural historiography honors precedents set by nationalist movements themselves.”⁵⁴ And since the theme of “manhood” has typically preoccupied nationalists, official and insurgent, one wonders with Romero how “an African-American woman—committed equally to both black nationalism and women’s participation in that enterprise—[could have made] her resistance recognizable.”⁵⁵ Dedicated to issues of both gender and race, how did Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper voice their concerns and implement their ideals?

Chapter One

Controversial Collectivities: Sojourner Truth's Search for Home

A tireless activist, Sojourner Truth devoted most of her adult life to the cause of civil rights. Although she participated in predominantly white anti-slavery meetings, suffrage groups and anti-capitalist communes, none of these associations could circumscribe nor contain her broad-ranging and subversive political activities. This discussion opens with Truth in part because she appeared on the historical stage before the other black women in this book.¹ But just as important, her eclectic activism helps to demonstrate the dynamic nature of syncre-nationalist politics, revealing its potential and limitations, its strengths and weaknesses.²

What political strategies were available to black women activists in the nineteenth century? How did African-American women fashion strategies of resistance against the dominant culture? Given Truth's inability to read and write, just how reliable is the record of her political speeches? What commonalities sustained the political community that Truth, an illiterate black woman, formed with white men and women in the nineteenth century? These are some of the questions that guide this chapter. While the women examined later in this discussion achieved a level of literacy that enabled them to participate directly in print culture, the hallmark of Benedict Anderson's nineteenth-century imagined community, the majority of black women who did not have access to the written form of communication engaged in alternative cultural processes that enabled them to experience "community." Truth, in particular, participated in spiritual, utopian and political collectivities whose values resisted the racist and sexist logic excluding blacks from the national community.

This chapter argues that Truth's activism and oratory exemplify syncre-nationalist politics. Her critique of, and consciousness about, the U.S.

nation-state involves the challenging of dominant constructions of identity as well as the imbalance of power between differentiated groups. While she challenged the racism and sexism underpinning the national community, Truth was dissatisfied with inequality of all kinds. She therefore would also protest the imbalances of the capitalist system by participating in communal anti-capitalist living arrangements. At the same time, she used the podium to question the fairness of the division of labor, which benefited men and exploited women. She spoke out against the logic of white supremacy which justified racial slavery and institutionalized discrimination. Calling for equality on many fronts, Truth wove syncretic cultural threads and philosophical systems into an on-going syncre-nationalist project. Combining liberal, Christian and African worldviews in her speeches, Truth mounted a powerful challenge to the exclusive logic of the nation-state.

Born as “Isabella” in 1797 in New York, Truth was separated from her parents when she was a young girl. Sold from master to master, Truth performed both domestic and fieldwork throughout her childhood and young adult years. Marrying a man named Thomas, who was selected to be her husband by her master John Dumont, Truth bore five children between 1815 and 1826.³ Soon thereafter, Truth escaped from Dumont’s plantation with her baby, Sophia. In the fall of 1826, Truth became a free woman shortly before New York State law would have declared her so in July 1827. In 1843, to signify her self-made identity, and perhaps to reflect the primary intentions of her soul, Isabella re-named herself Sojourner Truth.⁴

Never having learned to read or write, Truth would have been situated outside of Anderson’s community of individuals, who, “connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.”⁵ Fellowship derived from reading a newspaper, which is read only by those literate in that language, according to Anderson. The ability to read thus helped to constitute one’s identity as a national subject. Print culture did in fact play a significant role in the construction of imagined, nineteenth-century black middle-class communities. But what of those whose illiteracy prevented them from participating in print culture? How might we understand their relationship to “community”? Truth’s inability to read and write presents scholars with a dilemma since her concept of community does not rely primarily on literacy.

Importantly, Truth’s words reach scholars through the biased lens of her biographers.⁶ Not only is access to Truth in the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; With a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from Her “Book of Life”* (1878) mediated by

racial commentary, but transcribers also drastically altered her speeches and distorted her spoken words. The *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, for example, recorded Truth's "Ar'n't I a Woman" speech in standard English, on the day she presented it in 1851:

As for intellect, all I can say is, if woman have a pint and man a quart—why can't she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much, for we can't take more than our pint'll hold.⁷

However, the recollection of the Akron Convention organizer, Frances Dana Gage, twelve years later, differs dramatically:

'Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head—what dis dey call it?' 'Intellect,' whispered some one near. 'Dat's it honey. What's dat got to do with women's rights or niggers' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?'⁸

These contrasting versions of Truth's speech indicate that transcribers, motivated by personal agendas, may have been more faithful to their own expectations of how Truth *should* sound than they were to her actual words. According to numerous accounts, Truth's speaking style was in fact "very similar to that of the unlettered white people of [New York in] her time."⁹ Regardless, Truth's speeches were often recorded in southern folk dialect. Given scholars' unavoidable distance, then, from Truth's mode of self-expression in these instances, it is important to locate her distinct communication strategies in the records containing her words, yet to analyze critically the limitations presented by authorial bias. As Alessandro Portelli has argued, "the unacknowledged shadow of orality haunts and shakes the stability and certainty of [written] texts and institutions."¹⁰ In the case of Truth, therefore, the components of orality often challenge and work in opposition to the texts of her amanuenses and those of nineteenth-century social institutions. These fruitful sites of contradiction open up the text to traces of African-American culture that can help us to better analyze the politics and discourses deployed by Truth.¹¹

Although she did not personally ground her experience of community in print culture as it is commonly characterized, recent studies show that Truth's skilled negotiations of modern technologies and print capitalism represent a type of literacy situated beyond the mere ability to read and write.¹² Truth, for example, disseminated details about her lecture schedule

through anti-slavery publications; she sold carefully crafted photographs of herself to audience members, and gathered signatures to secure western lands by petition for former slaves. Such acts reveal not only Truth's understanding of but also direct participation in varieties of print culture; to reach her audience, she created photographs that could be read as texts, and used texts to participate in commerce.

Not only did Truth conduct her reform work boldly in public, thereby violating cultural proscriptions against female public speakers, but she also engaged in behavior considered eccentric and illogical.¹³ Rather than dismiss these behaviors, however, it is useful to examine them for their strategic value. Truth's most frequently cited communication patterns include her expressions through Biblical code, African-American dances and cultural forms, and folk sayings. According to the best sources available, Truth's parents, James and Betsey Bomfree, inculcated in their daughter not only Christian notions, but also the "Africanisms" which later surfaced in her speech patterns and behavior.¹⁴ Often, Truth incorporated clapping, singing and feet stomping into her lectures, which are hallmarks of African dance forms. Also noteworthy is Truth's spiritual perspective that God expresses Himself both in the ideological and material realms. God reveals His presence through inner guidance, for example, as well as in the forms of the "moon and the stars."¹⁵ Peterson indicates that such views parallel an African ideology, which makes no distinction between the material and spiritual dimensions. Convinced of the unity of all creation, this perspective conceives of God as an overarching being who organizes all life forms.

Arguably, her insistence upon using Africanisms before predominantly white audiences can be read as a gesture of resistance, rather than idiosyncratic behavior. Truth's persistent usage of African cultural expressions suggests that she was naming herself, constructing her own identity as she spoke, in defiance of onlookers' interpretations. It may be the case that she was articulating her distance from the whites in her midst. A marginal figure at most meetings that she attended, Truth perhaps relied upon forms of expression that produced for her a feeling of connectedness to God, or to a spiritual community privileging diverse oral expression.¹⁶ Although whites deemed incomprehensible her communication strategies, Truth may have been proclaiming her loyalty to African roots, articulating a sense of "blackness" that found no reflection in the faces of her immediate white audience. Truth, thus, was perhaps simultaneously communicating to blacks beyond her white audience, as Peterson suggests. Even though Truth spent most of her time in the presence of white benefactors and friends, she sensed that a stable "community" eluded her.

During the course of her public political life, Truth joined forces with outspoken white feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony. Prior to and during the Civil War, these activists, along with Frederick Douglass, agitated for women's and slaves' rights without treating the struggles as competing or antagonistic. After the Civil War, however, the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments (1868–1870) to secure the black male vote divided the abolitionist and suffragist movements.¹⁷ While Stanton and Anthony intended to acquire voting rights for privileged white women, Truth sought to extend such rights to the least protected classes of black men and women.

Despite her subversive political positions, Truth continued to affiliate with white suffrage movements throughout the postbellum period. The conflict generated by tensions between abolitionists and suffragists exposes one of the potential challenges inherent in the linking of varying oppressions. Chantal Mouffe has argued that social change can be affected by the joining of “diverse democratic struggles.”¹⁸ A newly created “subject position,” she theorizes, “would allow the common articulation . . . of antiracism, antisexism and anticapitalism.” While Mouffe acknowledges that such battles do not “spontaneously converge,” she suggests that through the act of strategic linkage, “the demands of each group could be articulated with those of others according to the principle of democratic equivalence.”¹⁹ Similar to identity politics, this strategy would enable subjects to negotiate a united identity behind which to struggle; each group's struggle would carry an equal value or “equivalence” in Mouffe's view, such that no particular interest would obscure another.

Perhaps dormant in Truth's experience with white feminists lay an early and unsuccessful manifestation of Mouffe's “democratic equivalences” model. Combining their struggles by the early 1860s, abolitionists and women's rights activists had acknowledged the urgency of each other's interests. Stanton and Anthony, for instance, established the National Women's Loyal League in 1863 for the purpose of petitioning Congress to abolish slavery in the form of the Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment. Apparently alliance-minded suffragists formed the Equal Rights Association (ERA) in 1866, thereby linking the efforts of white women and African Americans in the fight for the franchise. In this climate of cooperation, Anthony announced that it was time to “broaden” the women's rights platform “and make it in *name* what it has always been in spirit—a Human Rights platform.”²⁰ But at the same meeting, abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher proclaimed: “it is more important that women should vote than that the black man should vote.”²¹ Convinced that white women, unlike blacks, could exert a moral and civilizing influence on society by casting

their votes, Beecher gave voice to a popular concern among suffragists. This divisive sentiment, combined with general arguments about black inferiority, intensified during the 1860s and culminated in Stanton and Anthony's dissolution of the ERA in 1869.

Conducted in the context of the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, addressing citizenship and black male enfranchisement respectively, the contentious ERA debates exposed the fragility of the alliance between suffragists and abolitionists. When it appeared that black men would get the vote before white women, there was no attempt on Stanton and Anthony's part to assign an "equivalent" value to the struggles of black men, black women and white women. No neutral "subject position" was negotiated to enable the even articulation of diverse struggles. Rather, there was a systematic effort on the part of the privileged (white women) to maintain the hierarchical power relations separating themselves from those oppressed on account of race and gender. Stanton and Anthony attempted to erase the significance of historical inequity in order to posit universal women's rights as sufficient to protect women of all populations; at the same time, they worked to secure voting rights for privileged women whose votes would only reproduce their own protected social and economic status. Truth, on the other hand, understood the importance of the black male vote and took a supportive and "intermediate," rather than oppositional stance on amendments specifically aimed at expanding the rights of black men.²² Although she eventually positioned herself as a suffragist beside Anthony and Stanton in 1869, Truth continued to agitate specifically for black women's rights, despite her white counterparts' neglect of this issue. The failure of Stanton and Anthony to adequately broaden the women's rights platform to explicitly include black women struck a devastating blow against cross-racial women's alliances, which many twenty-first century feminists are still endeavoring to overcome.²³

These notions of social equality deeply appealed to Truth, whose life was marked by supporting a number of "utopian" causes. Having spent much of her life in search of a home, Truth generally experienced community in a shifting and temporary form. Not hindered by separatist racial beliefs, Truth's visionary concept of community compelled her to develop cross-racial ties with those whose religious and political convictions approximated her own. In 1833, Truth joined a religious commune presided over by Robert Matthews, who renamed himself Matthias. A self-proclaimed Jewish prophet, Matthias preached an apocalyptic message that the end of the world was imminent. Along with the other members of the Matthias commune, Truth contributed her material possessions to the cause and moved into Benjamin and Ann Folger's 29-acre farm, on the

Hudson River. The Folgers, a well-to-do couple involved in trade and real estate, legally transferred their property to Matthias in 1833, so convinced were they of his genuineness.

In theory, hierarchical relationships were outlawed in the commune, and members were to enjoy equality in Matthias's eyes. "Father" Matthias indicated that each must work "according to physical ability," but favoritism resulted in the disproportionate distribution of work. Truth's position was an uncertain one in the sense that she was "part peer, part servant."²⁴ On one hand, Truth enjoyed membership status because she had donated furniture and other possessions to the commune; on the other, she was recognized as a former slave who was excluded from discussions of consequence. Despite these shortcomings, Truth invested herself emotionally, spiritually and financially in this community. Controversy clouded the communal experiment, which terminated ignominiously after the death of member Elijah Pierson in 1834. Apparently undisturbed by Matthias's abuse and risqué sexual entanglements, Truth remained dedicated to his communal ideals and sought to testify on his behalf when he stood trial for Pierson's murder.

Despite the rumors and speculation surrounding the Kingdom, it is useful to read Truth's participation in the commune as an act of resistance. The ideals espoused among the members were in stark opposition to the raced and classed establishment in which they lived. Truth's decision, as a nineteenth-century black woman, to live in a co-ed communal arrangement with people from various classes and races was a radical one. This alternative community, far from utopia, nonetheless made a powerful anti-capitalist, antiracist statement. United around communal values of sharing and equality regardless of color and class, this group functions, theoretically, as an alternative to capitalist ideology premised upon scarcity and competition.

Even a cursory look at Truth's life story reveals her complex relationship to community formation. After the Kingdom dissolved, for example, her Millerite friends suggested that she join the utopian Northampton Association for Education and Industry, a labor commune, which also opposed capitalist values and hierarchical social systems. The Massachusetts-based Northampton Association provided a communal living arrangement, manufacturing silk in order to sustain itself (adults were required to work ten hours each day, for six cents per hour).²⁵ The community, comprised of 108 members in 1843, and 210 in 1844, was utopian in the sense that it promoted ideal social and economic conditions.

Believing that the racism and capitalism ordering their world were unjust, Northamptoners expressed their desire to undo "the manifold evils

of society and promote its further progress” in the Preamble of their Constitution.²⁶ Towards this end, the founders of the Association relied heavily upon Transcendental thought, detectable in their declaration that, regardless of color, sex and class, there should be “full enjoyment of liberty in thought, in word, and in action; . . . promoting the progressive culture and full development of all the capacities of human nature by the union of spiritual, intellectual and practical attainments.”²⁷ The writings of proto-socialist Charles Fourier, known in the nineteenth century for his celebration of “social harmony,” further influenced the community members. Consequently, the Northampton organizers claimed that:

Life is with some a mere round of frivolous occupations or vicious enjoyments, with most a hard struggle for the bare means of subsistence. The former are exempted from productive labour while they enjoy its fruits: upon the latter it is imposed as a task with unreasonable severity and with inadequate compensation. The one class is tempted to self-indulgence, pride, and oppressions: The other is debased by ignorance and crime, by the conflict of passions and interests, by moral pollution, and by positive want and starvation.²⁸

Given the Association’s dire assessment of the capitalist political economy, the Northampton Constitution proposed that there be “no distinction of rights or rewards between the strong and the weak, the skilful [sic] and unskilful [sic], . . . the rich and the poor . . . never accord to property peculiar privileges, but make the earth . . . the common heritage of the race as *one great family* . . . welcoming all to an equal participation.”²⁹ Above all, the founders insisted that adequate compensation for useful labor was essential in a just and humane society. Such ideals were particularly attractive to working-class laborers in the North, as “the factory system tended to confine and discipline workers to an unprecedented extent by the 1840s.”³⁰

Resentful of factory work and unsafe working conditions, white laborers occasionally compared their lot with that of slaves. David Roediger has shown that by 1860, “roughly half the nonslave labor force was dependent on wage labor and subject to new forms of capitalist labor discipline.”³¹ In particular, “regular, timed and routinized labor” forced wage earners to toil for long hours and low wages, abandoning cherished holidays and everyday freedoms. Both an external and internal phenomenon, capitalist discipline encouraged delayed gratification, and a refusal of the pre-industrial lifestyle largely structured around the seasons and human temperament. A cause for alarm among republicans occupied with notions

of liberty and justice, the new behavioral requirements and working environments prompted whites to protest exploitation and to affirm their entitlement to freedom. While some whites referred to themselves as “slaves” to evoke sympathy and effect change in the workplace, others refused to associate themselves with slavery and felt such parallels “violated at once their republican pride and their sense of whiteness.”³²

Against this backdrop of rampant industrialization and capital accumulation, the Northampton Association came into being. Its adherents were opposed to hierarchical race, class and gender relations. One of the primary tenets in this largely intellectual group, supported by William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, was that competition was an “evil” because it bred greed and inequitable conditions. Privileged were “cooperation, in the interest of women’s rights, freedom of expression, liberal education, and the abolition of slavery.” While utopian urges sometimes take the form of socialist living arrangements in which property is shared, the Northampton Association was less interested in communal property than in values of sharing and cooperation. Functioning as syncre-nationalist, the Association sought to “heal the class conflicts of the larger society” and, hence, connected a diverse population for the purpose of curing the world of the injustice fostered by the system of slavery.³³ Clearly syncretic in its composition, the Northamptoners brought together diverse men and women; out of multiple philosophies and political agendas, they formed one community. Like the syncre-nation theorized earlier, the Association functions as an experimental space where traditional cultural and social divisions are transgressed. It is the site where people from different cultures and backgrounds found common ground—one of the most important factors in syncre-nationalist practices. By rejecting the very hierarchies of race and gender upon which the U.S. social structure emerged, the Northampton Association challenged the very foundations of the nation-state, and its inequitable ethnic and gender relations.

The existence of this experimental community in the midst of an overwhelmingly oppressive and racialized social structure provides an example of Victor Turner’s “*communitas*” phenomenon, which “emerges where social structure is not. . . . [I]t transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency.”³⁴ *Communitas*, then, is a liminal space, existing “betwixt and between” the typical “positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom [and] convention.” Peterson’s discussion of *communitas* illustrates a key concept useful in understanding how Truth managed to live in a more “liberated” way than those who capitulated to the norms and customs of her day. Nor was Truth an isolated figure, for she

simultaneously attached herself to other persons “disengaged” from the status quo in this liminal space.³⁵ *Communitas* offered Truth freedom in the sense that she consciously disregarded social and cultural norms that she found limiting and discriminatory. While this in-between space should not be romanticized as an area exempt from violence, and free from traces of dominant culture, it did permit Truth, in a sense, to commit daily acts of social protest.

Not only did she participate in cross-racial communal arrangements, but Truth also insisted upon antiracism in the public sector. While living in Washington, D.C. in 1862, which had recently abolished local slavery, Truth found that streetcar drivers were reluctant to carry black passengers. Regardless of their resentment, Truth usually succeeded in securing a seat on these vehicles by boarding with white passengers, and refusing to budge when ordered to leave. While living in the realm of *communitas* emboldened Truth to commit these acts of resistance, it did not make her immune to physical abuse: in 1866, a streetcar conductor injured her shoulder in a hasty attempt to remove her from a public transportation car.³⁶

Aware that she was not oppressed merely as a woman, Truth recognized that she occupied multiple subject positions from which to organize. She therefore resisted oppression in conjunction with abolitionist, anti-capitalist, suffragist and spiritual collectives. The syncretisms discussed thus far help to constitute a broader series of seeming contradictions and tensions which structured Truth’s project. These complexities also reveal themselves in the records containing her words. Arguably, given the content of her speeches and the nature of her literary career, Truth went beyond both collective and liberal political positions, engaging in a third alternative in the realm of public discourse. In *Black Movements in America*, Cedric Robinson argues that, “[b]y the second half of the nineteenth century, two . . . Black political cultures had arisen, each nurtured by a particular Black experience.”³⁷ Black culture emerging from “the brutal regimes of slavery and, later, peonage,” writes Robinson, tended to combine African and Christian religious elements into a fortifying spiritual tradition. Their political culture could be considered as “communitarian rather than individualistic,” and “democratic rather than republican” in that an egalitarian consciousness compelled them to work with, rather than against, one another. Moreover, this segment of the African-American community was prone to resist oppression in the form of separatist-oriented emigration and migration.³⁸

Blacks steeped in liberal culture, on the other hand, aspired to capitalist advancement and the accumulation of wealth.³⁹ They appropriated liberal discourse and demonstrated “optimism about integration/assimilation.”⁴⁰ Truth,

however, sympathetic to both dispositions, incorporated elements of liberal and communitarian impulses into her racial uplift activism. As indicated earlier, Truth's primary source of strength sprang from her Afro-Christian religious beliefs. Staunchly egalitarian, Truth sought the franchise for the masses, rather than the educated few.⁴¹ And in response to urban poverty, she encouraged blacks to migrate to Kansas, where she hoped they could build a community in a region conducive to freedom. Kansas appealed to Truth as a destination for black migrants largely because land was abundant, and opportunities for self-activity appeared plentiful. Rather than taking menial jobs in the city, and maintaining their subservient relationship to whites, blacks, in Truth's view, should go West, build their own homes on their own land, and develop a measure of independence inaccessible to them when they were slaves.

While her politics were communitarian, liberal discourse also played a prominent role in Truth's speeches. In order to make blacks' political needs intelligible within the framework of liberal democracy, Truth routinely invoked the Constitution as a document destined to extend its protections and promises to African Americans. And some of Truth's logic, on the subject of government handouts, parallels that of self-help, liberal rhetoric. In 1871, for instance, Truth spoke before an audience of men and women celebrating the eighth anniversary of blacks' emancipation. "I been to Washin'ton," she remarked, "an' I fine out dis, dat de colud pepul dat is in Washin'tun libin on de gobernment. . . . Get dese culud pepul out of Washin'tun off ob de gov'ment, an' get de ole pepul out and build dem homes in de West, where dey can feed themselves, and dey would soon be abel to be a pepul among you."⁴² This call for black self-reliance is not unlike the discourse deployed by black liberals who claimed that independence could be earned through manual labor and property ownership.

Much like Booker Taliaferro Washington in this regard, Truth encouraged post-emancipation blacks to secure property and learn to care for themselves. Her work at the Freedmen's Village in Virginia during the war, and at the Freedmen's Hospital in D.C. afterwards, where she dispensed tips on domesticity, cleanliness and morality, seems to overlap with that also performed by Washington. Born a slave, he would work his way through school, teach at the Hampton Normal Institute, and eventually found the Tuskegee Institute in 1881. Writing on the subject of self-respect and self-sufficiency in his autobiography *Up from Slavery*, Washington argues:

We wanted to teach the students how to bathe; how to care for their teeth and clothing. We wanted to teach them what to eat, and how to

eat it properly, and how to care for their rooms. Aside from this, we wanted to give them such a practical knowledge of some one industry, together with the spirit of industry, thrift, and economy, that they would be sure of knowing how to make a living after they had left us. We wanted to teach them to study actual things instead of mere books alone.⁴³

The dignity inherent in caring for one's self figured prominently in the discourse of both Washington and Truth. According to the *Narrative*, Truth was wont to admonish her charges, "Be clean! be clean! for cleanliness is godliness [sic]." ⁴⁴ Given the similarity of Washington's and Truth's philosophies, we see that the latter eludes neat categorization. Truth's uplift activism blurred the lines that would cleanly distinguish conservative from radical black political culture.

One of Truth's better-known speeches provides further insight into her complexity as a subject. A close analysis of her 1851 "Ar'n't I a Woman" speech, examined at the opening of this chapter for the uniqueness of its diction, reveals the complicated resistance strategies which lay seething beneath her humor. The records created around Truth indicate that she engaged in a constant process of making and unmaking meaning. She inserted herself in the prominent discourses of the nineteenth century, revised them, and released them back into circulation for the purpose of transformation. After mounting the platform at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Truth declared: "I am a woman's rights."⁴⁵ While her incarnation as a black female had placed her outside of the discourse of domesticity, and, therefore, the realm of womanhood, Truth, nonetheless inserted herself in the discourse of womanliness.

As Hazel Carby has noted, "men associated 'the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution' and recoiled if a woman spoke of 'her great strength, her extraordinary appetite,' or 'her ability to bear excessive fatigue.'" ⁴⁶ While so-called true women could be distinguished thusly from their social and racial inferiors, Truth boldly reshaped the parameters of the category, "woman." Unambiguously asserting her womanly identity, Truth redefined womanhood as a condition expansive enough to contain sturdy females with big appetites and strong arms. By linking typically masculine qualities to her female form, Truth makes an intervention in the cultural discourses which structured fixed and distinct subjectivities for men and women. At the same time, she exercises power by creating an alternative definition of womanhood, in opposition to that formulated by dominant social constructions. Calling attention to the "materiality" of her body, Truth invites the audience to take note of her

muscles, which had enabled her to plow, reap, husk, chop and mow as well as her male counterparts could when she was a slave. Moreover, Truth remarked, "I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now."⁴⁷ Rather than casting doubt on Truth's identity as a socially acceptable woman, these examples, in her mind, constituted an alternative definition of womanhood—one broad enough to apply to women situated within various economic, social and racial locations.

Part of the work of syncre-nationalism involves the questioning of "reality"; as such, it allows for the merging of diverse cultural practices and epistemological systems. Demonstrating this tendency, Truth combined discourses and philosophies which appear contradictory by contemporary standards. In particular, Truth makes inquiries and deploys strategies in her speeches, which could be classified as post-structuralist by twenty-first century readers. By questioning the stability of meanings meant to fix black women as inferior Others, Truth's nineteenth-century rhetorical strategies resemble, to some extent, the deconstruction methods of Jacques Derrida.⁴⁸ Her practice of undermining common sense assumptions and undoing meaning, though, functioned in concert with invocations of an eternal, unchanging God, who remained constant in the midst of change. It is this infinite presence of a power greater than herself which functioned as the basis for her radical politics.

It is common for modern writers and literary critics to question the existence of an overarching principle, presence or law. One reason for their skepticism can be traced to the ways in which humanism's immutable truths have been deployed throughout history to perpetuate the status quo. According to the humanistic tradition, for example, men and women are, themselves, the source of meaning. They are individuals, all of whom share an immutable human nature, which naturally manifests itself in both a male and female form. Given their status as free agents, from this perspective, any degree of change is ultimately the responsibility of the individual. Social and economic hierarchies simply reflect the natural order of the universe, and the abilities of its inhabitants, rather than systemic patterns of oppression. In this way, liberal humanism limits the possibility of social transformation, as it posits each person as rational, uninhibited and capable of exercising free will. Such a philosophy obscures the broader social, economic and political forces at work designed to perpetuate inequitable conditions.

One of non-secular humanism's popular tools has been the Bible, which Bogin and Loewenberg identify as the "patrimony of mankind."⁴⁹ In particular, this text has frequently been misused by those in power to justify

and maintain social and racial hierarchies. Invested in perpetuating their power over subordinated peoples, men and women have referenced Biblical passages to invoke presumably essential truths about the nature of minority groups, thereby justifying the oppression to which they have been subjected. In *Afrotopia*, for instance, Wilson Moses details the process whereby “resourceful proslavery preachers” focused their attention on the Biblical story of Noah in order to explain blacks’ degraded condition.⁵⁰ Ham, Noah’s son, is said to have “mocked his father while Noah was drunken and naked.” According to scripture, upon awakening from his wine-induced stupor, Noah cursed Ham’s youngest son, Canaan, proclaiming, “a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.”⁵¹ As Moses indicates, this curse was broadened to include many of the descendants of Ham’s eldest sons as well. Black Americans, therefore, were doomed to fulfill the legacy inflicted upon Ham by his angry father. At the same time, scriptural references to women’s seductive and scheming nature (as in the case of Eve) seemed to justify their subordination by the laws of men. These so-called Biblical truths, then, about the “proper” place of women and blacks have historically been presented as evidence of their innate inferiority.

But for many free and enslaved religiously-inclined African Americans living in the nineteenth century, the Bible contained emancipatory potential. The ability to access an ideology that provided a steady source of meaning was invaluable to those acquainted with the frailty and uncertainty of life; many blacks were thus especially susceptible to spiritual laws and religious ideologies, which promised the comforting presence of that “changeless” something in the midst of their changing lives. According to Loewenberg and Bogin,

Religion was a hardy fixed point in a social universe of uncontrollable flux. Human beings cannot live with flux alone; there must be points of departure and return to permit survival of the psyche. Men and women in slave society found meanings in the promises of Scripture; . . . The moving words of song. . . and the rich imagery of Christianity gave countless slaves communion with imperishable stability.⁵²

Many black men and women integrated into their beings a God-centered liberal humanism. Clinging to it as a kind of lifeline, believers affirmed for themselves, and one another, the importance of the individual’s place as a member of the human family. Blacks took refuge in the belief that they were a part of the “oneness” which “derived from the fatherhood of God.” While this view might not have squared with the materiality of their lives, it

emboldened them to resist oppression in a myriad of ways. And just as important, humanism impacted the psyche in such a way that African Americans were able to know their own value and significance as human beings, despite competing racist ideologies asserting black inferiority. While Loewenberg and Bogin may appear to state the obvious, it is worth underscoring the fact that “[w]hite assumptions of black inferiority” indeed impacted on the consciousness of black Americans.⁵³ For many of the latter then, the laws of God functioned in a favorable way. It was blacks’ connectedness to an unchanging law, I would argue, which prepared so many of them to challenge the ideologies and practices meant to subordinate them to whites. In this sense, Truth practiced a kind of radical humanism, standing firmly on the ground of such immutable truths. At the same time, the records of her lectures show that Truth’s ultimate goal was to disrupt and revise commonly held perceptions for the purpose of social change. Her speeches made a political intervention on the cultural terrain—the realm where ideas, identities and beliefs get produced, reproduced and challenged—for Truth engaged in a struggle over the meaning of black female subjectivity.

In an 1853 woman’s rights speech before a crowd in New York, she creatively resisted the dominant construction of the black woman. Claiming the subject position for herself, Truth rejected the position of the powerless object of the audience’s gaze. Instead, it is *she* who watches *them*. In essence, Truth re-presents herself as a liberated woman, in defiance of the common sense assumption of black female inferiority; her very words appear to signify a liberated state of consciousness. At the beginning of her talk, Truth makes general observations about the crudeness of the crowd before her: She makes note of the “hissing” directed at her for daring to take the stage, and she later remarks that the rabble rousers would “have known better,” had they “been brought up proper.”⁵⁴ Using the Bible to her advantage, as she had memorized significant portions of it, Truth proceeds to make an analogy between blacks and the Biblical figure Esther, whose courage had compelled her to request from the king protection for her people from the cruelty of Haman; black Americans simply “want[ed] their rights as Esther” (568). Drawing the speech to a close, she warned:

I’m ‘round watchin’ these things [man’s inability to extend political rights to women], and I wanted to come up and say these few things to you, and I’m glad of the hearin’ you give me. I wanted to tell you a mite about Woman’s Rights, and so I came out and said so. I am sittin’ among you to watch; and every once and awhile I will come out and tell you what time of night it is. (568)

As we shall see, these speech acts—statements, criticisms, requests—have perlocutionary effects; Truth's acts, described above, were arguably meant to have an impact on her audience's feelings and actions.⁵⁵

Particularly illuminating is the manner in which Truth positions herself in relationship to her audience. She makes four successive utterances, each of which asserts her subjectivity: "I wanted to come up," "I wanted to tell you," "I am sitting among you to watch," and "I will come out and tell you what time of night it is" (568). Looking at the content of these utterances, one realizes that Truth constructs herself in such a way that she inhabits a position of power. Through these statements, Truth emerges as a willful, rather than powerless, figure. She occupies the position of one who gazes at an object (her audience) and establishes a hierarchical relation between the onlooker and the looked at. Truth's observation, for instance, that the younger people in the audience are lacking in social skills, could conceivably function as an indirect speech act, as Truth might have implied more than she actually said. Her criticism of their behavior might also have served as a critique of the unassailability of white womanhood. Since "true women" were responsible for teaching their children to become respectable, well-behaved citizens, the absence of these qualities among the members of the audience raises questions about the success of their mothers' parenting strategies. This evaluation of white women's children might have functioned to plant a seed of doubt in her listeners' minds, as to their unquestioned supremacy to the woman on the platform.

Not only is Truth present to watch, but she also determines that she is capable of assessing the dynamics of the situation in which she participates. She judges both the manners of the audience, as well as the progress of the women's movement. In effect, Truth assigns an empowering role to herself; rather than passively waiting to see in which direction the movement will turn, Truth declares that she will be actively watching and participating in the process.

But these sentences are not important for the sake of their content alone. It is reasonable to assume that Truth's utterances constituted speech acts, which had perlocutionary effects, for they were meant to impact meaningfully on her immediate and broader audience. Important to keep in mind is the historical moment in which Truth made these statements. According to the editorial comment documented in the *History of Woman Suffrage*, Truth's very presence on the platform functioned as "the signal for a fresh outburst from the mob. . . . Sojourner combined in herself, as an individual, the two most hated elements of humanity. She was black, and she was a woman, and all the insults that could be cast upon color and sex were together hurled at her" (567). Given the hostile environment that she

facéd, Truth's self presentation as a capable critic of contemporary society was likely intended to generate doubt about the legitimacy of white supremacy. Truth, in effect, comes across as equal, if not a bit superior, to her audience in this speech. Her presence at the New York City Convention in 1853 also underscores the importance of the subject matter, women's rights, to black women in particular. The fact that Truth promised her listeners that she would give them feedback as to the status of the movement functioned as a reminder that black women's concerns were as urgent as those of white women.

Another example of Truth's ability to strategically employ speech acts for a particular end is evident in her lecture, given in 1871 before a Boston crowd celebrating blacks' emancipation. At the opening of her speech Truth remarked: "W'en I was a slave I hated de w'ite pepul."⁵⁶ She then relayed an anecdote which illustrated the process whereby Jesus became her true and kindest "master." After this transformation was complete, Truth promised her master: "Yea, God, I'll lobe ev'ybuddy an' de white people too."⁵⁷ From that point on, Truth claimed, "dat lobe has continued an' kep' me 'mong de w'ite people."⁵⁸ Truth immediately went on to describe the miserable conditions in which blacks lived "off the government" in Washington, D.C.; she closed her speech by concluding: "I speak dese tings so dat when you have a paper [a reference to the petition which she later submitted to Congress in order to secure western lands for blacks] come for you to sign, you ken sign it."⁵⁹ Content-wise, Truth's speech is significant, as it describes her personal transition from sin to redemption.

Not to be ignored are the perlocutionary effects of Truth's speech acts. One can imagine what the wider implications of her words might have been; perhaps they were meant to persuade whites to sign her petition for land, out of sympathy for blacks' condition. Also effective is Truth's personal testimony to the fact of her own conversion to Christianity, which had enabled her to overcome the hatred she had harbored towards whites. Since she had been willing to forgive, and love her oppressors in return for their abuse, it followed that other blacks could do the same, ultimately becoming functional members of society. In order to make such strides, however, they required an opportunity to cultivate their own land. The juxtaposition of Truth's declaration of love for whites with her request for their signatures, then, conceivably functions as a speech act intended to influence her audience's behavior.

Further exemplifying Truth's tendency to challenge, assign new meaning to, and affect the world in which she lived, is the text of her 1867 speech. Taking economic rights as her theme, Truth uses this lecture as an opportunity to disrupt patriarchal power relations that designated women,

on the basis of biological differences, as inferior to men, suited for specific tasks, and as undeserving of equal compensation for equal work performed. Given the absence of female leadership in the courts, she argues: "If it is not a fit place for women, it is unfit for men to be there" (193).⁶⁰ This deceptively simple statement generates important epistemological questions. Aware that social meanings had been ascribed to sexual differences, Truth questions the fairness of the socially constructed division of labor which had channeled men, rather than women, into intellectually rigorous jobs. She also questions the sentiment that women's delicacy had suited them for domestic, rather than political activities. By positing men and women as mental and moral equals, Truth contests the assumption underpinning the ideal of "true womanhood," as well as the applicability of this ideology to the material reality of diverse women's lives.

By 1867, the Fourteenth Amendment had been proposed and was awaiting ratification by the states. Truth used this opportunity on the podium to underscore the value of rights for black men, as well as for women from different backgrounds. But how would she achieve this goal? Characteristic of Truth, her strategy for doing so proves to be complex, as she engaged in numerous speech acts to sway her listeners. Playing to her audience, Truth announced: "White women are a great deal smarter, and know more than colored women, while colored women do not know scarcely anything" (193). Making a case in favor of black women's unique need for the right to vote, Truth presents them as deficient in wisdom, and particularly vulnerable to black men; while black women perform their menial domestic tasks, she argues, "their men go about idle, strutting up and down; and when the women come home, they ask for their money and take it all, and then scold because there is no food. I want you to consider on that, chil'n" (193). Implicit in this anecdote is that black women, without access to the vote, could slip into a new form of slavery, catering this time to the needs of black, rather than white, men. While Truth appeared to flatter the crowd by appealing to its superior estimation of itself, she was also building the case that black women, the community's least protected members, required political power in order to avoid lapsing into an enslaved state.

Truth, however, is not concerned exclusively with the rights of black women. Associating them with German women, Truth observes that the latter had also worked just as hard as men in the fields. Even so, they do not "get the [same] pay" that their male counterparts earn (194). Truth establishes, at this juncture, a basis for a cross-racial labor alliance. This similarity in condition could have functioned as a common ground for political organization among black and German women. Even though these

populations were differentially situated in relation to the state, Truth found an issue around which they might have organized for the purposes of effecting economic change. Demonstrating her syncre-nationalist tendencies, Truth views the struggles of blacks not as in competition, but in harmony, with those of other oppressed peoples. Her syncre-nationalist impulse privileges cooperation and seeks commonality in the midst of difference. Much like the activism valued by contemporary black feminist Audre Lorde, syncre-nationalism aims to “take . . . differences and make them strengths.”⁶¹ The ability to understand that oppression functions not only along the lines of race, but also those of class and gender distinguishes Truth from her more conservative suffragist sisters, who shaped their feminist questions primarily around the concerns of middle-class white women.

Staunch egalitarianism manifests itself in this speech from beginning to end; Truth’s unrelenting critique of sexism compels her to conclude: “[men] cannot help us much until some of the spirit is taken out of them that belongs among the women. . . . When woman gets her rights man will be right. How beautiful that will be.” In characterizing the balance of power as beautiful, Truth reaffirms her commitment to living in a nation—a syncre-nation—in which equitable social relations are posited as both ideal, and practical. While arguing for economic, social and political change, Truth maintains the tension in her philosophy; she expects that worldly changes “will come quickly,” largely because of her changeless “faith in God,” an eternal metaphysical principle, and her confidence in the “truth in humanity.”⁶²

Questioning tradition and imagining an alternative to the racist republic in which she lived, the content of Truth’s speeches contains the major components of syncre-nationalism, as outlined earlier. She combined American and African practices in her activism, lacing liberal discourse with folk sayings and sacred song-dance performances. Although Truth made public appearances primarily in the northern states, her distinct cultural expressions parallel community-building strategies in southern slave states as well as in Western Africa and Central Africa, the primary areas from which the ancestors of blacks in America were exported.⁶³ Truth’s Africanisms, then, affirm African values of cooperation, sharing and humanity in the midst of a hostile, racially and economically stratified Western culture. Rather than relying upon personal bravery alone as the basis for self-activity, Truth’s identification of herself as God’s instrument enabled her to act and to insist: “The Lord has made me a sign unto this nation, an’ I go round a-testifyin,’ an’ showin’ on em’ their sins agin my people.”⁶⁴

Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart held in common a faith in God. While Truth's spirituality spurred her to join experimental and eclectic religious communities, which radicalized her in the process, Stewart's religious beliefs prompted her to move among more conservative circles. Overtly politicized from the start, Stewart's lectures delved into the meaning of black female identity and wrestled with the asymmetrical power relations empowering men, at the expense of women.

Although Stewart shared Truth's unshakable faith in God, her class and cultural status would distinguish her from the working-class former slave, who once proudly declared: "I don't know nothin' about grammar."⁶⁵ Stewart, on the other hand, carefully represented herself as one who had "been classed as a lady among [her] race all [her] life."⁶⁶ Never having experienced slavery first-hand, Stewart could only imagine what her enslaved counterparts must have suffered. This she did in her speeches; and despite the multiple historical, cultural and economic differences which undermine monolithic constructions of blackness, Stewart committed her life to building a black community whose unity would strengthen its ability to live, love life, and oppose oppression.

Chapter Two

Charting a Course for the Middle Class: Maria Stewart's Advice to the Middle Sector

Afro-Christianity¹ figures prominently in the uplift activism of both Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart but, unlike Truth, Stewart worked in predominantly black communities. In Stewart's speeches to elite organizations, she challenges middle-class blacks to intensify their racial uplift activities. Not only does Stewart encourage women to play a more public racial uplift role, but she also encourages blacks generally to become Christians and to instill such values in their children. This strategy, Stewart argues, will result in the "lifting" of both individual families and, ultimately, the race as a whole. Stewart's racial uplift project posits middle-class blacks as the agents of racial uplift, and masses as their beneficiaries.

This chapter argues that Stewart's courting of communities—or, more specifically, her calling of collectivities into existence through diverse forms of cultural work—manifested itself in syncre-nationalism. In particular, Stewart constructed dynamic floating alliances in her speeches and writings, and engaged in a syncretic set of social practices throughout her lifetime. Using a multi-faceted discourse, she challenges the dominant construction of liberal subjectivity inherited from Enlightenment thinkers.² In so doing, Stewart works to reject individualistic conceptions of identity and allows for the emergence of an alternative collective subjectivity that values both individual and community rights. In addition, Stewart's texts challenge hegemonic representations of blackness and femaleness, making an invaluable intervention into black nationalist narratives.

The cultural and political contributions of Stewart make necessary the recovery projects seeking to analyze the heterogeneous voices contrapuntal to masculinist national discourses. The marginalization of female input in black

nationalist histories long prevented scholars from thoroughly analyzing the critiques offered by women like Stewart, and studying hierarchical arrangements operating within nineteenth-century black communities. As Lora Romero argues, what makes Stewart “so disruptive to memories of African American political endeavor . . . is the conjunction in her writing of both vocabularies of nationalism: the language of life and the language of death.”³ By embracing both domestic values and the possibility of violent resistance to oppression, Stewart threatens socially constructed gender differences and thereby challenges “gender difference as a means of signifying oppositionality.”⁴ In blurring women’s difference from men, she “abandoned the claim of her moral difference” from them. This distinction is significant, Romero shows, as “[w]omen could intrude into matters of government only because their domestic associations retained in the rhetoric of social housekeeping provided a utopian alternative to a putatively male sphere of brute force.”⁵ The oppositionality of the female and male spheres is reflected in critics’ categorization of nationalist writings into either womanist or masculinist camps, grounded in qualitative differences rooted in patriarchal assumptions. More specifically, Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845)* has been categorized as masculinist because it privileges physical combat and the risking of life over bondage in slavery.⁶ Expanding on Romero’s claim that the merging of the languages of life and death have contributed to Stewart’s rejection from African-American political history, I argue that Stewart attempted to weave a holistic narrative into black nationalist discourse.

Derived from “holy” and “healed,” the term “wholeness” captures the interconnected diversification present within Stewart’s writings. Part of her syncre-nationalist uplift project involved the renewing and revival of an injured people through unity and group cohesion. Viewed holistically, the denial of integral elements proves injurious to the whole; similarly, Stewart attempted to inscribe a narrative into black nationalism rooted in unity and pluralism, which would allow for wholeness, or healing, to emerge. While merging the (fe)male languages of life and death, she also formulated imagined alliances and communities that theoretically disregarded the boundaries of race, nation and time. Stewart, through print and speech, engaged in subversive antiracist and antipatriarchal acts which parallel Truth’s practice of living in the liminal cross-racial space of “communitas.”

Although Stewart interacted primarily with black collectivities, she nonetheless experienced “community” as a complex and precarious entity. Born free in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1803, and orphaned at five, Stewart grew up in a minister’s home as a domestic servant. As a teenager, she attended Sabbath school and learned basic reading skills.⁷ Shedding her working-class beginnings through marriage, Stewart became a member of

Boston's black middle-class community when she married James W. Stewart in 1826.⁸ Within three or so years, the death of her husband and friends David Walker and Thomas Paul prompted a religious conversion that facilitated her transformation into a bold racial uplift activist. An outspoken lecturer, Stewart would encounter resistance from her black peers in Boston who were beholden to gender conventions. Unable to lecture freely in ecclesiastical settings, Stewart became an itinerant lecturer, making several public appearances in Boston, Massachusetts. Although there is virtually no specific documentation of the public's response to Stewart, who was the first American woman to lecture before a "promiscuous" audience composed of both men and women, her Boston "Farewell" speech in 1833 indicates frankly that she is under social siege and in need of refuge.⁹

According to Romero, Stewart's "nationalist" writings defied seamless assimilation into either "womanist" domestic sphere narratives or "masculinist" confrontational narratives.¹⁰ While Stewart advised that black women develop homemaker skills and lovingly attend to their children, she simultaneously called for broad social changes and public female participation. The formulation of "nationalism" that Romero identifies in Stewart's writing is consistent with Wilson Moses' contention that "it [black nationalism] has been 'nationalism' only in the sense that it seeks to unite the entire black racial family, assuming that the entire race has a collective destiny and message for humanity comparable to that of a nation."¹¹ While Stewart's politics could be classified as nationalist in many respects, a closer look at her complex political activism will reveal the syncre-nationalist dimensions of her project. More specifically, Stewart both deploys and problematizes the tenets of official and black nationalist thought. Responding creatively to nationalism's sexist and racially charged components, Stewart's texts reformulate and transform it in the process.

In order to explore the manifestations of syncre-nationalism in Stewart's racial uplift project, I want to consider her early political writings and speeches,¹² published in Boston by William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* between 1831 and 1833, which open onto the possibility of alternative forms of political organizing. Existing outside of mainstream politics, such activity would include, but not be limited to, anti-slavery community formations, spiritual communities, women's literary and improvement societies, and transnational collectivities. Using a multi-faceted discourse, Stewart re-imagined the rationalist ideology of the national community, critiqued modernity,¹³ and created a context in which cultural transformation and political emancipation could occur. Cognizant of the fact that one must first envision change before experiencing it, Stewart's productions call for a new way of seeing and being in the world.

In her 1831 essay, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on which We Must Build," for example, Stewart fuses Enlightenment discourse with religious-historical and human rights discourses, thus advancing an alternative epistemology meant to reject the oppressive practices of the American state. The reason-driven Enlightenment project is what David Harvey characterizes as "[t]he development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought [which] promised liberation from the irrationalities of myth, religion [and] superstition. . . . It was, above all, a secular movement that sought the demystification and desacralization of knowledge."¹⁴ Although Stewart deploys Enlightenment discourse she also revises it, as it is inadequate to the task of addressing the political, economic and social situation of blacks. As Peterson has argued, Stewart's texts are not necessarily "shaped by Enlightenment structures of reason" in the sense that they "offer no statement of a main thesis that is then proved by means of empirical observation, rational argument, or repeated invocation of book knowledge."¹⁵ Nonetheless, Stewart's invocation of Enlightenment reasoning in her texts is significant because she decenters it.

The discourse of modernity, for example, had not hastened the abolition of slavery. Reason and rights discourses had not produced meaningful change among communities of oppressed blacks. Stewart, therefore, uses Enlightenment discourse because it has utility, but she critiques it by privileging alternative ways of knowing. That is, she draws on a non-scientific, African-American Biblical protest tradition that emboldened many black women to enter public spaces, challenging convention, tradition and injustice. Drawing primarily from the Old Testament as well as Revelations in the New Testament, Stewart cited passages that would interpellate her audience, and inspire her listeners to view themselves as subjects who could exercise collective action. As we shall see, Stewart's Christian beliefs are likely Africanized, revealing the "influence of an African Cosmology."¹⁶

In 1831, for example, Stewart endeavored to disrupt the discourse of white supremacy by countering it with a Biblical discourse rooted in egalitarianism. "Religion and The Pure Principals of Morality," therefore, proclaimed:

Many think, because your skins are tinged with a sable hue, that you are an inferior race of beings; but God does not consider you as such. He hath formed and fashioned you in his own glorious image, and hath bestowed upon you reason and strong powers of intellect. He hath made you to have dominion over the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea. (29)

The inclusion of Biblical reasoning at this juncture serves as an attempt to counter disempowering ideologies that merely rationalized the political economy of slavery and discrimination based on race. By appropriating the discourse of equality, Stewart tries to undo the dominant construction of blackness and instead associates black men and women with nobility and near-divinity. In short, Stewart uses Biblical passages to construct an alternative black consciousness. Contextualizing not only her 1831 essay, but also her entire body of work, Stewart's usage of the Bible enables her to establish the conditions that will justify black agency.

Although she relies heavily on Biblical language, Stewart also engages the discourse of modernity, which underscores her unshakable faith in the inevitability of linear progress. Her perennial themes include education, the beneficial effects of science, and the centrality of economic, social and political progress. Also consistent with Enlightenment ideology is Stewart's faith in the "innate goodness and rationality of human nature."¹⁷ Along these lines, she advises blacks that hard work and moral decency will ultimately earn them social and political equality. Exhorting blacks in "An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall" (1833) to "follow the example of the whites," who have prospered, given their "prudence, economy, and exertions" (60, 58), Stewart advises young black men to "flee from the gambling board and the dance-hall" (59–60); she condemns them for "spend[ing] their hard earnings for this frivolous amusement; for it has been carried on among us to such an unbecoming extent that it has become absolutely disgusting" (60). And in her 1831 essay she declares: "I am of a strong opinion that the day on which we unite, heart and soul, and turn our attention to knowledge and improvement, that day the hissing and reproach among the nations of the earth against us will cease" (37). According to this optimistic narrative of merit, blacks, with hard work and equal opportunity, will compete fairly with whites. In short, Stewart appeals to liberal values in an attempt to secure a place for African Americans in the racialized social structure.

At the same time, she exposes the impediments to black advancement, as well as the complicity of the state with the national subjugation of blacks. To effect social change, Stewart published the realities of African-American life alongside the nation's abstract promises of equality and justice. She criticizes *America* for depriving blacks of "equal rights and privileges" (39), and the southern planters who reaped wealth on the backs of their black slaves, as well as the national community for extending its "charity" to Greek, Polish and Irish nationalists, while refusing to aid black Americans at home (39). Acknowledging the state's failure to protect black citizens, Stewart attempts to create an environment conducive to change.

Not merely airing grievances, Stewart uses the experience of African Americans to confound the cultural claim that meritocracies reward hard workers with fair and equal treatment. In so doing, she aims to bring about a new reality in which African Americans enjoy social, economic and political power.¹⁸

Rather than relying exclusively on the language of the Enlightened liberal individual, Stewart encourages her black readers and listeners to view themselves as *community members* capable of collective action. Her speeches, then, raise the possibility of alternate forms of organizing. Stewart not only “identifies herself with her audience” by using pronouns like “we” and “our” in her speeches,¹⁹ but she also uses such pronouns to enlarge narrow notions of subjectivity. More specifically, she identifies in her audience a potential community of Christians; of women; and of black men and women sharing ties to an ancient Ethiopia, all engaged in collective struggle. In linking blacks thus to the site of Ethiopia, Stewart troubles Enlightenment reasoning through what Paul Gilroy might term an “invocation of anteriority.”²⁰ In a speech made to African Americans at the African Masonic Hall in 1833, for example, Stewart notified her audience that:

History informs us that we sprung from one of the most learned nations of the whole earth; from the seat, if not the parent, of science. Yes, poor despised Africa was once the resort of sages and legislators of other nations, was esteemed the school for learning. . . . But it was our gross sins and abominations that provoked the Almighty to frown thus heavily upon us, and give our glory unto others. Sin and prodigality have caused the downfall of nations, kings and emperors; and were it not that God in wrath remembers mercy, we might indeed despair; but a promise is left us; “Ethiopia shall again stretch forth her hands unto God.” (58)

Instead of positing Greece as the origin of civilization, Stewart centers Africa, thereby challenging the Anglo-European narrative of history. That ancient Africa was the “parent of science” represents the continent as a former site of glory, *and* a contemporary source of hope.

Stewart’s references to Africa—Ethiopia in particular—signify her willingness to challenge western epistemology. Her privileging of Ethiopia, for example, undermines the centrality of linear time and horizontal nation development. According to Anderson, the transition from Messianic to chronological time prepared the stage for modern nation formation. Unlike chronological time, Messianic time holds that circumstances unfold in accordance with an eternal, divine plan. On the other hand, “[t]he idea of a

sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history."²¹ Passing out of anteriority and moving forward in history became the mark of a modern people. While linear, or horizontal time appears as the vehicle for progress in Stewart's writings, generally, temporal hybridity also emerges, as Messianic time links the glory of ancient Ethiopia to blacks' present and future. The assurance that Ethiopia is always already in a potential state of regeneration suggests that blacks' current state of degradation is temporary; the cycle of black Americans' rebirth is always on the verge of manifestation.

This reference to the Ethiopianist tradition is also significant because it allows Stewart to display to blacks, and the world, a version of their glorious heritage. It enables her audience to imagine a link between the past and the present; since they ruled themselves and influenced others in pre-slavery days, they could do so again. This passage constructs blacks as a distinct people with a diasporic bond, as the "powerful sons and daughters of Africa" (63). Stewart characterizes them as a kind of family springing from the "enlightened nation" of Ethiopia (58). And, given this illustrious heritage, Stewart encourages blacks to view themselves as a community of Christians, capable of rising up to secure their rights.

Perhaps Stewart's repeated allusions to Africa also reveal in part a worldview that prompted her to claim a leadership role, despite the societal restriction of gender. Ryan, for example, argues that "the primary indications of the influence of an African cosmology appear in [Stewart's] unsanctioned belief in [her] own capacity for creative or righteous agency, and in the fact that [her] vision of the role and responsibility of preacher is informed by and expresses an ethos of interconnectedness."²² Specifically, Ryan stresses the significance of the "interconnectedness of male and female aspects of Deity in African cosmology," as well as the "acceptance of female aspects of Deity" in Africa,²³ cultural models which likely created an environment in which antebellum African-American women had access to spiritual power. In effect, "African cosmological thought" served to demonstrate "the limits of male authority" to early black Americans.²⁴ Given her detailed textual references to the prominent spiritual roles that women have played globally throughout history, Stewart, in all probability, had also acquainted herself with this aspect of African spiritual tradition. Spiritually empowered to act as an individual, Stewart nonetheless stressed the value of collective self-activity.

Stewart's emphasis on community, rather than individual advancement alone, raises the possibility of an alternative form of subjectivity. Although Stewart encourages the westernized, educated black to advance

socially, politically, and economically, she positions the individual in relationship to community; his or her responsibility will be that of uplifting the masses to advance socially and politically, as fully “civilized” peoples. This desire for group effort, rooted in non-egalitarian cultural assumptions, however, confounds Stewart’s sporadic support of liberal individualism. While envisioning blacks, generally, as a community, Stewart also foregrounds hard work and personal effort as essential to individual success. She calls for the formation of a black community that is *cooperative*; for capitalist advancement to be used for the building of community. Since oppression and negative ascription encouraged blacks to view themselves collectively, activists like Stewart often viewed themselves not as individualistic subjects but as subjects invested in collective political struggle. While she invokes interiority, revealing a constructed inner life in her speeches and writings, she cannot be reduced to a liberal individual subject; hers is a collective subjectivity that stands for community rights.

The emergence of a new type of subjectivity is significant because it departs from the conventional understanding of the fixed, coherent, rational subject. From a poststructuralist perspective, Chris Weedon articulates the stakes involved in questioning the construct of the liberal humanist rational subject. Not merely an ideological exercise, she claims that

[t]he political significance of decentering the subject and abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity is that it opens up subjectivity to change. In making our subjectivity the product of the society and culture within which we live, feminist poststructuralism insists that forms of subjectivity are produced historically and change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them.²⁵

The unwillingness to accept uncritically the existence of “essential blackness,” for example, enabled many black activists to intervene in dominant constructions of identity in order to rework and transform the stereotypical forms of subjectivity ascribed to diasporic Africans.

Not only do Stewart’s cultural productions challenge the construction of liberal subjectivity, but they also explode the conventional categories that nationalist ideologies create for women generally, and for black women in particular. Stewart’s uplift project proves unorthodox, as she not only argues for increased racial uplift activity among the middle sector, but she also calls for expanded opportunities for black women in general.²⁶ Stewart’s writings have endorsed not only death as a means of resistance, but also life.²⁷ By endorsing various strategies for group survival such as education, temperance and economy, Stewart’s writings could be interpreted as collaborative,

assimilationist and bourgeois. Such analyses, however, would ignore the complexity and subversion of Stewart's rhetoric. A militant figure, she represented herself as a willing warrior, armed for the battle for rights and resources. When she declares that she is "willing to die by the sword as the pestilence" for the cause of liberty (46), Stewart is re-imagining the role of the female subject. Not simply the reproducer and nurturer of the nation's citizens, Stewart's conception of herself as woman inhabits both the domestic space and the discursive battleground.

At a historical moment when blacks were presumed to be sub-human, Stewart took up the pen, and spoke from the platform. The act of writing itself is political,²⁸ as Stewart consciously responds to dominant constructions of blackness and femaleness as inferior incarnations. Rejecting conventional portrayals of African-American women as the hypersexual and unfeminine non-citizen, Stewart emphasizes the intersectionality of race and gender—more specifically, the humanity of African-American women.²⁹ "It is you," she informs them in her 1831 essay, who "must create in the minds of your little girls and boys . . . the love of virtue, [and] the abhorrence of vice" (35). Representing black women as republican mothers, she assigns them a central role in society.³⁰ Normally an inferior position intended to affirm women's *moral* superiority, but *general* inferiority to men, the role of the domestic mother in this context becomes subversive. The depiction of black women as moral and upstanding members of society speaks back to texts designed to perpetuate the assumption of their depravity. Referring in her 1831 essay to black women specifically as "the fair daughters of Africa" (38), Stewart calls attention to their African ancestry. During a historical moment in which many (but not all) blacks were beginning to shy away from identifying themselves thus, given the dominant, negative perception of the continent, Stewart consciously and voluntarily represents herself as a daughter of Africa. But shortly thereafter in her 1832 lecture at Franklin Hall, she insists that she is "a true born American" (46). Disrupting the construction of the unified, transcendent individual, Stewart posits herself as a subject occupying multiple positions: she is a descendent of Africa, an American, and a woman. This representation of her subjectivity runs over the borders and confounds the concept of universal identity.

For all her uniqueness, Stewart is quite similar to other nineteenth-century blacks such as Douglass and Shadd Cary, who also imagined themselves as part of a middle-class community that was moving forward in time, evolving as a unit. Douglass, who could read and write standard English, the "language of power," felt separate from Truth who seemingly experienced a different concept of time. According to feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton's recollections, Truth once declared: "I don't read such small

stuff as letters, I read men and nations. I can see through a millstone, though I can't see through a spelling-book."³¹ While Douglass understood time as a civilizing mechanism through which the written word could be transmitted, Truth privileged the immediacy of the present moment, and the power of the spoken word to name and reconfigure it.

Like Douglass, then, Stewart imagines herself as part of a black community which aspires to refine itself through the passage of time. This concept emerges in various forms throughout Stewart's speeches. In 1832, for example, before an elite group at the Franklin Hall, she argues:

As far as our merit deserves, we feel a common desire to rise above the condition of servants and drudges. I have learnt, by bitter experience, that continual hard labor deadens the energies of the soul, and benumbs the faculties of the mind. . . .

It is true, that the free people of color throughout these United States are neither bought nor sold, nor under the lash of the cruel driver; many obtain a comfortable support; but few, if any, have an opportunity of becoming rich and independent. (47)

This passage concerning social mobility contains the desire for collective improvement: Stewart articulates the need to advance as a group. Rather than confining blacks to manual labor, Stewart imagines the flowering of a community in which African Americans can develop other faculties, thereby becoming "independent." Despite the dismal state in which blacks found themselves, there was hope, according to Stewart, in the promise that "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God" (47). Explaining further the source of her hope in her 1833 Masonic Hall address, Stewart predicts that: "many powerful sons and daughters of Africa will shortly arise, who will put down vice and immorality among us, and declare by Him that sitteth upon the throne that they will have their rights" (63). In effect, Stewart believed that religious conversion would hasten God's salvation. When spiritual conditions were sufficiently in order on the physical plane, the Divine would reveal itself in the form of justice and retribution. Africa's "sons and daughters" are thus posited as partially responsible for their advancement as a group.

Stewart depicted unity, one of the recurring themes in her writings, as both the potential strength and actual weakness of the antebellum black community. As previously discussed, Stewart committed herself fully to the concept of community empowerment. She believed that the more fortunate African Americans in Boston had a responsibility to assist the destitute and discouraged in their struggle for resources. Steeped in a sense of responsibility for blacks in general, she proclaimed in her 1831 essay:

I am sensible, my brethren and friends, that many of you have been deprived of advantages, kept in utter ignorance, and that your minds are now darkened; and if any one of you have attempted to aspire after high and noble enterprises, you have met with so much opposition that your souls have become discouraged. For this very cause, a few of us have ventured to expose our lives in your behalf, to plead your cause against the great [...] (40–41)

This passage reveals a sensitive awareness, on Stewart's part, of the pain that results from degradation, oppression and injustice. Stewart was not immune to the psychic consequences that social and economic abuse could wreak. Establishing an environment of loyalty and accountability, Stewart links the destiny of wealthier blacks to the economically oppressed and emotionally resigned. Presumably, the "few" whom Stewart characterizes as blacks' advocates are the free and financially stable blacks. Again challenging rugged individualism as a legitimate ideology, Stewart stresses the importance of cooperation and compassion. Although dominant society lumped blacks together as a degenerate, monolithic mass, Stewart turns this negative into a positive. Since blacks were already bound together by a legacy of oppression, Stewart uses this historical "glue" to remind wealthier blacks that they could not achieve true freedom as long as their counterparts, North and South, remained disadvantaged. It makes sense, therefore, that Stewart would call repeatedly for "every female heart [to] become united" (37) for the purpose of "rais[ing] a fund" to be used "for the building of a High School, that the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us" (37). Not only did Stewart prioritize teamwork for the sake of fund raising, school and business building, but, as we shall see, she demanded it for the sake of building a compassionate community to which she, herself, could belong.

As dedicated as she was to constructing a socially unifying ideology, Stewart did not occupy a secure position in her own community. In fact, one could imagine that she suffered extreme disappointment, to the extent that she sensed a lack of connectedness among the blacks she encountered. Her repeated calls for unity among African Americans implies that she perceived its absence. The following quote from a letter written by historian William C. Nell to William Lloyd Garrison captures her predicament:

In the perilous years of '33-'35, a colored woman—Mrs. Maria W. Stewart—fired with a holy zeal to speak her sentiments on the improvement of colored Americans, encountered an opposition even from her Boston circle of friends, that would have dampened the

ardor of most women. But your words of encouragement cheered her onwards[.]³²

While Stewart did not find significant acceptance among many African Americans, this letter indicates that she did get support from key abolitionist figures like Nell and Garrison.

Seemingly in response to such treatment, from her “circle of friends,” Stewart laments before the Afric American Female Intelligence Society in 1832: “It appears to me that there are no people under the heavens so unkind and so unfeeling towards their own, as are the descendants of fallen Africa. I have been something of a traveller in my day; and the general cry among the people is, “Our own color are our greatest opposers” (53). She later writes:

And why is it, my friends, that we are despised above all the nations upon the earth? Is it merely because our skins are tinged with a sable hue? No, nor will I ever believe that it is. What then is it? Oh, it is because that we and our fathers have dealt treacherously with one another, and because many of us now possess that envious and malicious disposition, that we had rather die than see each other rise an inch above a beggar. No gentle methods are used to promote love and friendship among us, but much is done to destroy it. (54)

Ripe with complexity, this passage brings several difficult issues to the fore. In another attempt to inspire her audience into self-activity, Stewart suggests that blacks’ lack of advancement could be traced to personal flaws, rather than racial discrimination. The shortcomings that Stewart privileges over structural and political failings here take the shape of intra-group dissension, betrayal and envy. While Stewart might have been referring to any number of quarrels that plagued blacks in the 1830s, it is important to view the fragility of African-American relations within the broader context of racial injustice, hostility and discrimination. If there was a significant amount of bitterness among the blacks whom Stewart encountered, this negativity must be understood in relationship to the historical circumstances in which blacks struggled to survive.

Another explanation for the hostility Stewart encountered could be traced to her unpopular stance on issues of gender. An unorthodox figure, as previously mentioned, Stewart insisted on playing a public, rather than private, role in the racial uplift movement. Opal Moore has argued that Stewart “spoke with the voice of a man—i.e., a voice of authority . . . [and] interpretation.”³³ In short, “she spoke both in and against the male

tradition.”³⁴ Clearly, Stewart’s public accusation in 1833 that black men’s actions fell short of masculine resistance to oppression merely contributed to her perceived and actual alienation from key black male supporters. Hardly more successful in establishing “community” with black women in Boston, she begged them to “cultivate among [themselves] . . . a spirit of Christian love and unity, having charity one for another” (55). Estranged from these women, Stewart scolded: “[A]nd there is not one of you, my dear friends, who has given me a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord, or soothed the sorrows of my wounded heart, but God will bless you, not only you, but your children for it. Cruel indeed, are those that indulge such an opinion respecting me as that” (54–55). This painful isolation proved to be a common burden for black women activists who conducted their reform work in public. Decades later, journalist Ida B. Wells would face similar difficulties finding a “home” for herself among black and white men and women.

In an assessment of Wells’s contribution to the history of civil rights activism in America, Paula Giddings effectively documents the extent to which racial uplift activists marginalized the journalist’s input. Citing both class and gender status as the possible causes of the treatment she received, Giddings goes on to explain that “the whites in the NAACP tended to be elites” while Wells was “still below the ‘well-to-do’ or ‘rich’ categories.”³⁵ This fact made Wells “stick out like a sore thumb in style, if not substance.”³⁶ That is to say, Wells exhibited none of the “moderate sensibilities of the establishment”; instead, she was forthright and explicit in her analysis of the causes of lynching. Furthermore, she attacked the complacency of the justice system, which refused to address the problem rigorously on a national level, as well as the white liberals who actually believed that lynching was in fact a reaction to black men’s assaults upon white women. The fact that Wells was confrontational was one thing. But she was also a woman, and, according to Giddings, “the very last thing [black men] could have wanted was to be challenged by [Wells] in front of white women, particularly upper-class, educated white women, with whom they were working as colleagues for the first time.”³⁷ Known for her assertive personality, Wells played the lead role in having a sheriff removed after his prisoner was lynched in 1904. Consequently, the *Springfield Forum*, a black newspaper, characterized her thusly: “Ida Wells-Barnett is to be highly lauded for her courage and magnanimity . . . She towers high above all of her male contemporaries and has more of the aggressive qualities than the average man. It belittles the men to some extent.”³⁸ Such publicity merely confirmed the conservative perspective that Wells was doing “men’s” rather than “women’s” work.

It is therefore instructive that, when she displayed emotion at the close of a speech made in New York in 1892, the “tears Wells shed on this occasion

helped her cause and made her performance more believable.”³⁹ In an insightful essay on Wells’s oratorical strategies, Nicole King argues that “[t]he tears and expressions of homesickness are equally important aspects of Wells’s performance of womanliness and sentimental emotions.” Having been forced out of Memphis, Tennessee, by the threat of violence, and finding herself longing for family and friends, Wells becomes temporarily overwhelmed by despair. Even though she personally viewed this expression unfavorably—as a sign of weakness—it nonetheless emphasized her “femininity” as well as her “credibility” as a true woman, for emotional displays of this kind signify, within a patriarchal culture, femaleness and delicacy.⁴⁰

Given the difficulties of inhabiting the roles of both woman and activist, it is not surprising that Wells and Stewart would experience some form of rejection. Not only did Stewart believe that the national community had failed her, but she was also careful to represent herself as a rejected outsider in relation to Boston’s black community. In “Mrs. Stewart’s Farewell Speech to her Friends in the City of Boston” (1833), Stewart declared:

I am about to leave you, perhaps never more to return. For I find it is no use for me as an individual to try to make myself useful among my color in this city. It was contempt for my moral and religious opinions in private that drove me thus before a public. Had experience more plainly shown me that it was the nature of man to crush his fellow, I should not have thought it so hard. Wherefore, my respected friends, let us no longer talk of prejudice, till prejudice becomes extinct at home. Let us no longer talk of opposition, till we cease to oppose our own. (70–71)

The negative response that Stewart ultimately received from African-American men and women prompted her to withdraw from the spotlight in Boston. Impacted greatly by the fact that most blacks were unreceptive to her message, Stewart experienced the antithesis of what she had aspired to build: she became an *individual*, to use her own term, among those generally united by “color.” This conflict speaks to the oft-elided fact of intra-group diversity among blacks. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham effectively highlights this insidious pattern as it operates in typical analyses of black Americans in the United States:

Afro-American history . . . has accentuated race by calling explicit attention to the cultural as well as socioeconomic implications of American racism but has failed to examine the differential class and gender positions men and women occupy in black communities—thus

uncritically rendering a monolithic “black community,” “black experience,” and “voice of the Negro.” . . . Even black women’s history, which has consciously sought to identify the importance of gender relations and the interworkings of race, class, and gender, nonetheless reflects the totalizing impulse of race in such concepts as “black womanhood” or the “black woman cross-culturally”—concepts that mask real differences of class, status and color, regional culture, and a host of other configurations of difference.⁴¹

Stewart’s encounters with black men and women exemplify the multiplicity of in-group difference to which Higginbotham refers. Some of the blacks in Boston, beholden to dominant gender-based ideologies that structured the division of labor and social relations in general, may have felt offended by Stewart’s apparent violation of gender roles. Others, recently immigrating to the North from the South, perhaps rejected Stewart’s assimilative tactics. Stewart’s inability to attract a large following among black men and women testifies to the diversity of voices and realities operating within the African-American communities in the antebellum era.

Clearly, Stewart’s textual strategy had its literary predecessors. Much like the Biblical apostles, Stewart fashioned herself (and also lived her life) as something of a wanderer. Indeed, the “motif of travel and journey” being central to her writing, Stewart “took seriously Christ’s command to go empty-handed into the world to spread the Gospel.”⁴² And like the prophet Jeremiah, Stewart repeatedly represents herself as spiritually isolated from a larger network of humanity. In addition to borrowing from the Biblical tradition, she also combines conventions of the American jeremiad with aspects of the “black jeremiad” in her speeches and religious meditations.⁴³ Following the example of her friend David Walker, Stewart challenged black Americans to grow in their Christian faith. Taking cues from the Biblical Jeremiah who criticized the children of Israel, and John Winthrop in the 1630s who encouraged the “New World” settlers to return to the ways of God, both Walker and Stewart encouraged their own to forgo social vices in favor of renewing their marriage bond with God. This strategic alignment with the masculine Biblical and Puritan traditions both empowered and isolated Stewart in relation to other blacks. Instead of constructing herself as just one of God’s many children, Stewart consciously represents herself as a leader, and a prophet, come to reveal an unwelcome message to her people. This complex role, difficult for any nineteenth-century woman to bear, merely compounded Stewart’s experience of Otherness as a black and a woman.

Another particularly controversial aspect of Stewart’s uplift project, which might have distanced her from large numbers of African Americans,

was her unapologetic admiration of Western culture and values. Her 1833 speech given before the black Masons, for example, advised blacks to master the attitudes and economic strategies of their white counterparts in order to improve their socioeconomic status. While it is tempting to read this habit as merely proof of Stewart's admiration of European Americans, and irrefutable evidence of her naïve faith in the American dream, it is nonetheless useful to analyze her essays and speeches for their rhetorical maneuvers. In response to colonizationists' efforts to relocate blacks to Liberia in the 1830s, Stewart wanted to secure a place for African Americans on U.S. soil. Thus, Stewart's apparent celebration of European civilization, here and on other occasions, may be read as a tactical move.⁴⁴ Her lectures to blacks about their citizenship status were, very likely, also intended for whites; in effect, Stewart used creative expression partly to convince whites that blacks could adopt their model of modernity and Western "progress."

Not only strategic, this "rhetoric of imitation," as Peterson terms it, translates into a pluralism wherein Stewart drew on both African and European cultural traditions, weaving them into an African-American racial uplift narrative. For instance in "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality," in an attempt to expand black women's roles in the public sphere, Stewart foregrounds the industriousness of white women who "toiled in the blazing sun, year after year, weeding onions" in order to uplift their own communities in Connecticut (37). With respect to this point, Peterson speculates that Stewart perhaps also pays silent tribute here to the ingenuity of West African women who themselves participated in "activities such as farming, trading, craft production, or food-processing."⁴⁵ Assuming this to be true, Stewart apparently merges the capabilities of both white and black labor, thus producing a model for black female labor.⁴⁶ This hybrid labor prototype, then, suggests that Stewart is not merely imitating the culture of her oppressors, rather she is infusing it with the history of her ancestors, and transforming anew the dominant cultural practices in which she is engaged.

Further evidence of this syncretic strain in Stewart's narrative is located in her conviction that God communicates to women more often than to men. Not only does this assumption operate widely in African cultures, but it also emerges in Greek, Roman, German and British culture, as Stewart indicates during her lectures in Boston. By constructing an international model of female agency, Stewart hints at the global underpinnings of her syncre-nationalism. That is to say, she imagines and proposes the construction of a cross-cultural, transnational community of activists in her speech. For instance, Stewart suggests that black women join the ranks of

their progressive female counterparts who had distinguished themselves in various nations at specified times. Referring her audience in 1833 to John Adams's *Woman, Sketches of the History, Genius, Disposition, Accomplishments, Employments, Customs and Importance of the Fair Sex in All Parts of the World Interspersed with Many Singular and Entertaining Anecdotes By a Friend of the Sex*, Stewart proclaims:

In the 15th century, the general spirit of this period is worthy of observation. We might then have seen women preaching and mixing themselves in controversies. Women occupying the chairs of Philosophy and Justice; women writing in Greek, and studying in Hebrew. Nuns were poetesses, and women of quality Divines; and young girls who had studied Eloquence, would with the sweetest countenances and the most plaintive voices, pathetically exhort the Pope and the Christian Princes to declare war against the Turks. Women in those days devoted their leisure hours to contemplation and study. The religious spirit which has animated women in all ages, showed itself at this time. It has made them by turns, martyrs, apostles, warriors, and concluded in making them divines and scholars. Why cannot a religious spirit animate us now? Why cannot we become divines and scholars? (69)

Here, Stewart encourages black women to join, across space and time, in sisterhood with white women who once engaged publicly in religious, intellectual and military matters. Although Stewart argued that blacks should advance as a unified people, thus advancing a version of racial collectivity, she also remained committed in theory and practice to cross-racial alliances.

During the Civil War, for instance, Stewart joined the predominantly white Church of the Epiphany in Washington, D.C. Her goal was to secure funding from this church so that she might build a regular place of worship for African-American children. Although she was treated as an "outcast" by the clergy and the congregation, Stewart nonetheless, in her words "clung to the church" until she finally departed.⁴⁷ She eventually became a member of Crummell's St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. Although the Church of the Epiphany refused to warmly embrace Stewart as a member, her attempt to form productive links between the black and white communities testifies to her dedication to the cause of racial uplift.

Since Stewart's contributions are constitutive of, not supplementary to, uplift narratives, the marginalization of her writings merely perpetuates fragmented readings of African-American collectivities, endorses life and death binaries, and obscures the subversion inherent in holistic nationalist

narratives. This fragmented condition is arguably antithetical to the wholeness for which Stewart argued. The re-incorporation of this “exile” will enable scholars to better understand the writings of what Moses calls “classical black nationalists,” since the writings of Stewart are an integral dimension of racial uplift discourse. The “wholeness” in Stewart’s writings manifests itself in the form of reconciled opposites which work as complements beneath the surface. Stewart, for instance, envisions women working both as domestic managers and public leaders in the struggle against slavery and systemic oppression. She also promotes both peaceful resistance and the possibility of violent revolution, thus dissolving the boundary between pacifism and activism. Simultaneously espousing Garrison’s nonviolent activist tactics as well as revolutionary measures resulting in possible bloodshed, Stewart disregards dualistic paradigms and creates a comprehensive model of resistance capable of incorporating perceived opposites.

Stewart’s female contemporaries perhaps rejected her subversive narratives because they might have subsequently also upset the newly-found power that black women experienced in the domestic sphere. Emerging in eighteenth-century England, domestic ideology operated as a narrative of empowerment for women beleaguered by the writings of Rousseau, which declared women unfit to raise their own male children without men’s supervision.⁴⁸ Republican motherhood, acquiring national popularity in the United States in the nineteenth century, offered disenfranchised women the power to instill the nation’s values in their offspring, thereby contributing to the nation’s welfare. While black women’s access to domestic ideology was compromised by the substandard status of freed blacks in the labor force, and by slavery generally, middle-class black women incorporated republican motherhood ideology into racial uplift discourse as a means of negotiating a space for black women in middle-class society. Stewart’s episodic resistance, then, to black women’s wholesale adherence to domestic ideology might easily have been interpreted by her peers as counterproductive to the racial uplift cause. By attacking the public/private binary, Stewart was disrupting the base on which other black activists were building racial uplift projects.

While Mary Ann Shadd Cary cared deeply about the causes to which Stewart dedicated her life, the former’s approach to community reform was by no means identical to Stewart’s. Believing that religion was more of a crutch than a source of empowerment, Shadd Cary’s primarily secular uplift activism took her away from the church, and impelled her toward an emigrationist philosophy. Like Truth and Stewart, Shadd Cary was a staunch abolitionist. Indeed, these women shared the same goals of

freedom, justice and fairness. But heterogeneous as they were, each resisted oppression in a distinct manner, thus underscoring the fact that reform is far from a uniform project.

Not only must we review the writings of Stewart to better understand the nationalist projects which eclipsed hers in the annals of history, but an understanding of her literary career can also be of value to progressives committed to change in the twenty-first century. The current resurgence of nationalism, or reliance upon discourses of patriotism, as well as the preoccupation with national boundaries has developed in tandem with a worldwide consciousness mired in separation and sectionalism. Politicians and mainstream ideologies encourage U.S. citizens to perceive their rights and resources as being in conflict with those of other nations. American exceptionalism has unapologetically resurfaced as a viable response to the terrorism that shook the U.S. at its roots on September 11, 2001. Is it possible, or even desirable, to take the national debate in a different direction?⁴⁹

The syncre-nationalist proclivities examined thus far in the activism of Truth and Stewart, as well as in the politics of Shadd Cary, as we shall see in Chapter Three, resonate deeply with contemporary Black Diaspora studies. Such approaches to politics and culture may provide a needed alternative to more reactionary strategies of the nineteenth century. In their examination of the diaspora concept and its utility in the academy, Tiffany R. Patterson and Robin G. Kelley make the following distinctions between the diaspora and the nation-state:

First, the diaspora is not a sovereign territory with established boundaries, though it is seen as “inherently limited” to people of African descent. Second, while there is no official language, there seems to be a consistent effort to locate a single culture with singular historical roots, no matter how mythical. Third, many members of this diaspora see themselves as an oppressed “nation” without a homeland, or they imagine Africa as their (future?) home.⁵⁰

While there are important differences between the diasporic and syncre-nationalist approaches to culture, there is a significant point of overlap worth noting. As previously shown, syncre-nations need not be affiliated with specific territorial spaces—they are comprised of people from diverse racial, cultural and social backgrounds. While the syncre-nation could be conceived of as naturally limited, the grounds of exclusion would neither be racial nor cultural. Rather, membership would be open to those gravitating toward compatible concepts of equality and justice, despite regional

and cultural boundaries. Syncre-nationalism is consistent with a coalition-based politics which seeks to find common ground among seemingly disparate factions. The effort to create coalitions based on shared goals, dignity and respect could further the struggle towards social, economic and political justice.

Chapter Three

Bi-National Connections: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the Afro-Canadian Community

Pervasive as it is in America's cultural mythology, rugged individualism impels us to view successful men and women as exceptional figures whose hard work has earned them a privileged place among the masses. Rather than accept such a view, this chapter attempts to consider the link between an individual woman and her community, as the collective often shapes and supports the seemingly solitary figures remembered for their singular accomplishments. Even in those instances when the community appears to "fail" its members, as in the case of Maria Stewart, whose rhetorical boldness prompted her friends to bid her farewell, the group nonetheless exerts a clear influence on its members. In Mary Ann Shadd Cary's case, gender and class position shaped her journalistic writings, as well as the cultural productions of her learned contemporaries.

Shadd Cary's writings may be characterized as syncre-nationalist in that she challenged the limitations of the nation-state. Calling for blacks to leave America for Canada, she encouraged emigrationists who had "come under British rule from necessity, to become British at heart in reality."¹ According to Jane Rhodes, Shadd Cary's "nationalism blended these two impulses: blacks could not hope to possess and control Canada, but could claim their rightful place within a nation-state that promised them equality and citizenship."² By envisioning "community" beyond the bounds of the American state, Shadd Cary tried to imagine an alternative to the racist conditions in the land of her birth. Her willingness to transcend national boundaries was only one aspect of her politics. Syncre-nationalism also

manifests itself in Shadd Cary's belief that the political, social and cultural unification of black people was essential for their survival.

A richly diverse population, African Americans could be distinguished along gender, class, color, cultural and regional lines. Yet Shadd Cary felt that such differences should be subsumed beneath a broader concept of unity for the sake of race progress; in short, she wanted to construct a community of blacks dynamic and resilient enough to contain conflict and diversity.³ She called on blacks to commit themselves, as a group, to community advancement despite intra-group distinctions. While privileging unity, Shadd Cary was unwilling to organize with others on the basis of skin color alone; liberation and citizenship, in her view, were worthy causes around which to rally. Syncretic in her thinking and writings, Shadd Cary intervened in discourses of black and official nationalism, womanhood, emigration, temperance and religion. In so doing, she helped to critique dominant constructions of blackness and femaleness; she also circulated multiple black perspectives in her newspaper, which further undermined monolithic representations of racial identity.

Born in Delaware in 1823, Shadd Cary enjoyed a financially comfortable upbringing. When her family relocated to Pennsylvania in 1833, she had access to a private, Quaker education,⁴ which she soon used to benefit others. Encouraged by her activist father when she was quite young to "uplift" the less fortunate among her race,⁵ Shadd Cary returned to Delaware to teach during her teenage years. Later proceeding to New Jersey and New York, Shadd Cary taught for ten years in several all-black schools. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, she decided to relocate to Canada, where she opened a school for African-American fugitives and exiles. Shadd Cary's racial uplift rhetoric parallels possessive liberal individualism,⁶ stressing self-help, temperance, and moral reform as advancement strategies. Complicating this philosophical position, however, is Shadd Cary's dedication to collective action, her sense of responsibility to and for others, and her uninterrupted work as both an antebellum abolitionist in Canada and a postbellum activist in the United States.⁷

In order to fully understand the nature of Shadd Cary's activism, it is useful to consider the context in which it emerged. Given that relatively few reports remain which explore Shadd Cary's writings and the public's response to it,⁸ and since much of her project was inflected by the works of others, I would suggest, along with Rhodes, that "[p]arts of the story of this early black feminist must be unraveled through the men around her."⁹ Her predecessor Martin Delany, for example, advanced political arguments in the 1840s which would find expression in Shadd Cary's newspaper editorials

almost ten years later. While proposing different solutions to the challenges of slavery and racism, Shadd Cary and Delany nonetheless held important principles in common, many of which Delany had inherited from his mentor, Reverend Lewis Woodson.

One of the first African Americans to formulate a nationalist-emigrationist ideology,¹⁰ Woodson came from humble beginnings. Born a slave in Virginia in 1806, he labored in that condition until the age of nineteen, when his father purchased his freedom.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, Woodson moved first to Ohio and then to Pittsburgh, where he resided for the next thirty years. During this period, Woodson linked the concept of national feeling with that of mass emigration. For him, emigration was to be a “national” project, such that all blacks, rather than a select few, would move “on one *plan*, or to one place.”¹²

Although he was an active member of the American Moral Reform Society in 1835, which had committed itself to a universal, non-racial strategy for the purpose of improving blacks’ social and economic status,¹³ Woodson nonetheless harbored separatist views. Using the penname “Augustine,” under which he wrote letters to *The Colored American*, Woodson anonymously voiced his complex and contradictory perspective on the status of blacks in America. On the one hand, Woodson accused blacks of perpetuating their own subordination. The “indignity and contempt” directed at black people, in his view, could only be explained by blacks’ “want of proper attention to cleanliness and neatness of dress.”¹⁴ He further observed: “The want of a decent exterior is so repulsive, as to at once bar the affections, and entirely exclude us from the society, of all persons of taste and refinement.”¹⁵ By no means uncommon, Woodson’s fixation on self-presentation sprang largely from the nineteenth-century preoccupation with “respectability.”

After the Revolutionary War, as Rael indicates, “political exigencies melded religious notions of moral virtue [the Puritan work ethic] into secular conceptions of civic virtue [the capitalist concept of self-discipline].” Since “the industrial revolution had demanded a new conformity to moral values appropriate to the emerging market economy,” workers were responsible not only for internalizing the capitalist work ethic, but also for putting their respectability on display, as evidence of their virtuous character. In that historical moment, one’s appearance was presumed to “reflect [the] delicate balance of worldly success and personal integrity.”¹⁶ With this philosophy in mind, readers of the *Ladies Repository* were therefore warned: “As a man is responsible for all the influence he can acquire, he is bound to secure a decent apparel.”¹⁷ The man who appeared attractively in public, then, emanated a degree of respectability—a term that

tended to connote a set of values closely linked with the qualities required for material and moral success in an expanding market economy. . . . Respectability largely meant that one had, through dint of *individual* industry and perseverance, cultivated one's inner character sufficiently to harvest the rewards of material success (emphasis mine).¹⁸

Accepting this social theory, Woodson felt that blacks should strive to display the fruits of respectability in public. In so doing, he argued, blacks would surmount the racist structures stacked against them.

While Woodson held the black masses responsible for their lowly social and economic condition, he nonetheless characterized them as a separate "caste" that had been unfairly discriminated against. Moreover, he argued: "Only through the creation of a 'national feeling' . . . would blacks, as a class with a 'general character' lift themselves from degradation—and then perhaps only through the development of separate institutions."¹⁹ This same tension between assimilation and separation would also appear in Delany's writings in 1852. And, as we shall see in Shadd Cary's editorials, the solutions that Woodson proposed to blacks' problems resurfaced in her newspaper in yet another form.

Woodson's and Delany's ideas had been publicly circulated by the time Shadd Cary emigrated to Canada in the 1850s from New York City; in the British province, she became the first African-American woman to found a newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, in which she fashioned a black middle-class self-sufficient identity for her integrated, international readership. One of Shadd Cary's early contributions to the racial uplift movement appears in letter form to Douglass's *North Star* publication in 1849. Describing a strategy for black advancement, Shadd Cary criticizes "uneducated black ministers" who insist that blacks will attain justice in the ever-elusive "promised land." "The influence of a corrupt clergy among us," she argues, "sap[s] our every means, inculcating ignorance as a duty, superstition as true religion."²⁰ The clergy's corruption, Shadd Cary believed, stemmed from their interest in money rather than morals. African Americans were "prevented from seeing clearly" by ministers who wanted to keep black congregants dependent upon them, and financially bound to their ministerial services. Their "superstition," the binary opposite of "true religion," in Shadd Cary's estimation, proved inconsistent with social advancement; drawing on the tradition of Enlightenment thinkers who claimed to abandon myth in favor of scientific reason, Shadd Cary equates organized black religion with ignorance and irrationality. Again, the boundary between horizontal and messianic time re-surfaces, banishing

black religion to a realm of ancient thinking that blacks must abandon in order to embrace modern, rational modes of thought.

Not originating with Shadd Cary, these sentiments reflect the views of many elite African Americans whose concern with respectability prompted them to oppose the uninhibited preaching style of uneducated ministers. Learned reverends, like Daniel Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Philadelphia, understood religion to be a tool of uplift and redemption. On the topic of the AME Church in the early 1800s, Payne complained: "Men and women who made the most and greatest noise, and the most extravagant gesticulations, were regarded as the greatest Christians." He disliked ministers who engaged in "stamping, beating the Bible, [and] cutting odd capers" in order to generate "shouting, jumping and dancing" amongst the congregants.²¹ In his view, black churchgoers were lacking a "competent clergy of [their] own, to supply [their] intellectual wants, to exalt [their] minds . . . and prepare [them] for the performance of noble and virtuous deeds."²² Entirely opposed to the singing of Negro spirituals or "'Corn-field Ditties,'"²³ as he termed them, Payne preferred the more staid environment found in churches associated with middle-class whites. Payne's concerns about black Christians' behavior stemmed from his hope that white onlookers would perceive blacks to be dignified and upstanding members of society. But just as important, as James Campbell notes, was Payne's belief that emotionalism was insufficient to bring about a complete conversion from sinfulness to redemption. While he felt it was necessary for preachers to "'re-echo the thunders of Sinai'" in order to awaken congregants to their sinful nature,²⁴ he also believed that, once indicted, sinners would need more than excitement to finalize their conversion.

Further contributing to the critique of religion in the black community, Delany honed in on what he considered to be the detrimental impact of religion on blacks in general. In 1852, he concluded: "The colored races are highly susceptible of religion; it is a constituent principle of their nature. . . . But unfortunately for them, they carry it too far. Their hope is largely developed, and consequently, they usually stand still—hope in God, and really expect Him to do that for them, which it is necessary they should do for themselves."²⁵ Delany, whose primary concern was that blacks act on their own behalf, believed that they performed too many religious rituals and too few actions that would culminate in self-help and respectability. Also secular in her approach to racial uplift, Shadd Cary probably would not have disagreed with Delany's assessment.²⁶ By the time she entered the public sphere, the case against uneducated black ministers had been urgently made. Already voiced was her grievance that black ministers were to blame for "the downright degradation of the free colored people of the

north.”²⁷ Distinguishing Shadd Cary’s complaint, however, was her gender. As a black woman, she had an additional social barrier around which to navigate in order to enter the public sphere.

Poignantly, Shadd Cary’s estrangement from black religious leaders reflects her general condition of being in conflict with antebellum African-American communities. Critical of Pan African ideology premised upon color consciousness or segregation of any kind, she argues in her writings: “colored men are as merciless as other men, when possessed of the same amount of pride, conceit, and wickedness, and as much, if not more ignorance.” Shadd Cary did not endorse the formation of an “exclusive nation”²⁸ for blacks, as she did not position any one group as superior to others. On the contrary, she tried to dismantle conventional concepts of race, referring to African Americans not as “black,” but as “colored people,” as well as men and women of “complexional character.” She opposed colonization schemes to send blacks to Africa, but nonetheless befriended Delany, who supported such a plan.

In 1852, both Shadd Cary and Delany outlined emigrationist projects but their proposed solutions to racial subjugation in the United States led them to varying conclusions as to the ideal geographical location of a new black settlement. Delany’s project, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered*, involved the colonization and “civilization” of native Africans by middle-class African Americans. But Shadd Cary shared no such domination-based designs. To Africa-bound men, Shadd Cary asks, “What will you do, or what will your women say, for they must go along, when surrounded by big spiders, lizards, snakes, centipedes . . . and all manner of creeping and biting things?”²⁹ While this totalizing view of Africa points to Shadd Cary’s preoccupation with negative representations of the continent, her lack of enthusiasm for establishing an African colony also seems to hint at her general unwillingness to reproduce the hierarchical power structure of Euro-Americans onto African natives. This disruption of the colonialism model operates as a political act of resistance to cultural and racial domination both in black nationalist movements and the United States generally.

Similar to Stewart in her thinking, Shadd Cary considered the lack of unity among blacks to be detrimental to their political advancement. In 1857, Shadd Cary addressed this problem in an editorial entitled “Obstacles to the Progress of Colored Canadians.” In her usual direct manner, she insists:

Courts of justice, corrupt judges nor any other grievance of which we may complain can injure [blacks] a tithe in comparison, with the treachery, want of confidence and down right wickedness [of] one

towards the other. . . . While upon one question some may unite, there will be the most rancorous and bitter division, upon others equally clear and conclusive. . . . unlike every other people, the more division the better; and unable to get along beautifully in the work of separation, a free invitation is indirectly given for the inroads of the enemy[.] (PF, Jan. 31, 1857).

Never failing to identify systemic racism as one of blacks' primary obstacles, Shadd Cary nonetheless felt the need to identify the self-sabotaging behaviors that Afro-Canadians had acquired as slaves. On southern plantations, masters had encouraged blacks to distrust one another. House slaves, many of whom were the offspring of their masters, learned to view themselves as superior to their darker counterparts in the fields. And blacks who did in fact succeed in planning organized revolts were often betrayed by one of their own. According to Shadd Cary, many "negro[es]" (PF, Jan. 31, 1857) had carried this same scheming and competitive nature, first cultivated on the plantations, to their newly acquired farms in Canada. Afro-Canadians who insisted upon seeking individual gain, at the community's expense, functioned as weak links in the golden chain of blacks' good. In order to advance as a community, Shadd Cary tried to persuade blacks to befriend each other, as their greatest strength lay in their ability to work together.

In the *Provincial Freeman*, she attempted to consolidate and mobilize this growing, aspiring black community through print by "address[ing] multiple audiences of readers and subscribers, men as well as women, the black communities of Canada West as well as the abolitionist communities—both black and white—of the northern and western United States."³⁰ This imagined community, which produced a sense of belonging and shared consciousness for an emergent literate black population, spanned across Canadian regions to the United States, serving as, in Shadd Cary's words, "no unimportant medium of communication between the friends of the downtrodden on both sides of the Atlantic."³¹ Functioning as a trans-Atlantic cultural product, enabled by print culture, Shadd Cary's *Freeman* linked populations across geographical and political boundaries, which, in and of itself, points to the hybridized underpinnings of Shadd Cary's syncrenationalism. Her bi-nationalist stance against colonialism and racism rejects the narrower visions of nationalism predicated on ethnic difference, and instead relies primarily on heterogeneous ideological and political alliances with black and white collectivities in Canada and America. Shadd Cary's refusal to subordinate her paper to the designs of specific American abolitionist organizations provides further evidence of her hybridized politics.

Well aware of “Garrisonianism, Lewis-Tappanism, Douglassism [and] Free Soilism,” Shadd Cary assured her readers that her paper would not perpetuate the divisions among abolitionists in the United States (*PF*, March 25, 1854). Instead of advocating localized politics, she constructed the *Freeman* as an independent organ supporting diverse antiracist Canadian and American voices.

In her writings Shadd Cary encourages blacks to relocate to Canada. Since blacks could not find an acceptable home in antebellum America, she tried to cultivate an alternative space for them on British (Canadian) soil. In common with Truth, Shadd Cary tried to convince blacks of the dignity inherent in owning and cultivating their own land. In so doing, she claimed, blacks would become self-sufficient. Espousing a pre-industrial argument reminiscent of Woodson’s, Shadd Cary wanted blacks to become “producers” rather than remain mere “consumers.” The ability to produce was of great importance to all black leaders preoccupied with republican values. As “respectability for black leaders entailed economic independence,” many African Americans felt that “[t]hose whose livelihoods depended on the charity or goodwill of others had no claim to respectability.”³² In the words of Woodson, “a more powerful means of changing our present dependent and precarious condition into one of comfort and independence, could not be devised, than of our settling in the country and becoming the cultivators of the soil.”³³ Rather than remaining in a dependent position relative to whites, Woodson, Truth and Shadd Cary wanted to alter social relations so that blacks could both meet their own needs and position themselves to meet the needs of others. African-American activists, however, counseled the masses to move to the country for a variety of reasons.

Preoccupied with notions of respectability, many financially comfortable African Americans advised against “rushing into the already too populous towns, to indulge in idleness and dissipation; to lengthen the catalogue of vagrants [and] to fill the mouths of [blacks’] enemies with arguments against them.”³⁴ Blacks engaging in the public sphere considered cities to be hotbeds of iniquity, overrun by drunks and prostitutes. While these concerns regarding city life may seem to be melodramatic to contemporary scholars and critics, the living conditions of most urban blacks were in fact desperate. The majority of blacks crowded into slum-like urban spaces in which they were forced to live. Barbara Christian writes that African-American women migrants from the South, “[i]nstead of being housekeepers, cooks, and cotton pickers, . . . became domestics, garment factory workers, prostitutes—the hard bottom of the labor market.”³⁵ Not only did black women toil in such occupations, but many of the live-in domestics also

became the unwilling targets of sexual advances from their bosses.³⁶ Another troubling aspect of city life, from the perspective of conservative blacks, was the fact that brothels, as well as gambling and dance halls, posed unsavory opportunities for, and promoted idle behavior among, young men and women who might otherwise grow into respectable individuals.

Not only Shadd Cary, but also other educated African Americans in leadership and highly visible positions, “railed against the dangers of city life, the greatest of which was the erosion of the work ethic.”³⁷ Frederick Douglass, for instance, objected to the fact that the majority of black urbanites found employment as “waiters about hotels, barbers or boot-blacks,” while black women resorted to “washing white people’s dirty clothes.”³⁸ The spectacle of blacks holding the majority of service jobs, Douglass felt, could only reflect poorly upon blacks as a whole. Since those in power judged blacks not as individuals but as a monolithic people, Douglass felt that obtaining respectable employment (mastering a trade, for example) might help blacks to disprove whites’ assumptions about their incapacity to “rise” socially and economically. The opportunities available to blacks in the country, however, ranging from farming to entrepreneurship, seemed to provide greater room for social and economic mobility. Regardless of the professions selected by black migrants to Canada, Shadd Cary sought to radicalize them, and solicit their support for her paper and political cause.³⁹

Despite Shadd Cary’s theoretical desire for unity among people of color, her own position in relation to antebellum black communities was chronically precarious. Shadd Cary’s public attacks on black institutions were sufficient to alienate most middle-class black men embracing traditional gender roles. By insisting upon voicing contrary opinions to and about most of the black communities that she encountered, she ultimately succeeded in antagonizing and alienating well-known and influential black Canadian, Henry Bibb.

Unlike the latter, Shadd Cary was adamant about the flexibility of gender roles. Her writings therefore call for the expansion of female participation in the public sphere; but Shadd Cary also capitulated at times to Victorian codes of morality for strategic purposes. Rhodes argues that Shadd Cary “was quite comfortable with evoking masculinity as the ultimate symbol of black power and authority, at the same time that she openly challenged black male supremacy.”⁴⁰ When Shadd Cary assumed that the *Freeman* would flourish if a black man were presumed to be the editor, she refrained from identifying herself as such and publicly deferred to men in hopes that such concessions would benefit the circulation of her

paper. On other occasions, Shadd Cary did not disguise the fact that she managed the general operations of her Canadian publication.

Out in the open, as she was, Shadd Cary became the target of bitter commentary from Bibb. Shortly after making a new home for herself in Canada, she began to criticize the Refugee Home Society, a black settlement association organized in 1852 in Canada, which provided escaped slaves with housing and financial resources. Although Michigan-based whites ran the Society, runaway slave Bibb and his wife, Mary, directed it locally. Shadd Cary clashed ideologically with the Bibbs who had also founded the first black Canadian newspaper, *Voice of the Fugitive*, and announced that “strangers in a foreign land, no matter of what country or color they may be, experience a greater degree of happiness in being associated with those who may have come from the same region as themselves.”⁴¹ Rather than segregate blacks from the general Canadian population, Shadd Cary, seeking cultural assimilation and racial mobility, encouraged blacks to embrace the mainstream culture in Canada, where they could benefit from “equal laws” and “equal rights” (*PF*, Jan. 31, 1857).

Moreover, she criticized the Bibbs’ tendency to give preference to former slaves seeking assistance, rather than addressing equally the needs of the free-born black emigrant population. Additionally, she questioned the value of “begging” in order to secure funding for newly-settled Afro-Canadians (*PF*, Jan. 31, 1857). Interestingly, Shadd’s irritation with the Bibbs reveals her racial uplift strategy: blacks should publicly position themselves as capable of becoming fully self-sufficient figures. Rather than respond fully to the merits of Shadd Cary’s critique of the Refugee Home Society, Bibb often tried to reduce their political disagreement to a more manageable dispute over the importance of gender conventions. In an 1852 edition of *Voice of the Fugitive*, Bibb declared: “Miss Shadd has said and written many things which we think will add nothing to her credit as a lady.”⁴² Contrasting Shadd Cary’s behavior unfavorably with that endorsed by the cult of true womanhood, Bibb marginalized her analysis of his racial uplift philosophy.

Consistent with Victorian gender conventions relegating women’s work to that of child rearing and housekeeping, Bibb’s ideas were not uncommon in the nineteenth century. Not only white, but also black women were encouraged by pastors as well as newspaper pieces in their own communities to adhere to the tenets of true womanhood. As early as 1839, the *Colored American* distinguished female from male qualities in the following manner: “Man is daring and confident—Woman is deferent and unassuming; Man is great in action—Woman in suffering; Man talks to

convince—Woman to persuade and please.”⁴³ And when women did talk, they were counseled not to say too much.

In his research on nineteenth-century gender relations, James Oliver Horton uncovered an anecdote in *Freedom's Journal* that told of “a woman doomed to a life without a man because she violated one cardinal role of female behavior, she ‘could not keep her mouth shut.’” Another article told of a woman who took in a male boarder and eventually “drove him crazy” with her incessant “admonitions to sit properly in his seat and exhibit correct table manners.”⁴⁴ As discussed earlier, the invocation of gender conventions proves problematic because the model of true womanhood distinguishes between the morals and capabilities of the sexes; in effect, traditional gender expectations curtail equitable relations between men and women, leaving the latter lagging behind their male counterparts. Similarly, Bibb deployed the cult of true womanhood in hopes of silencing and trivializing Shadd Cary’s energetic critique of his policies and authority in the Afro-Canadian community.

While revolting against oppression and slavery, Shadd Cary necessarily challenged the Bibbs’ worldview because she believed men and women to be equally capable of public protest. She also wanted blacks to demonstrate to the public their worthiness as soon-to-be citizens. As indicated in a *Provincial Freeman* circular, one of the paper’s primary goals was to “encourage habits of independence” among refugees in the province of Canada.⁴⁵ Instead of requesting donated clothing and food from the United States, Shadd Cary suggested that black exiles and fugitives obtain their own resources, once settled on Canadian soil. Rather than embrace the image of the needy black, as Bibb allegedly did, Shadd Cary created and sustained through print the hope that middle-class black collectivities could at any moment materialize. In retrospect, the naïveté of her point of view is apparent, as the stronghold of white supremacy did not give way in the face of positive examples of black men and women. In fact, successful blacks tended to become the targets, rather than allies, of white supremacists who felt intimidated by the display of black economic power.⁴⁶

Her wariness of dependency must be understood, however, not as a personal quirk, but as a common response within the context of the dominant political philosophy of the antebellum era. Deeply committed to the notion that the republic’s strength depended upon the independence and virtue of its citizens, black leaders had long concluded that “[i]ndependence is an essential condition of respectability. To be dependent, is to be degraded.”⁴⁷ Likewise, Shadd Cary, engaging in a form of cultural politics, struggled over the appropriate means of representing the black population. Aware of the power of images, she understood that the construction of her

community could have a political impact on blacks' condition around the world. In her effort to change unequal social relations, Shadd Cary strove to re-present an alternative image of black men and women to a cynical public that had come to accept blacks' dependent state as a foregone conclusion.

Although Shadd Cary challenged the assumption that blacks were helpless and needy, the black masses were in fact enslaved and oppressed by a system of racial terror in the United States.⁴⁸ Her middle-class, non-enslaved social position, by contrast, perhaps made her less sympathetic to the conditions facing the black majority. In 1849, for instance, she declared that she would "expose every weakness, . . . [and] exclaim against every custom" that was counter-productive to blacks.⁴⁹ Similar to her predecessor Maria Stewart, Shadd Cary touted thrift and sobriety as crucial components of success. In short, Shadd Cary condemned the "processions, expensive entertainments, excursions, public dinners and suppers, a display of costly apparel, and churches on churches, to minister to our vanity." She further argued: "Negroes . . . set more value on the outside of their heads than on what the inside needs. [Blacks] are glad when one of their number dies, that they may walk in procession, and show their regalia."⁵⁰ This culturally elitist and incisive critique of aspects of African-American culture resonated with the discourse of many of Shadd Cary's contemporaries.

Not surprisingly, given his appreciation of Western culture, Douglass shared Shadd Cary's opinion. Of parades and public celebrations held among working-class blacks, Douglass complained: "The enemies of our people see this tendency in us, and encourage it. The same persons who would puff such demonstrations in the newspapers, would mob us if we met to adopt measures for obtaining our just rights."⁵¹ Other black leaders, however, considered antislavery celebrations and processions to be important opportunities for political expression. By 1830, Pinkster celebrations and Governor's Day Parades had been outlawed in northern regions, as they had provided lower-class whites and blacks with an opportunity to mix freely in the streets, to the dismay of local white authorities.

But emerging in the place of these events were gatherings that "help[ed] define a new era of aggressive and confrontational racial politics."⁵² Of this phenomenon, Rael notes:

In the first half of the nineteenth century, [the] streets became stages for the public presentation of conflicting class, ethnic, and racial interests. . . . Similarly, black northerners employed [parades] to assert their right to public spaces and hence an equal role in the civic community. . . . [B]lack parades that threatened the racial hierarchies that Americans

increasingly relied upon to understand the organization of their society seemed radically subversive.⁵³

Many black activists, then, viewed processions and parties as sites for subversive activity. These public gatherings could be considered as forerunners of the marches and rallies prevalent in the 1960s, which have become symbolic of the Civil Rights Movement.

Shadd Cary, and other elite blacks, however, tended to shy away from public displays of African-American culture, as they were perhaps disturbingly reminiscent of the earlier celebrations held by enslaved northern blacks, with the permission and encouragement of their masters. As Rhodes argues, Shadd Cary's rendering of public black celebrations might have sprung from either her austere Quaker roots or internalized racism.⁵⁴ Perhaps she found black folk culture to be embarrassingly in conflict with that of middle-class white culture. Nevertheless, Shadd Cary attempted to mold the black masses into her own image of an empowered collectivity by offering an ideological road map to black enfranchisement. Not unlike Stewart who felt that racial uplift could be accomplished in part by generating incisive cultural productions, Shadd Cary harped on the great potential that lay within blacks, despite their miserable material conditions. By focusing on cultural processes and money management, Shadd Cary turned the attention of blacks to circumstances over which they exercised some degree of control. While it was impossible to force employers, politicians and newspaper writers to forgo their "possessive investment in whiteness,"⁵⁵ blacks could, and did, nonetheless cultivate an inner attitude of determination, and develop pragmatic strategies for political agitation which would enable them to maximize whatever opportunities existed.

While foregrounding black choice, Shadd Cary does not dispense with her attack on inequitable social conditions; on the contrary, her refusal to live on American soil during the antebellum period was an unambiguous act of rejecting systematic white oppression of blacks. Her decision to emigrate, however, was considered controversial in that blacks such as Douglass felt that slavery could be fought more effectively from the United States than from foreign soil. Unmoved by such views, she argued that blacks committed to living in America were "waiting for 'a powerful miracle for the overthrow of slavery.'" The American abolition movement had proved a failure, whereas Canadian emigration, in her opinion, was proactive. Shadd Cary argues: "If a sound moral and religious influence, when exerted by individuals, can accomplish great good, surely the influence of large communities, such as this . . . can do more" (*PE*, March 25, 1854).

She explained her rationale for wielding a moral influence in unambiguous terms:

With British subjects, then, whether by birth or adoption, the question assumes and can assume only a moral phase. Having no slaves (the southern U.S. assertion to the contrary notwithstanding), extending to each class the immunities of freemen, it is important to aid in fashioning public opinion on the question of Slavery by insisting on a strictly Scriptural course of conduct between man and man; on the part of governments toward individuals. (*PF*, March 25, 1854)

Living outside the United States, in a non-slaveholding country, Shadd Cary understood that her leverage lay in arguing for the abolition of slavery on moral grounds; direct political action was not an option, as she had removed herself from American soil. Moreover, the appeal to higher laws, rather than government, strategically set the *Freeman* in a morally superior position to that of the degraded, slave-holding United States. Shadd Cary, then, endeavored to strengthen international anti-slavery alliances that would ultimately exert moral pressure on the southern states to abolish the system of slavery. Embarking on a path well traveled by black abolitionists since the 1830s, she looked elsewhere for support at home. Activists James McCune, Alexander Crummell, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Sara Parker Redmond, William Wells Brown, and William and Ellen Craft had all made visits to England in the antebellum era to lecture on the evils of slavery and/or to raise funds for the abolitionist cause. In the post-emancipation era, Ida B. Wells would also act on the principle that “favorable international opinion could influence developments at home.”⁵⁶ As part of her anti-lynching campaign, Wells lectured in Scotland and throughout the British Isles. Her fact-based speeches, containing statistics that revealed an increase in the number of white lynchings of blacks in the South, resulted in the formation of the Anti-Lynching Committee in London.⁵⁷

By helping to facilitate the establishment of a successful, integrated community in Canada, Shadd Cary hoped to participate in a racial uplift experiment that would undermine the racist assumptions prevalent in America. The publicity given to the successful communities in Canada served as a powerful challenge to the racialized social structure that prevailed at home. By promoting Canadian emigration via the *Freeman*, she endeavored to attract an increasing number of blacks to the Canadian province. In the process of reporting the progress of black Canadians to an international audience in the *Freeman*, Shadd Cary engaged in cultural politics, challenging racist assumptions that blacks were un-educatable and

un-assimilable. Moreover, she formulated a model of middle-class identity to which blacks, in the absence of a legally protected coherent community, could aspire.

Truth, Stewart and Shadd Cary were not alone in their culturally and politically pluralist tendencies, but they were uniquely overt and uncompromising in their refusal to endorse nationalism predicated on narrow definitions of difference, ethnicity and race. As Gilroy argues, even Delany, “the principal progenitor of black nationalism in America,”⁵⁸ modeled his construction of an independent black state after Euro-American models of nationalism. Delany’s well-publicized calls for a separate black state operate in conjunction with his voluntary exile to Canada, a visit to England, and his deep admiration for the Earl of Shaftesbury.⁵⁹ His fictional text, *Blake*, moreover, argues for a Pan-Africanism premised on trans-denominational global unity among blacks in Sudan, Cuba, the West Indies and the United States. Despite these instances of pluralism in Delany’s philosophy and writings, his racial project nonetheless identifies Africa as the “father-land” that black intellectuals were destined to civilize by implementing a colonization scheme.⁶⁰ In short, Delany’s project relies on a black hierarchy in addition to black separatism and isolation from white social institutions. While manifestations of cultural pluralism appear to varying degrees in the nationalist writings of Delany and Crummell, these instances of hybridity⁶¹ do not disrupt the larger binaries at work in their projects, which reproduce stratified gender differences and consequent patriarchal relations.

The courting of communities by Truth, Stewart and Shadd Cary involved a fluid form of social labor that was both limiting and liberating.⁶² They “courted” communities in the sense that they engaged in practices and behaviors, such as writing, traveling and public speaking, which they hoped would result in the emergence of alliances between unlikely or previously non-aligned groups. That is, these three women attempted, to varying degrees, to form coalitions with black men, white women, and white men. They recognized the value in emphasizing common goals such as justice and liberty, despite competing differences such as gender, class and race. But, largely prevented from participating in black male conventions, and unable to hold positions of power in the church, and positions of relevance in white men’s and women’s groups, black women lacked a secure platform from which to speak. Publicly exposing themselves on the page and in person, Truth, Stewart and Shadd Cary braved the criticism confronting women daring to disregard the norms of dominant culture. Unable to organize as “American citizens” and “universal women,” they acted from an accumulation of “situated knowledge”⁶³ which forced them to see the world differently from such figures as Delany and Susan B. Anthony. From

their social and political locations as blacks, women and feminists, Truth, Stewart and Shadd Cary had unique access to the contradictions of republicanism and the limitations of nationalism.

Situated in the twenty-first century, how can we begin to assess Shadd Cary's racial uplift strategy? How should we evaluate the uplift rhetoric which coincided with white middle-class concepts of civilization and national progress? In his deftly written *Uplifting the Race*, Kevin Gaines argues for a reading of racial uplift values as accommodationist. In his view, "[t]he problem with racial uplift ideology is . . . one of unconscious internalized racism."⁶⁴ By replacing the language of biology with that of civilization and class, Gaines reasons, blacks merely perpetuated racism. Blaming the masses for their inability to conform to the mores of dominant culture surely confirmed racist claims regarding blacks' genetic inferiority to whites. But how else might we understand this ideology? As Gaines concedes, one of the positive results of this social movement was the black assertion of dignity and humanity in an antiblack racial climate.

African-American men and women countered negative racial images with a philosophy rooted in "self-affirmation" and "self-help."⁶⁵ What concerns Gaines about the latter is that it "echoed judgmental dominant characterizations of 'the Negro problem,'"⁶⁶ elevating elite blacks and downplaying structural problems in the process. It is useful, though, to consider the complexity of Stewart's and Shadd Cary's arguments, which tended to be at least two pronged. These women criticized blacks for not acting more assertively on their own behalf, but they never lost sight of the structural forms of racism that undermined America's experiment in democracy. And, visionaries in their own right, Stewart, Shadd Cary, and other blacks in positions of power had high expectations of their communities. When they critiqued what they perceived to be blacks' weaknesses, they were not merely demoralizing the masses while advancing themselves. On the contrary, these women tried to inspire blacks to "promote" themselves at a time when few others would.⁶⁷ Consistently emerging in Stewart's sermons and writings is the theme of self-activity. Aware of the opposition facing blacks, Stewart nonetheless counseled: "Let nothing be lacking on your part" (41). While the state played a primary role in her critique of society, Stewart encouraged blacks to do for themselves what they could: to view themselves not merely as victims, but as potential victors over their condition.

Not only does Gaines consider internalized racism to be the underlying explanation of racial uplift values, but he also reasons that

African Americans' middle-class ideology, like the majority society's ideals of social mobility, remained trapped within that which it has

denied, or tried to forget: that historically, the conditions for social mobility and class formation among all Americans, blacks, immigrant groups, and other racially marked groups, including whites, have been circumscribed by race and color, and implicated within the legacy of slavery, segregation, and white supremacy. Elite African Americans were replicating, even as they contested, the uniquely American racial fictions upon which liberal conceptions of social reality and “equality” were founded.⁶⁸

These insights into racial uplift are especially useful because Gaines foregrounds the dominant ideology at work in the nineteenth century. According to liberal political theory, all Americans had the opportunity to advance socially and economically; those who failed to do so could only blame themselves. Fully invested in the philosophy that equal competition in the marketplace would produce fair outcomes, African Americans like Stewart and Shadd Cary insisted that, presented with equal opportunity, blacks would “rise” to the level of their white counterparts. Nonetheless, self-help rhetoric did not blind them to the realities of structural and cultural racism. Balancing Shadd Cary’s critique of black society, for instance, was her attack on American social institutions for refusing to fulfill its obligations to African Americans. And let us remember that blacks who participated in the public sphere had to engage with the dominant discourse of the day, even as it limited their societal analyses. Relying on cultural promises of social mobility and equality ensured that the speeches and writings of these women would resonate with and appeal to the accepted values of their historical moment.

Particularly thoughtful in his analysis of racial uplift discourse, Rael does much to respond to its critics. In his estimation, “many activists considered racial prejudice a failing of whites. Yet, consistent with the mythology of personal success . . . black leaders did not hesitate to consider their own responsibility in creating their situation. If not by considering their own agency, how else could blacks counter hostile white racial attitudes?”⁶⁹ It is unrealistic to claim that black activists should have transcended the mythology of personal success entirely, as they could not have removed themselves from historical moment in which they lived. At the same time, it is important to recognize that elite blacks saw the gap between mythology and reality. Rael goes on to persuasively argue that “Black activists embraced elevation not simply as a strategy for subverting prejudice but as a social good with inherent moral worth. Whether it worked or not to change the public mind, black leaders thought, moral and mental uplift would both fulfill the word of God and manifestly better the

worldly lives of African Americans.”⁷⁰ Giving credence to Rael’s claim, the writings of Stewart make plain that living a virtuous life would produce its own reward. Getting an education, and embodying the values of purity, thrift and sobriety, she believed, were worthy pursuits which, in and of themselves, would improve the wellbeing, if not the economic status of blacks. Similarly, Shadd Cary argued that, regardless of white supremacy, blacks should educate themselves so that they could prepare to influence the world in which they lived.

Challenging the disparaging labels which critics tend to attach to racial uplift strategies, Rael insists:

This was not supplication. It was resistance, capitalizing on the oppressed’s own agency and based on the premise that, if African Americans properly exercised their ability to control their own behavior, whites’ own adherence to the logic of acquisitive capitalism would compel them to yield rights that blacks understood to be rightfully theirs. Black leaders did not offer whites their virtuous conduct as the price of admission into the civil community. Instead, they intended to use the one resource they knew they could all command—themselves—to put whites in a position whereby they would be forced by their own values to yield rights.⁷¹

Truth, Stewart and Shadd Cary all deployed racial uplift rhetoric in their attempts to transform inequitable social relations. Working within the limits of liberal political thought, they managed to incorporate critiques in their writings which foreground the distance between equality and the actual conditions in which blacks lived. While they might have expected the nation to fulfill its cultural promises to black Americans as well as white, these women continued to hold the state accountable for its role in blacks’ oppression. As “bourgeois” as the writings of these women may appear to twenty-first century readers, I attempt to explore the subversive threads in their cultural productions. Even though black activists routinely invoked the discourse of liberalism, we should not overlook the radical aspects of their racial projects. That their writings were not thoroughly oppositional does not neutralize their subversive value. Stewart’s and Shadd Cary’s radicalism made a key intervention in antebellum culture; not only did they impact on the lives of their contemporaries, but they also contributed to the climate of change that ultimately culminated in the twentieth-century movement for civil rights.

The postbellum heirs of the early nineteenth-century activist tradition clearly build on the writings and speeches of the women discussed in the

first three chapters. Activists like Anna Julia Cooper and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, as we shall see, carve out with their cultural productions a discursive feminist space within nationalist discourse. Like their predecessors, these women invoke the language of nationalism, while transforming it from the inside out. The writings of Cooper, in particular, did much to critique the imbalance of capitalism and the injustice of racism. A middle-class woman who cast her lot with the masses, Cooper made a persuasive case for cross-racial coalitions and cultural transformation.

Chapter Four

Tending to the Roots: Anna Julia Cooper on Social Labor and Harvest Reaping

Anna Julia Cooper's visionary writings, much like those of Maria Stewart and Mary Ann Shadd Cary, intervened in nationalist discourse, responding creatively to the sexism that shaped dominant constructions of identity in the nineteenth century. Committed to the social labor begun by her antebellum predecessors, she occupied a primary space in the postbellum public sphere. Seeking to transform society by breathing life into Biblical precepts, Cooper framed her uplift activism in what contemporary readers would call black liberation theology. Concerned about the welfare of not only blacks but also all peoples, she strove to find common ground between African Americans and variously oppressed groups such as Asians and Native Americans. Attacking power structures, which sought to divide and antagonize these populations, Cooper laid the groundwork for coalitions, so that diverse groups might unite, thereby increasing their social, economic and political power.

Cooper's cultural productions embody syncre-nationalist politics in that they espouse black-nationalist principles, while problematizing racial and sexual essentialism. They infuse the language of nationalism with a variety of distinct discourses for political purposes. Her syncre-nationalist practices, more generally, both embrace and evade nationalist discourse, undermine hierarchal social arrangements, and overturn restrictive binary configurations. In the postbellum writings discussed in this chapter, Cooper crosses the boundaries of race and sex to court communities from which black women were traditionally excluded, or within which they were routinely marginalized. Her creative politics prove to be syncretic, allowing for

the deployment of binaries and hybridities on the one hand, and universalisms and essentialisms on the other. Making strategic use of the discourses at her disposal, Cooper paints a complex portrait of African-American women which evades the fixed identity represented by Enlightenment subjectivity.¹ Although Cooper devotes much of her text to the defense of black women's virtue, a task made necessary by the ideological and physical attacks they suffered under the political economy of slavery, she also displays a steady commitment to rooting out the multiple manifestations of oppression that impacted differentiated subordinate groups to varying degrees.

The product of relations between her slave mother and their master, Cooper was born Annie Julia Haywood in 1858 in North Carolina. At the age of nine, she entered St. Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute for newly-freed slaves, which had been established by the Episcopal Church in 1868.² Although she married at the age of nineteen, Cooper became a widow two years later, and proceeded to earn B.A. and M.A. degrees at Oberlin College in Ohio. Upon graduating, she accepted a position as a teacher of math, science and Latin skills at Wilberforce College in Xenia, Ohio. After dedicating much of her life to this profession, Cooper relocated to Washington, D.C., where she initially taught at, and then later became principal of, M Street High School,³ a black institution, in 1901. She held this position until the D.C. Board of Education dismissed her in 1906, alleging, among other things, that she was "too sympathetic to weak and unqualified students."⁴ Making a home for herself in D.C., where she belonged to a politically-active black community, Cooper attended Alexander Crummell's Protestant Episcopal Church, St. Luke's, which he had established in 1873.⁵ She befriended Crummell and his wife, and also developed friendships with Charlotte Forten Grimke, who had moved to Washington, D.C. in 1872, Edward Blyden, Anne Douglass, and Alain Locke.⁶ Later in life, Cooper adopted five children; and although racism and sexism had prevented her from retaining her position as principal at M Street school, Cooper nonetheless resumed her employment there as a Latin teacher, at the behest of the new superintendent in 1910. A consummate scholar, Cooper continued to pursue her own education well into her sixties. In 1925, she became the fourth African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Paris.⁷

Although Cooper took advantage of educational opportunities unavailable to most women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she did not isolate herself from the masses of black women. Cooper's economic location and extensive education nonetheless prove relevant to this discussion because they inflect the tenor and perspective of her racial uplift

writings. That is to say, Cooper's academic training and middle-class lifestyle, as we shall see, informed her understanding of gender relations, Western civilization and racial uplift.

Perhaps more so than Stewart and Shadd Cary, both of whom necessarily invested tremendous energy in the fight for abolition and the eradication of antebellum manifestations of racism in the North, Cooper had the means and opportunity to pen a sustained and forceful critique of the sexism facing African-American women. Drafting her collection of essays, *A Voice from the South, by a Black Woman of the South* (1892) in the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction,⁸ Cooper could address, in greater detail, a wider variety of black women's concerns, as the institution of slavery no longer existed in its conventional form. Blacks faced, however, new manifestations of oppression. Although slavery had been abolished, blacks had not yet attained their freedom in the fullest sense of the word. Formal segregation had been institutionalized in the South; black men faced not only a rise in lynching, but also limited economic freedom as sharecropping indebted many of them to their former owners. Black women, many of whom also remained bound in service to their former masters, continued to struggle as washerwomen, sharecroppers and domestic laborers.⁹

African-American women not only had to deal with oppressive white society but also with oppression within their own racial group. Specifically, the response of black male intellectuals to antiblack racism at times trivialized and neglected the concerns of black women.¹⁰ In her introduction to Cooper's *A Voice*, Mary Helen Washington relays a historical anecdote, which captures the inequitable power relations plaguing postbellum black communities. Meant to illustrate the extent to which "women got left out of black political life,"¹¹ Washington describes the way in which Du Bois repeatedly ignored Cooper's attempts to participate more fully in the public sphere:

She wrote to him at least three times, once in 1936 to ask if he would publish her biographical sketch of her friend Charlotte Grimke. Du Bois said it was too long, although he praised the idea. When she suggested he run it in three serials (probably in the *Crisis*), he neither answered nor returned her notes for the sketch. She wrote to him in 1929, urging him to write a response to *The Tragic Era*, a racist book on Reconstruction by Claude Bowers. . . .

Du Bois' famous book, *Black Reconstruction*, was the result of his response to Cooper's urgings.¹²

Du Bois's initial unresponsiveness to Cooper, a prominent female activist, seems to contradict his general concern for women, as articulated in "On

the *Damnation of Women*" (1920). As Washington observes, this essay was "generally progressive," as it "sympathetically analyzes the oppression of black women."¹³ Nevertheless, it is in this essay that Du Bois incorporates Cooper's assertion that "only the black woman can say 'when and where I enter.'" Rather than crediting Cooper with the quotation, however, he instead attributes it to "one of our women."¹⁴ It is against this backdrop of troubling male-female relations that black feminist discourse took shape at the turn of the century.

Fully consistent with black-nationalist ethics, Cooper doggedly promotes black autonomy throughout her essays.¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter Two, Stewart counseled blacks, as early as 1831, to "promote themselves" despite the burden of prejudice they faced. Following Stewart in this tradition, Martin Delany determined that "Our elevation must be the result of *self-efforts*, and work of our *own hands*."¹⁶ Picking up on this commonly deployed theme of self-activity, and resonating fully with the political philosophy of republicanism which celebrated personal independence, Cooper advises her readers that: "A race cannot be purified from without" (29). Like other nationalists, Cooper refuses to view blacks as powerless victims of white oppression; instead, she urges them to take responsibility for aspects of life over which they exercise some degree of control. Although she holds racism in its cultural and institutional forms responsible for its impact on black Americans, Cooper combines with this critique the call for blacks to look within and search for the inner strength that will sustain them in their struggle for liberation.

Elaborating on another of the central themes of her literary foremothers, Cooper urges blacks to cooperate with and uplift one another, despite the daily difficulties they faced. In an essay read before the Colored Clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1886, Cooper claimed:

"I am my sister's keeper!" should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race, and this conviction should purify and exalt the narrow, selfish and petty personal aims of life into a noble and sacred-purpose.

We need men who can. . . . be a father, a brother, a friend to every weak, struggling unshielded girl. We need women who are so sure of their own social footing that they need not fear leaning to lend a hand to a fallen or falling sister. We need men and women . . . who can go into the highways and byways, lifting up and leading, advising and encouraging with the truly catholic benevolence of the Gospel of Christ. (32-33)

In admonishing blacks to "lift" themselves and one another, Cooper reveals her interest in community activism as well as in social and economic

advancement. Resonating with the Biblical precept that much is required of those to whom much is given, Cooper articulates the sense of responsibility that socially advantaged blacks should display toward the poor. Against the ruthless economic ethic of narrow self-interest, Cooper encourages blacks to care for one another as they would family members because cooperation and compassionate social relations could only fortify the racial uplift movement. Endorsing an ethic of care and collaboration that runs counter to the capitalist philosophy urging individuals to advance at the expense of their peers, Cooper provides an alternative route to worldly success. Encouraging blacks to exhibit the benevolence of Christ, she uses the teachings of Jesus to lend credibility to her position. In addition, she reinforces the link between the well-to-do and the poor, reminding wealthier blacks of their obligation to their racial “family.”

But her deployment of racial uplift rhetoric raises key questions about black middle-class elitist attitudes and practices. A popular assumption among black intellectuals in the 1890s was that leaders would help to guide the race towards “civilization.” Kevin Gaines argues that, rather than accept the racist conclusion that blacks were innately inferior to whites on biological grounds, many elite African Americans argued that “bourgeois values of self-control and Victorian sexual morality” were “a crucial part of the race’s education and progress.”¹⁷ Once blacks fully embraced the values of piety, frugality and self-discipline, they too could ascend the “racial hierarchy” which, in those days, was “understood in evolutionary terms.” Embracing what Gaines describes as “bourgeois evolutionism,” middle-class black leaders assumed “authoritative role[s]” within black communities, performing their civilizing mission in every area of society. Elites committed themselves to “lifting” the masses as teachers, ministers, and military men in imperialist wars.¹⁸ The disadvantage of evolutionary racial theory, however, manifested in the cultural distinction that elites sometimes drew between themselves and the black majority.¹⁹

One such elite, Mary Church Terrell, distinguished from Cooper by the former’s upper-class status,²⁰ held a distinct attitude towards the poor. In 1900 she informed her fellow clubwomen: “Even though we wish to shun them [the masses], and hold ourselves entirely aloof from them, we cannot escape the consequences of their acts. So, that, if the call of duty were disregarded altogether, policy and self-preservation would demand that we go down among the lowly, the illiterate, and even the vicious to whom we are bound by the ties of race and sex, and put forth every possible effort to uplift and reclaim them.”²¹ In 1902, Terrell lamented the fact that “the dominant race in this country insists upon gauging the Negro’s worth by his most illiterate and vicious representatives than by the more

intelligent and worthy classes.”²² Clearly, she wrestled with ambivalent feelings towards the less economically successful members of the black community. She, and other elites, feared the masses would negatively impact their own ability to advance as individuals. But even those who might have wanted to turn their backs on the masses could not because the one-drop rule had grouped all Americans of African descent into a distinct and single category.²³ Since they could not escape the negative cultural representations of African-American identity, many black elites “sought status, moral authority, and recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably undeveloped black majority.”²⁴ In novels, newspaper articles and other forms of media, upper-class blacks positioned their evolved morality against the debased condition of the poor, further reinforcing the popular stereotype of black degradation.

However, it is important to remember that Terrell’s sentiments do not reflect those of Cooper, who had great sympathy for the poor. She understood the toll that the conditions of slavery, discrimination and poverty took on the masses, and did not disparage them as inherently flawed for it. While Cooper might have had sufficient money to isolate herself from poor black Americans, she refused to separate herself from other blacks as Terrell seems to have done, at least, at the rhetorical level.

Cooper did, however, express disdain for religious practices in which many poor blacks engaged. In an analysis of middle-class blacks concerned about social decorum at the turn of the century, Tera W. Hunter argues that “[t]he black elite sought to impose its own values and standards on the masses, to obliterate plebian cultural expressions that, in its view, prolonged the degradation of the race.”²⁵ Although Hunter’s study foregrounds the black elite’s desire to curb working-class behavior in dance halls, Cooper’s 1886 speech before the convocation of colored clergy exemplifies a similar tendency. Here, she theorized: “[t]hinking colored men almost uniformly admit that the Protestant Episcopal Church with its quiet, chaste dignity and decorous solemnity, its instructive and elevating ritual, its bright chanting and joyous hymning, is eminently fitted to correct the peculiar faults of worship—the rank exuberance and often ludicrous demonstrativeness of their people” (34). Her characterization of black worshipping styles as “rank” and excessive speaks to a similar class-based attempt to “tame” the masses, and mold their behavior into a normative Protestant standard. Not uncommon, Cooper shared a commitment to uplifting the masses with other middle-class and nationalist intellectuals.

Another nationalist theme underpinning Cooper’s essays is the notion that each race, “naturally” endowed with specific gifts, is destined to make

a unique contribution to humanity. Anticipating the development of “the genius of young Africa in America” over time (144–145), Cooper expected blacks to express matchless talents and distinctive capabilities as they continued to develop as a people.²⁶ In her words: “Each race has its badge, its exponent, its message, branded in its forehead by the great Master’s hand which is its own peculiar keynote, and its contribution to the harmony of nations” (152). Similar to the nationalist beliefs of Edward Blyden, Cooper’s logic seems to fall prey to what Gaines refers to as “romantic racialism” in order to turn blacks’ “perceived racial differences and liabilities into strengths.”²⁷ Exemplifying this inclination in her essay, “Has America a Race Problem; If So, How Can it Best Be Solved?” Cooper states:

We would not deprecate the fact, then, that America has a Race Problem. . . . More than all, let us not disparage the factor which the Negro is appointed to contribute to that problem. America needs the Negro for ballast if for nothing else. His tropical warmth and spontaneous emotionism may form no un-seemly counterpart to the cold and calculating Anglo-Saxon. And then his instinct for law and order, his inborn respect for authority, his inaptitude for rioting and anarchy, his gentleness and cheerfulness as a laborer, and his deep-rooted faith in God will prove indispensable and invaluable elements in a nation menaced as America is by anarchy, socialism, communism, and skepticism poured in with all the jail birds from the continents of Europe and Asia (173).²⁸

Harkening back to the eighteenth-century categorizations of Herder, Cooper depicts whites uniformly as a hearty and mathematically inclined people.²⁹ Blacks, on the other hand, emerge as a harmless, feminine race, whose good-natured sensibilities function as the comfortable counterpart to whites’ ambitious nature. Uplifting America with their presence, blacks are represented here as the saving grace of the nation.

Part of a larger tradition, romantic racialism, which manifested itself in the thinking of prominent blacks and whites alike, can be understood as a “separate tradition” irreducible to the “mainstream of racist thought.”³⁰ According to George Fredrickson, “Whereas scientists and other ‘practical’ men saw only weaknesses, others discovered redeeming virtues and even evidences of black superiority.”³¹ He goes on to argue:

This doctrine—which we shall call romantic racialism—resembled Herder’s relativism more than Gobineau’s hierarchical racism, and was widely espoused by Northern humanitarians who were more or less

antislavery. Although romantic racialists acknowledged that blacks were different from whites and probably always would be, they projected an image of the Negro that could be construed as flattering or laudatory in the context of some currently accepted ideals of human behavior and sensibility. At its most tentative, the romantic racialist view simply endorsed the “child” stereotype of the most sentimental school of proslavery paternalists and plantation romancers and then rejected slavery itself because it took unfair advantage of the Negro’s innocence and good nature. . . . A further development of the romantic racialist position was to deny unequivocally that these traits constituted inferiority, and its logical extreme was to argue. . . . that the Negro was the superior race—“the choice blood of America”—because his docility constituted the ultimate in Christian virtue.³²

Resonating with the later manifestation of romantic racialism, Cooper portrays blacks’ Christian-like nature as a valuable trait destined to enrich the national community. Aligning herself with northern whites who also subscribed to this ideology and viewed themselves as blacks’ allies, Cooper makes what in her day must have been a racially progressive argument, despite what we recognize today as the racially essentialist tenets of this logic.

Complicating her reliance upon romantic racialism as a strategy to represent blacks as an asset to America, however, is Cooper’s unequivocal rejection of racial stereotypes when she feels they work to blacks’ detriment. In particular, she attacks the literature of William Dean Howells,³³ which depicts blacks as a monolithic people who “prefer to keep to themselves in all public places” (208). Further distinguishable by a “‘*black voice*,’ a black character, easy, irresponsible and fond of what is soft and pleasant,” Howells contends, blacks have “a black ideal of art and a black barbaric taste in color” (209). Although suggesting, on other occasions, that blacks are unique in their tendencies, here Cooper fervently dismisses the notion that blacks share common characteristics which would distinguish them from whites. Strategically arguing two sides of the same issue, Cooper both rejects and embraces racial essentialism depending on the context of the argument at stake. Speaking directly to her changeability, Gaines concludes that Cooper’s “place at the vortex of several sites of social conflict—namely, class, gender, race, color, region, religion, and culture, to name those articulated in her essays—made it impossible for her to maintain a consistent ideological position, particularly on the tortured question of race.”³⁴ But these contradictions did not originate in Cooper’s thinking.

The limitations of the discourses made available, the inadequacy of social categories, and the shifting dynamics of racial oppression made it

necessary for black activists to remain flexible and creative in their antiracist and antisexist agitation. In fact, this was one of her strengths. As Gaines astutely notes, Cooper “demonstrates the impossibility of uplift ideology’s project of constructing a unified black subject that might guide the race along the path to progress.”³⁵ Instead of constructing a transcendental black subject, Cooper stresses black diversity.

At times, she highlights economic location; she speaks to well-to-do blacks, for example, when she argues: “We need men and women who do not exhaust their genius splitting hairs on aristocratic distinctions and thanking God they are not as others” (33). Cooper also singles out women when she implies that that no reasonable Christian “doubts or questions” the significance of the female “influence on social progress” (24). To blacks, she proposes that the “Negro has his niche in the infinite purposes of the Eternal” (26). Cooper also makes special reference to the plight of black southerners, referring to them as “[o]ne muffled strain in the Silent South” (I). In addition, she invites black Episcopalians to help uplift black women through the formation of industrial schools. Stressing, as she does, the multiple sites of black identity, Cooper undermines the assumption of the transcendental fixed subject. Put another way, Cooper engages in what we can understand as syncre-nationalist politics in that she destabilizes static notions of racial identity, revealing the varied sites of identity within the category of “blackness.” This lack of closure on the fixity of race opens onto the possibility of a shifting subjectivity that blacks themselves can continually redefine to make new alliances that will help them resist the imposition of identity by dominant culture.

While recurrent assumptions about African Americans’ nature and destiny throughout *A Voice* cast a nationalist hue on Cooper’s writings, her cultural productions refuse to fit neatly into the latter category. Following, it seems, the *syncre*-nationalist examples set by Truth, Stewart and Shadd Cary, Cooper distinguishes herself from predominant male nationalists through her stance on women’s rights. Rather than put forward manhood as the answer to African Americans’ social and economic challenges, Cooper posits womanhood as the ideal solution. But taking her argument a step further, as we shall see, Cooper explains that the flowering of *black* womanhood,³⁶ in particular, will enable black Americans to advance as a people, and the United States to thrive as a country. Cooper was one of the first feminist writers to theorize the diversity of women’s voices. As this chapter will show, Cooper devotes much of her analysis to the racialization of gender, and to the gendering of race. Contemporary critics correctly observe, however, that Cooper’s nineteenth-century writings reflect many of the conventions of her time. In particular, Cooper seems to sometimes

discount racial differences, referring to *women* as “woman,” and to *black women* as “The Black Woman.” Along with Karen Baker-Fletcher, I would suggest that “such language appears to represent women as a monolithic group and fails to capture the pluralism Cooper sought to embrace.”³⁷

Concerned with justifying her claim before the colored clergy that women’s potential impact on society is considerable, Cooper traces man’s recognition of woman’s laudable “influence” to the “Gospel of Jesus Christ” and the feudal system, respectively (12,13). According to her research, the “idea of . . . reverence for woman as woman regardless of rank, wealth, or culture” originated with Christ (14); and the feudal system, with its concept of chivalry, merely “fostered and developed it” (13). Cooper scholar Shirley Logan writes that “[t]his claim would have captured the attention of a group of late nineteenth-century Christian church workers without offending or shocking them.” Not only Cooper but also her contemporaries T. Thomas Fortune and others drew on this originary claim about women’s nature.³⁸ While Cooper calls on men to protect women, thereby invoking patriarchal conventions, she nonetheless criticizes selective chivalry, the legacy of feudal times, which manifested itself in a “respect for the elect few” (14). Keeping in mind the religiosity of her immediate audience, composed of the colored clergy, Cooper reminds her listeners that Christ himself believed all women, regardless of their station, to be worthy of respect and honor.

It is therefore incumbent upon the church to devote itself to uplifting black women, whose sexuality and womanhood had suffered tremendously under the regime of slavery, by teaching them religious principles and values. Thus, Cooper asks her audience to study not only religious principles but also to live them. Criticizing the organized church for failing black women, she implores the male members of the church to follow the example of Christ, who “has given to men a rule and guide for the estimation of woman as an equal, as a helper, as a friend, and as a sacred charge to be sheltered and cared for with a brother’s love and sympathy” (18). In her analysis of Cooper’s Christian orientation, Hazel Carby explains that she “interpreted the Gospel as a liberation theology, a set of ideals which argued for equality not only for women but also for the poor, the weak, the starving, and the dispossessed.”³⁹ Cooper thus draws on an expansive ideology which can be potentially applied to a broad segment of society. Deploying conventional religious principles towards progressive ends, Cooper grounds her call for changes within the clergy in the same principles that undergird her effort to transform secular segments of society.

Arguing that all women are worthy of reverence, Cooper necessarily grasps a redefinition of the term, which too often got translated into “the

idea that women may stand on pedestals or live in doll houses . . . but they must not furrow their brows with thought or attempt to help men tug at the great questions of the world" (75). In short, Cooper does not call for black women to be treated like the mythological southern belles, whose delicate natures precluded them from playing active roles outside the home. Advocating a very different kind of "respect" for women (14), she rejects the tradition that would merely train them to look pretty and serve as agreeable wives to their husbands. Although situating herself, to a considerable extent, within the tradition of domesticity, Cooper reworks its tenets as did earlier feminists Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart.

Similar to her black female activist counterparts in this regard, Cooper reinscribes the cult of womanhood, and also argues for a more expansive definition of womanliness. For the benefit of men who regrettably "drop back into sixteenth century logic" when wrestling with the woman question (75), she calls for the development of "a deeper, richer, nobler and grander meaning to the word 'womanly' than any one-sided masculine definition could ever have suggested or inspired" (50–51). As we shall see, Cooper encourages women to develop their intellect and to exert their influence both within and beyond the bounds of the domestic sphere. Since women have a distinctly "feminine" perspective to offer the "world of thought" (53), Cooper theorizes that only *their* influence could quench the world's thirst, as it presently languished "under the predominant man-influence, unmollified and unrestrained by its complementary force" (53).

Cooper was convinced that women had the capacity to exert a powerful force on society, largely because their roles as wives and mothers positioned them to mold "the earliest impulses of [man's] character" (21). Since women functioned as children's first role models and teachers, Cooper hoped that they would begin to instill in their offspring religious morals and values which would, in turn, help to civilize the nation. Critical as this responsibility is, she concludes that the very "hope for our country primarily and fundamentally rests" upon the "influence of good women" in the domestic arena (12). Women's capacity to socialize and mold their children into model citizens, therefore, makes them valuable not only as mothers but also as reproducers of the nation's values.

In addition to invoking the ideology of republican motherhood,⁴⁰ which assigned to women the tasks of birthing and caring for the citizens of the state, Cooper further concludes that women's sympathetic influence is the only effective counter force to callous patriarchal power. Personifying human characteristics and economic relations as inherently male and female in nature, Cooper identifies the "law of love" as feminine, and the "law of supply and demand" as masculine (58). It is women's compassionate sensibility,

Cooper hypothesizes, which functions as a compliment to men's aggressive nature; having gone unchecked by women's mollifying influence, masculine energy had manifested itself as unwieldy patriarchal power. Were the "feminine ingredient" (57) considered in the realm of politics and economics, she claims:

you [would] not find jurisprudence formulating as an axiom the absurdity that man and wife are one, and that one the man—that the married woman may not hold or bequeath her own property save as subject to her husband's direction; you [would] not find political economists declaring that the only possible adjustment between laborers and capitalists is that of selfishness and rapacity—that each must get all he can and keep all that he gets . . . after the feminine half of the world's truth is completed. (58)

The presence of the "feminine" principle of love, then, could have a radical effect on both social relations as well as on relations of production (58). Cooper thus establishes women as the vehicles through which loving kindness and fairness, conventionally "feminine" qualities, find expression. Equitable in its outlook, the feminine system would presumably recognize the rights of both, rather than only one, of the sexes; it would transform inequitable gender relations into complementary social relations. According to Cooper, the "feminine half of the world's truth" (58), or method of viewing the world, would recognize both men and women as legal subjects, entitled to equal rights under the law. Needed just as urgently in the market place, this ethic of care would also serve to counteract the "masculine" forces, which had manifested themselves as selfishness and rapacity. The cure for societal ills, then, could be found in the midst of evenly expressed male and female qualities, the latter of which took the form of nurturing activity. This "mothering" influence, Cooper contends, is recognizable in the building of "homes for inebriates and homes for lunatics, shelter for the aged and shelter for babes, hospitals for the sick, [and] props and braces for the falling" (59).

To illustrate the importance of achieving balance between masculine and feminine principles, Cooper insists:

It is no fault of man's that he has not been able to see truth from her standpoint. . . . But in any case his work is only impoverished by her remaining dumb. The world has had to limp along with the wobbling gait and one-sided hesitancy of a man with one eye. Suddenly the bandage is removed from the other eye and the whole body is filled with

light. It sees a circle where before it saw a segment. The darkened eye restored, every member rejoices with it. (122–123)

Likening men's suppression of female voices to a hobbling, one-eyed man, Cooper illustrates the crippling result of women's oppression. Although men may try to speak on women's behalf, she intimates that men are incapable of voicing the distinct viewpoint of their female counterparts; after all, men have traditionally been trained to be rationally oriented, and women emotionally predisposed (60). Even as Cooper deploys the cult of true womanhood in this passage, she nonetheless makes a feminist argument by depicting men's domination of women as abnormal and insufficient. Only the inclusion of women's voices can restore balance to the body politic.

Dominance in either direction being undesirable, Cooper insists that neither men's nor women's perspectives should govern one another. She makes clear "[t]hat, as both are alike necessary in giving symmetry to the individual, so a nation or a race will degenerate into mere emotionalism on the one hand, or bullyism on the other, if dominated by either exclusively" (61). It is tempting to dismiss Cooper's claim that feminine and masculine standpoints are equally valuable as irredeemably essentialist and overly reliant upon binaries. But, considered within a syncre-nationalist context, Cooper's use of the masculine/feminine dichotomy could be read as potentially productive, for both of its components carry equal weight in her formulation. Departing from dominant cultural practices which assign lesser value to one half of binary configurations, Cooper tries to treat binaries as potentially complementary halves of one whole, refusing to arrange them into hierarchal relations. Interpreting male and female voices not as contradictory but as potentially in cooperative relationship, Cooper disrupts dominant constructions of identity which define differences in competitive, antagonistic terms. Significantly, Cooper's epistemological position makes her useful to us today. It resonates, for example, with the theoretical project of contemporary theorist Chela Sandoval, whose "differential consciousness" is enabled by "meaning" that is "defiant in the face of any binary opposition."⁴¹ Sandoval calls attention to the "cultural and human forms that do not easily slip into either side of a dominant binary opposition" because they "upset the binary order of same and different."⁴² The version of this theoretical framework that underlay Cooper's politics made her writings particularly subversive because they threatened dominant systems of thought that relied upon competitive rationality and oppositional modes of existence.

The subordination of the "voice" of one sex to another would disrupt what Cooper sees as a holistic system constituted by male and female principles. Although Cooper's language at times suggests that each sex speaks

with a unified voice, the nature of her argument reveals a complexity of thinking which contradicts such an assumption. While ascribing distinct qualities to men and women, she nonetheless escapes the essentialist pitfall to some degree by claiming that each sex can express qualities typically associated with its counterpart. Representing this possibility as ideal, she longs for the day when “boys may supplement their virility by tenderness and sensibility, and [when] our girls may round out their gentleness by strength and self-reliance” (61). But lest there be too much confusion, Cooper reiterates an essentially biological argument, assuring her readers that the man who “weeps over the wrongs and struggles for the amelioration” of unjust social conditions is merely articulating the “impulses” instilled in him by his mother (60), and is “simply materializing and giving back to the world in tangible form the ideal love and tenderness, devotion and care that have cherished and nourished the helpless period of his own existence” (60). Bearing in mind her black feminist agenda, Cooper stresses the so-called nature of women frequently and passionately; and in so doing, she strengthens her case that women are destined to utilize their “essential” qualities to transform the ailing country into a healthy state.

It is not enough for women to merely make a uniquely feminine contribution to the nation, however. Only the *educated* female can help to civilize the country. Before alleviating the suffering that has been unleashed by uninhibited masculine energy, women must first “grasp” and “master” theology, science and the political economy (58). Only by learning to “reason and think and express their thought” as men had, could women “administer to the world the bread it need[ed] as well as the sugar it cri[e]d for” (57). In the late nineteenth century, most black women toiled away as sharecroppers and low-wage domestics.⁴³ But the privileged few who gained access to higher education were steered into less prestigious programs than were men. And once enrolled, women were encouraged to become the brides of their classmates, rather than high-achieving students.⁴⁴ Hoping to resolve some of the grievances that Stewart and others had voiced in the antebellum era, Cooper calls for collective action to be taken on black women’s behalf. In fact, her solution to the lack of educational opportunities for women reads much like those posed by Stewart and Shadd Cary. In response to the problem, she counsels: “To be plain, I mean let money be raised and scholarships be founded in our colleges and universities for self-supporting, worthy young women, to offset and balance the aid that can always be found for boys who will take theology” (79). Alluding to the preferential scholarships made available primarily to men, Cooper agitated for similar opportunities for black women. Representing the problem as one to be solved by the community at large, Cooper

encourages blacks to act as a unit to bring about social transformation for individual women.

Unequal education being just one feature of a broader culture rooted in sexist assumptions, nineteenth-century norms in general insured that women would assume a less visible role than men in the public sphere. Denied equal access to education, property and the vote, women did not participate as full citizens in the nation.⁴⁵ But transforming this negative into a positive, Cooper argues that men's domination of women has ironically worked to the advantage of the latter. Their experience of subordination, she claims, has made them peculiarly perceptive about the plight of the oppressed, and therefore well poised to help alleviate social, political and economic challenges. Contemplating the unexpected benefits that women have accrued from their oppression, Cooper explains:

[t]here are those, however, who value the calm elevation of the thoughtful spectator who stands aloof from the heated scramble; and, above the turmoil and din of corruption and selfishness, can listen to the teachings of eternal truth and righteousness. . . . One needs occasionally to stand aside from the hum and rush of human interests and passions to hear the voices of God. . . . And similarly it may be woman's privilege from her peculiar coigne of vantage as a quiet observer, to whisper just the needed suggestion or the almost forgotten truth. The colored woman, then, should not be ignored because her bark is resting in the silent waters of the sheltered cove. She is watching the movements of the contestants none the less and is all the better qualified, perhaps, to weigh and judge and advise because not herself in the excitement of the race. (137-8)

Worth noting are the eclectic ideological traditions on which Cooper draws to characterize the advantageous condition of African-American women. The African myth that women enjoy an especial connection to divine guidance, for instance, seems to permeate this passage. And, ironically, it is black women's distance from political processes which has made them so receptive to hints from the Divine. Representing their lack of participation as an asset that has enabled them to ascend to an elevated state, Cooper contends that black women have attained a degree of moral rectitude, unknown to those immersed in corrupt political practices. Having been thusly "enriched" through quiet observation, black women have in fact become "more qualified" than men to offer a perspective consistent with the will of God. But black women are not only sensitive to Divine guidance. As Baker-Fletcher argues, they also seem to become representatives of Christ, himself, such that:

there is a strong similarity between her descriptions of Jesus and of the Black woman of the South. Just as Cooper describes the Black woman of the South as mute, so she describes Christ as mute. Just as Christ is a vital element in the regeneration of civilization in a universal sense, so is the Black woman a vital element, in a particular sense, in the regeneration of a race. . . . Both have a muted, liberating message that has been suppressed.⁴⁶

Capable, then, of emanating a Christ-like quality, it is imperative that black women's voices be articulated in order to hasten the transformation of their community, and by extension, the nation, for the better. In addition to invoking the Biblical tradition, Cooper also reaffirms the cult of true womanhood; staying within its ideological reach, she makes clear that whatever women's contribution, it is sure to have a *quiet* and *gentle* influence on society.

Thus, Cooper takes a syncretic approach to situating black women within both the racial and the national community. Combining diverse ideological traditions to characterize their current position and potential impact on society, Cooper uses African theology, Biblical allusions and the ideology of true womanhood. Much like other syncre-nationalists, Cooper demonstrates her ability to combine a variety of discourses for political purposes. As discussed in Chapter Three, Shadd Cary demonstrated some forty years beforehand through her syncretic uplift project that cultural politics was a form of resistance available to men and women with little political power. She used her newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, to intervene in stereotypical depictions of black Canadians as incompetent migrants and fugitives. Similarly, Cooper consciously re-works the dominant image of black women, transforming them on the page from over-sexed sub-human beings into wise and quiet observers who are poised to transform the culture for the greater good.

While Cooper makes general claims at the outset of her text about the urgency of women's participation in society, her focus often sharpens to rest on the specific plight of black women. In an effort to alter their oppressive social and economic conditions, Cooper courts potential allies in both black male and white female communities, frustrated that African-American women have been marginalized by both. Seeking to form productive coalitions across sexual and racial lines, Cooper first analyzes what has historically prevented such alliances from thriving. In so doing, she carves out the common ground that could serve as a rallying point for diverse interest groups. As previously explored, Cooper expresses great concern about the quality of black women's education. Representing black men as a formidable

obstacle on their path to progress, she remarks that “the majority” of black men “do not yet think it worth while that women aspire to higher education” (75). In response to those who would oppose higher education for women on the grounds that it would unfavorably alter the nature of male-female relations, Cooper simply quotes the position commonly articulated by her progressive female contemporaries:

[T]heir knowledge of physiology makes them better mothers and housekeepers; their knowledge of chemistry makes them better cooks; while from their training in other natural sciences and in mathematics, they obtain an accuracy and fair-mindedness which is of great value to them in dealing with their children. (71–72)⁴⁷

Depicting women’s mastery of the sciences as potentially beneficial to the family, the building blocks of the nation, Cooper tries to make palatable her unconventional sentiments about classical education.⁴⁸ Even though she promotes higher education as a boon to both the household and the state, she is careful to acknowledge and respond to her opponents’ threats that educated women could prove undesirable to potential mates. Newly acquired knowledge by women, Cooper confesses, would irrevocably shift the uneven balance of power between the sexes. But she goes on to explain that men would benefit from such a change because they would have to “grow” to meet women’s increased “standards” and heightened expectations. Along with women’s newly-developed powers of discernment would come additional demands on men; but Cooper predicts that the latter would welcome the opportunity to “so develop [their] God-given powers as to reach the ideal of a generation of women who demand the noblest, grandest and best achievements of which [they are] capable” (70–71).

In addition to debunking the imagined crises that might result from providing women with a classical education, Cooper sharply criticizes men’s tendency to consider the “subaltern” woman as “already positioned, represented, spoken for or constructed as absent or silent or not listened to in a variety of discourses.”⁴⁹ Using Martin Delany as an example of one who presumed to speak for both men and women within the African-American community, she questions his assertion that “when he entered the council of kings the black race” would enter “with him” (30). Cooper contests the logic that Delany’s individual achievements would reflect positively on, and therefore benefit, the entire community. She plainly reminds her readers that “no man can represent the race” (30), and that black women’s voices cannot be reproduced by men speaking from an all-encompassing position of “blackness.” While specific black men might

have made personal political and economic gains, Cooper is convinced that their success bears little relation to the status of black women in America, who still lagged behind their male counterparts on social and political fronts. A proponent of the view that “[y]ou may judge a nation’s rank in the scale of civilization from the way they treat their women” (12), Cooper does not want the specificity of black women’s positionality to be occluded by the category of race.

Although she rejects men’s sexist practices, Cooper nonetheless calls for them to perform the patriarchal duty of protecting black women. Writes Claudia Tate, “elite Africans Americans, whom Du Bois labeled ‘the talented tenth,’ (whose economic stability sustained intraracial communities that afforded more protective isolation from crude forms of racism than did the usual black community), enforced social codes that respected black patriarchal entitlement” (224). While adopting these codes at times “enhance[d] their opportunities for personal advancement” (224), as Tate suggests, Cooper likely engages here in a pragmatic, community-oriented call for male aid, since black women still suffered, as they had during slavery, from sexual victimization at the hands of their employers. In *When and Where I Enter*, Paula Giddings notes that “Black women saw their sisters as extremely vulnerable, and men often taking advantage of them.”⁵⁰ Black women required unique protection which Cooper felt only men could provide. Voicing her “plea for the *Colored Girls* of the South” (24), Cooper entreats black men to “save them, help them, shield, train, develop, teach, inspire them! Snatch them, in God’s name, as brands from the burning! There is material in them well worth your while, the hope in germ of a staunch, helpful, regenerating womanhood on which, primarily, rests the foundation stones of our future as a race” (25). Again engaging in syncretist politics, Cooper both deploys and dismisses conventional gender roles.

Depicted in this passage as fragile beings, black women become “true women” in desperate need of “true men” to help them survive. Cooper reinforces the masculine-feminine binary, and yet she also upsets it, encouraging men to both inhabit and transcend traditional gender identities, in order to establish a new kind of relationship with women. More specifically, Cooper wants men to protect women, and to defend their virtue; at the same time, she wants men to partner them as equals and helpmates. Necessarily, Cooper takes what seems to be a self-contradictory position; to respond to the conflicting needs created by the political economy of slavery and its aftermath, she adjusts her rhetoric to the demands of the moment.

Just as committed to aligning herself with white suffragists as she is with black men, Cooper interrogates the divisive politics of white women

who refused to welcome blacks into their organizations. Identifying white supremacy at the root of their behavior, Cooper shows how these women perpetuate racist distinctions to advance their own cause. The tactics of Reverend Anna Shaw, for instance, one of the leaders of the women's movement who spoke at the National Women's Council in 1891, incur Cooper's disapproval, as Shaw's remarks against the granting of rights to racial Others are sustained by the doctrine of racial inequality. While Shaw proclaims rights to be a more pressing concern for white women than for Native American and black men, Cooper represents this type of cross-racial tension as a self-sabotaging legal suit, the "Eye vs. Foot" (123). Imagining the discourse of the eye (the "plaintiff"), she writes:

"There is that dull clod, the foot, allowed to roam at will, free and untrammelled; while I, the source and medium of light, brilliant and beautiful, am fettered in darkness and doomed to desuetude." The great burly black man, ignorant and gross and depraved, is allowed to vote; while the franchise is withheld from the intelligent and refined, the pure-minded and lofty souled white woman. Even the untamed and untamable Indian of the prairie, who can answer nothing but 'ugh' to great economic and civic questions is thought by some worthy to wield the ballot which is still denied the Puritan maid and the first lady of Virginia. (123)

Sarcastically describing white women as the "source" of light, Cooper contrasts their supposed nobility with the destructiveness of their politics. Teasing out their white supremacist assumptions, Cooper lays bare the belief system which valued whites more than those designated as racial Others. According to dominant constructions of identity, blacks and Native Americans fell far below white women on the scale of human value. Their presumed lack of humanity, then, justified the inferior treatment they received. Highlighting the interdependence of humanity across racial lines, she illustrates competition between ethnic and cultural groups as a single body turned inward against itself. As the battle between the eye and foot is doomed to result in the destruction of the entire body temple, Cooper speaks to the futility inherent in the adoption of an antagonistic stance by one aggrieved group towards another.

Seeking to reframe the terms of the debate, Cooper suggests that white women broaden their sympathies beyond themselves to encompass all groups that have been "crushed under the iron heel of Anglo-Saxon power and selfishness" (123). Rather than compete with others, Cooper wants white women to align their cause with that of blacks, for, in fact,

their struggle was one and the same. Since white women themselves had experienced patriarchal oppression, they were not only oppressors but were also victims, to a lesser degree, of Anglo-Saxon power. Aware that a “unitary, though antipodally differentiated, oppression” subordinated blacks, women and other nonwhites, Cooper seems to have understood what Charles Mills has recently described as “a common process” that “makes the Other ‘Other’ in the first place—as structures of patriarchy create woman as Other to man, and white supremacy creates the nonwhite native as Other to the European settler, or black as Other to white.”⁵¹ It was therefore incumbent upon white women to identify themselves with “the cause of the weak,” for their own oppression by men and economic structures was interwoven with the forces that subordinated racial others (117).

In effect, Cooper calls for the emergence of a coalitional consciousness so that “when all the weak shall have received their due consideration, then woman will have her ‘rights,’ and the Indian will have his rights, and the Negro will have his rights, and all the strong will have learned at last to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly” (117). Stringing the rights of diverse groups along a common thread, Cooper challenges white women to unite with black for the common cause of eradicating sexism and racism. Not only does she wish to form an alliance across racial lines, but she also tries to refashion the nature of relationships between social groups such that the suffering of the minority will register as a direct affront not only to the dignity of the subordinated, but also to the privileged.

In *Freedom Dreams*, Robin Kelley wisely notes that “[r]adical black feminists have never confined their vision to just the emancipation of black women or women in general, or all black people for that matter.”⁵² Certainly the case where Cooper’s writings are concerned, there is an arrant anti-imperialist argument threading her essays together which compels readers to consider her project beyond the bounds of the North American context. The concern of “woman,” she argues, is “every interest that has lacked an interpreter and a defender. Her cause is linked with that of every agony that has been dumb—every wrong that needs a voice” (122). Going beyond the particularity of black women’s experiences, Cooper broadens her discussion to encompass the fullness of universal human rights.⁵³

Aware of the link between white supremacy and imperialism, Cooper problematizes the ideology that sprang from the former and justified the latter:

Whence came this apotheosis of greed and cruelty? . . . Whence the self-congratulation of “dominant” races, as if “dominant” meant “righteous” and carried with it a title to inherit the earth? Whence the

scorn of so-called weak or un-warlike races and individuals, and the very comfortable assurance that it is their manifest destiny to be wiped out as vermin before this advancing civilization? (51)

Deconstructing the components of manifest destiny, the notion that the white “race” was ordained by God to expand its form of government and civilization throughout the world, Cooper denounces it as “Barbarian brag” (52). She ridicules racists who conclude that: “As for Far Orientals, they are not of those who will survive. Artistic attractive people that they are, their civilization is like their own tree flowers, beautiful blossoms destined never to bear fruit. . . . Just as surely as morning passes into afternoon, so surely are these races of the Far East, if unchanged, destined to disappear before the advancing nations of the West.”⁵⁴ Exposing the arrogance and ignorance of such thinking, Cooper interrogates the legitimacy of white supremacy and attacks its outward manifestation as imperial aggression. That is to say, she challenges what had become a common sense notion about race—that darker-skinned peoples were underdeveloped—which had justified the existence of the institution of slavery, and which would further justify U.S. military action in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 and 1899. Since dominant culture had identified these populations as somehow inferior to whites, the survival of the fittest ethos made acceptable to racial chauvinists the conquering of such people by the “stronger” of the races. But again, Cooper asks us to reconsider the origins of the binary formulation (i.e., stronger/weaker), and to question the ideology that assigns differential value to its components.

As this chapter demonstrates, Cooper’s antiracist feminist argument interrupts the multifaceted articulations of patriarchy, racism and imperialism in the nineteenth century. In the process, she valorizes feminine qualities to such an extent that she becomes rather disillusioned with white women whose actions fail to conform to her theory about the civilizing influence of femininity. In other words, Cooper calls attention to the suffragists who refuse to exert their loving influence on behalf of blacks and other non-whites. She is convinced that American women—white women in particular, given their socially sanctioned intimacy with white men—bear responsibility for emanating loving-kindness as a corrective to brute masculinity. And since Anglo women could positively influence their husbands as well as their children, Cooper faults them for the dearth of charity demonstrated toward those in need. She contends, for instance, that a white woman’s power is such that she “gives tone directly to her immediate world, [and that] her tiniest pulsation ripples out and out, down and down, till the outermost circles and the deepest layers of society feel the vibrations” (85).

Capable, then, of transforming their environment with the slightest actions, Anglo-American women could conceivably alter social conditions were they so inclined.

Instead, Cooper laments, the empathetic nature of many women had been weakened by white supremacist notions. Alluding to a woman by the name of Mary Livermore to illustrate the problem, Cooper describes how the latter's racial superiority complex clouded the lens through which she experienced reality:

She was dwelling on the Anglo-Saxon genius for power and his contempt for weakness, and described a scene in San Francisco which she had witnessed. The . . . American small-boy, had pounced upon a simple, unoffending Chinaman, who was taking home his work, and had emptied the beautifully laundried contents of his basket into the ditch. "And," said she, "when that great man stood there and blubbered before that crowd of lawless urchins, to any one of whom he might have taught a lesson with his two fists, *I didn't much care.*" (54)

As a result of this tale, Cooper confesses that her theory about women's civilizing influence threatened to be thrown into crisis. Here was Mary Livermore, after all, who admired the kind of strength that expressed itself as physical aggression. Adopting an attitude of disdain toward the suffering Chinese man on account of his nonviolence, Livermore's reaction contradicts Cooper's characterization of the typically feminine response to suffering. Rather than intervening in the skirmish to counter aggression with pacifism, Livermore instead embraces the ideology of white supremacy and its attendant aggression towards so-called "un-warlike races" (itself an essentialist, problematic phrase). Cooper, however, does not abandon her romantic ideals about femininity. Instead, she qualifies her argument, claiming that even when an educated woman "parrot[s] over the cold conceits that some man has taught" her, she is in no way disturbing the integrity of her inner purity (55). In other words, even if the voice of the "thinking woman" happens to "strike a false note" (54, 55), such discordance would in no way diminish the fact that her "heart is aglow with sympathy and loving kindness" (55). In Cooper's estimation, women cannot escape the power that lies dormant within them. They may use their power for good or ill, but regardless, they will have a definite impact on the society in which they live. It is therefore essential that Anglo women transcend the limiting belief system of white supremacy, as it is sure to prevent them from aligning themselves with their black counterparts and other non-whites in the struggle against patriarchy and racism.

Fighting for liberation on many fronts, Cooper's essays span a range of concerns worthy of examination by contemporary scholars. But most relevant to this discussion is her sophisticated treatment of the intricacy of black female subjectivity. Following steps taken by Sojourner Truth in the 1850s, who articulated the "double bind" facing women who also happened to be black,⁵⁵ Cooper writes: "The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. . . . She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both" (134). Anchoring this abstract condition in a concrete example, Cooper offers the dilemma facing black women in public transportation. Giving a hypothetical account of her experience at a "dilapidated station," she writes, "And when . . . our train stops . . . I see two dingy little rooms with 'FOR LADIES' swinging over one and 'FOR COLORED PEOPLE' over the other." Understandably, this conundrum causes her to wonder "under which head[ing]" she comes (96). Bringing to the fore the intersection of race and gender,⁵⁶ Cooper shows how these identities cannot be separated and dealt with in isolation from each other.

Her pivotal writings on this issue helped to pave the road for contemporary theorists who are now exploring the dialectical nature of race and gender discourses. Her turn-of-the-century analysis called for the complexities that "both/and" formulations allow, rather than the limitations inherent in "either/or" binaries. At the same time, Cooper could strategically speak as a "woman" to women, and as a "black" to blacks. Such is the flexibility of her syncre-nationalist proclivities. And to her credit, Cooper understood the exclusions facing black women as the beginning, rather than the end of the struggle. A perennial optimist, she maintained in the face of demoralizing racial conditions that the world would indeed "be moved . . . whether by us, by blind force, by fate, or by God!" And, characteristic of Cooper, she ends her collection of essays with the Biblical promise that: "If thou believest, all things are possible; and *as* thou believest, so be it unto thee" (304).

The unrepentant faith in progress was characteristic of the age in which Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary and Cooper lived. Although most of the women examined heretofore display a strong faith in the unseen powers of the Divine, they are nonetheless heirs of the Enlightenment project who clung to the belief that socioeconomic advancement was partly a product of a classical education. An urgent aspect of each racial uplift project advanced in this book, education receives additional attention in the following chapter. While works of nonfiction have been examined thus far, Chapter Five will explore Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy*, a fictional portrayal of

the uplift movement in general, and of women's need for higher education in particular. Disciplinary concerns often demand that we read nonfiction and fictional works separately, but here I read them together because the work done in both genres is meant to re-write, literally and figuratively, black women's experience. As Barbara Christian has argued, Harper and other black women novelists may have been constrained to some extent by the conventions of sentimental literature and the expectations of their white middle-class readership.⁵⁷ But, as Chapter Five suggests, black women's fiction nonetheless made an important contribution to the racial uplift movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

How do the unresolved concerns of the antebellum era get articulated in postbellum fiction? How does *Iola Leroy* complement or contradict our syncre-nationalist reading of black women's activism? And how does this text portray the education of black women, in the wider context of concerns about class and community building? My re-reading of Harper's classic poses some provisional answers to these questions.

Chapter Five

Inheriting Community: Or, Educating Iola

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, born in Maryland in 1825, contributed to the racial uplift movement through a variety of discursive forms. As a poet, antislavery lecturer, essayist, feminist, temperance advocate, teacher and fiction writer,¹ Harper creatively cut across genres, political affiliations and geographical locations. Rather than focus, however, on the breadth of her accomplishments, this chapter re-reads Harper's only full-length work of fiction, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), because it explores a range of the primary concerns addressed in the nonfiction texts of Maria Stewart, Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Anna Julia Cooper, albeit within a different literary form. Situating this novel against the backdrop of these previously discussed cultural productions, this chapter pays close attention to *Iola Leroy's* intervention into official (state) and insurgent black nationalist discourses. It also considers the extent to which Iola, the main character in the book, embodies the aspirations and expectations outlined by Harper's previously discussed literary ancestors. Does Iola live up to the standards of womanhood advocated by Truth, Stewart and Cooper? Just as important, how does this novel build upon and transform our understanding of syncretic-nationalist politics?

This chapter argues that *Iola Leroy* makes an important contribution to contemporary interrogations of nationalism because the narrative necessarily speaks within and against this dominant political philosophy in important ways.² Harper's writing reminds us that black nationalism is not a monolithic concept, but rather a dynamic racial project in which black men and women participated. Making a multifaceted argument against the oppression of black men and women, this novel aligns itself with state and insurgent black nationalist discourses; but it also questions the legitimacy

of racial borders and challenges nineteenth-century gender conventions. While *Iola Leroy* draws on the political language of the state, it also critiques the racially essentialist and sexist components of nationalist ideology, infusing it with a variety of distinct discourses to argue for human and political rights. A syncretic thinker, Harper weaves together nationalist, sentimental, egalitarian and civilizationist ideologies in her text. She also details the evolving nature of the ideology of racial uplift which, by the 1890s, had taken on the contours of Victorian morality and social Darwinism.³

Specifically, Harper's novel promotes a moral version of racial uplift, which she believed would hasten social uplift in the nation at large. By writing about the outrages committed against the morally exemplary Iola Leroy, Harper also hoped to revive the political activism prevalent among progressive Northern whites during the era of Radical Republicanism, which had waned considerably by the end of Reconstruction. Like the writings of many other middle-class blacks, Harper's work specifies the strategies that educated blacks could adopt to help effect social change. Moreover, the novel gives much attention to the role of black women in the context of community formation during and after the Civil War era, providing a fictional representation of the challenges facing women and the racial uplift movement, in general, near the turn of the century.

While the previous chapters focus on nonfiction writings by black women, this chapter engages fiction, as this literary form also served an important purpose for black women endeavoring to effect social change. Peterson has argued that early African-American writers viewed fiction as an "instrument" of "social protest."⁴ It also functioned as a tool of "empowerment, enabling both the entrance to a broader literary marketplace and, most especially . . . the creation of community."⁵ Working within the realm of fiction, black writers not only sought access to wider audiences, but they also used this literary form to tackle political themes, construct positive images of black Americans and express values and aspirations that would serve as the basis for the building of community. I read fiction alongside nonfiction because black women used both forms to record the world in which they lived, reconstruct their histories, and imagine better futures for themselves, their families, and their country. Exploring the political implications embedded in this novel, this chapter also examines the mulatta figure within the wider context of syncre-nationalist politics, because her textual presence calls into question the legitimacy of racial borders and the fixity of race. This kind of "disruption" is consistent with syncre-nationalist politics, which also interrogates the naturalness of racial categories, leaving destabilized an essential form of racial identity.

As this study demonstrates, syncre-nations are subversive: they challenge conventional nations by questioning the borders of race, space, nation and/or time, allowing for the formation of communities constituted by an interplay of cultures, ethnicities, identities and/or populations. They may also function as experimental spaces in which traditional gender and social divisions are transgressed, linking people across the boundaries of religion, race, culture and region. Syncre-nationalist practices thus consist of a set of strategies or actions that work to subvert binaries, hierarchies and dominant constructions of social identity. In so doing, they work to undermine the politics of division and racial domination. Chapter Five continues this discussion of syncre-nationalist practices by exploring Frances Harper's activism, and highlighting the syncre-nationalist dimensions of her novel.⁶ A brief review of Harper's own eclectic politics and the context in which she wrote sheds additional light on the complexity and content of *Iola Leroy*.

Harper, born into a free, middle-class household, was orphaned at an early age. After the death of her mother, Harper began to attend the Academy for Negro Youth, a private school run by her evangelical uncle, Reverend William Watkins. Until the age of thirteen, she took advantage of the courses offered there, which focused on Greek, Latin, the Bible and elocution.⁷ After her thirteenth birthday, Harper left school to work as a domestic laborer in Baltimore.⁸ In the early 1850s, she relocated to Columbus, Ohio, where she worked as a sewing instructor at Union Seminary, a school sponsored by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Shortly thereafter in 1852, Harper moved to Pennsylvania, where she continued to teach. Her life was forever changed, however, when a law passed in Maryland in 1853, which prevented free blacks from entering the state without jeopardizing their freedom.⁹ According to Foster, this occurrence "became a major turning point" in Harper's life, particularly because, for some time, she had been "searching for a way to contribute to the general welfare of her race." The passage of this law prompted Harper to "pledge" herself to the abolitionist cause.¹⁰

A contemporary of other female lecturers such as Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Sojourner Truth and Frances Dana Gage,¹¹ Harper became a professional speaker, under the employ of the Maine Anti-Slavery Society. Her lecturing career, which took her to a variety of northeastern states, as well as to Canada,¹² was postponed during her brief marriage to Fenton Harper in 1860. After his death four years later, Harper resumed speaking in public, lecturing in both the North and South to receptive, as well as hostile audiences.

During the postbellum era, she lectured courageously throughout the South, preaching a message of "reconciliation" which assured listeners that

“between the white people and the colored there is a community of interest, and the sooner they find it out, the better it will be for both parties; but that community of interest does not consist in increasing the privileges of one class and curtailing the rights of the other.”¹³ Seeking to find common ground between blacks and whites, Harper hoped to bring about a cultural shift that could benefit racially and culturally diverse communities. Even though Harper’s worldview, like that of most turn-of-the-century intellectuals, had been influenced by the Darwinian concept of competition and struggle, this particular remark provides a glimpse of her egalitarian leanings. Implicit in Harper’s plea is her opposition to the practice of racial competition and domination.

Throughout her lifetime, Harper attacked social injustice on many fronts. A proponent of the notion that well-to-do blacks should assist their less-fortunate counterparts, she counseled northern blacks in an 1875 speech: “it is better to feel that the weaker and feebler our race the closer we will cling to them.”¹⁴ Above all, she warned her peers not to “isolate” themselves “in selfish, or careless unconcern” from the masses.¹⁵ Not only did she address racial issues but Harper also agitated for women’s right to vote, earn an education and gain career opportunities outside the home.¹⁶ At the age of sixty-seven, she completed *Iola Leroy*, which was considered to be “the crowning effort of her life” by the *AME Church Review*.¹⁷ Unfortunately, when she died in 1911, W.E.B. Du Bois eulogized her thusly: “she was not a great writer, but she wrote much worth reading. She was, above all, sincere.”¹⁸ Du Bois’s lack of enthusiasm notwithstanding, Harper’s novel was among the best-selling African-American literary works in the nineteenth century.¹⁹

Briefly summarized, *Iola Leroy* tells the story of an attractive, fair-skinned African-American woman who, unaware of her African ancestry, is raised as a white woman. Born on a southern plantation before the Civil War, Iola and her brother Harry get sent hastily away to the North—primarily because their parents want to distance their children from the dangers of slavery—but also because they want to provide them with a quality education. The younger child, Gracie, stays at home with her parents. After Eugene—Iola’s father and her mother’s former master—dies unexpectedly from yellow fever, the calculating cousin, Alfred Lorraine, conspires to claim Eugene’s estate. As a result, Iola gets tricked into returning to the South, where she, her sister Gracie, and their mother are reduced to the status of slaves. Shortly thereafter, Gracie dies from grief. But given her resilience and extraordinary beauty, Iola inspires the admiration and sympathy of former slave, and army “helper,” Tom Anderson (40), who works to secure her freedom from bondage.²⁰ After her tenure in this condition

ends, Iola is “given a place as a nurse” in support of the Union Army (39). At the close of the war, accompanied by her uncle Robert, Iola begins her search for her long-lost family.

Although many of Harper’s contemporaries responded favorably to her work,²¹ numerous recent critics have relegated the novel to the dustbin of sentimentalism and inauthenticity. Houston Baker disapproves of the text’s “lofty sentiment—[and] its creakingly mechanical and entirely predictable plot”²²; Sterling Brown has charged the work with being “inept” and “as dull as it is pious.”²³ Nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, typically written by, and for, women, to influence their emotions and—subsequently—their actions, has long been dismissed by detractors as sub-literary, ineffective and unrealistic. Jane Tompkins, for example, notes that, for some time, the “male-dominated scholarly tradition” has “prevented even committed feminists from recognizing and asserting the value of a powerful and specifically female novelistic tradition.”²⁴ She cites Ann Douglas as a representative of the professed feminists “who have invested their professional careers in that study” but nonetheless refer to women’s novels as “trash.”²⁵ The view of sentimental novels is largely negative because

[i]n reaction against [sentimentalists’] world view, and perhaps even more against their success, twentieth-century critics have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority.²⁶

Unconvinced by the sentimentalist’s assumption that “feeling right” would lead to “doing right,” nay-sayers identify the former’s attempt to produce emotional responses in readers as manipulative. Sentimental authors such as Harper, rather than tackling the brutality of slavery and oppression in general without flinching, have been charged with obfuscating harsh realities by portraying suffering in a utopian or redemptive manner.²⁷ Perhaps worst of all, they ultimately succeeded in nothing more than seducing their readers into a private world of emotional melodrama, where they shed “tears, idle tears.”²⁸ But Tompkins and other women scholars have argued against the conclusion that nineteenth-century women’s novels are devoid of value.

Claudia Tate’s feminist scholarship, for instance, does much to expose the subversive “discourses of liberation” embedded in black women’s sentimental fiction.²⁹ In “Allegories of Black Female Desire; or, Rereading Nineteenth-Century Sentimental Narratives of Black Female Authority,” Tate

explains that the “scholarly tradition” has historically embraced “texts that argue unabashedly for civil justice in an interracial context, while questioning both the social efficacy and aesthetic value of those works that neither overtly dramatize racism nor explicitly argue for civil justice.” Black women’s fiction, privileging “marriage and domestic idealism,” has therefore been judged as trivial and assimilationist, by comparison.³⁰ Rather than challenging the system, it seems, they merely seek inclusion within it. Similarly engaged in revisionist scholarly projects, Carby and Foster have correctly argued that Harper’s novel revises the conventional sentimental plot by subverting the stereotype of the tragic mulatta; rather than a passive figure, Iola proves to be “feisty” and assertive. She does not acquiesce, for example, to the series of slave masters who attempt to seduce her. Instead, Iola rejects their advances as morally repugnant overtures (41, 42). But Harper also engages in other acts of literary subversion that deserve critical attention.

Re-reading *Iola Leroy* through a feminist optic, I argue that this novel, far from encouraging women to retreat into a sentimental “dream world,”³¹ in fact invited them into a political conversation structured within and against nationalist discourse. Aimed at black and white women in particular, as well as at Sunday school students and social reformers, this work packages a countercultural message in sentimental casing.

First, it challenges the white racism underlying nineteenth-century American nationalist discourse. Using the political language of the state to describe the ideal destiny of the younger generation, Dr. Latimer, Iola’s future husband, underscores by contrast the failure of the state (which imagined itself as “white”) to protect black Americans. Aware of the fact that the prevailing power structure identified blacks as “anticitizens,”³² Latimer counters this racial exclusiveness, declaring: “We want our boys to grow up to be manly citizens and not cringing sycophants” (242). Latimer invokes republican logic which “had long emphasized that the strength, . . . and resolve of a people” marked them as independent, rather than dependent.³³ Tightly bound up with notions of national identity and patriotism, republicanism demanded that citizens be “manly” and free from servile inclinations. Men were expected to fulfill the conventionally masculine roles of protecting and providing for their families.

But black men in the Reconstruction South faced obstacles, many of them state-sanctioned, which prevented them from exercising the rights enjoyed by white men. They literally took their lives in their hands when they attempted to vote, assert their equality, or protect their families from white violence. Limited job prospects, the convict leasing-system, lynching, and legalized segregation beginning in the 1880s all spoke to the white con-

sensus on black inferiority. By appealing to notions of republicanism, Dr. Latimer seeks to make familiar and intelligible the concerns of black men to a nation that imagined itself as a racially homogeneous and exclusive entity.

The black school teacher in the novel, Lucille Delany, also appropriates the nationalist language of the state, lamenting that blacks “have been aliens and outcasts in the land of [their] birth” (251). In effect, they have been rendered non-normative beings, the Other of normative white bodies. Hopeful about social change, Delany proclaims, “I want my pupils to do all in their power to make this country worthy of their deepest devotion and loftiest patriotism” (251). Reversing the white cultural assumption that blacks are unworthy to enjoy equality with whites, Delany asserts that the country itself, awash in racism, is unworthy of blacks’ affection. Their charge, then, is to do the social, cultural and political work necessary to uplift the nation out of its moral squalor. She wants blacks to feel that America’s “glory is their glory, its dishonor their shame” (251). Rejecting the view of Thomas Jefferson that white-dominated America was capable of reading the black body only in “alien” terms,³⁴ Delany urges her black students to help reset America’s moral compass, and to claim it as their homeland. In opposition to the emigrationist’s view that blacks stood little chance of being treated as fully human in America, Harper puts patriotic rhetoric in the mouths of her characters.

Stressing the sacredness of the “rights of life and liberty” (225), the novel at the same time reinforces the fact that these freedoms had yet to be extended to black Americans. The warning of Rev. Carmichael, a college-educated African American who emerges in the second half of the novel, thus functions as a caution to the reader in particular, and America in general: “Nations, honey-combed by vice, have fallen beneath the weight of their iniquities” (259). To avoid such a tragedy, America must necessarily become a less arrogant and savage nation, and more just and inclusive (259). The novel, then, draws on official nationalist discourse, partly to underscore the Americanism of blacks. But it also problematizes the cultural and structural racism undermining America’s experiment in democracy.

Iola Leroy, using these characters as mouthpieces to critique the contradictions within U.S. democracy, also aligns itself with black nationalist discourse. As in conventional U.S. nationalist thought, nineteenth-century black nationalist ideology relies on racial essentialism and sexual assumptions; Harper both revisits and revises these in her novel. While this is not a black nationalist novel per se, nationalist ingredients inform its ideological orientation. Specifically, Harper represents her subjects who demonstrate race pride and community solidarity—the hallmarks of black nationalism—as admirable and virtuous men and women. At the same time, she

“reinforce[s] her theme of a natural, organic relationship between black elites and masses, figuring the race as a family transcending class, cultural and color differences.”³⁵ Despite external distinctions, the elite blacks in the novel remain devoted to their socially and economically disadvantaged counterparts. This sense of racial obligation, Wilson Moses argues, is not merely a dimension of black nationalism, but it is in fact the “essential quality of black nationalism.”³⁶ Black nationalists felt keenly “responsible for the welfare of other black individuals, or black people as a collective entity, simply because of a shared racial heritage and destiny.”³⁷

Manifesting itself at a variety of critical moments in the text, this nationalist impulse is particularly apparent during the debate over “passing,” undetected, from one racial identity to another. The text, for example, condemns those who deny their blackness and instead represent themselves as “white” for the purpose of personal gain. Arguably, the rejection of racial passing is rooted in nationalist reasoning. Iola’s phenotypically white brother, Harry, for example, chooses to align his destiny with that of phenotypically black African Americans. His uncle, Robert, approves of his decision, remarking, “it would be treason, not only to the race, but to humanity, to have you ignoring your kindred and masquerading as a white man” (203). Particularly interesting here is the choice of the term “treason,” which generally refers to the behavior of those who betray the interests of their own nation. If the “nation” in this instance is constituted by diasporic blacks of African descent, it therefore follows that its interests involve the retention of all of its members. Passing as white therefore functions as a somewhat damaging defection from the (black) nation.

Displaying the kind of selflessness that parallels her brother’s, Iola informs Dr. Gresham that she is unwilling to forgo her African-American heritage to become his wife. She confesses to her white would-be suitor: “[t]he intense horror and agony I felt when I was first told [that I was black] are over. Thoughts and purposes have come to me in the shadow I should never have learned in the sunshine . . . I intend, when [the Civil War] is over, to cast my lot with the freed people as a helper, teacher, and friend” (114).³⁸ The realization that she is black marks the beginning of Iola’s process of education. No longer living under the shadow, or misconception, that she is a white woman, Iola is forced to rethink her childhood understanding of slavery as a benign institution; she must also consider her newly-revealed ties to the black community in the South. Iola’s commitment to her community and unwillingness to pass as white are consistent with the black nationalist conclusion that socially advantaged blacks have an obligation to use their education to mold and guide the masses to a more successful future. Far from demonstrating ambivalence toward her newly-discovered black

identity, Iola proclaims that “the best blood in [her] veins is African,” and that she is “not ashamed of it” (208). This sense of pride reinforces the nationalist feeling in the novel.

Identifying one’s self in positive terms proves significant in a racially stratified society. As Gayle Wald writes in *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture*, “[w]here racial designation is a means of social exclusion and oppression, racial self-definition becomes more than an abstract or superficial practice; rather, it acquires political significance as a public critique of racial ideology.”³⁹ Holding herself in high esteem, Iola necessarily rejects the dominant social construction of blackness, and its attendant stigma of inferiority. She engages in cultural politics and redefines herself in opposition to racist discourses.

Not only do the novel’s black protagonists assess themselves in positive terms, but they also stress the value of self-activity as a strategy of uplift. Iola’s future husband Dr. Latimer, for example, informs Iola: “[O]ut of the race must come its own thinkers and writers. Authors belonging to the white race have written good racial books, for which I am deeply grateful, but it seems to be almost impossible for a white man to put himself completely in our place” (263). The desire for black independence emerges in this passage, which echoes nationalist Martin Delany’s proclamation that “Our elevation must be the result of *self-efforts*, and work of our *own hands*. No other human power can accomplish it.”⁴⁰ Rather than look to white allies for direction, black nationalists recognized the value of taking the lead in matters concerning their own destiny. Sympathetic to this worldview, *Iola Leroy* reinforces its validity, arguing that blacks must tell their own stories, write their own books and build their own institutions. It does not call for racial separation, but for racial empowerment. The didacticism and sentimentality of women’s fiction are thereby put to the service of a black nationalist principle.

Not only do the main characters in *Iola Leroy* embrace self-activity as a strategy of uplift, but they also adhere to the civilizationist model of human development common among intellectuals, black and white, in the postbellum era. The concept of civilization had played a prominent role in black nationalist thought since the early 1800s. But, given the popularity of social Darwinian thought in the 1890s, African Americans associated a new sense of urgency with the mandate of civilization. More specifically, the Darwinian “notions of race extinction” held that dominant groups would ultimately annihilate “inferior” peoples.⁴¹ Only “civilization” could ensure the development and survival of the masses.

Iola Leroy, therefore, argues for blacks’ capacity to develop from an uncivilized stage of barbarity to a European-like state of civilization. Invoking

this linear model of cultural development, Iola warns Dr. Gresham: “I believe the time will come when the civilization of the negro [sic] will assume a better phase than you Anglo-Saxons possess. You will prove unworthy of your high vantage ground if you only use your superior ability to victimize feebler races and minister to a selfish greed of gold and a love of domination” (116). The Darwinian notion of racial struggle emerges here, along with the anxiety surrounding the process of achieving and maintaining an advantageous social position. Situating African and European Americans on the same ladder of cultural development, Harper’s project seems to imagine only the possibility of hierarchal relations between them. She criticizes Anglo-Saxons’ “love of domination,” identifying it as the flaw that may enable blacks to surpass them as “civilized” beings. But in this scenario, the structures of domination merely get reversed. Perhaps embedded in Harper’s critique of nineteenth-century whites’ penchant for zero-sum power relations is the unexamined possibility of egalitarian social relations.

Further explaining Harper’s social philosophy, Wilson Moses writes in *Afrotopia* that she “revealed an evolutionary conception of Victorian Christianity . . . As did Cooper and most other black women of her generation, Harper advocated an ideology of progress that was unilinear and monistic. . . . [S]he thought of progress in terms of the mastery of English language and Protestant religion.”⁴² This same view of civilization gets articulated in Harper’s novel through Dr. Gresham who theorizes:

The negro . . . is not the only branch of the human race which has been low down in the scale of civilization and freedom, and which has outgrown the measure of his chains. Slavery, polygamy, and human sacrifices have been practiced among Europeans in bygone days . . . I do not see that the negro could not have learned our language and received our religion without the intervention of ages of slavery. (225–226)

Gresham thus makes an argument against slavery and proposes religion and the English language—rather than enslavement—as the true agents of uplift. But in equating the history of Europeans and Africans as he does here, Gresham elides the unique obstacles that blacks alone faced. The implication is that by emulating whites, or more specifically, by studying English and Christianity, blacks could have succeeded.

Also missing from his observations on racial development is an important component of uplift philosophy, according to which the masses were not only expected to master official forms of knowledge; but they

were also encouraged to look to “leaders” who would play a primary role in their process of development. In Iola’s own words: “To be . . . the leader of a race to higher planes of thought and action, to teach men clearer views of life and duty, and to inspire their souls with loftier aims, is a far greater privilege than it is to open the gates of material prosperity and fill every home with sensuous enjoyment” (219). Instead of finding pleasure in worldly things which money could buy, Iola seeks the kind of spiritual fulfillment that comes from helping others. She makes a distinction between “sensuous” enjoyments—material goods which please the senses—and soul satisfaction, which derives from being of service to the less educated. Civilization, then, has both interracial as well as intraracial implications.

Clearly illustrating the distance between the educated, morally exemplary black woman and the masses, Harper juxtaposes Iola with folk characters, Aunt Linda and Uncle Daniel, both of whom had attained their freedom at the end of the Civil War. Harper locates one of the overt distinctions between these social groups in the dialect of the folk, which Carby has described as “poorly written” and “intended to indicate their illiteracy.” According to Carby, the language that Harper used was not meant to capture the “inherent qualities . . . of the freedmen’s speech.” Rather, Harper’s rendering of dialect “was based on an authorial sense of error and deviation from an assumed norm.”⁴³ When Iola’s uncle Robert invites her to dine with him at the home of the former slaves, Iola, who uses standard English, finds herself “amused and interested” at the “quaintness” of Aunt Linda’s speech. When Robert suggests that Linda learn to read the Bible, the latter responds pessimistically about her abilities: “I think it would gib me de hysterics ef I war to try to git book larnin’ froo my pore ole head” (156).⁴⁴ Linda’s self-deprecating humor—meant to provoke laughter—and inability to read, place her in a category distinct from that occupied by the confident and literate Iola.⁴⁵

Not only has Iola mastered the English language, but she has also become proficient in Biblical principles, which she eagerly shares with her new acquaintance. When Linda offers some home-made wine to her guests during their visit, for instance, Iola warns: “the Bible says that the wine at last will bite like a serpent and sting like an adder” (185). After Iola and Robert explain the principles of temperance to Aunt Linda, the latter chooses to abandon her drinking habit.⁴⁶ Convinced by her guests’ Biblically-based argument that alcohol consumption is immoral, Linda promptly decides: “I beliebs I’ll let dis [wine] turn to winegar, an’ not make any more” (186). Iola thus helps to transform behavioral practices considered to be immoral, by teaching the restrictive tenets of the Protestant religion. Not only does she personally adhere to a strict moral code, but she

also directs her missionary impulse outwards, sharing her knowledge with those whom she believes are in need.

In turn, Linda adopts an attitude of awe towards Iola, as demonstrated by Linda's "vision dat somebody fair" was coming to "help" her and the other blacks in North Carolina (275). Defining the desired "help" in moral terms, Linda confesses that she had always "wanted some nice lady to come down yere and larn our gals some sense" (276). Answering the call, Iola has already positioned herself to "teach in the Sunday-school, help in the church, [and] hold mothers' meetings to help . . . boys and girls to grow up to be good men and women" (276). Not yet a mother herself, Iola is nonetheless armed with a value system, a moral compass and the skills necessary to guide young blacks and their mothers along the path of improvement. Presumably, Iola's education, religious background, and devotion to her people have placed her in this position of leadership.

While *Iola Leroy* espouses black nationalist notions such as race obligation, pride, and civilization, the novel nonetheless challenges other aspects of this political philosophy. According to Gaines, rhetorical "mulatto-baiting" was common among certain nationalist thinkers in the 1890s,⁴⁷ but Harper's novel engages in no such tactics. During the decade in which Harper wrote the text, prominent nationalist Alexander Crummell complained about blacks of mixed racial ancestry to journalist John Bruce; in particular, he worried that "a 'fanatical and conceited junto' had arisen, 'more malignant than white men, pushing themselves forward as leaders & autocrats of the Race; and at t[he] same time, repudiating t[he] race. And what is the basis for their superiority? Bastardy!'"⁴⁸ More broadly speaking, some darker-skinned African Americans accused mulattos of harboring ambiguous political agendas. Accusations of this kind tended to emerge because some mulattos claimed fair skin signified their superiority to the black majority. Social snobbery crept into the consciousness of some, compelling them to form exclusive social clubs and engage in discriminatory behavior.⁴⁹ Given their white parentage and phenotypically white appearance, fair-skinned blacks generally had more access to educational opportunities, and therefore better jobs, than the majority of blacks. The few political positions available to black Americans, therefore, were typically occupied by educated mulattos.⁵⁰

Preoccupied with Darwinian concerns, black nationalists worried that "race mixing" might result in the extinction of blacks as a people. Influenced by whites whose opposition to interracial relations sprang from a doomed campaign to promote racial "purity," many black nationalist thinkers also committed themselves to the project of racial conservation. Nationalist Edward Blyden, as we have seen, theorized that "in each separate race,

something of the absolute is incarnated. The whole of mankind is a vast representation of the Deity. Therefore, we cannot extinguish any race either by conflict or amalgamation without serious responsibility."⁵¹ He and other nationalists advocated the preservation of distinctive racial traits and cultural qualities, believing that race mixing was injurious to the black racial character.

Such a project relies on what Michael Omi and Howard Winant refer to as a racially "essentialist approach which suggests . . . that the truth of race is a matter of innate characteristics, of which skin color and other physical attributes provide only the most obvious, and in some respects most superficial, indicators."⁵² From a racially essentialist perspective, then, there are deeply ingrained differences between groups identified as races at which skin color merely hints. But *Iola Leroy* displays little concern with such a project, as it playfully undermines the notion that race can either be seen, on the one hand, or otherwise detected through some distinctive racial essence, on the other.⁵³ Stumbling upon the instability of race, Dr. Latrobe, a racist figure in the novel, acknowledges that some blacks look "as white" as he. Nevertheless, he proclaims: "There are tricks of blood which always betray them [as black] . . . I can always tell them. Now, that [Robert] is as white as any man, but I knew he was a nigger the moment I saw him. I saw it in his eye" (229). In a subsequent chapter, however, Dr. Latrobe's racial radar falters, as he mistakenly identifies Dr. Latimer as a white man. In what seems to be a direct commentary on efforts to locate racial distinctiveness on, or in, the body, the narrator reflects on the doctor's error:

Dr. Latrobe had thought he was clear-sighted enough to detect the presence of negro blood when all physical traces had disappeared. But he had associated with Dr. Latimer for several days, and admired his talent, without suspecting for one moment his racial connection. He could not help feeling a sense of vexation at the signal mistake he had made. (239)

Critiquing "common sense" assumptions about race,⁵⁴ this passage throws racial essentialism into crisis.

Contemporary analyses of racial identity go a long way to problematize racial essentialism as well. Particularly useful in this regard is Omi and Winant's "racial formation theory" which shows that the definition of race "has changed over time."⁵⁵ In brief, they demonstrate how racial awareness developed gradually from a relatively disorganized set of beliefs into a hardened, hierarchal ideology supposedly rooted in science.⁵⁶ This process of flux and development underscores the social construction of race. In

addition to highlighting the fact that race is “constructed and transformed sociohistorically,”⁵⁷ Omi and Winant also make reference to the fact that scientific research has rejected the notion that humanity can be divided up into separate races.⁵⁸ Rather than examining race from a biological perspective, they instead analyze how the state, economics and culture work together to reproduce racial categories.

Similarly, *Iola Leroy* questions the stability of reliable indicators of race, casts doubt on its fixity, as well as on its status as a biological fact. This is not to suggest that race loses its meaning entirely in the novel. On the contrary, education, job prospects and life chances in general are inflected by one’s racial designation. At the same time, though, race gets wrested away from an entirely biological context and thrust onto political ground.

Harper’s work can be further distinguished from that of classical nationalists because it runs counter to the patriarchal orientation of black nationalist projects committed to re-invigorating the masculinity of black men, at the expense of black women. Discussed at length in Chapter Three, male nationalists tended to equate masculinity with the redemption of the race. In their view, black women bore the responsibility of performing femininity to help build up the masculinity of their mates; women were therefore discouraged from engaging in so-called masculine behavior, thereby making “spectacles” of themselves in public. As James Horton writes in *Free People of Color*, one of the most counterproductive “techniques for bolstering black manhood” was that of requiring black women to “affirm their own inferiority to uphold the superiority” of their spouses.⁵⁹ Delany’s writings reflect the common black nationalist position, for he deemed it “evidence of the . . . degradation of our race” that women, “whose husbands are . . . able and willing to support them” instead “voluntarily leave home” to find their own employment.⁶⁰ Iola’s stance on working women sharply contrasts with that of Delany’s. Against the conventional black nationalist perspective, she argues in favor of women’s higher education and employment—not only to ensure their effectiveness as mothers, but also to enable their fulfillment as women.

Embedded in Iola’s unconventional attitude towards gender is the seed of feminist thought.⁶¹ On the issue of working women, she informs her uncle Robert: “I have a theory that every woman ought to know how to earn her own living. I believe that a great amount of sin and misery springs from the weakness and inefficiency of women” (205). Later, she elaborates on this point, hypothesizing that “there would be less unhappy marriages if labor were more honored among women” (210). Significantly, Iola locates joy in the condition of independence; implicit in this assumption is a critique

of traditional attitudes towards women, which would isolate middle- and upper-class women on pedestals. Furthermore, Iola casts an attractive light on the possibility of equitable gender relations. Rather than prepare oneself to merely look pretty for one's mate, Iola feels that women should, more importantly, be self-sufficient partners. She does not consider employment as a last resort for single women in financial need. Rather, she argues that all women should cultivate a skill and have the opportunity to apply it meaningfully both inside and outside the home. Not only single but also married women, she believes, would find their lives enriched and their sense of independence deepened were they capable of using their skills for some noble purpose.

Published during the same year in which Anna Julia Cooper wrote *A Voice from the South*, Harper's *Iola Leroy* espouses a similar message regarding the beneficial outcome of egalitarian marital relations. In essence, Iola's idyllic relationship with Dr. Latimer bears out Cooper's claim that the education of women could enrich both sexes, enabling men as well as women to grow as mature beings. There is no hint in the text that Dr. Latimer expects Iola to remain in the domestic sphere once she becomes his wife. On the contrary, both Iola and her husband plan to devote themselves to their community—Iola through her teaching, and Dr. Latimer through his "medical skill" (274). Their marriage does not signify the end of her career outside the home; rather, the exchange of wedding vows marks the union of two souls equally invested in their marriage partnership, for in uniting, they become stronger, and better positioned to serve and uplift the black masses.

Arguably, Iola exemplifies the qualities that Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary and Cooper called for black women to develop throughout the nineteenth century. In other words, Iola embraces the concept of "true womanhood," but she invests it with rich, political meaning; she carries the values of the domestic sphere—those of caring, nurturing and teaching—into the public sphere, where she can aid the community at large. Living up to the standards established by Truth, who wanted black women to live boldly independent lives, Iola refuses to subordinate herself to men whether they be her superiors or her equals. In her youth, Iola was considered to be an "intractable" girl, whose eyes "spitfire" in response to her master's lascivious propositions (38). As a young woman, Iola refuses Dr. Gresham's marriage proposal and traditional masculine protection. Instead of accepting the "offer of love, home, happiness, and social position" (118), Iola embarks on a lonely journey to the South, accompanied by her uncle, to reunite with her mother. Determined to locate her family, and single-minded in her intention to be of "lasting service to the race," Iola excludes from her life unnecessary diversions.

Concerned about her serious nature, Dr. Latimer informs her that “[m]ost of our people take life easily—why shouldn’t you?” Iola’s solemn approach to life stems largely from her keen awareness of the dangers facing black Americans on a daily basis. Concerned about the prevalence of random white violence, she claims that “they never burn a man in the South that they do not kindle a fire around my soul” (269). Reiterating her obligation to blacks despite class and cultural distinctions, Iola reminds readers that the destiny of socially advantaged blacks is bound up with that of the masses. Moreover, the graveness of Iola speaks back to stereotypical representations of blacks as a jovial and carefree people, content with their substandard socio-economic position. Uncle Robert also takes notice of Iola’s somber nature and eventually asks her whether she “believe[s] in young people having a good time” (243). Iola agrees that they should, but promptly adds that “the times are too serious for us to attempt to make our lives a long holiday” (243). Very much in the tradition of Shadd Cary who, in 1849, claimed that public celebrations and parades were harmful to blacks’ image, Iola displays a great concern for the image of blacks in the public imagination. While Shadd Cary decided to use her newspaper to “expose every weakness” and “exclaim against every custom” that was injurious to blacks,⁶² Iola’s strategy consists of uplifting the masses, as well as leading a sober and disciplined existence, in defiance of her enemies’ expectations.

In many respects, Iola is the fictional embodiment of the qualities that Stewart hoped black women would develop. Iola’s courage and collective concept of identity would likely qualify her, in Stewart’s estimation, as a woman capable of serving and leading the black community. Following in the footsteps of her literary foremothers, Iola challenges racism and sexism wherever she finds it. Although she insists on her right to work outside the home, Iola meets resistance at the workplace, on account of her African ancestry. She resigns from her first job after racist colleagues succeed in creating a hostile work environment. After Iola reveals her racial identity to the co-workers at her second job, her boss fires her immediately. Despite the racist treatment that she receives, Iola continues to express pride in her heritage and refuses to deny her racial identity. Resolved that the “blood in [her] veins” will not be a “bar to [her] success,” Iola proceeds to apply for yet another position, which she obtains and retains, despite the “traditions of her blood” (211). Negotiating her way around the obstacles that she encounters, Iola’s determination to succeed ultimately works in her favor. But regardless of her individual accomplishments, success for Iola finds full expression in the context of community.

Although she has enjoyed the advantages of a classical education, and is socially positioned to leave the group behind, Iola instead identifies with

the masses. She therefore illustrates the balance required in the racial uplift leader. That is, Iola affiliates herself with the black majority, but she does so as a leader, not an equal. Her mission is to impart to them a rigorous education and a presumably “evolved” moral structure.

Situated in the twenty-first century, we may well be critical of the fact that Iola seems to privilege middle-class culture rather than celebrating African-American folk culture.⁶³ But it is important to remember that Harper, engaged in a specific political project, felt compelled to meet the expectations of her predominantly white female readership. Harper, herself, indicated in the “Note” at the close of the novel: “I have woven a story whose mission will not be in vain if it awakes in the hearts of our countrymen a stronger sense of justice and a more Christlike humanity in behalf of those whom the fortunes of war threw, homeless, ignorant and poor, upon the threshold of a new era” (282). By the time that *Iola Leroy* had been published, blacks in the South had been the victims of countless acts of violence. During the last sixteen years of the nineteenth century, over 2,500 lynchings (most of which were committed against blacks) had occurred in the South.⁶⁴ Not only did blacks face random violence from the Klan (established in 1866), but they also had little legal recourse; the federal troops that had overseen Reconstruction withdrew in 1877. And in 1883, the Supreme Court overturned the Civil Rights Act of 1875, further stripping blacks of the few rights they had been granted after the Civil War.

Facing these and other hardships, blacks could not rely on the support and protection of local and national governments.⁶⁵ In response to these vicissitudes, Harper proceeded to make use of the novel form because, as Christian has argued, “the novel, constructed as a romance had been one of the most effective propaganda techniques that abolitionists had used in their fight to change public opinion about slavery.”⁶⁶ But in choosing this literary form, Harper had to adhere to “certain requirements” that were constitutive of the romance. In Christian’s words:

Romance novels, in the nineteenth century, as today, feature the conventional heroine, the ideal woman as society defines her, and place her in a situation of peril, in conflict with her ideal nature. . . . Beautiful in a delicate Anglo-American mold, they were also natural Christians, that is, obedient, pure, refined. The perils with which they are confronted, though physical, are, at core, moral; for what the danger is really about is the assault of the sullied world on their natures. They would rather die than alter their standards. The effect on the reader is edifying, for the fact that such perfection could be destroyed by the world indicates that the world must be changed.⁶⁷

Hoping to convince her readers that social transformation was both an attractive and necessary step in the evolution of society, Harper endeavored to meet as many of the previously listed requirements as she could. It is understandable, then, that Iola would exemplify the middle-class heroine, committed to upholding the values of virtue, piousness, chastity and self-discipline. But in so doing, Harper also challenged racism, sexism and narrow definitions of who could emerge as fully human in the context of the novel.

Similar to the writings of the previously discussed women, Harper's project has syncre-nationalist overtones because it both draws upon and yet disrupts state and insurgent nationalist discourses, to effect meaningful change in the world. The novel combines with nationalist discourse the language of sentimentalism, evolutionism, antiracism, humanism, feminism and antiessentialism. The latter necessarily disrupts racial dichotomies and dislocates dominant social categories. Likewise, Iola's and Harry's very incarnation works to frustrate restrictive racial categories. Harry, for example, could pass for white, in appearance, but he instead "takes his place" with blacks "on the arena of life" (126), so as to "stand where he could strike the most effective blow for their freedom." White in appearance, Harry's politics prove to be "black" in orientation. Basing his identity on politics and not pigmentation, Harry, in one sense, "passes" as black. Often mistaken by whites as an Anglo Saxon male, Harry nonetheless claims for himself an African-American identity. He thus passes out of the phenotypically white into the phenotypically black world. On the subject of racially indeterminate bodies, Ginsberg points to the

positive potential of passing as a way of challenging . . . categories and boundaries. In its interrogation of the essentialism that is the foundation of identity politics, passing has the potential to create a space for creative self-determination and agency: the opportunity to construct new identities, to experiment with multiple subject positions, and to cross social and economic boundaries that exclude or oppress.⁶⁸

Opting to pass out of the white world and the privileges contained therein, Harry instead practices a kind of strategic essentialism,⁶⁹ placing himself in what he believes is a politically effective location. His subversive self-positioning has syncre-nationalist implications because it speaks to the possibility of coalition building, and the formation of communities based not only on color, but also on politics and principle. Although Harper published *Iola*

Leroy in 1892, its political implications remain relevant to twenty-first century scholars and activists. As our society grows increasingly multi-cultural, and the borders between colors and countries grow ever more porous, the strategies for organizing communities of resistance must necessarily follow suit.

Academics and activists who are engaged in efforts to transform inequitable social relations benefit from thinking not only about what separates, but also what unites humanity. Having written extensively on the need for inter-ethnic alliances, George Lipsitz convincingly argues:

All politics is about identity, but not all politics is identity politics. Political mobilization takes place when people share a common image of themselves as members of an identifiable group. Mutual identification (as citizens, workers, or subjects of any sort) takes place strategically, out of a perception that it makes sense for the moment to emphasize the things that build unity and to ignore temporarily the things that undermine it.⁷⁰

Our ability to engage in “mutual identification” is one of our greatest strengths as human beings. All of the women discussed in the previous chapters valued their membership in a wider community of blacks. At the same time, they sought alliances and connections with unlikely people in challenging environments for the greater purpose of change. It is certainly the case that populations historically designated as races are situated differently in relation to the state. But the women featured in this project endeavored to think creatively—and encourage us to do the same—about the commonality of humanity and the interconnectedness of our lives.

In *Freedom Dreams*, Robin Kelley writes that “[f]reedom and love may be the most revolutionary ideas available to us, and yet as intellectuals we have failed miserably to grapple with their political and analytical importance.”⁷¹ In their unrelenting struggles for rights and resources, the women discussed in this study revealed a love and concern for members of the black community, and the human community in general. The love invoked by Kelley and demonstrated by these black female activists is not a sentimental feeling, but a transformational force that prompted them to respect humanity—not just their own—but that of all peoples. Situated in the twenty-first century, we could take our cues from these pioneering figures. A politics rooted in imagination and a “love supreme”⁷² just may yield a creative harvest for subversive use.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Community as Continuum

African-American women activists and intellectuals in the nineteenth century made key contributions to black public protest and social transformation. Through their oratory and writings in the antebellum and postbellum periods, they explored issues of nationalism, sexism, and community, and the human capacity to imagine new strategies for political organizing and resistance. In their efforts to transform inequitable racial, gender and class arrangements, many black women deployed the persuasive political discourses available to them in their historical moment. The enduring power of nationalism manifests itself at the core of their racial uplift projects, as black women saw the value of making their protests intelligible within the framework of the U.S. nation-state. Using the language espoused in the nation's founding documents, black female writers and activists sought to remind the largely hostile power structure in America of its failure to extend and fulfill its lofty promises of equality and justice for all to African Americans.

Even as they embraced the language of the state and demanded inclusion in the national community as fully franchised citizens, black women activists problematized the racism and sexism inherent in nineteenth-century nationalist discourse and structures of oppression. The black women in this study thus aligned themselves with and struggled against official and insurgent forms of nationalism, creating a new variety of nationalist thought. Through syncre-nationalism, they exposed the limits of nationalism, and nationalist community formation premised on marginalization and exclusion of the Other.

This study expands on Benedict Anderson's model of the nation as an imagined community to foreground the writings and cultural productions

of African-American women. By examining their works, I necessarily complicate Anderson's formulation of the nation in which the primary figures are literate male patriots. As I have shown, Anderson's characterization of the function of temporality and print capitalism in relation to nation formation does not adequately capture the heterogeneity and hybridity operating within African-American communities. Anderson argues that the popularization of the novel and the newspaper in eighteenth-century Western Europe set the stage for the development of print capitalism in the nineteenth century, facilitating "a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together." The shift from Messianic to homogeneous, empty time, he notes, made it possible for individuals to imagine themselves as part of a collective nation.¹ Ousted from Anderson's model by definition, as they were neither male, nor legally recognized citizens before 1868, Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper called communities into being that disrupted and de-naturalized the language of nationalism. Speaking and writing themselves into the nation, these women affirmed their identity as Americans, even as they called attention to their racial and gender specificity.

Truth, for example, was wont to identify herself as both a "citizen of New York," and a former slave in her speeches. At the same time, she sought to unite with women culturally and socially different from herself. Truth understood the importance of versatility and flexibility, seeking coalitions and commonalities in the midst of stark social and economic differences that divide humanity. Just as Truth positioned herself so that she could organize with others unlike herself, she also made use of diverse philosophies and ideologies, weaving them into incisive speeches that questioned dominant culture, racist institutions and the binary oppositions upholding them. Stewart's and Shadd Cary's writings and life histories also reveal diverse conceptions of collectivity. The imagined communities configured by these women necessarily had cross-cultural, interracial, and diasporic dimensions.

Likewise, Cooper's coalitional consciousness helped to lay the groundwork for activists seeking to find commonality in the midst of diversity. Combining the languages of nationalism, true womanhood, anti-imperialism, Christianity and human rights, Cooper makes a multifaceted argument against the oppression of all women and people of color negatively impacted by racism, sexism and the ideology of manifest destiny. Her syncre-nationalist writings not only problematize the racial and sexual essentialism inherent in nationalist language, but they also make tactical use of discourses that appear to be contradictory for the purpose of destabilizing binary configurations rooted in unequal social relations.

Similarly, Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy* raises important questions about the nature of political mobilization. By exploring identity, community and women's role in society, Harper reveals the constructedness of hierarchal social structures and gestures toward creative forms of community building. Creating an identity behind which diverse peoples may unite for the purpose of social transformation emerges as a key theme in *Iola Leroy*. This thread visibly connects the writings and activism of Truth, Stewart, Shadd Cary, Cooper and Harper, each of whom helped to pave the road for 1960s Civil Rights activists who would later build on the writings and political discourse of their nineteenth-century forerunners. The innovative organizational strategy of the latter remains with us today, as a viable, and yet sometimes, forgotten possibility.

In *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, Patrick Rael offers significant insights into the complexity and value of nineteenth-century black political discourse. He describes the important work done by blacks who "constructed a public racial identity," and used this identity to inflect "African American critiques of a democratic nation predicated on the principle of white supremacy." His discussion, however, focuses almost exclusively on men. Why? According to Rael, his book "unavoidably follows antebellum contemporaries in slighting the participation of African American women in the freedom struggle." He writes that "the general absence" of women in his work "suggests a countervailing presence—the presence of important forces that tended to silence women and that deeply conditioned the shape of black public protest."² Clearly, structures of domination worked to suppress women's voices in the nineteenth century. But these hindrances notwithstanding, black women did speak, and in so doing, they transformed and helped to shape the discourse of black activists. It is imperative that we look for and listen to their voices—otherwise, we only hear half of the story.

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).
2. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.
3. Dana Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 34.
4. Nelson, *National Manhood*, 34.
5. Nelson, *National Manhood*, 60.
6. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990).
7. According to Hobsbawm, the formation of a state or country must precede the formation of a nation; on the other hand, discourses of nationalism precede the formation of the nation-state. Modern nationalism (i.e., nationalism as defined by post nineteenth-century criterion), distinguishes itself from “less demanding forms of . . . group identification” by elevating the politics of the nation above other “public obligations.” In other words, “nationalism” implies a sense of pride, loyalty and cohesion on the part of group members to the political interests of the state. It is this consciousness which “invents” nation-states. “Legitimate” nations, which consist of “a state or . . . a body of people aspiring to form such a state,” also have precise ties to a “unit of territorial political organization” (*Nations and Nationalisms*, 9, 46, 47).
8. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms*, 46.
9. Hobsbawm, 46.
10. Hobsbawm, 46, 47.
11. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 135, 236.
12. Hobsbawm, 73.
13. Collectivities identifying as Irish-Americans across the U.S., for example, understand themselves as sharing an imagined, originary connection to Ireland.

14. Wilson J. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (Hamden: Shoe String, 1978) 20.
15. Moses, *The Golden Age*, 11.
16. Moses, *The Golden Age*, 20.
17. Wilson J. Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey* (New York: New York UP, 1996) 191, 190.
18. Quoted in Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*, 184, 184–185.
19. Carla L. Peterson, “Doers of the Word”: *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North, 1830–1880* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 112.
20. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980) 7, 8.
21. Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 7–8.
22. Kerber, 8.
23. Kerber, 8–9.
24. Kerber, 11.
25. Kerber, 11.
26. The enslaved woman, for obvious reasons, could not meet the cultural standards of the republican mother.
27. Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*, 4.
28. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981) 27.
29. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 49.
30. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 24. For a classic critique of liberal political theory, see Karl Marx’s “On the Jewish Question,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978) 26–52. In this essay Marx argues that the abstract citizen inhabiting the political state stands in contrast to the individual man in the civil sphere.
31. Quoted in Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 24.
32. In a useful discussion of postbellum blacks and property ownership, Kevin Gaines argues that certain well-to-do blacks, attempting to appease white politicians, businessmen and philanthropists, and also seeking to counter the minstrel stereotype of the lazy, urban black, discouraged rural blacks from escaping southern oppression through migration. Booker T. Washington and his supporters, for instance, “identified with the interests of white business elites” and consequently took an anti-labor stance, “refus[ing] to recognize blacks as an economically exploited group” (Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* [Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1996], 94–95).
33. Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 144–5.
34. Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998) xv.
35. It is useful to bear in mind the fact that, “Cary had considered Canada the only acceptable site [for emigration], but by 1856 she appeared willing to tolerate other locations” (Peter C. Ripley, ed. *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Volume II, Canada 1830–1865* [Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina

- P, 1985] 339). Similarly, Carla Peterson has noted: "Throughout the 1850s Shadd Cary remained the only black woman who took an active part in the debate over emigration, favoring Canadian emigration alone. In the aftermath of Harpers Ferry, however, Shadd Cary seems to have gradually shifted from active opposition to African emigration to quiet acquiescence. Peterson writes that, in this, she appears to have been motivated more out of friendship for Delany and antagonism toward Haitian emigration than out of any deep ideological commitment" ("*Doers of the Word*," 117).
36. Quoted in Peter C. Ripley, ed. *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, 284.
 37. Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 38.
 38. Quoted in Louise D. Hutchinson, *Anna J. Cooper: A Voice from the South* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981) 38.
 39. Charlotte Forten Grimke, granddaughter of wealthy black abolitionist James Forten, was well educated and well read. Her journal entries were first published in 1953. See Ray Allen Billington, ed. *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten*. This manuscript has recently been republished in an expanded form; see *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke*, ed. Brenda Stevenson (New York: Oxford UP, 1988). Mary Church Terrell, graduate of Oberlin College, was also the first elected president of the National Association of Colored Women. Josephine Bruce was the wife of prominent black Senator Blanche K. Bruce, of Mississippi.
 40. Hutchinson, 93.
 41. Frances Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (New York: Feminist, 1990) 19.
 42. Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 19.
 43. Quoted in Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828–1860* (Knoxville: The U of Tennessee P, 1992) 126.
 44. According to Frances Foster, *Iola Leroy* was "probably the best-selling novel by an Afro-American writer prior to the twentieth century" ("Introduction," *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* [New York: Oxford UP, 1988], xxvii).
 45. Peterson, 4.
 46. For further discussion of this point, see Peterson, 151.
 47. For more on the political implications of genre selection, see William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1769–1865* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986).
 48. Peterson, 17.
 49. Peterson, 17.
 50. Frances Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746–1892* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993) 15.
 51. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 129.
 52. See Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 13. Gaines's work on the culture of uplift is especially useful. He writes, for example, that: "[t]here was a historical tension between two general connotations of uplift. On the one hand, a broader vision of uplift signifying collective social aspiration, advancement,

and struggles had been the legacy of the emancipation era. On the other hand, black elites made uplift the basis for a racialized elite identity claiming Negro improvement through class stratification as race progress, which entailed an attenuated conception of bourgeois qualifications for rights and citizenship”(*Uplifting the Race*, xv).

53. Gaines, 13.
54. Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 54, 55.
55. Romero, *Home Fronts*, 53.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Although Sojourner Truth was born prior to the other women in this study, Maria Stewart actually made her first public speech before Truth appeared on the platform in the presence of suffragists and abolitionists. One of the earliest documented anti-slavery meetings at which Truth spoke was held in Northampton in 1844. The following year, she lectured before the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York City. For more on the chronology of Truth’s career see Nell Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996) and Suzanne Fitch and Roseann Mandziuk, eds. *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song* (Westport: Greenwood, 1997).
2. This discussion is not meant to be a biographical account of Truth’s life. Although I frequently cite Painter’s biography of Truth, this chapter is primarily a study of the discourses deployed by Truth, and the political strategies contained within, and inspired by them.
3. For a comprehensive overview of Truth’s early years, see Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 19.
4. Historians have speculated a great deal about the significance of Isabella’s name change. Painter contributes much to this discussion in *Sojourner Truth*, 74, 75.
5. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44.
6. Preconceived notions about African Americans abound in Truth’s dictated autobiography. See Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from her “Book of Life”* (1878; New York: Oxford UP, 1991).
7. Quoted in Jeffrey C. Stewart, “Introduction,” *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* by Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) xxxiii.
8. Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 134.
9. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 7.
10. Alessandro Portelli, *The Text and the Voice: Writing, Speaking, and Democracy in American Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) xiv-xv.

11. The manifestations of African-American culture in her speeches include the singing of songs, the telling of tales based on myth and personal anecdotes, and the use of humor.
12. For more on Truth's manipulation of print capitalism, see chapter 2 of Carla Peterson's "*Doers of the Word*."
13. See Peterson, who explores this point further, especially pages 48–49.
14. Peterson, "*Doers*," 25.
15. Peterson, "*Doers*," 45.
16. Truth's resourcefulness as an activist should be underscored here. Drawing from many discourses, her reform strategies stem from her African and Pentecostal backgrounds.
17. Although many historical accounts represent Truth as seamlessly united with Anthony and Stanton in their struggle for "universal" women's rights, Nell Painter argues for a more complex reading of Truth's relationship with these women in *Sojourner Truth*.
18. Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993) 18.
19. Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 18, 19.
20. Quoted in Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1983) 71.
21. Quoted in Davis, 72.
22. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 229.
23. For a complete discussion of the historical limits of universal sisterhood, see Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).
24. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 53, 55.
25. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 92–93.
26. Alice McBee, *From Utopia to Florence: The Story of a Transcendentalist Community in Northampton, Mass., 1830–1852*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, Porcupine, 1975) 27.
27. Quoted in McBee, 26.
28. Quoted in Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 91.
29. Quoted in McBee, 44.
30. David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991) 69.
31. Roediger, *The Wages*, 20.
32. Roediger, *The Wages*, 86.
33. Painter, 92, 93.
34. Here I draw on Carla Peterson's discussion of Victor Turner's "communitas" concept in "*Doers*," 17.
35. Peterson, 17, 28.
36. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 211. It is also important to view Truth as a forerunner of Rosa Parks, the black woman who refused to give her seat to a white person on a public bus in Alabama in 1955. Like Truth, Parks refused to passively accept the manifestations of legalized segregation.
37. Cedric Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 96.

38. Robinson, *Black Movements*, 97.
39. Robinson goes on to argue that: "In the decades that followed the end of Reconstruction, these ideological surges at times coalesced, at others diverged, and at still other historical moments vanquished the others to the margins" (*Black Movements*, 98).
40. Robinson, 96.
41. Sojourner Truth was unlike Frances E. Watkins Harper, in this regard, who believed that only educated people should have access to the vote.
42. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 215–216.
43. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (1901; New York: Modern Library, 1999) 83.
44. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative*, 182.
45. Quoted in Jeffrey Stewart, "Introduction," xxxiii.
46. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 25.
47. Quoted in Stewart, "Introduction," xxxiii.
48. Although Truth did not develop a formal language theory, her use of discourse resembles what contemporary scholars might term "deconstruction." Cornel West characterizes the subversiveness of deconstruction thusly: "It is salutary in that it focuses on the political power of rhetorical operations—of tropes and metaphors in binary oppositions like white/black, good/bad, male/female, machine/nature, ruler/ruled, reality/appearance—showing how these operations sustain hierarchical worldviews by devaluing the second terms as something subsumed under the first." For more on deconstruction as it relates to political strategy, see Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1999) 132.
49. James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, ed. *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1976) 10.
50. Wilson J. Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 59.
51. Moses, *Afrotopia*, 59, 60.
52. Loewenberg and Bogin, *Black Women*, 9.
53. Loewenberg and Bogin, *Black Women*, 11, 8.
54. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, ed. *History of Woman Suffrage, 1848–1861*, 6 vols. (New York: Arno, 1969), 1:568. Future page references to Truth's speeches are included parenthetically within the text.
55. For more on speech act theory, see John R. Searle, F. Kiefer, and M. Bierwisch, eds. *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980).
56. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative*, 213.
57. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative*, 215.
58. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative*, 215.
59. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative*, 216.
60. For the speeches made between 1861 and 1876, see *History of Woman Suffrage*, volume 2.

61. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown: Persephone, 1981) 99.
62. Quoted in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (New York: NY Press, 1995) 38.
63. It is difficult to be more specific in this discussion about the adaptation of African cultural practices to African-American culture. Here, I will defer to the research of Sterling Stuckey who writes: "What we know of slave culture in the South, and of that of blacks in the North during and following slavery, indicates that black culture was national in scope, the principal forms of cultural expression being essentially the same. This is attributable mainly to the similarity of the African regions from which blacks were taken and enslaved in North America, and to the patterns of culture shared more generally in Central and West Africa" (Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* [New York: Oxford UP, 1987], 82).
64. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative*, 152.
65. Quoted in Fitch and Mandziuk, 38.
66. Quoted in Marilyn Richardson, ed. *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 99.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Judylyn Ryan uses this term because "aspects of African religion/cosmology inform Black people's engagement with Christianity" ("Spirituality and/as Ideology in Black Women's Literature" in *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, et al. [Berkeley: U of California P, 1998], 275).
2. The Enlightenment era marks the historical moment in which scientific modes of inquiry took precedence over other forms of thought. Out of this era came the assumption that the human subject was "excessively rational and impossibly atomistic." Moreover, the humanistic, rational subject has since been the "basis upon which claims to equality, rights, and freedom have typically been made." For more on the importance of the Enlightenment and subjectivity, see Margaret McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2002) 54, 55.
3. Romero, 68. Romero's broader argument is that "nationalism (whether insurgent or official) is a discourse about life as much as about death. The moment of founding the nation expresses itself as the exaction of revolutionary justice; therefore, it speaks the language of death and violence. The quotidian responsibilities of nation building, on the other hand, involve processes of nurturing, education, and social reproduction; therefore, they speak the language of life." She also indicates that the "binarism

- of life and death in nationalist discourse already implies the binarism of female and male” (*Home Fronts*, 66).
4. Romero, 68.
 5. Romero, 69.
 6. For a broader discussion of this tendency, see chapter 3 in Romero, *Home Fronts*.
 7. Marilyn Richardson, “Introduction,” *Maria W. Stewart, America’s First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 3. My discussion of Maria Stewart relies on this edition of the text. All future references to this work are included parenthetically in the text, unless otherwise indicated.
 8. For more biographical information on Stewart, see Richardson, “Introduction,” 3–27.
 9. Early in her speaking career, Stewart was pelted with tomatoes by a jeering crowd of men. This occurrence is noted in Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828–1860* (Knoxville: The U of Tennessee P, 1992) 115.
 10. Romero, 56.
 11. Quoted in Romero, 56.
 12. For details concerning Stewart’s publishing history, see Richardson, “Preface” and “Introduction,” xiii–xvii, and 1–27.
 13. The project of modernity, which emerged in the 1700s, presumed science and rationality to be superior to alternative and contradictory epistemologies. Its main goal was to “develop objective science, universal morality and law,” (David Harvey, *The Condition of Post Modernity* [Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990], 12).
 14. Harvey, *The Condition of Post Modernity*, 12–13.
 15. Peterson, 69.
 16. Ryan, “Spirituality and/as Ideology,” 275.
 17. Richardson, “Introduction,” 13.
 18. The significant political and cultural work of Stewart and her contemporaries serves as a reminder that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s had its roots planted in the nineteenth century, if not earlier.
 19. Shirley W. Logan, “*We Are Coming*”: *The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999) 39.
 20. Paul Gilroy describes “anteriority” as the “black civilization anterior to modernity,” (*The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993], 57, 190).
 21. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26.
 22. Ryan, 275.
 23. Ryan, 275.
 24. Ryan, 276.
 25. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, (New York: Blackwell, 1987) 33.
 26. Appearing on the historical stage in the late nineteenth century, Mary Church Terrell might be considered a more orthodox, or conventional figure.

She adhered, for instance, to gender roles more than she challenged them. As Paula Giddings writes, Terrell “was a confirmed member of the elite . . . whose husband, Robert, was a beneficiary of Booker T. Washington’s patronage. In any case she was a ‘backroom’ negotiator rather than a militant challenger” (“Missing in Action: Ida B. Wells, the NAACP, and the Historical Record” in *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 1.2 [2001]: 10).

27. Here I paraphrase a useful point made by Romero, 68.
28. Frances Foster provides an in-depth explanation of the political implications of African-American writings in *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746–1892* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993).
29. I borrow this term from Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1995) 357–383.
30. For more on the historical emergence of the trope of the republican mother, see Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.
31. Quoted in Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 230.
32. Quoted in Richardson, “Maria Stewart’s 1879 Preface,” 90.
33. Opal Moore “The Productions of Maria W. Stewart: Rebellious Domesticity and Black Women’s Liberation” in *Early America Re-Explored: New Readings in Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum Culture*, ed. Klaus H. Schmidt and Fritz Fleischmann (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 448.
34. Moore, “The Productions of Maria W. Stewart,” 448.
35. Wells, for example, argues that the lynching of black men was not in fact due to black men’s assaults upon white women, as had been commonly alleged. Rather, through her journalism, Wells articulates the link between lynching, and the attempt of certain white men to suppress black economic power. For more on Wells’s activism, see Giddings, “Missing in Action,” 9.
36. Giddings, “Missing in Action,” 9.
37. Giddings, “Missing in Action,” 10.
38. Quoted in Giddings, “Missing in Action,” 12. This quote was taken from the *Springfield Forum*, dated 11 December 1909.
39. Nicole King, “‘Colored Woman in Another Country Pleading for Justice in Her Own’: Ida B. Wells in Great Britain” in *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana*, ed. Gretchen H. Gerzina (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003) 92.
40. King, “‘Colored Woman in Another Country,’” 92.
41. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17.2 (Winter 1992): 255–256.
42. Sue Houchins, Introduction, *Spiritual Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xl.
43. Peterson argues that Stewart’s writings combine aspects of the political sermon delivered by the Biblical Jeremiah with the tradition of the American

- jeremiad. At the same time, Stewart applies the form of the jeremiad to the social and historical conditions of African Americans in the New World. For an in-depth analysis of the American (Puritan) jeremiad, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978). For a fuller discussion of Stewart's use of the jeremiad, see Peterson, 64–66, who argues that Stewart reshapes Walker's jeremiad.
44. While there are possible strategic motivations behind Stewart's deployment of liberal discourse and middle-class values, it is nonetheless important to note that these rhetorical maneuvers were not merely tactical. I would suggest that Stewart's teachings on religiosity and virtuous living reflect some of her sincere beliefs. As Rodger Streitmatter reminds us, "Stewart believed that African-Americans could achieve justice for their race only if they led moral lives" ("Maria W. Stewart: The First Female African-American Journalist" in *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 21.2 [1993]: 45).
 45. Quoted in Peterson, 73. Here Peterson discusses a point made by Niara Sudarkasa, "Female Employment and Family Organization in West Africa," in *New Research on Women and Sex Roles*, ed. Dorothy McGuigan (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1976) 53.
 46. Peterson, 73.
 47. Quoted in Richardson, "Sufferings During the War," in *Maria W. Stewart*, 108.
 48. See Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, especially chapters 1 and 2.
 49. Here, I mean to refer the "debate" privileged by the mainstream media.
 50. The ideas of James Clifford are considered here by Tiffany R. Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World" in *African Studies Review* 43.I (2000): 15.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Most of the newspaper articles cited in this chapter are available in C. Peter Ripley, ed. *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. II, Canada, 1830–1865* (Chapel Hill, U of North Carolina P, 1985). All references to the newspaper source, unless otherwise indicated, will appear parenthetically within the text. This quote was taken from *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, 362.
2. Rhodes, 87.
3. See, for example, Shadd Cary's editorial in the *Provincial Freeman*, 31 January 1857.
4. For a thorough discussion of Shadd Cary's upbringing, see Rhodes, especially chapter 1.
5. Mary Ann Shadd Cary's father, Abraham Shadd, was one of the founding members of the American Anti-Slavery Society.
6. C.B. Macpherson illuminates the limitations of possessive liberal individualism thusly: "Its possessive quality is found in its conception of the indi-

vidual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself . . . The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is the proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession” (C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* [London: Oxford UP, 1962], 3).

7. Shadd Cary helped to recruit black troops for the Union Army during the Civil War. She would later attend law school at Howard University, becoming, in 1883, one of the first women in America to earn a law degree.
8. Sarah Cary Evens, Shadd Cary’s daughter, wrote a biographical essay about her mother in 1926. This work helped to spark contemporary interest in the activist. Her essay reappeared in a black history anthology in the 1970s. That decade also witnessed increasing interest in Shadd Cary’s newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, published from 1853–1860, which prompted other scholars to explore the activist’s life in print (Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, xvi, xvi-xviii). Additional work on Shadd Cary emerging from this time period can be found in Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler, *Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Ann Shadd Cary* (Toronto: North Carolina P, 1977).
9. Rhodes, xvi-xvii.
10. Floyd Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787–1863* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1975), 94.
11. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 94.
12. Quoted in Miller, *The Search*, 101.
13. In 1835, William Whipper founded the American Moral Reform Society. Fearing that separate institutions would further alienate blacks from whites, Whipper chose to mobilize around “the belief in Christian rectitude, industry, thrift, and temperance” (Miller, *The Search*, 95).
14. Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2002), 197.
15. Quoted in Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest*, 197.
16. Rael, 130, 137.
17. Quoted in Rael, 137.
18. Rael, 131.
19. Quoted in Miller, 97.
20. Quoted in Rhodes, 21.
21. James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 39.
22. Quoted in Rael, 190.
23. Quoted in Rael, 190.
24. Quoted in Campbell, 40.

25. Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (1852; New York: Arno, 1968) 37, 38.
26. Although Shadd Cary was not deeply religious, she did make occasional use of religious discourse in her speeches and writings. In 1858, lecturing before an audience, she suggested: “[The] 1st business of life[,] to love the Lord our God with heart and soul, and our neighbor as our self (sic). We must then manifest love to God by obedience to his will—we must be cheerful workers in his cause at all times. . . . These two great commandments, and upon which rest all the Law and the prophets, cannot be narrowed down to suit us but we must go up and conform to them. They proscribe neither nation nor sex—our neighbor may be Either the oriental (sic) heathen or the degraded Europe and or the Eslaved (sic) colored American” (*PF*, April 6, 1858). In order to justify her call for equal rights for black men and women, Shadd Cary sometimes invoked the religious philosophy that men and women are equal in the eyes of God.
27. Quoted in Rael, 190. Shadd Cary to Frederick Douglass, 1849.
28. Quoted in Rhodes, 86.
29. Quoted in Rhodes, 87.
30. Peterson, 105.
31. Quoted in Rhodes, 85.
32. Rael, 132.
33. Quoted in Miller, 99.
34. Quoted in Rael, 191. This quote was taken from a letter written by “Peter Paez,” which appeared in Frederick Douglass’s *Freedom’s Journal*.
35. Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (New York: Pergamon, 1985), 8.
36. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 113.
37. Rael, 191.
38. Quoted in Rael, 191.
39. Although eager to garner support for her paper, Shadd Cary often had a hard time of it. In 1854, for example, Shadd Cary encouraged women’s organizations to hold fundraising activities to help keep the *Provincial Freeman* afloat financially. With some bitterness, Shadd noted that bazaars were routinely organized in support of William Lloyd Garrison’s and Frederick Douglass’s papers. For more on Shadd Cary’s difficulties in this area, see *PF*, June 3, 1854.
40. Rhodes, 63.
41. Quoted in Rhodes, 42. In addition to Shadd Cary’s disapproval of the Bibb’s cultural politics, she also alleged that the Refugee Home Society was illegally pocketing money that should have gone to assist black men and women in their relocation process. Bolstering her claim that Bibb and his wife made personal use of donated funds was the evidence that the Bibbs had “built a house, bought a vessel, bought a house and lot, on which he lives, leased another, and Mrs. Bibb has purchased a farm” (Quoted in

- Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 66). Shadd Cary's distrust of these particular rivals, then, was not merely a matter of politics; she was also genuinely concerned about the integrity and legitimacy of the Refugee Home Society. Her contention with them cannot be dismissed as a dispute between worldviews (i.e., that of integration vs. separation, and begging vs. independence).
42. Quoted in Rhodes, 54.
 43. Quoted in James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993) 102–103.
 44. Quoted in Horton, 103.
 45. Circular, February 1857. Mary Ann Shadd Cary Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. Box 13–1, Folder 51.
 46. William and Ellen Craft are useful examples in this regard. After leaving England, where they had lived as fugitive slaves for several years, the Crafts returned to the United States. The couple settled in South Carolina, where Ellen opened a school, and William went into business with a man who had leased a nearby plantation, Hickory Hill. The Crafts flourished until the Ku Klux Klan destroyed Hickory Hill, burning it to the ground. Another example of an economically successful black who was not embraced, but rather attacked by white competitors, is Tom Moss, friend of Ida B. Wells. Co-owners of a thriving grocery store in the 1890s, Moss and his partners became the targets of violence because a nearby white grocer was losing business. Initially the latter assaulted the black businessmen with armed friends. After the black men defended themselves and were jailed, they were subsequently seized and murdered by white men. For more on the violence directed towards black businessmen in the nineteenth century, see Dorothy Sterling, *Black Foremothers: Three Lives* (Old Westbury: Feminist, 1979) 51, 78.
 47. Quoted in Rael, 132. This statement was made at the national black convention of 1848.
 48. In Canada, blacks' situation was significantly improved, but not ideal. Black men enjoyed legal equality with white men in Canada, but the former were channeled into the least desirable jobs, and subject to discrimination and de facto segregation.
 49. Quoted in Rhodes, 22.
 50. Quoted in Rhodes, 22.
 51. Quoted in Rael, 59.
 52. Rael, 72.
 53. Rael, 73.
 54. Rhodes, 23.
 55. For an eloquent analysis of “whiteness,” the socially constructed category which has structural effects, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998).

56. R.J.M Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983) 3.
57. For more on the activities of Ida B. Wells, see Sterling, *Black Foremothers*, chapter 2.
58. Gilroy, 20.
59. Gilroy, 20.
60. Quoted in Gilroy, 20.
61. I borrow the term “hybridity” from Lisa Lowe, who defines this phenomenon as “the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations” (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 67).
62. In chapter 1 of “*Doers of the Word*,” Carla Peterson argues that black women could “enter into the arena of public civic debate” by “adopting a self-marginalization that became superimposed upon the already ascribed oppressions of race and gender that paradoxically allowed empowerment.” While black women traveled away from their local communities, they were nonetheless “a part of” them in the sense that “they were never fully free from, but remained in tension with, the fixed social and economic male dominated hierarchies that structured Northern urban life” (“*Doers*,” 17, 18).
63. I borrow this term from Donna Haraway who writes that situated knowledge refers to the way in which one’s perspective is inflected by racial, class and social locations (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* [New York: Routledge, 1991], 111).
64. Gaines, 6.
65. Gaines, 3.
66. Gaines, 4.
67. See, for example, Maria Stewart’s essay, “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality.”
68. Gaines, 3.
69. Rael, 188.
70. Rael, 199–200.
71. Rael, 205.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. According to Margaret McLaren, Enlightenment subjectivity is particularly problematic because it assumes an individualistic, rational and universal consciousness (mind). This view of the self privileges men, as women have historically been associated not with rationality, but with emotion. The universality of the subject elides racial, cultural, sexual and class differences. Moreover, the Enlightenment subject is presumed to enter into social relations voluntarily, and to participate in contractual relations freely. As McLaren observes, this “liberal view of the subject misrepresents the extent to which subjects are separate from one another, and

outside of institutional arrangements” (*Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, 75).

2. At a young age, Cooper learned to respond constructively to sexist conditions. Mary Helen Washington indicates that, at Oberlin College, the authorities discouraged young women from taking the challenging “Gentleman’s Course.” Instead of studying the classics and theology along with their male counterparts, young women tended to take the “distinctly inferior ‘Ladies’ Course” (“Introduction,” *A Voice from the South, by a Black Woman of the South*, by Anna Julia Cooper [1892; New York: Oxford UP, 1988], xxxii-xxxiii). Despite this tradition, Cooper opted to enroll in the former. This tendency to disregard social conventions and to seek out intellectual challenges remained a constant in Cooper’s life, resulting in her eventual attainment of a Ph.D., and other accomplishments that far exceeded those of most middle-class women, black and white, in the nineteenth century.
3. In 1916, M Street High School relocated and was renamed Dunbar High School. For more information about this institution, see Baker-Fletcher, 48.
4. Washington, “Introduction,” *A Voice from the South*, xxxv.
5. Baker-Fletcher, 48.
6. See Baker-Fletcher, 50. Anne Douglass was the second wife of Frederick Douglass; Alain Locke is known for his anthology, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (1925).
7. Baker-Fletcher, 55.
8. Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South, by a Black Woman of the South*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers (1892; New York: Oxford UP, 1988). My discussion of Cooper relies on this edition. All future references to this text, unless otherwise indicated, are included parenthetically in the text.
9. See Paula Giddings, especially chapter 3 in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984). See also, Baker-Fletcher, 36.
10. By the 1890s, African Americans had been declared formal citizens of the United States. Black men, in addition, had been granted the franchise. Yet formal equality under federal laws contrasted with blacks’ actual political power. In many areas, these federal protections had been repealed by local governments.
11. Washington, “Introduction,” xl.
12. Washington, “Introduction,” xl-xli.
13. Washington, “Introduction,” xli.
14. Quoted in Washington, “Introduction,” xlii.
15. Nonetheless, Cooper always solicited and welcomed the aid of white Americans.
16. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny*, 45.
17. Gaines, 34–35.
18. Gaines, 35, 75, 74.

19. For more on this dynamic, see Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*.
20. Cooper, the daughter of a slave, came from a modest household. Mary Helen Washington classifies her as “a middle-class black woman” (“Introduction,” xlvii). Terrell, however, was born into a wealthy family and lived a life of relative privilege. For more on Terrell’s upbringing, see Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 2000).
21. Mary Church Terrell, “The Duty of the NACW to the Race,” in *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church*, ed. Beverly W. Jones (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990) 144.
22. Mary Church Terrell, “What Role is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of her Race?” in *Quest for Equality*, 154.
23. Gaines describes the one-drop rule as “the legal and social classification in the South of persons with known black ancestry—the proverbial single drop of ‘black blood’—as Negroes, despite their nonblack appearance” (*Uplifting the Race*, 50).
24. Gaines, 2.
25. Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997) 186.
26. Like most nationalist thinkers, Cooper embraces the Western philosophy of evolutionary progress. Situated in the twenty-first century, we now read the previous statement with a critical eye. Clearly, Cooper viewed “development” as a movement away from so-called low culture to the high culture of Western civilization. But during the 1890s, most black intellectuals held such views. Not having benefited from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, which would celebrate a unique Negro culture, and decades away from the social movements of the 1960s, which would celebrate the distinctness of African culture, nineteenth-century black intellectuals like Alexander Crummell, Martin Delany and Mary Ann Shadd Cary embraced Euro-American culture, which had been designated as “high” by the dominant culture.
27. Gaines, 145.
28. This is an example of black nativism. In order to secure a place for themselves on the shifting sands of U.S. territory, nineteenth-century blacks at times disparaged immigrants, thereby making the “problem” at hand cultural and/or religious rather than racial. After 1870, no matter how denigrated and excluded blacks were, they could still identify themselves as citizens, and sometimes did so to the disadvantage of others. The sentiments of black nationalist William Ferris (1874–1941) also resonate with black nativism. In particular, he believed blacks to be superior to the “ignorant foreigners, who made up the rank and file of Tammany Hall” (Quoted in Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 104).
29. The late eighteenth-century writings of Herder stress what he considered to be the innate and unique differences that manifest themselves in different “races.” It is important to remember, however, that Herder did not rank races in an explicitly hierarchal fashion. Instead, his writings suggest that each nation has its own unique identity.

30. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1971) 101. According to Fredrickson, romantic racial notions were popularized by plantation romances of the 1820s and 1830s. For more details on this topic, see Fredrickson, 102. Reginald Horsman further argues that abolitionists had incorporated romantic racialism into their antislavery arguments by the late 1830s (*Race and Manifest Destiny*, 265). Not as influenced by romantic racialism to the extent that Cooper was, Maria Stewart, as we saw in chapter 2, did not devote much time to pinpointing innate black characteristics. She did, however, criticize what she thought was blacks' tendency to patronize dance halls and gambling rooms, due to poorly-ordered priorities. The romantic description of African Americans is especially apparent in Sojourner Truth's speeches, in which she tends to describe African Americans as a particularly forgiving people. Mary Ann Shadd did not celebrate the perceived link between blacks and Christianity. In fact, as noted in chapter 3, she criticized the masses for what she considered to be their over-reliance upon the black church.
31. Fredrickson, *The Black Image*, 101.
32. Fredrickson, *The Black Image*, 101–102.
33. An early American literary realist, Howells wrote novels and edited the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine from 1871 until 1881. During his tenure at the *Monthly*, Howells introduced European realists to an American audience. Some of his most popular novels are *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890).
34. Gaines, 148.
35. Gaines, 148.
36. A comprehensive term, black womanhood refers to the multiple components that constitute the social construction of "womanhood." Under this umbrella term I include piety, sexuality, domesticity, compassion and empathy.
37. Baker-Fletcher, 20.
38. Logan, 118.
39. Carby, 98.
40. For a detailed discussion of the emergence of republican motherhood as a concept, see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.
41. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 147.
42. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 151.
43. Baker-Fletcher, 36.
44. Washington, "Introduction," xxxii.
45. For an excellent discussion of black women's social and legal status in the nineteenth century, see Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*.
46. Baker-Fletcher, 69.
47. In her text, Cooper writes that she is quoting directly from an "excellent symposium of learned women" (*A Voice*, 71).

48. As early as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft blanketed her call for women's education beneath the claim that their increased intelligence would benefit the family first, and the nation, second. Her political manifesto, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792; New York: Norton, 1988), is an important forerunner to contemporary feminist writings.
49. Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994) 21. Here, Davies summarizes a point made by Gayatri Spivak in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In a revised version of this essay [see "History," in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 198–311], Spivak looks at Indian colonial history, the indigenous elite, Indian nationalism and the Indian populations. She further suggests: "If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." In particular, Spivak warns against the "continuing construction of the subaltern" by those with more power, because in such instances, the specificity of the subject is elided. And, the voice of the subaltern is silenced as well ("History," 274, 281). Similarly, Davies is concerned about women's ability to have their speech heard and understood because they have historically been denied this right. As examples, she cites the experiences of Professor Anita Hill, a black woman whose testimony before the U.S. Senate in a sexual harassment case was denigrated in the media. She also makes reference to Professor Lani Guinier's writings, which were distorted by the media during Bill Clinton's presidency. The international history of the exclusion and/or silencing of women's voices clearly serves as common ground around which women from different nations may organize.
50. Giddings, 114.
51. Charles Mills, "Defending the Radical Enlightenment" in *Social Philosophy Today* 18 (2001): 26.
52. Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002) 137.
53. Cooper continued her activism well into the twentieth century. In a pamphlet entitled "Hitler and the Negro," drafted in the 1940s, Cooper insists: "Hitler . . . embodies the one idea that threatens not alone our country's foundation principles but octopus like it would send its deadly tentacles into the vitals of every individual man and woman cutting adrift every racial variety of human form not answering 'perfect' to his plans and specifications. Elimination of the unfit, ruthless and forcible elimination, ultimate annihilation or enslavement, not of Jews alone, but of Frenchmen, Italians, all Mediterranean races and nations. . . . Such is Hitler's ideal declared or implied and such his deliberate aim and purpose to make room for the supremely fit, the glorified progeny of Germanic kultu, the unadulterated Nordic breed, divinely appointed overlords and sovereigns of the earth." As she did in the nineteenth century, Cooper warns her readers of the dangers of the logic of white supremacy. Interestingly, she posits the Jews, "Frenchmen, Italians, [and] all Mediterranean races and nations" as

the imminent targets of Hitler's ideology. This suggestive alignment of diverse peoples gestures towards the possibility of strategic community formation for political purposes. Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. Box 23-25, Folder 64.

54. Quoted in *A Voice*, 52.
55. For more on this phenomenon, see Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*.
56. For a thorough discussion of intersectionality, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" in *Critical Race Theory*.
57. See Barbara Christian, "The Uses of History: Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy*, *Shadows Uplifted*," in *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (New York: Pergamon, 1985). Here, Christian explains: "If read as a novel in our contemporary sense, *Iola Leroy* could be described as a pious treatise about a neo-black woman, which condemns slavery but otherwise extols Anglo-American middle-class values. . . . and which romantically insists on the fulfillment of the American Dream for black people, if only they'd become as moral and thrifty as whites." But Christian goes on to argue that Harper meant to write a romance that would in fact excite the emotions of her white female readership and move them to antiracist action. Such readers were accustomed to portrayals of chaste middle-class heroines with impeccable morality. Harper, then, made use of the prevailing literary conventions; she "constructed an ideal" but "she changed that ideal, so that it had some relationship to reality and to her small audience of literate black women of the day." In short, writes Christian, Harper aimed to "try to change her [primarily white] audience's view of black women" ("The Uses of History," 167, 170).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Frances Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (New York: Feminist, 1990) 4, 7.
2. Here I refer to texts written within the last twenty or so years. Among the recent excellent works devoted to the examination of the nationalist aesthetic are Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, and Floyd Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*.
3. See Gaines, 82, 83. Many intellectuals and politicians viewed the world through the lens of social Darwinism in the 1890s. This philosophy was taught in major universities, incorporated into popular culture, and also served as a justification for U.S. imperialist activity in Cuba and the Philippines. An extreme version of Darwinian uplift is provided by Gaines who writes: "In positing moral causes for the sickness and death of poor urban blacks, uplift proponents employed an apocalyptic Darwinian rhetoric of racial extermination; due 'to a lack of moral stamina within,' blacks might perish 'in the environment of a nineteenth century civilization,' if proper

measures were not taken" (*Uplifting the Race*, 82). Darwin, with whom this theory is often associated, published a theory of evolution in his book *The Origin of the Species* (1858). Philosophers subsequently applied his theory of evolution to society in order to explain differences in wealth and success; it was Herbert Spencer who proposed the theory of social Darwinism in the late 1800s.

4. Peterson, 175.
5. Peterson, 175. In this passage, Peterson refers specifically to the work produced by black writers in the 1850s. But I extend her claim to include works written at the end of the century, as it still holds true for this time.
6. The fair-skinned heroine in the novel, Iola, who is initially recognized as white, and later as black—according to dominant systems of categorization—experiences life, for a time, as both a “white” and a “black” woman. Given this “twoness,” this melding into one being of two identities, what theoretical conclusions can we draw from a syncre-nationalist perspective? The extensive body of scholarship on racial passing points to the political dimensions of the mulatta figure. For more on the subject of racial passing, see Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000); Elaine K. Ginsberg, ed. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996); and Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1995). Along with Valerie Rohy, I argue that the “discourse of racial passing reveals the arbitrary foundation of the categories “‘black’ and ‘white.’” (“Displacing Desire: Passing, Nostalgia, and Giovanni’s Room,” in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 227). The exposure of the tenuousness of racial categories is political in that it opens onto the possibility of resisting racial categories to which power and social meaning have been attached. Many scholars have explored the complexities and problematics inherent in the act of racial passing—leaving behind a less socially powerful identity (i.e., black) for a more powerful one (i.e., white). And neither the black nor the white characters in the novel encourage such an option.
7. Foster, 7.
8. Foster, 8.
9. In 1853, Maryland passed a law which forbade the entrance of free blacks across the state’s northern border. Blacks who entered the state in spite of the law were likely to be sold into slavery.
10. Foster, 10.
11. As discussed in chapter 1, Frances Dana Gage’s version of Truth’s Akron, Ohio Speech has become famous. Gage was the convention organizer, whose “recollections” of Truth’s speech, twelve years after the fact, did not square with reports made of the speech in 1851.
12. While onlookers used pleasing adjectives to describe Harper’s speaking style, most characterized Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s public speaking abilities unfavorably. For more on this, see Peterson, “*Doers of the Word*,” 122.
13. Quoted in Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 19.

14. Quoted in Gaines, 21.
15. Quoted in Gaines, 21.
16. Harper was one of the founding members of the National Council of Negro Women. For more on Harper's political activism, see Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 21.
17. Quoted in Frances Foster, "Introduction," *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* by Frances Harper. (1892; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xxxiv.
18. Quoted in Foster, "Introduction," xxxv.
19. Foster, "Introduction," xxvii.
20. Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers (1892; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 40. My discussion of Harper's novel relies on this edition of the text. All future references to this novel appear parenthetically within the text.
21. For a thorough overview of early critics' responses to *Iola Leroy*, see the introduction to Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).
22. Houston Baker, Jr., *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 31.
23. Sterling Brown, Arthur Davis and Ulysses Lee, *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes* (New York: Dryden, 1941) 140, 139.
24. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 123.
25. Quoted in Tompkins, 123.
26. Tompkins, 123.
27. Here I paraphrase Tompkins's discussion of various readings of the sentimental tradition in chapter 5.
28. These are William Dean Howells's words, quoted in Shirley Samuels, "Introduction." *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 5.
29. Claudia Tate, "Allegories of Black Female Desire; or, Rereading Nineteenth-Century Sentimental Narratives of Black Female Authority" in *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989) 107.
30. Tate, 126.
31. Tompkins, 124.
32. I borrow this term from David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 100.
33. Roediger, 35.
34. See Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781).
35. Gaines, 36.
36. Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 20.
37. Moses, 20.
38. Upon learning that she is "black" and not "white," Iola asks her mother: "[A]re these people Christians who made these laws which are robbing us of our inheritance and reducing us to slavery?" In Iola's case "inheritance"

- is significant. As a slave, she is deprived of the right to her father's name "and to an inheritance in [his] property" (Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 67). Not only does property signify material gain in this instance, but it also includes the rights, privileges and protection that white women enjoyed. For an in-depth discussion of the racialization of property, see Cheryl Harris's "Whiteness as Property," in *Critical Race Theory*.
39. Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth Century U.S. Literature and Culture*, 120.
 40. Delany, *The Condition*, 45–6.
 41. Gaines, 120.
 42. Moses, *Afrotopia*, 133.
 43. Carby, 78.
 44. Carby uses this example to illustrate a similar point in her book, page 78.
 45. Foster writes that Harper's writing "paved the way for the later, very popular fiction of Charles Chesnut" (*A Brighter Coming Day*, 4). Chesnut (1858–1932), author of *The Goophered Grapevine* (1887), *The Conjure Woman* (1899) and other fictional works, made use of dialect in the portrayal of his folk characters.
 46. Robert, like Iola, "enjoyed the distinction of being a good reader." This is key because the novel early on distinguishes Robert from his fellow slaves, most of whom could not read (Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 16).
 47. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 118.
 48. Quoted in Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 118. Bruce worked as a journalist in New York at the time.
 49. In Charleston, South Carolina, for example, the Brown Fellowship Society welcomed only fair-skinned blacks who could afford a membership fee. Among the benefits of belonging were educational opportunities, widow support and medical care.
 50. For more on the tension created by this outcome, see Gaines, 41.
 51. Quoted in Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 49.
 52. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 64.
 53. Since racists often attributed the success of prominent blacks such as Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington to their white ancestry, Harper's novel is careful to call attention to the achievements of blacks whose blood is "unadulterated." Of Lucy Delany, for example, Iola says "Every person of un-mixed blood who succeeds in any department of literature, art, or science is a living argument for the capability which is in the race" (*Iola Leroy*, 199).
 54. I borrow the term "common sense" from Antonio Gramsci, who uses it to describe the manner in which the powerful maintain their power. According to Omi and Winant, "ruling groups must elaborate and maintain a popular system of ideas and practices—through education, the media, religion, folk wisdom, etc.—which [Gramsci] called 'common sense.' It is through its production and its adherence to this 'common sense,' . . . that a

- society gives its consent to the way in which it is ruled” (*Racial Formation*, 67).
55. Omi and Winant, 71.
 56. Omi and Winant, 61–64.
 57. Omi and Winant, 71.
 58. Omi and Winant, 64.
 59. Horton, *Free People of Color*, 96.
 60. Delany, *The Condition*, 198.
 61. Clearly, Iola meets the standard of true womanhood, given her physical beauty, piety and self-discipline. But her independent and fiery nature would complicate any attempt to read her as a typical true woman.
 62. Quoted in Rhodes, 22.
 63. For a suggestive essay which argues that *Iola Leroy* does much to underscore the complexity of slave culture, and the importance of the oral tradition in the black community, see Marilyn Elkins, “Reading Beyond the Conventions: A Look at Frances E.W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, *American Literary Realism* 22.2 (Winter 1990): 44–53.
 64. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, ed. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (New York: Norton and Company, 1997) 466.
 65. For more information on blacks in the post-Reconstruction Era, see *The Norton Anthology*, especially pages 461–472.
 66. Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 168.
 67. Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 168.
 68. Ginsberg, “Introduction,” *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 16.
 69. I borrow this term from Gayatri Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988). Spivak intends strategic essentialism to mean a “strategic use of a positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (“Subaltern Studies,” 205).
 70. George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001) 134.
 71. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 12.
 72. John Coltrane, “A Love Supreme,” rec 1964, *A Love Supreme*, Impulse Records.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. Anderson, 36, 24.
2. Rael, 3, 6.

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