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Sites of Education: Race, Memory, and the Conflicting Discourses of Learning in America, 1827-1914

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Sites of Education: Race, Memory, and the Conflicting Discourses of Learning in
America, 1827-1914

Douglas Terry

Dissertation submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in
American Literature and Cultural Studies

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ABSTRACT

Sites of Education: Race, Memory, and the Conflicting Discourses of Learning in America, 1827-1914

Douglas Terry

This dissertation is a cultural study that challenges the handling of race in the history of American education by exploring how educational discourse shapes race. It argues that education itself is a manifestation of race, inseparable from the iterative processes of racial formation. While we take it as a prevailing truism that race is learned, this dissertation shows how the educational system itself is central to this learning.

It explores race in the educational landscape in a similar way to how scholars explore tension between history and cultural memory. In this manner, the dissertation focuses on what it terms “sites of education,” the culturally designed points within schools and outside them where racial identity is negotiated at junctures where differing ideas about education converge. As participants are attracted to educational sites, the structures, texts, and social roles that reproduce race are likewise caught in their vortex. Educational sites could be physical places, like schools and classrooms, or they could be cultural sites such as the common school and industrial education movements. Their dynamics demonstrate not only how racial ideology underlies American education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but also how it recurs, manifesting across geographically and temporally distant sites outside schools, as well as within them.

This project examines the overlapping discourses of race, education, and American nationhood across interrelated educational sites spanning the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century through the texts that they produce.

Dedication

To: Kyla, Ben, and Evie

Acknowledgments

Many people have supported and encouraged me over my years of graduate study. Dr. Michael Germana has been an unparalleled mentor and constant friend. When work on this project was at its most difficult, his guidance, patience, and insight helped me turn the corner and see it through. For him, I have unending appreciation and admiration. I offer him my deepest thanks.

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Introduction: Race and Performance at Sites of Education

Scene One:

In 1828, David Walker recounts in an oration a moment involving race, education, and violent discipline. Walker tells about a slave owner beating one of his enslaved children for merely possessing a school textbook. “A slaveholder,” states Walker, “upon finding one of his young slaves with a small spelling book in his hand (not opened) fell upon and beat him almost to death” (2). As Walker explains, the master told the child that through the beating, “You will acquire better learning than I or any of my family” (2).

Scene Two:

In 2015, students attending an Algebra class at Spring Valley High School in South Carolina made cellphone videos of a white police officer violently disciplining an African American student. The videos were picked up and widely distributed by news organizations over the Internet, prompting protest and debate in the media that resulted in the officer’s firing, which led to subsequent protest and more debate in the media (Fausset). From various angles, the videos depicted the uniformed officer grabbing the sixteen-year-old student by her neck and forcefully yanking her from her desk, overturning the desk and flinging her to the front of the classroom. Repeatedly commanding her to “give me your hands,” the officer pinned the student face-down on the floor with his knee to arrest her (Southall). News reports stated that student had refused to leave the class after the teacher had observed her paying more attention to her phone than the math lesson (Robertson).

The discussion surrounding race and education in America often casts them as separate and opposed. Education, on one hand, is traditionally viewed as perhaps the most important catalyst to the realization of what is considered America's central tenet of democratic equality. Race, on the other hand, is considered as a social problem that promotes inequality and impedes America's democratic progress. In fact, it is ingrained in our popular discourse that education, specifically school, plays a central role in mitigating American inequality. This discussion articulates an underlying narrative that recurs throughout the nation's past: the schoolhouse door acts as the entry point to citizenship and the classroom is the place where an individual's concerns merge with those of the nation's. Schooling acts, as Horace Mann put it in 1848, as the "great equalizer" in which "the schoolroom connects itself, and becomes identical, with the great interests of society" (669). It is, according to the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* ending legalized racial segregation in public schools, "the very foundation of good citizenship" and the "principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values" (Brown). Greater access to schooling, President Barack Obama sums up in his 2015 State of the Union address, allows "everyone to contribute to our [the nation's] success." Schooling, we do not need to be told, means that no child will be left behind.

The traditional history of American education generally reinforces the truism of schooling as the antidote to American inequality, unifying cultural and racial factions with a common national language and common social values. This traditional history therefore promotes a narrative of progress untroubled by race: the proliferation of public schooling simply means increased access to democracy. For example, John D. Pulliam's *History of Education in America* (2006) and Joel Spring's *The American School: A Global Context from the Puritans to the Obama Era* (2011), two of the most prominent surveys of American educational history, deal

with racial injustice as episodic anomalies, separate from the main narrative of educational progress rather than central to it. In such studies, slavery and segregation might pose dilemmas, but these dilemmas are resolved easily through the inevitability of American progress. To Pulliam, Spring, and others, schooling represents a microcosmic arena through which the state and society attempt, often successfully, to overcome racial hurdles and relegate them to a mostly irrelevant past.

In this way, the story that we tell ourselves about American education and racial progress is much the same story that has been told throughout America's history. Its approach offers a simplified account of nonwhite educational involvement. Pulliam and Van Patten, for example, articulate the commonly held assumptions about education for antebellum African Americans. They write, "very little progress was made in providing educational opportunities [for African Americans] before 1861" (148). Pulliam and Patten further note that antebellum "black education in the South was almost nonexistent and very limited in the Northern states" (148, 149). This twenty-first century characterization of African American education closely echoes liberal white sentiment of the antebellum period. In 1831, for example, an anonymous contributor to *The Liberator*, commenting on what he perceives as African American's lack of educational participation, asserts: "Our free black brethren are to blame for this state of things. If they will pay for instruction for their children, they command it. Interest is stronger than prejudice, and white teachers may be found in multitudes who will impart the stores of the mind for a convincing consideration" (2). Though separated by roughly 150 years, the two texts seem culturally adjacent, drawing from similar conceptions of education and its relationship with racial progress. They echo the fallacy that this dissertation exposes: that if nonwhites had greater access to schooling they would not be left behind in the march of American democracy.

These texts are separated by roughly as many years as the two scenes of violent educational discipline that began this introduction. Both of those scenes involve African American children who are subjected to a similar violent discipline. The children meet with the “better learning” of a white, male figure, culturally recognized as representing the dominant social and legal authority, who physically apprehends and expels them. The two scenes, like the texts, appear overlapping and homologous. Fundamentally, this dissertation asks, how can this be? Indeed, the traditional history of American education and racial progress suggests that it cannot. The two scenes are separated by pivotal events, such as Emancipation and the Civil Rights movement, that have greatly impacted the experience of race and education in America. Viewing the scenes with the lens of the traditional history of American education emphasizes the differences and directs our attention to the evidence of racial progress: In the first, a black child punished for merely yearning to experience the progress that education promises; in the second, a black child, sitting within the walls of a classroom and seemingly possessing the object of the enslaved child’s yearning, is punished for interfering with the mandatory education provided to her by the state. However, the violence similarly performed by whites upon blacks within educational settings evokes an uncanny familiarity between the two scenes—sensations that Sigmund Freud might describe as occurring when an experience causes us to suddenly recognize something “established in the mind...that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (47). In this case, the repression is race itself. The traditional history of American education fails to account for the overlap between educational moments like these because it posits a distinction between race and education where there is no distinction.

The proponents of traditional educational history envision learning as inherently raceless rather than existing within a white supremacist tradition. Following the interplay among

educational moments reveals this to be false. In the case of David Walker's address, for example, it is likely that the slavemaster would have encountered the child holding a copy of Noah Webster's compact and easily portable *American Spelling Book*, which was widely distributed in the United States during antebellum period (Lepore 6). The Preface of 1822 edition of Webster's speller touted sales since its first edition of more than three million copies (Webster ii). Whether it was Webster's or one of several others, it would have been the product of white authorship, intended to be used by students in common schools that, for the most part, excluded African Americans. Moreover, it would have attended to engendering values deemed by the dominant culture as fundamental to American citizenship, a social status inaccessible to the enslaved child. Editions of the *American Spelling Book* concluded with a "Moral Catechism" containing such queries such as "What is truth?" and "What is justice?" that the context of slavery deeply complicates (Webster 162, 160). The book's cultural tradition and its context in the scene accordingly complicate the American story of education. The book evinces how America's dominant educational practice, even in a subject as seemingly straightforward as literacy, was not an antidote to inequality and agent of democratic progress but rather participated in reinforcing racial stratification.

Some scholarship challenges this traditional narrative of American education, greatly deepening our understanding of the challenges that African Americans faced in their pursuit of education, as well as the strategies they employed in meeting those challenges. Consequently, this project is indebted to scholars such as Heather Andrea Williams, Hilary Moss, James D. Anderson, Elizabeth McHenry, Carl Kaestel, and Leon Litwack who have developed a tradition of scholarship that focuses on how nonwhites have participated in education. Despite much greater attention to the efforts of African Americans in the history of American education,

however, scholars frequently discuss race as a stable category of identity rather than a social process. The prevalent use of the terms African American education and Black education illustrate this problem. Quite often scholars employ those terms to describe students—the people engaging in education—rather than demonstrating how educational practices contributed to the social mechanics that produce race. For example, Hilary Moss’s *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* and Heather Andrea Williams’ *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, detail the countless hurdles that were absent from whites’ educational experience, such as literacy laws and segregation, that African Americans faced as they sought education. Used in this way, a term like “African American education” describes different experiences of learning along the color line without questioning how that line came to be. This perpetuates a misunderstanding of how the reproduction of race was central to educational practice. A term like African American education, therefore, becomes an umbrella. Under its label, scholars include educational methods designed by whites, such as segregated schools run by philanthropic organizations that promoted manual labor curriculums. They likewise include literary societies established by African Americans under that term. While African Americans were students in both white-run charity schools and literary societies, the racial ideologies underpinning those two approaches differed. Simply labeling them both as African American education ignores the divergent social contingencies surrounding their creation and how their methods differently configured what it meant to be a black citizen of the United States.

This project, rather, explores how educational discourse shapes race. Race, as John Ernest discusses, “encompasses the complex processes by which individuals are positioned, both socially and geographically, sometimes delimiting and sometimes extending privileges, options,

mobility, and ideological flexibility” (37). Therefore, this project draws from scholarship that views race as a dynamic social process constructed by the discourse that arises from immediate social contingencies, perpetually shifting as those contingences change. Rather than viewing race as categories of black and white or as qualities that people biologically or intrinsically possess, I view education itself as a manifestation of race, inseparable from the iterative processes of racial formation that Ernest describes. While we take it as a prevailing truism that race is learned, this dissertation shows how the educational system itself is central to this learning. What we call education is a racist discursive tradition that all of us have inherited and must continuously negotiate within the contingencies of the present moment. Because of the instability of race resulting from its perpetual renegotiation, a collection of geographically and temporally disparate moments and events in America’s educational past cannot be adequately described along a narrative of linear racial progress. Take the following instances of racial production involving education: the two violent scenes of this introduction, the 1840s campaign lead by William C. Nell to desegregate Boston’s public schools, the Common School movement, Bronson Alcott’s experimental Temple School, the curriculum of Virginia’s Hampton Institute, the Phoenix Literary Society in New York, and the enslaved Frederick Douglass surreptitiously giving bread to poor white neighborhood children in exchange for writing lessons. Arranging these events chronologically, imposing upon them rigid racial categories and a story of democratic progress, ignores how educational practice has contributed to forming the innumerable ways that race is negotiated.

My approach to race in the educational landscape explores those negotiations in a similar way to how scholars explore tension between history and cultural memory. Attention to race in America's past requires viewing education as sites where various, often conflicting, ideas about

race compete. Accordingly, I draw from Pierre Nora's "sites of memory," as contested places, like Kent State or a Confederate flag on the capitol grounds of a southern state, that function as the "embodiments of a commemorative consciousness" (6). Describing moments of learning as ritualistic, like the incident involving the enslaved child of Walker's anecdote, emphasizes the ways in which participating in such moments necessitates a collective remembering where rehearsed and culturally scripted actions carry a heightened symbolism. The spectacle of ritual, as Mervyn Busted note, blurs the distinction between participant and observer, by "bond[ing] spectator to participant and creat[ing] a sense of involvement" that relies upon the each individual involved adopting a performative role within the ritual's narrative framework (71). Busted articulates what Joseph Roach calls a "behavioral vortex," where people perform their affiliation to social groups by participating in ritualized, commemorative acts. A site of memory like a Civil War battlefield or Disney World, according to Roach, compels commemorative performances that simultaneously normalize and reinvent social roles so that "everyday practices and attitudes may be legitimated... reinforced, celebrated, or intensified" (28). Like church sanctuaries, graveyards, and parades, classrooms are theaters for collective remembering that urge their participants to submit to their ritualized performances. The transmission of knowledge that we traditionally practice in a classroom relies upon collective remembering. Classroom learning depends upon collaborative performance among students and teachers to pass down grammar conventions, mathematical equations, the periodic table, how to write letters, how to pronounce words, how to read text on a page, historical narratives, important dates, and scientific principles. Correctly performing the classroom's roles, students and teachers embody its behavioral rules. These collaborative performances take many forms such as discussion, lectures, worksheets, activities, and exams that test our ability to participate in collective memory.

Grading scales rank how rewarding with advancement or penalizing with remediation. Thus notions of social progress are built into educational commemoration.

Even though educational practice fundamental relies on collective ritual, we do not regularly consider classrooms alongside other sites of memory. Nor do we necessarily think of a classroom as part of the visible landscape. While driving along an interstate highway, we sometimes see a homemade roadside cross situated at a sharp turn and are momentarily thrust into the contemplating the death of someone whose life we never knew. No one, we think, walking along in everyday life accidentally happens upon a classroom. We believe them to be sequestered from the politics of everyday life. To emphasize this imagined separation between school the real world, there are admission procedures—themselves rituals—in which an outsider joins the class and becomes initiated into its communal belonging. Gaining access to the commemoration within a classroom requires permission from those who are already within. Leaving the ranks of the everyday world is a central feature of the cultural narrative of going to school and passing through the classroom door. This imagined separation greatly influences how we talk about education. It has even led educational scholars to call the classroom “the black box of schooling,” an analogy borrowed from the hard sciences to describe an obscured mechanical system. The term, as educational scholars Braster, Grosvenor, and Andrés note, implied viewing the classroom as a “system with the abilities and backgrounds of students as its input and their educational performance as its output. What was happening inside the box was basically unknown” (12). Understanding the social mechanism of the classroom was akin to opening the box.

This dissertation examines and disassembles the narrative that poses the practice of education, signified by the classroom, as distinct from everyday life. It demonstrates instead that

the materials that make a classroom are cultural not physical. The educational commemoration that we believe only occurs in classrooms in fact manifests everywhere as a result of social discourses, race principle among them. In this manner, I focus on what I term sites of education, the culturally designed points within schools and outside them where racial identity is negotiated at junctures where differing ideas about education converge. As participants are attracted to educational sites, the structures, texts, and social roles that reproduce race are likewise caught in their vortex. These convergences at educational sites draw out the tensions among the social and ideological forces underpinning conflicting concepts of race. Their dynamics demonstrate not only how racial ideology underlies American education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but also how it recurs, manifesting across geographically and temporally distant sites outside schools, as well as within them. Educational sites could be physical places, like schools and classrooms, or they could be cultural sites such as the common school movement of the antebellum period or industrial education movement that developed after the Civil War. These sites produce ritualized performances that emerge from, to borrow a term from Jean Anyon, the “hidden curriculum” of race in American educational practices.

This dissertation views education as racialized negotiations among socially affiliated groups often distanced by culture, time, and space. Studies such as Spring's *American School* devote little attention to normal schools with industrial curriculums schools like the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia that, at the turn of the twentieth century, promoted industrial education for African Americans (Anderson 49). Spring's study views them as a perplexing but relatively minor events illustrating a simple story of oppressor and oppressed. Hampton, Spring notes, was an aberration in the march of racial progress in which education was used as “the agent for civilizing freed slaves” that would “adjust African Americans to a

subordinate position in Southern society” (188). The simplicity of oppressor and oppressed overlooks schools like Hampton as an educational site where different histories meet. What emerges from that meeting is neither pure oppression nor pure resistance. Rather it represents a convergence of learners engaged in an institutional process that is as educational in racial production as the curriculum. Hampton’s curriculum, furthermore, reveals connections between it and others, altering the educational landscape by bringing into view marginalized sites—places and events where divergent ideological, cultural, and narrative lines converge. For example, approaching history at the point of this convergence at Hampton, in turn, lends prominence to the conflicting racial narratives that emerge from the private Noyes Academy. Founded in 1835, Noyes was a project in desegregated schooling initiated by white abolitionists. Conversely, it was also a site of racialized violence, as reactionary whites demolished the school (Litwack 117-120). Educational sites like the Noyes Academy and the Hampton Institute culturally attract an expansive web of participants—students, teachers, parents, reformers, newspaper writers, pamphleteers, textbook editors, and fundraising agents, among others. In addition to these participants, various notions of education and social patterns of race combine at these sites, and are transmitted among them through the mechanics of social memory. In this way, Hampton and Noyes are linked, not by a narrative of progress, but rather through the negotiated patterns of race with which they engage.

Educational sites produce and enfold a constellation of texts that reveal through their discourse the interconnectedness of racial and educational ideologies. Consequently, this dissertation studies how various dynamics that combine at educational sites are represented by and transmitted through print culture. For example, the Spring Valley students’ videos and David Walker’s speech as texts that emerge from those sites are not merely narratives of white

aggressors and African American victims. They also tell the stories of how people employed different strategies to oppose violent manifestations of white supremacy. Walker, for instance, includes the enslaved child's story in a call to action before the Massachusetts General Colored Association, one of many alliances through which African Americans combatted white supremacy. His address argues that the Association's "primary object" should be to "unite the colored population, so far, through the United States of America, as may be practicable and expedient; forming societies, opening, extending, and keeping up correspondences, and not withholding anything which may have the least tendency to meliorate our miserable condition" (Walker 2). With the speech as context, the story of the enslaved child's solitary struggle for self-education shows the urgent need for establishing community and organizing networks for mutual aid.

In the Spring Valley High School algebra classroom, the videos show a different strategy for resistance. Each of the Spring Valley students' videos depict the scene as a stolen moment from the vantage of a school desk using angles that indicate their creators' attempts at avoiding detection. The longest video, which runs only 1:30 seconds, repeatedly jumps away from the confrontation, as the student endeavors to hide his or her intent to record the conflict ("Spring Valley"). With the phone concealed, capturing only the sound of the commotion and a handwritten algebra assignment on desk, the video's creator documents two voices: "What the fuck?" exclaims the first, presumably a student's, in an aghast tone. "Hey," the second replies firmly, "I'll put *you* in jail next" ("Spring Valley"). The videos reveal students engaged in an education of social navigation, practicing the assertion of their subjectivity within an institution's discipline. From their various perspectives, the videos both illustrate the fragmentation created

by race and demonstrate how these fragments can be reassembled in ways that undermine the forces of subjection that led to this fragmentation in the first place.

This dissertation attends to fragmentation created by race within education and explores how people strive for coherence by attempting to put the pieces together. This process of fragmentation and reassembling that occurs at the Spring Valley High School replicates at sites of education across America's nineteenth and twentieth century past. Consequently, the purpose of this essay is not to tell a cohesive narrative about race and education in the United States during this period. My approach instead follows that of Robert Levine's *Dislocating Race and Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Nationalism*, which returns "a sense of tenuousness, provisionality, and even fictiveness" to traditional historical narrative through explorations of episodes that representing disruption and "dislodging of historical certitude" (7, 13). Because the rise of common schooling has been specifically associated with that of American democratic progress, this dissertation examines sites that interact with common schooling in ways that unsettle that "historical certitude" by revealing its participation in a tradition of white, paternalistic educational efforts that were underpinned by racist motivations intent on reproducing white social hegemony.

As white supremacy underlies education across sites, its language often obscures its racialism behind a veneer of paternalism. Though appearing to advocate benevolence, paternalism, as James Oakes puts it, "assumes an inherent [social] inequality" in which "some are born to rule, others to obey" (xi). Oakes further notes, therefore, that the paternalist views the social order as "stable, hierarchical, and consequently elitist" (xi). Paternalism, as scholars have demonstrated, was a prominent feature of how whites reinscribed racial difference as they articulated their relationship to nonwhites. Many of the texts that I explore, such as schoolbooks,

newspapers, pamphlets, and common school journals, represent artifacts of what Susan M. Ryan calls “the grammar of good intentions.” She describes this paternalistic grammar as the “competing rhetorics of benevolence that circulated among mid-nineteenth century among mid-nineteenth-century Americans” (1). According to Ryan, this included the discourse employed, sometimes earnestly sometimes disingenuously, to advocate “a range of interventions that today strike us as pernicious and self-serving” such as charity work and abolitionism, as well as African colonization and even slavery (3).

The paternalistic grammar of good intentions characterizes the language of antebellum education. Though this language, white philanthropists and educational activists advocated widespread schooling as inextricably linked to the experience of full citizenship. They employed a paternalism that obscured its impulse toward racial normativity behind language that associated the social improvement with the performance of manners that they dubbed good Christian values. By advocating Christian values, the paternalistic language that educational discourse invoked enshrouded its racist impulse. Enforcing behavior labelled “Christian values” and linking the manners associated with those values to the performance of republican citizenship functioned as a pretext for members of the dominant culture to advocate their own racial hegemony, which was fundamentally undemocratic. The essential racist purpose of American education in the antebellum period therefore ran counter to the values that its discourse overtly professed.

This discourse was, however, the dominant language of American education. It was adopted and proliferated by proponents of America’s common school movement. An 1855 article in the *American Journal of Education* epitomizes both the argument and tone of the

principled appeal for common schools as the most vital institution for maintaining a society based in Christian values:

the school is for the whole child. It is not only to teach him how to read well, but to behave well. It is designed not merely to teach him to keep his accounts, but to be a good citizen of a free and Christian commonwealth. It is not simply for the training of his intellect, but for the culture of his affections. [...] At school, children are to be taught self-control and self-denial—to respect the rights of each other—to have reverence for authority—to pay due deference to superiors—the honor the hoary head—to pity the unfortunate—to succor the needy—to give reason and conscience control over caprice and passion—to abhor and put away all that is mean and selfish—to cherish honorable and generous feelings—to be governed by the question of right, rather than by the policy or fashion—to have noble aims in life—to ‘fear God and keep his commandments,’ as the whole duty of man. (Gale 20-21)

This passage indicates how racial normativity was articulated through paternalist language that linked the experience of national citizenship with one’s ability to perform the well-intentioned grammar of the schoolhouse. The schoolhouse, moreover, was the primary site where that paternalistic grammar was learned, remembered, passed on to future generations, and rendered inseparable from the discourse of nation and race. Therefore, schooling was employed as a means of encoding inequality into the lived experience of race in America, consolidating white hegemony and its privileges while administering citizenship to nonwhites, compelling their assimilation, apportioning their labor, and limiting their access to political and social influence. Education was supposed to unify the peoples of America according to a common set of Christian

morals and democratic values, but in practice it contributed to formulating race, solidifying white supremacy, and fragmenting society.

This dissertation follows educational discourse across four sites of racial conflict within education. Over the course of the project's chapters, which span the antebellum period and the early twentieth century, the discussion of race within educational language and practice becomes more overt. Education is more openly viewed and increasingly implemented as a way of buttressing white supremacy by administering the experience of citizenship for nonwhites. Rather than promoting democracy and equalizing the social fracturing produced by race, education ultimately becomes viewed in the middle nineteenth century and into reconstruction as a tool for normalizing the link between whiteness and national citizenship. The dissertation reflects this by organizing chapter around two pairings. Chapters one and two explore sites in which educational discourse in the antebellum period obscured its underlying racist motivations behind a paternalism that was overtly preoccupied with advocating social improvement through the performance of Christian manners. Chapters three and four, in turn, demonstrate the overt associations of race, education, and national citizenship.

The first pairing represent case studies that illustrate the mechanics of race and education through texts that emerge from a site that I label the educational threshold, a cultural space outside dominant educational practice. Chapter one, set in the early 1800s, examines how African Americans experienced the threshold. In this chapter, the educational threshold describes the shared dilemma that antebellum Africa Americans faced as they struggled for inclusion within the classroom while also recognizing that the education practiced within its walls was underpinned by racist ideology. Illustrative of the threshold, the *Journal's* readership consisted of both African American and white reformers who had competing ideas

about race and education. Though the educational threshold experienced by African Americans is not limited to a single specific physical space or time, I explore the threshold through the writing that appears in *Freedom's Journal*, the first newspaper under African American editorship.

The chapter argues that *Freedom's Journal* not only illustrates the dilemma African American faced as they sought access to education, it also articulates that dilemma by subtly revealing to its African American readership the racist ideology underpinning educational discourse. *Freedom's Journal* demonstrates how expressions of ambivalence toward white, paternalism provided a means of critique and dissent, which extended beyond the newspaper's articles directly about educational issues like schooling, and emerged as a subtle satire of white paternalism in genres like advice columns and travelogues that dealt with the learning of identity outside the classroom. In this way, *Freedom's Journal* amplified a critical racial literacy—a way of reading whiteness—throughout its circulation as a strategy for teaching its African American readership how to navigate race within the sphere of everyday life. The chapter demonstrates how the threshold provides a lens through which to view other writing by African Americans, such as David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, which demonstrates the motivation of writers positioned outside dominant educational practice to reveal race as central to education, and in Walker's case announce it overtly.

While African Americans struggled for access to dominant educational practices but were pushed out, some whites elected to position themselves outside of those practices but were drawn back into them. Chapter two examines this aspect of the educational threshold through an analysis of Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody's *Temple School*, which opened in Boston in 1834 as an alternative to common schooling's panoptic disciplinary techniques. As a case study, the Temple School illustrates how the racial dynamics of the threshold forced white and African

Americans in different directions. The chapter, therefore, characterizes the process of racial fracturing as this divergent momentum—or gravitational pull—of the threshold that constructs difference according to the social performance of education. The Temple School demonstrates well-intention reformers failing to do what *Freedom's Journal* and Walker's *Appeal* accomplish. Instead of confronting the racist motivations underlying the common school's paternalistic discourse, I suggest that Bronson Alcott and the participants in the Temple School ultimately reproduce the contingencies that normalize white supremacist subjects. The writings that emerge from the Temple School display Alcott's ignorance of his own racial privilege, as he makes superficial adjustments to educational space and to education's veneer of Christian language without overtly engaging with its underlying racial ideology.

The second pairing, chapters three and four, explore the racial dynamics at educational sites during the periods preceding the Civil War and, finally, to Reconstruction. Together, the chapters demonstrate how race became more overtly associated with nation in educational discourse, as whites explicitly discussed deploying education to manage the experience of nonwhite citizenship. Chapter three explores this formulation through an analysis of the numerous textbooks that were widely distributed for use in common school classrooms. It examines how white educational reformers, as well as textbook writers and publishers imagined the nation as a school, a fantasy that I label the common school myth. The chapter demonstrates how common school myth that was articulated through textbooks that promoted the normalization of white ideology through a national market. In doing so, the chapter does not endeavor to describe the actual experience of children attending antebellum schools. Instead, it reads common school discourse as signifying an educational theater of the mind that imagines students and teachers interacting with textbooks and each other as they perform roles that bond

within a circle of racial affiliation. It argues that textbooks promote this affiliation by encouraging racializing performances within the classroom that standardize whiteness as the national racial norm. They envision a classroom process that affirms white supremacy conceptions of race as integral to nation. Textbooks, their authors, and publishers their vision of a marketplace that seemingly enforced the standardization of racializing curriculums and ostensibly amplified the common school myth across America's geographical space.

Chapter four demonstrates how African American students cut against the overt use of education to promote white supremacy. In doing so, it recontextualizes the African American threshold within the differing views over labor and education characterized by the debate between W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. It situates the threshold at Storer College in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, which was established by white missionaries who sought to train African American teachers. By the 1900s, however, Storer had shifted to more explicitly to industrial education. This formalization of manual labor at Storer corresponded with a widespread movement in the South that was predicated upon white supremacists notions of black inferiority. At normal schools such as Virginia's Hampton Institute and Storer College, proponents couched manual labor within a discourse of Christian paternalism. Often claiming a progressive abolitionist legacy, they asserted that manual labor made African Americans fit for citizenship by instilling Christian values and moral character. This chapter reads the school's newspaper, the *Storer Record*, as articulating the tension between students and administration over the performance of labor and the normalizing of racial national subjects. Storer's administration used the *Record* to downplay the school's reliance on student labor and emphasize its abolitionist roots. Students, on the other hand, repurposed the *Record* to subtly voice resistance to the administration's use of their labor.

Overall, this project identifies the tradition of American education as fundamentally racist and explores how its discourse replicates across space and time. While scholars have examined the white supremacy that underlies specific educational practices, they stop short of recognizing how the very conception of American education is white supremacist. With this dissertation, I hope to suggest that no matter the setting or the practitioners, participants involved in education inherit and must confront a discourse that traditionally reproduces racial categories, empowering those it constructs as white while disempowering those it constructs as nonwhite. This project therefore has application in literary study, while also prompting greater sensitivity to the past that every teacher and student inherits in the classroom. It shows that educational discourse and the ideologies that combine and reproduce race at sites of educational practice are not confined to the schoolhouse. They manifest in the texts of everyday life such as magazines and periodicals, as well as novels, poetry, and other literary texts. Associating the formulation of race within the discourse of American educational movements provides a fresh lens through which to view the normalization of white supremacist ideology and the resistance of it. By exploring the interplay of racial discourse between the classroom and literary texts, we contextualize racial learning within one of the most highly organized efforts to normalize racial national subjects: the American school.

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Chapter One

“The Silent Response of the Little Monitor Within”: *Freedom’s Journal*, Education, and

Race in Everyday Life

Freedom’s Journal, considered the first African-American edited newspaper, published its first number in 1827 with a call for education. “As education is what renders civilized man superior to the savage,” declared its coeditors, Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm, “...we deem it expedient to establish a paper, and bring into operation all the means with which our benevolent CREATOR has endowed us, for the moral, religious, civil and literary improvement of our injured race (“Proposals”). The coeditors recognized that education was central to the struggle for advancing African American citizenship in a white supremacist nation perpetuated by the systemic ignorance of the rights of nonwhites. Education was central to the lives and activism of both Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm. Cornish, a Presbyterian minister, was affiliated with aid societies and served as an educational agent for the New York Manumission Society and a proposed college (Swift 57-63). Russwurm, a schoolteacher before attending Bowdoin College, was among the first black American college graduates. Moving to Liberia in 1829, Russwurm was the colony’s school superintendent, launched its first newspaper, and served as its governor until 1851 (Winston 16, 60, 74, 90). With every number *Freedom’s Journal* followed through, providing information about literary societies and schools, lectures on education by community leaders, articles about learning practices in different cultures, literary works submitted by readers, and news about the world. It was, during its two year run, the only publication substantively confronting African American educational concerns from a nonwhite perspective.

As the appearance of terms like “savage” and “civilized” denote, however, the *Journal’s* educational features often appear couched within paternalistic racist discourse. Many of them focus on moral uplift that, at first glance, seems to echo the paternalistic language of white antislavery reformers such as the members of the New York Manumission Society who paradoxically advanced a racial order in which blacks occupied a separate and subordinate social position (Gellman 56-59). The New York Manumission Society was established in 1785 and included elite, white politicians, religious leaders, and business people in New York. Among its founding members were society president John Jay (a participant in the Continental Congress and architect of the state’s constitution), John Murray (a wealthy, Quaker merchant), and Alexander Hamilton. The Manumission Society desired society to be, as historian David Gellman put it, “reformed in their image and under their direction,” advocating the multi-year gradual emancipation of New York’s enslaved population which sought to counterbalance African Americans’ right to freedom with slaveholders’ property rights (59). For instance, Cornish and Russwurm assert that education is “an object of the highest importance to the welfare society” (“To Our Patrons”). On the other hand, they qualify that claim with paternalist language suggesting that education should serve a society marked by distinct racial spheres. “We form a spoke in the human wheel,” write the coeditors, “and it is necessary that we should understand our dependence on the different parts, and theirs on us, in order to perform our part with propriety” (“To Our Patrons”). Accordingly, Cornish and Russwurm appeared to walk a fine line in *Freedom’s Journal*, advocating widespread education for African Americans while simultaneously reassuring whites that its effects posed no threat to their hegemony.

This essay explores the newspaper’s ambivalence towards the practice and social purpose of education. In doing so, it builds upon recent scholarship that has complicated our

understanding of African American print culture in the nineteenth century. My approach to *Freedom's Journal* is informed by recent scholarship that complicates the cultural and literary history of the antebellum black press in ways that, as Frances Smith Foster puts it, address its role in advancing a “purposeful self-identified African America” (718). Scholars such as Frances Smith Foster, John Ernest, Joanna Brooks, Eric Gardner, and Marcy Dinius, with their attention to the periodicals, texts, writers, and readers participating in the African American press, have opened pathways into exploring the social dynamics of antebellum print culture. As John Ernest has importantly articulated, the African American Press was “a dynamic and communal process that gathered and arranged information to meet the shifting contiguities of African American life” (281). As I specifically attend to African American educational life, my reading of *Freedom's Journal* draws from scholarship that examines how African American periodical writing informed the productions of racial identity through its interplay with dominant racial discourses. In recent years, scholars such as Jacqueline Bacon, Timothy Helwig, Todd Vogel, and James Winston have increasingly attended to how *Freedom's Journal*, its editors, and contributors, participated in promoting African American community and public life despite systemic white supremacy. Among their concerns, scholars have contributed to discussions involving the newspaper's advocacy of education, a pressing issue to any community but especially to African Americans staking a claim to citizenship in the urban north. Bacon's indispensable history of *Freedom's Journal*, for example, attends to the newspaper's role in promoting literacy, supporting mutual aid societies, and encouraging moral uplift. Such studies make room for my exploration of the newspaper's ambivalence toward white-led educational efforts for African Americans.

This essay views *Freedom's Journal* as emerging from a shared cultural site marked by the conflicting convergence of educational ideologies--of African Americans striving for education against a white supremacist culture that sought to exclude them from it. The various texts that comprised *Freedom's Journal* were, to borrow from Derrick Spires' observations on the circulation of black convention proceedings, "performative speech acts that seek to manufacture the very citizenship practices from which [African Americans] had been excluded" (274). For northern white Americans, the early antebellum period marked the beginning of a large-scale mobilization in mass education known today as the common school movement. For black New Yorkers in the 1820s, however, the path to education was more precarious than a walk to school. Excluded from most white-run schools, African Americans also recognized that the education practiced within their walls was a racializing discourse underpinned by white supremacist ideology. African Americans were culturally situated on the threshold of education, requiring inclusion while observing injustice in traditional educational practice. Illustrative of the threshold, the *Journal's* readership consisted of both African American and white reformers who had competing ideas about race and education. *Freedom's Journal* articulates the ambivalence of the educational threshold, pressing for a view of education that seems embedded in white, paternalistic notions about African American citizenship. However, this essay argues that *Freedom's Journal* demonstrates how expressions of ambivalence toward whiteness provided a means of critique and dissent rather than support. Through examining manifestations of this ambivalence in the newspaper, I posit that ambivalence was often a tool for subtle criticism, emerging as literary performance that undercut the newspaper's seemingly conservative educational message. The performance of this ambivalence, moreover, extended beyond the newspaper's articles directly about educational issues like schooling, emerging as a

subtle satire of white paternalism in genres like advice columns and travelogues that dealt with the learning of identity outside the classroom. *Freedom's Journal*, therefore, not only illustrates the dilemma African American faced as they sought access to education, it subtly reveals the racist ideology underpinning educational discourse. It amplified a critical racial literacy—a way of reading whiteness—throughout its circulation as a strategy for teaching its African American readership how to navigate race within the sphere of everyday life.

On the Educational Threshold

Freedom's Journal circulated during a period fraught with competing ideas about race and education. The paper's first year coincided with the final stages of New York's gradual emancipation of most of its enslaved population. In the city, a community of roughly 14,000 free African Americans was gaining a middle class foothold (Curry 245). While this gave African Americans cause for celebration, white New Yorkers, even those who were members of the most liberal reform groups, expressed trepidation. These concerns were exacerbated by the white press, which regularly published sensationalized crime reports that drew upon racist narratives and applied them to the African American community as a whole (Harris 110). Involvement in education was a way to represent the black community positively, countering a white "publick" that had, as Cornish and Russwurm put it, "too long...been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us deeply" ("To Our Patrons"). Education, however, also posed a dilemma. Whites perceived it as a social category over which they claimed authority, articulated through a myriad of institutions and practices. For African Americans to declare public entry into education, they were asserting their participation in a tradition that had been developed by whites for whites. New York, for instance, took its first steps toward developing a tax-supported school system for whites in 1795 (Ravitch 7). In 1827,

it was estimated that nearly 500,000 white children within the state attended its 8,000 common schools (Randall 56). Part of this white educational tradition was the development of ways to control the access of nonwhites. In some circumstances, whites excluded African Americans, sometimes violently, from schools and access to basic literacy (Moss 3, 37-38). In others, whites limited inclusion through developing, as educational historian James D. Anderson put it, “schooling for second-class citizenship,” separate institutions and curriculums deployed to instill in African Americans a subordinate social position (1).

The New York Manumission Society with its educational arm, the African Free School, was one such institution, run by white philanthropists who were firmly against slavery but were also ambivalent to citizenship for free African Americans. Founded in 1787, the African Free School was the largest educational operation for African Americans in the city of New York (Harris 137). The Society rooted its actions in whites’ anxiety, charging itself in its official charter with “keep[ing] a watchful eye over the conduct of such Negroes as have been or may be liberated; and to prevent them from running into immorality or sinking into idleness” (New York Manumission Society qtd. in Rury 233). African Free School headmaster Charles Andrews reprinted an article from the *New York Commercial Advertiser* in his book-length history of the school that uses similar language. The article contrasts African Free School students with “those idle [children] who are suffered to grow up uncultivated, unpolished, and heathenish in our streets; who, for the want of care and instruction, are daily plunging in scenes of sloth, idleness, dissipation, and crime, until they pass from step to step over the tread mill, into the state prison, and at last up to the gallows” (qtd. in Andrews 45-46). In the absence of slavery, according to the African Free School’s headmaster, free African Americans necessitated management from white institutions--either the schoolhouse or the prison house. The schools’ discipline was in

keeping with this. It employed a monitorial method in which the schoolmaster appointed a hierarchy of student monitors who oversee younger students, teach the school's values, and enforce its rules. The apparatus depended upon a reward system of tickets for good behavior that students used to purchase promotions in rank (Free School Society of New York 20). Each spring, the African Free School's academic year would culminate with a public examination in which students would model the efficacy of the school's discipline through performances in areas such as oration, literacy, penmanship, mathematics, geography, and needlework. The *New York Commercial Advertiser* described "the effects of education" demonstrated by students at an African Free School exhibition as setting them apart from "black children...who drag out a miserable existence as pests in our streets" (qtd. in Andrews 45). Indeed, the school's administration idealized students' performances of gratitude to the African Free School's benefactors and acquiescence to its discipline. Charles Andrew's history, for example, includes a poem recited but not written by a student during an examination that distills the performance of self-discipline in the monitorial experience. "As soldiers under discipline," the student performed," We end our work as we begin / with regularity pursue / each exercise we have to do / orderly perseverance gains / a good reward for all our pains" (qtd. in Andrews 143). Employed to illustrate the efficacy of white-run education, the student's poem likewise articulates the educational dilemma that African Americans faced. Entering white-run charity schools like the African Free Schools offered the possibility of social elevation through literacy, mathematics, and some vocational training, but it also meant participating in a discourse that suppressed their subjectivity and aimed to reinforce a white hegemony.

Many contemporaries of Cornish and Russwurm fought against white educational authority. In New York and elsewhere, African Americans throughout the antebellum period

struggled for educational control by attempting to reshape the existing educational culture. Organizing boycotts of white-run schools was one of the more forceful methods of protest. In 1832, for example, parents in New York waged a boycott of the African Free Schools. Sparked by Andrews' violent caning of a student, the boycott resulted in his dismissal and the appointment of African Free School graduate John Peterson as Andrew's replacement. After only two years of Peterson's leadership, all but one of the school's teachers were African American and its enrollment was 1,439 students, the highest in the school's history (Harris 143-44). African Americans likewise established small private schools in their homes or churches that offered basic instruction. In 1815, for instance, the Brooklyn African Woolman Benevolent established a school in the home of its charter president, Peter Coger. Later, when the New York public schools turned away black children to accommodate more white children, the Woolman Society raised money for a school, a church, and a library (Wilder 127). Philadelphian Jeremiah Gloucester likewise ran a notice in *Freedom's Journal* for a tuition-based school that offered instruction in "Reading, Writing, Cyphering, Geography, English Grammar, and Natural Philosophy. And to the females Needle Work" (Glouster). St. Philip's, a black Episcopal Church in New York City, also advertised in *Freedom's Journal*, offering evening music lessons on Tuesday and Friday evenings ("St. Philip's").

In cities like New York, African Americans also formed literary societies that fostered a network of community-based organizations focused on education. Ranging from small to large, these societies, organized around reading and literature, offered discussion groups, lectures, poetry recitations, reading rooms, and circulating libraries (McHenry 50). New York's Phoenix Society, for example, was founded in 1833 with the populist mission of "promoting the improvement of the colored people in Morals, Literature, and Mechanical Arts" across no less

than the entire black population” (“Address and Constitution” 142). The Society’s constitution outlined a plan that involved dividing the city into wards, “visit[ing] every family in the Ward, and mak[ing] a register of every coloured person in it—their name, sex, age, occupation, if they read, write, and cipher.” This comprehensive support included encouraging children to attend school regularly, enrolling infants in day programs so that parents could work, offering access to lending libraries, helping adults acquire vocational training or means to pursue liberal arts, and providing school clothing (“Address and Constitution” 144).

From these efforts, African Americans developed a discourse marked by ambivalence toward the white educational culture that they sought to reshape. While assertively promoting widespread education as central to racial justice, African Americans’ public statements often stopped short of criticizing the paternalism and racist assumptions that underscored white-run educational efforts. On New York’s 1827 emancipation day, for example, William Hamilton, president and cofounder of the African Society for Mutual Relief, called whites’ assumptions that African Americans were less capable of study “false as hell,” concluding an oration delivered at the African Zion Church with a forceful demand for his listeners to devote themselves to literature and the sciences (Hamilton 103, Townsend 46). Hamilton’s speech, which praised the New York Manumission Society, also trafficked in white misconceptions about African American’s capacity for citizenship. It borrowed from the paternalistic beliefs held by liberal whites that African Americans’ were sorely in need of instruction in Christian values. More important than academic learning, Hamilton told his audience, “first...let me invite you to the path of virtue.” Directing his strongest admonition not to racist whites but rather as a warning to African Americans, he continued, “Vice, from which I would call you [...] is a crooked, thorny way, full of stinking weeds, the path of trouble, debasement, misery, and

destruction” (103). Similar discourse manifested in the constitution of New York’s Phoenix Society. Not only did the society seek to encourage African Americans to “improve their minds” but also “to abstain from vicious and demoralizing practice” (“Address and Constitution” 145). In this way, often antebellum African Americans both advocated education while, at the same time, speaking about it a similar paternalistic register as liberal whites. They recognized widespread learning’s importance in the pursuit of social justice but stopped short of overtly challenging the racial ignorance central to American education—that set of normalized learning practices that emerged from a Protestant tradition and worked to sustain white hegemony.

“Ignorance and Treachery”

Some African American writing from the educational threshold did overtly criticize the paternalistic aims of white-led education. As Sarah Mapps Douglass declared in 1832, “The present system of education abounds with corruption and error, and I fondly anticipate the time when a complete reformation may be wrought therein” (Douglass 127). Of Cornish and Russwurm’s contemporaries none was more critical of it than David Walker, *Freedom Journal*’s own subscription agent in Boston. His *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), published two years after the inaugural issue of *Freedom’s Journal*, labeled white educational practice as “ignorance and treachery” (24). An influential figure in Boston’s African American community of the late 1820s, his *Appeal* views the dilemma of the threshold in starker terms than *Freedom’s Journal* by articulating an overt assessment of white-run education for African Americans. While scholars often attend to the pamphlet’s significance in the development of African American print culture or refer to as part of the larger discussions antebellum African American activism, they do not often discuss it in within an educational context. However, the

activism that Walker advocated was fundamentally educational, as evinced by his stated goal in writing the pamphlet. “My object is, if possible,” he asserts, “to awaken in the breasts of my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in this Republican Land of Liberty! ! ! ! !” (4-5). In this manner, Walker’s *Appeal* was for a radical reconsidering of how whites deploy education to subjugate African Americans. His *Appeal* urges to a revolution, not through violence, but by recognition of the extent to which the dominant practice of American education perpetuates ignorance. He describes this systemic internalization of ignorance in his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829) as “a mist, low down into the very dark and almost impenetrable abyss in which our fathers for centuries have been plunged” (22). As with *Freedom’s Journal* Walker’s *Appeal* speaks to dual audiences of whites and African Americans, plainly instructing both on the dynamics of white-run education, which reproduce social conditions that contradict the professed social values of white, Christian culture. In doing so, he announces how white education that promises African American empowerment implements a curriculum that actually only empowers whites.

Throughout his *Appeal*, Walker demonstrates how this “ignorance and treachery” manifests in language and flows, seemingly naturally, into formations of everyday life. At one point, for example, Walker demonstrates this by examining the handwriting of an African American child who had attended a white-run school for nine years. Looking at the student’s handwriting, Walker connects the hypocrisy of the “grammar of good intentions” to the literal child’s literal use of grammar on the page. The child’s neat and composed handwriting “only looks beautiful,” Walker noted, when actually he “knows grammar this day, nearly as well as he did the day he first entered the school-house, under a white master” (36, 39). Walker, therefore,

overtly contests the underpinning ideology of white education, asserting that it insidiously internalized in African Americans a sense of inferiority. “Young men of color,” he writes, “who have been to school, and who are considered by the coloured people to have received an excellent education, because, perhaps, some of them can write a good hand, but who, notwithstanding their neat writing, may be almost as ignorant, in comparison, as a horse” (37). For Walker, true education necessitated learning how to uncover and confront systemic normative whiteness. Accordingly, Walker demonstrates the effects of this on the lived experience of African Americans, thereby drawing the connection between how whiteness is learned in the classroom and beyond it. He reproduces a conversation with a man who repairs boots and shoes for whites. Walker criticizes the man for saying that he is “completely happy!...never want[ing] to live any better or any happier than when [he] can get plenty of boots and shoes to clean!!!” (34). Walker employs this conversation to illustrate that throughout everyday life, as with white schooling, there is a systemic force at work maintaining racial boundaries through instruction accorded to a white supremacist social curriculum. Walker, in this respect, attends not only to the man’s “mean and low” occupation as an example of the effects of this curriculum but also to the man’s failing to recognize these social forces at work, his subjugation by them, and lack of language—his inability to articulate his own experience.

Therefore, one of his *Appeal*’s most direct calls to action is for African American teachers. “Men of colour, who are also of sense,” he writes, “...I call upon you therefore to cast your eyes upon the wretchedness of your brethren, and to do your utmost to enlighten them--go to work and enlighten your brethren!” (33). Moreover, Walker recognizes that while whites are empowered by the proliferation of ignorance through dominant educational practices, they are also victims of it. In this sense, his call is for African Americans to follow his example and to

teach whites to comprehend the systemic quality and ramifications of the ignorance that has been instilled in them. His *Appeal* culminates models this teaching for his African American and white readers, culminating with an object lesson in racial literacy. In doing so, he speaks directly to his white readers, leading them through an analysis of how white supremacy corrupts language by inverting its meaning. He translates the underlying hypocrisy in Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, inserting his instruction within the document itself and employing images of pointing fingers as punctuation to aid readers as they navigating key sections. In one particularly emphatic note, he inserts:

See your Declaration Americans ! ! ! Do you understand your own language?
Hear your language, proclaimed to the world, July 4th, 1776-- [pointing finger-->]
‘-"We hold these truths to be self evident--that ALL MEN ARE CREATED
EQUAL!! that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights;
that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness! !' Compare your
own language above, extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your
cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and
yourselves on our fathers and on us--men who have never given your fathers or
you the least provocation! ! ! ! ! (85)

With his methodical analysis of language, throughout his *Appeal* and most pointedly with his reading of the *Declaration*, Walker renders evident the truths about systemic white supremacy that America's dominant educational practice obscures through its corruption of language. For Walker, true education necessitated learning how to uncover and confront racial normativity.

While Southern whites attempted to prevent the *Appeal* circulation through legal action, even the most sympathetic white, northern readers David Walker's white generally received

with ambivalence and some foreboding. The *Ariel*, a Philadelphia newspaper, described it as “seditious,” as it reported on arrests of people in North Carolina who were involved in distribution (“Varieties”). In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison’s antislavery newspaper *The Liberator* published a series of responses and letters of the editor about the *Appeal*, several agreeing with Walker’s assessment of slavery and white supremacy but voicing skepticism about what they interpreted as his advocating violence. One contributor to the *Liberator* describes it as “so much of the delusion of fanaticism mingled with so much sound sense and noble feeling” (“Walker’s Appeal” 2). This contributor subsequently misreads Walker’s critique of education and call for African American teachers. Incredulously, the contributor states, “Our free black brethren are to blame for this state of things. If they will pay for instruction for their children, they command it. Interest is stronger than prejudice, and white teachers may be found in multitudes who will impart the stores of the mind for a convincing consideration” (“Walker’s Appeal” 2). Despite the *Appeal*’s direct critique of systemic normative whiteness, the *Liberator*’s response indicates the challenge that African Americans faced in levelling overt critiques at white education. Using language that seemingly advocates African American agency through self-reliance, the response reaffirms a white claim to education that African Americans should, quite literally, buy into. The contributor lacks the language to articulate what education would be if not underpinned by white supremacy.

“Reading and Reflection”

Freedom’s Journal and its readership were situated amid these competing ideas surrounding white reform education for African Americans. Though a product of New York’s African American community, for instance, *Freedom’s Journal* also had ties to the Manumission

Society and its schools. African Americans and white members of the Manumission Society--as well as other reformers in New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere--read, subscribed, and helped fund the newspaper (Bacon 47). The newspaper's coeditors provided copies of *Freedom's Journal* for the African Free School library ("New York"). Consequently, ambivalence marked discourse that emerged in *Freedom's Journal* from the convergence of these competing ideas about race and education was marked with ambivalence. This ambivalence appears in its handling of the New York Manumission Society's African Free School. At first glance, its involvement with the African Free School seems to illustrate the uncritical acceptance of the paternalistic educational practice that David Walker would reject two years later in his *Appeal*. "No man of colour," notes a *Freedom's Journal* article about the Free Schools, "can hesitate one moment about embracing the generous offer of the Manumission Society." It continues, "we can but pledge ourselves to render every assistance in our power, to further the philanthropic views of the Society" ("School Meeting"). The newspaper published advertisements for the schools, notices, accounts of the Manumission Society meetings, descriptions of public examinations, and examples of student work. For further evidence of the newspaper's support, one could look at Samuel Cornish's and John Russwurm's personal involvement with the school as well. They served as agents for the school, visiting homes on the Society's behalf. Employing an organizational strategy similar to the monitorial order of its classroom, the Manumission Society divided the city into seventeen districts, appointing agents for each district ("School Meeting"). Though the Phoenix Society would later employ a similar approach to assess the educational needs of New York's African Americans, the white Manumission Society was more concerned with behavioral discipline. For children's school admittance, parents would be required to uphold "good characters," as well as exemplify "Sobriety and Honesty,--and peaceable and orderly

living” (New York Manumission Society qtd. in Harris 65). A child’s education itself was the ticket in the reward system. Cornish acted as the General Visiting Agent while Russwurm served as a district agent. Cornish’s role entailed administering a wide-spread canvassing effort throughout the city to gather information and report to the Society on “the particulars of every coloured family in each district (“School Meeting”).

While the coeditors’ involvement as agents for the African Free School suggests their support, the report published in *Freedom’s Journal* announcing this plan reveals ambivalence. On one hand, the article borrows from white, paternalistic discourse. It articulates whites’ underlying anxiety over black citizenship that fueled white-led educational efforts to instill Christian values, citing that “it is feared that many hundreds [of African American children] are spending their time in idleness” (“School Meeting”). Expressing ambivalence was, on the other hand, a way of publically challenging white education in the guise of support. While overtly contesting white education, the article also implies that the canvassing plan should be seen as a way for African Americans to assert greater influence over education. For instance, the article presents the plan as a “joint” effort between the Manumission Society and the African American community (“School Meeting”). Accordingly, it emphasizes that leaders in African American community would be the plan’s chief administrators. The article, for instance, lists the thirty-four African American leaders representing the city’s seventeen districts. In addition to Cornish and Russwurm, readers would recognize that the committee included prominent community members such as William Hamilton and Henry Scott, a successful entrepreneur in the pickling business (Townsend 2). Peter Williams, the reverend at St. Philips Episcopal Church, presided over the committee and represented a ward (Townsend 40). The article both asserts African American subjectivity while not overtly rejecting white conceptions of education and the “ample

provision made by the Manumission Society” (“School Meeting”). Consequently, the article’s meaning—whether it represented assent to white educational authority or an assertion of African American subjectivity—depended upon the cultural standpoint of the reader. A white audience, empowered by the dominant educational system, could read the article as assenting to that system, while a black audience, disempowered by it, could read dissent. Expressing ambivalence in this manner was a means of surreptitiously critiquing white education through texts that appeared to support it.

For example, in a three-part article simply entitled “Education,” a contributor writing under the pseudonym Philanthropos echoes the sensationalized images of crime and social decay to describe “the evils accruing” to the black community for want of education. Philanthropos writes in the second installment that without education:

“youths ... are permitted to wander from street to street, to indulge in every species of juvenile dissipation, and to imbibe habits, the most pernicious to their future interests, and destructive of every moral and social obligation. ...[T]hey are less disposed to industry in the pursuit of any vocation...; they are unused to aspire after elevation of condition; and consequently continue during a wretched existence, ignorant, poor and contemptible. (“Education No. II”)

This passage ostensibly reflects the sentiment of white educational reformers. Philanthropos, though, does not identify white schooling as the solution. He ironically uses its discourse to promote African American educational efforts for adults. He advocates Sabbath Schools in black churches “for the instruction of those who may be unacquainted with the art of reading,” as well as secular “mutual relief” schools of which he identifies two “among our brethren of this city...under their own superintendence” (“Education No III”). Finally, he advocates informal

education through “READING AND REFLECTION, as well as by conversing in the social circle” (“Education No. III”). The subjugating language of white schooling therefore cloaks an argument for an education whites cannot monitor. The practice of reading functions as to way of instituting unmonitored spaces for building community within the social contingencies of everyday life. *Freedom’s Journal* itself, Philanthropos further implies, carries import in this social “READING AND REFLECTION” conducted informally with friends and family throughout the course of everyday life. In this manner, while seemingly reproducing the discourse of white education, Philanthropos advances the radical literacy of reading and reflection--the intellectual space for critiquing the dominant culture. Juxtaposed here are the racializing discourses of subjugation and educational liberation. His authorial performance as both a white reformer and a self-identified member of New York’s African American community articulates the tension between them.

Navigating Print, Negotiating Race

As a newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal’s* was uniquely suited to circulating this ambivalence toward white institutions, amplifying it among its readership. The newspaper’s circulating ambivalent discourse taught readers how to navigate competing racial discourses in everyday life. Simply reading the newspaper, for instance, was an act of social navigation. Each issue included an array of texts of various genres by African American and white authors, juxtaposing original submissions with reprints of articles from the white press. Issues regularly engaged readers in the practice of reading articles, advice columns, poems, letters, tales, travelogues, and other serialized works of fiction and nonfiction. Because its layout of various texts across several large pages did not depend upon a linear reading, readers would move across the paper’s terrain from text to text, as they constructed meaning from each issue’s contents. Through its

variety of texts, *Freedom's Journal* encouraged its readers to navigate the tensions among the many discourses that participated in the negotiation of racial difference.

By appropriating genres common to newspapers, *Freedom's Journal* established spaces for scrutinizing the dominant discourse that normalized racial difference. This often meant attending to deceptively minute circumstance of daily life. Advice columns, with their recurring attention to the everyday, were one manifestation. *Freedom's Journal* published a column entitled "The Observer" that implicitly examined the monitorial discipline utilized by the Manumission Society. Under the pseudonym "Mr. Observer," the author claims to give voice to "the silent response of the little monitor within" ("Observer, No. I"). While this seemingly constitutes strident didacticism to queries from supposed readers about everyday concerns, Mr. Observer's authorial performance and exaggerated mimicry of white reform rhetoric suggests satire. For instance, Mr. Observer begins his first installment by observing himself, thus subtly caricaturing the internalization of the white panoptic system. Speaking of himself in the third person, he observes himself judging others while refusing to regard their judgement of him. "The Observer," writes Mr. Observer, "is aware that his intentions will frequently be called in question, and the purity of his motives disbelieved. It matters not with him" ("Observer, No. I"). Watching himself watch others watch himself, the character of Mr. Observer, reveals the absurdity of monitorial discipline. Accordingly, the column's first query contributes to this. Though Mr. Observer grandiosely claims "to expose the deeds of the designing, and defend the weak and inexperienced from the power of the strong and subtle," his readers' queries ironically involve minor problems. For instance, he responds to "an elderly lady, of great piety and benevolence" outraged by churchgoers who "turn their heads round" when someone enters service late. Mr. Observer responds with a disproportionate indignation, employing the "rod of

reproof” to chastise the African American community. “We should let no unholy thought,” he writes, “no worldly care intrude upon our minds.” Then, as if winking at the reader, he continues, “And far from us should be the least appearance of levity. I hope these few words will produce the intended effect” (“Observer, No. I”). Depending on how one reads his “intended effect,” Mr. Observer either provides for his audiences the uncritical reproduction of racializing reform ideology or a subtle critique of it. Through literary performances that drew upon periodical genres like advice columns, *Freedom’s Journal* utilized its status as a newspaper to direct the repeated, consistent, and reinforced implementation of this subversive education to the everyday social sphere.

Along with advice columns, travelogues reprinted from the white press posed complex representations of African American subjectivity that encouraged this radical literacy. “The Memoirs of Captain Paul Cuffee,” for instance, was one such reprint. Not only was Cuffee’s “Memoirs” originally published in a white newspaper, it was written in the third person most likely by a white amanuensis. On one hand, the editors of *Freedom’s Journal* appear to establish Cuffee, a well-known black shipping merchant who prospered in the late eighteenth century, as embodying the values of citizenship acceptable to the newspaper’s white readers (Thomas). The narrative establishes Cuffee as pious and industrious. He uses the money from his shipping business to fund agricultural endeavors and build a school “open to all who pleased to send their children” (“Memoirs”). On the other hand, Cuffee’s story illustrates how *Freedom’s Journal* utilizes reprints from the white press to emphasize the discursive tensions between white constructions and black subjectivity. In the first number of *Freedom’s Journal*, Cuffee’s “Memoirs” is situated on the front page among numerous other reprints and original articles. This includes the editors’ statement of purpose in which they declare emphatically, “We wish to

plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us” (“To Our Patrons”). Through the paper’s layout, the coeditors set “Memoirs” in tension with the newspaper’s objective of providing an African American voice. The editors emphasize this by overtly identifying Cuffee’s story as the product of the white newspaper the *Liverpool Mercury*, presumably of white authorship, speaking for an African American. The newspaper’s layout undercuts what appears to be the acceptance of a white person’s rendering of an African American with a juxtaposition that implies the underlying discursive conflict over African American subjectivity. This conflict reemerges throughout the issue, displayed literally before the readers’ eyes as they navigate the pages. Readers move from the compelling travelogue of Cuffee’s nautical and social navigation, to another reprint pronouncing the flourishing of common schools that do not admit blacks, to verse by the white poet William Cullen Bryant entitled “The African Chief,” to a vignette reprinted from a white newspaper about a cruel slave owner and a pious slave, and finally to a brief advertisement for a modest, private school for African Americans. As Cuffee navigates the ocean, readers must navigate Cuffee in relation to themselves within the white supremacist world that *Freedom’s Journal* overtly shows its audience. In this manner, the newspaper facilitates the critical negotiation of its readers’ own subjectivity through an implicit curriculum underlying its contents.

“Travelling Scraps,” an original travelogue, maps these negotiations across the reach of the newspaper’s circulation. As with Mr. Observer and Philanthropos, “Travelling Scraps” similarly engages with authorial identity as performance. It involves weekly correspondence addressed to Mr. Observer from an anonymous African American traveler. The traveler’s narrative recounts an excursion from New York to his destination in Washington DC, through which he describes life, society, and institutions within the cities he visits. His descriptions

particularly attend to African Americans' situations of learning. "Travelling Scraps" links readers in communities across geographic distance, unifying them at the point where ideological struggle over black subjectivity meets everyday life. Beginning with his first installment, the traveler establishes these tensions with a description of an everyday situation in which he faces white reformers. As his journey progresses, his critique of white reform becomes increasingly overt. He notes initially that his steamboat to Philadelphia is filled with "indefatigable benefactors, of the Society of Friends" (27 June). Eventually he bitingly asserts the reformers' company is worse than exposure to "the inclemencies of the weather" (27 June). Finally, he cuts to the crux of the problem. Why is it," he asks, "that even in the estimation of men, who are really our friends, we are all classed and considered alike?" (27 June). He remarks with frustration that "prejudices at present are so great" that African Americans would be afforded more "convenience and comfort" during travel posing as a slave to the Governor of Georgia "than as a free man on your own private affairs" (27 June). The travelogue provides for such moments to enter the broader public conversation of black subjectivity. Reaching Philadelphia, for example, the traveler shifts his gaze from the everyday to a sweeping perspective of the city's landscape, which he explains represents the epitome of "good order and economy" (27 June). He uses this perspective, along with an approving tone, to survey the schools whites established for African Americans. "Besides the City Public Schools in Sixth street," observes the traveler, "there are no less than five others supported by Societies & individual charity: two in Willings Alley, Male and Female, containing each thirty-five scholars" (11 June). While this description seems to look with uncritical favor on white institutions' role in establishing an orderly and just society, the traveler's frustration with white reformers in his descriptions of everyday life tell a contradictory story. The travelogue reveals the juxtaposition between perspectives, implicitly

underscoring the difference between the theoretical benevolence of white educational reform and the more difficult reality of its practice. Rather than simple didacticism, “Travelling Scraps” demonstrates the *Journal’s* broader educational process of building African American community through fostering the shared practice of culturally-specific reading that critiques white supremacy. The newspaper, a collection of various published scraps, pieces together a fluctuating representation of the discursive tension from competing racializing ideologies and encourages its readers to participate in negotiating that tension within the sphere of everyday life.

African Americans evidently recognized the role of *Freedom’s Journal* in teaching readers to navigate the educational threshold. Despite David Walker’s overt critique of education, he acknowledges that periodicals edited by African Americans were central to promoting this education that confronted white ignorance within the language of everyday life. Though the *Appeal* appeared after *Freedom’s Journal* ceased publication, Walker advocated the “universal spread” of *The Rights of All*, its successor also edited by Samuel Cornish. “The utility of such a vehicle...cannot be estimated,” he stressed. “If we should let it go down,” he continued, “never let us undertake anything of the kind again, but give up at once and say that we are really so ignorant and wretched that we cannot do anything at all!!” (76). In short, Walker saw newspapers like *Freedom’s Journal* as essential features of the African American community as sources of education that countered the effects of white-led schooling by revealing its underpinning ideology. Moreover, other African American writers recognized that navigating the tensions of the threshold was integral to the newspaper’s legacy. A literary piece published in the *Anglo African Magazine* in 1859 entitled “The Last and the First Colored Editor,” captures this tension as the undercurrent running through subsequent efforts in African American periodicals. The tableau imagines the tension as performed through body of last colored editor.

It depicts him “in his chair editorial, with the first number of the *Freedom’s Journal*...held in one hand and outspread before him, while the other, as though expressive of his resolve, is firmly clenched.” To emphasize the legacy of this tension and the primacy of newspapers in navigating the struggle against white supremacy, the tableau situates this editor amid the artifacts of these everyday texts. “Surrounding him,” it continues, “are piles of all the journals edited by colored men from the commencement up till the present, among which the *Freedom’s Journal*, *Colored American*, *People’s Press*, *North Star*, and Frederick Douglass’s paper are the more prominent (Ethiop 53). In this way, the tableau considers the antebellum struggle for civil rights as the accumulation of individual newspaper issues, each of which signifying a communal attempt to help people across a circulation of readers better navigate their immediate daily worlds.

Engaged in the everyday struggle of asserting subjectivity and influence over racial production, African Americans situated on the threshold of white education turned to newspapers to circulate intricate literary performances like “Travelling Scraps” and nuanced characters such as Philanthropos and Mr. Observer that articulate ambivalence toward white educational discourse. These performances ultimately inform our understanding of race, American education, and African American literary history by emphasizing how black print culture contributed to the development of a black educational culture that challenged white schooling and its underlying ideology.

During the *Journal’s* run, however, whites viewed the newspaper differently. Whereas African Americans like David Walker and others recognized its challenge to white supremacy as it motivated the intentions of well-meaning whites, white-edited periodicals that discussed *Freedom’s Journal* favorably and reprinted its articles did not evince that they recognized the challenge that the newspaper posed to them. For example, several either reprinted excerpts from

the Cornish and Russwurm's prospectus or summarized it, usually focusing on the sections that explicitly discussed education in conventional language that reflected the aims of white-run institutions. *The Boston Recorder and Religious Telegraph* commented that *Freedom's Journal* "may have an important influence in elevating their [African American's] intellectual and moral character" ("Freedom's" 31). The *Christian Spectator*, in its assessment of the *Journal's* first two issues, makes sure to note that "the design of the editors appears to be, not to awaken feelings of resentment, or to breed discontent in the minds of the coloured people" ("Literary" 224). Indeed, the *Spectator* explains, Cornish and Russwurm's object was to challenge African Americans to assimilate to white, Christian values through education rather than upset the institutions that preserved white hegemony. The *Spectator* read the *Journal's* design for African Americans as "incit[ing] them to industry, sobriety, and self-improvement, and thus to teach them, by elevating themselves, to shame the prejudices of the whites" (224). When facing writing from the threshold, *The Christian Spectator* and the *Boston Recorder* both incline toward the *Journal's* replication of educational discourse, offering literal interpretations that seemingly affirm the primacy of white educational traditions, social values, and ideas about citizenship. They fail to notice the critique of those traditions, as it circulates among African American readers. These white readings of *Freedom's Journal* demonstrate the fragmentation that racial education promotes. The responses indicated that, while African Americans may have felt ambivalent about education, whites felt ambivalent about African Americans being educated. Dominant educational discourse that articulated Christian and republican values. Consequently, whether on the pages of *Freedom's Journal* or a common school journal, that discourse was comforting to whites. When experiencing ambivalence toward their own social privilege, whites gravitate toward the language of education that reaffirms the connection between whiteness and

nation while African Americans are pushed toward the threshold and are forced to reinvent that language. The object lesson the threshold, therefore, allows us to redefine racial progress.

While David Walker's *Appeal* could be seen as evidence of progress as it comes chronologically after *Freedom's Journal*. Walker's *Appeal* is an exceptional text that does not entirely represent the landscape of the threshold after *Freedom's Journal*. Moreover, whites responded to Walker's *Appeal* with resistance to African American educational agency. So instead of clear progress, there is more conflict that multiplies at educational sites through further recurrences of the threshold.

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Chapter Two: Transcendentalists on the Threshold

View of Mr. Alcott and the Children conversing.

Fig. 1. Sketch of the Temple School's Classroom (Conversations 1)

In 1834, Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody attempted to reform dominant educational practice, particularly its approach to discipline, by opening a school on the second floor of Boston's Masonic Temple. This chapter explores Alcott's Temple School as a case study that further illustrates the racial dynamics of the educational threshold. Both Peabody and Alcott were members of the Transcendental Club, a loosely formed group of Unitarian social reformers who were generally skeptical of traditional education (Gura 70-71). While African Americans who sought access to the common school classroom were pushed to the margins, white reformers like Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody elected to occupy the educational threshold. Alcott believed that true learning was universally available to anyone who knew how to witness the divine that existed in the world around them. He asserted that common school

discipline interfered with the transmission of this spirit. Alcott sought to reform educational discipline by reconfiguring educational space. Rather than silently sitting in rows, memorizing and reciting moral lessons, students at Alcott's Temple School sat in a circle and talked. A sketch of the school's classroom from Alcott's *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* exhibits Alcott's approach to organizing educational space (see Figure 1). Captioned, "View of Mr. Alcott and the Children conversing," the sketch shows students seated in chairs rather than desks, positioned in a semicircle with Alcott's table on one side of the room and his assistant's on the other (*Conversations I*). Whereas common school proponents advocated rigid discipline in the classroom, Alcott and Peabody's conversational methods appeared to be a fundamentally different, more flexible approach.

Common schools were an articulation of white, protestant ideology. Carl Kaestle labels them "the reform versions of this ideology," which, "called for state-regulated common schools to integrate and assimilate a diverse population into the nation's political, economic, and cultural institutions" (x). They were quasi-state run institutions, often supported and maintained primarily by community members at the local level. As the extensive exclusion of nonwhites from common schools evinces, they represented the paternalistic interests of whites to normalize their cultural hegemony through instilling manners and behavior in students that they associated with Christian values and national citizenship. Common school reformers envisioned schoolhouses as spaces for instilling these values through disciplinary measures reminiscent of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. The paternalistic language surrounding the common school, with its emphasis on discipline and moral values, acted as a veneer that obscured education's racist intent.

Despite Alcott's seemingly radical approach, the students' conversations illustrated that his goals were ultimately similar to those of common school advocates. The Temple School was a new delivery system for the same white paternalism. Alcott, as with common school reformers, sought to construct citizens by instilling good Christian values. Yet, like common school reformers, Alcott failed to interrogate education's function in formulating race. Therefore, this is not a story about a group of radical white reformers successfully effecting change against the racial status quo. Temple School shows The *Temple School* is a case study of well-intentioned reformers failing to do what *Freedom's Journal* and Walker's *Appeal* accomplish. Unlike the contributors to *Freedom's Journal*, who were forced to negotiate the existing white, paternalist educational discourse and repurposed it in a way that empowered them, Alcott's Temple School represents white reformers' inability to recognize education's racist underpinnings. The writings that emerge from the Temple School illustrate that the struggle they faced was with themselves and their own internalized ideas about race. To borrow an analogy from Shannon Sullivan, this chapter is about the process of whites struggling against the "bad habits" of their own whiteness. "In a world filled with white privilege," Sullivan observes, "habits that privilege whiteness will result, and these habits in turn will tend to reinforce the social, political, economic, and other privileges that white people have" (Sullivan 4). The "bad habits" of white privilege, she notes, "actively thwart the process of conscious reflection on them, which allows them to seem nonexistent even as they continue to function" (6). Alcott ignores his own racial privilege, as he makes superficial adjustments to educational space and to education's veneer of Christian language without overtly engaging with its underlying racial ideology. The Temple School ultimately reproduced educational contingencies that normalize white supremacist subjects. In this way, the Temple School demonstrates how social memory

compels performances as educational sites. While African Americans struggled for access to dominant educational practices but were pushed out, some whites elected to position themselves outside of those practices but were drawn back into them. Therefore, the Temple School depicts the process of racial fracturing as this divergent momentum—or gravitational pull—of the threshold that constructs difference according to the social performance of education.

Discipline in the Imagined Common School

Superficially, the paternalistic rhetoric surrounding nineteenth-century common schooling seemed to have nothing to do with race. It frequently asserts that widespread education in Christian values would establish a responsible national citizenry. One of the most well-known examples of this was an impassioned plea for common schooling written by Horace Mann and published in 1838 as the “Prospectus” for the first issue of the Massachusetts *Common School Journal*, which he edited. According to Mann, the national progress depended upon universal common schooling to fuel the advance of American society and its republican government. Without the present generation educating the next in line, he writes, “the [human] race must remain stationary, and the sublime law of human progression be defeated” (“Prospectus” 4). To Mann, human progression was part and parcel with American republicanism, and he painted a bleak picture of what the nation would look like without universal schooling. Without common education, a majority party in government would “know nothing of the principle and structure of government...of the functions of its officers, or the qualifications indispensable for discharging them” (6). More troubling to Mann than elected officials not knowing the functions of government, however, was the potential for citizens to descend into moral depravity. As the fear of moral depravity crept into common school language, it revealed its preoccupation with the haunting presence of the uneducated other. For example, Mann continues, arguing that without

common schooling, the citizens would be oppressed by rulers who “have labored to draw society backward towards barbarism; or even worse than barbarism, to prostitute civilized intelligence to gratify savage desires,” which would “ruin a nation as certainly as they will ruin a man” (6). The common school, in other words, was conceived not merely for promoting Christian values such as equality and justice but for formulating a dichotomy between citizens and noncitizen. This dichotomy, moreover, implied the stigma associated with beings that embodied the citizen’s antithesis.

The dichotomy of the citizen and noncitizen was ubiquitous in common school literature on instilling Christian discipline in the classroom. Thomas H. Palmer, in his influential *The Teacher’s Manual: Being an Exposition of an Efficient and Economical System of Education Suited to the Wants of a Free People* (1840), for example, articulates the primacy developing classroom citizens. “Discipline,” writes Palmer, “is a subject of the first importance in schools. Without subordination and good government, no school can make considerable progress” (29). This feature of common school discourse manifested in the architectural plans of its buildings and classrooms, representing them as spaces that subordinated noncitizens and reconstructed them. Throughout this period in which universal education was being promoted, school attendance was increasing dramatically, and new school buildings were in demand. A great deal of consideration went into how the classroom environment influenced learning and contributed to the goals of common schooling. Educational books and periodicals published architectural plans for idealized schoolrooms, detailing every aspect and implement of the room, from its dimensions, down to the proper way to make crayons. White reformers idealized the entire school building and everything in it as apparatus comprised of various parts that worked together to construct moral citizens. As Thomas H. Palmer observes “nothing...should ever be

considered a trifle which can, in any measure, exert an influence on the moral character of youth” (72). The efficacy of education in this regard was not merely a result of how well the teacher administered curriculum. Common school reformers agreed that controlling the learning environment was central to controlling behavior within that space. They believed that classroom space could be organized to promote white protestant moral values through discipline rather than resorting to punishment. Common school reformers held that every aspect of the classroom should be directed toward instilling values that would form children into moral citizens of the republic.

These designs demonstrate the inheritance of Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon; or, The Inspection House* (1791) in which he describes an architectural plan for a building in which all occupants would feel perpetually under the watch of the building’s authority and would, consequently, internalize its discipline. Bentham notes many circumstances in which this design would be useful, including “prisons or confinement before trial, or penitentiary houses, or houses of correction, or work-houses, or manufactories, or mad-houses, or hospitals, or schools” (3). “Ideal perfection,” he writes, “...would require that each person should actually be in that predicament [surveilled] during every instant of time.” That being impossible, Bentham explains that the next best thing is to make the subjugated “believe as much, and not being able to satisfy himself to the contrary, he should conceive himself to be so” (3). Bentham’s panopticon, in other words, was space engineered to invoke social performance, valuing certain performances while devaluing others.

The design involves circular building lined with cells each of which functions like a stage, but there is no curtain to draw. Instead each cell has a window facing toward the center of the building, and each holds one occupant who cannot interact with the occupants of other cells.

A circular structure, often rendered as a guard tower that Bentham calls “The Inspector’s Lodge,” occupies the center of the building. From behind a one-way screen in the lodge, the Inspector can surveil the occupants of each cell and, Bentham notes, can even hear the occupant’s speech by way of small, tin tube that would carry even “the slightest whisper” back to the inspector (8). Because of the screen on the Inspector’s Lodge, cell occupants never can tell if they are being inspected, so they must constantly assume that they are. Consequently, like actors on a stage, the opponents in the cells must constantly perform the behavior that they presume their Inspector—their audience—wants to see. As Michel Foucault explains in his analysis of Bentham’s *Panopticon*, the building induces “subjection...born mechanically from a fictitious relation” (202). The cells’ occupants perform their roles regardless of whether there is anyone in the Inspector’s Lodge or not. The occupant, explains Foucault, “inscribes in himself the power relation” and “simultaneously plays both roles” so that “he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202-3).

The architectural designs for common school replicated aspects of Bentham’s panopticon and articulated paternalism as the fictional relationship between the student and nation, and Christian manner as the performance of the student’s subjection. These discussions about the arrangement of the room carried over to the construction of the desks, which were considered important disciplinary tools. Desks, more than any other pedagogical device, were represented by school reformers as symbols of authority over students. They literally held students’ bodies. Desks served more than a practical purpose of providing students with a place to work. They isolated students, separating, confining, and regulating their movements. Consequently, they were a symbol of the common school’s purpose of combatting the ever-present conception of the

noncitizen. Horace Mann, contributing to the *Common School Journal*, illustrates by describing the desk's influence both physically and racially. He writes:

Children sometimes go to school at an age when many of their bones are almost as limber as green withe, when almost any one of the numerous joints in the body may be loosen or distorted. They go almost as early, as when the Chinese turn their children's feet into the shape of horses' hooves; or when some tribes of Indians make their children's head as square as a joiner's box. [...] The question is, whether the seats shall be conformed to the children...or the children deformed to the seats" (282).

The desk, in other words, functions as a civilizing agent and must be perfectly calibrated the mark the distinction between white, American values and those of a racialized other. We see this, for instance, in the writings of Bronson Alcott's cousin, William Alcott, who was also an educator and a recognized expert on common school educational space. He published a prize-winning essay in 1832 for the American Institute for Instruction entitled "On the Construction of School-Houses." William Alcott's essay discusses desks at length. The chief difference between Alcott's design and others was that his touted a flat, rather than slanted, writing surface. This might seem like a small detail. However, he imagines the effect of this difference in terms of its pronounced physical and moral impact on students. Traditional slanted desks, he explained, were "extremely unfavorable to the healthful actions of the lungs, stomach, liver, &c., as well as liable to produce distortion of the spine, and consequent disease" (10). The angle of the common school desk, envisioned William, significantly influenced students' ability to perform their roles. William Alcott and Mann situated desks within a normalizing process that separated bodies that perform the values associated with white, protestant ideology, from the bodies stigmatized as

abnormal, whose actions do not appear to conform to those values. Thus, an aspect as seemingly inconsequential as the angle of a school desk was imagined as rendering students' bodies abnormal. They demonstrates how schoolhouse architecture likewise amplified a normalizing discourse. Students whose performances do not conform, to borrow from Foucault, carry the stigma of "a villain, a monster, am madman, perhaps a sick and, before long, 'abnormal' individual" (101). Common school classroom design plans consequently reflect this underlying motivation. They are portrayed in common school literature as environments wherein the cultural forces bearing down upon individuals demand and reward the performance of the values that represent the white hegemony. Having, for the most part, excluded nonwhites from participation in common schooling, reformers envisioned classrooms as spaces in which whites inherited the practices of their whiteness, the habitual behavior associated with the privilege of national citizenship.

While essays devoted to classroom design like William Alcott's were a response to practical issues that communities faced as they undertook the funding and constructing of school buildings for their residents, their plans characterized the common school house as the panopticon of American discipline. Overtly, reformers like William Alcott were concerned over the cleanliness of the learning environment, as well as the health of the students that resulted from communities erecting schools cheaply and maintaining them poorly. However, reformers even imagined the buildings themselves as noncitizens embodying the stigma of a racialized other. William Alcott, for instance, describes poorly constructed schoolhouses as "dark, crowded, ill-looking, and *sometimes* disorderly and filthy huts...mis-called school-houses," noting that such buildings often "seem to have been provided as a kind of necessary evil" (W. Alcott 5). In this way, he envisions a scene of savagery and primitivism when describing school

buildings constructed in a manner that fail to promote moral discipline. They exhibit the abnormal body of the noncitizen while schoolhouses that promote normalizing discipline are, in his words, “places of voluntary and cheerful resort” (5).

Though common school reformers did quibble somewhat over their schoolhouse designs, their widespread similarity is emblematic in their intent to normalize subjects. They varied in the inches between the rows of desks, the number of windows and placement of the windows, and whether or not the floor should slant toward the teacher’s area at the head of the room. They did not reject panopticism as a premise for rendering the schoolhouse a theatre for the performance and normalizing of white hegemony. Consequently, the performative roles of teacher and student were simply architectural aspects of their designs. William Alcott, for example, describes the space at the front the class as a “stage for speaking and reading” (41). Because its central visibility afforded heightened surveillance, it was also a space to situate any students cast in the role of abnormal, somewhere “to place an idler at, to study” (41, see Figure 2). A school, reformers believed, should be organized so that the teacher could continually perform the role of inspector, observing students who should not easily converse or otherwise engage with one another. William Alcott characterizes the teacher like an unfeeling guard tower, an almost inhuman feature of the classroom that represents an impersonal but ever-present authority. “I would place the teacher,” he writes, “on an elevated platform, eighteen or twenty-four inches above the horizontal floor of the house, from which his eye can easiest view every part” (41). Like the Bentham’s “Inspector’s Lodge,” the teacher functioned as the all-seeing eye of the white hegemony’s moral values that common schooling sought to internalize in its subjects. Like Bentham’s cells, common school reformers described the classroom, laid out with desks in rows, with a precision down to the inch. William Alcott’s prize essay even includes a diagram

that illustrates his proposed layout, which varies only marginally from the plans advocated by other reformers. A report by Horace Mann published in the *Massachusetts Common School Journal* illustrates this: “The seats with desks should be arranged in parallel lines, lengthwise of the room, with aisles between, each seat to accommodate one scholar only. [...] Eighteen inches is, perhaps, a suitable width for the aisles. Each desk should be two feet long, and not less than one foot and six inches wide. A width of one foot and nine inches would be better” (281). Reformers’ design provided highly detailed plans for how classroom space should be arranged to maximize the teacher’s gaze and the visibility of the students. “How much better is it,” writes William Alcott “to prevent evil, by such an arrangement that a vigilant instructor can see the whole school at a single view, and...keep pupils in the way of duty, than to expose them to unnecessary temptation, and then punish them for offending” (20).

Fig. 2. William Alcott's Classroom Diagram (W. Alcott 22)

To this end, reformers believed that the classroom environment should contain objects that persistently reminded students that they are subjects of the teacher’s gaze so that they would

internalize common school discipline. William Alcott notes that “every object” and all of the “inanimate things” surrounding students in a classroom “have a very considerable influence in forming [students’] dispositions, and giving a determination to their future character” (5).

Envisioning the Educational Threshold

While common school reformers envisioned the classroom as a panoptic space that enforced white protestant values by instilling national discipline, other social reformers imagined different educational spaces. Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody would have been particularly aware of how common school space. Not only was Bronson’s cousin a recognized expert on common school design but also Peabody and Alcott were experienced educators by the time they undertook the Temple School (Mattingly 18). Alcott undertook many projects throughout his life that illustrate a sustained interest in experimenting with pedagogy and curricula for both children and adults. The Temple School represented one in a series of schools, educational experiments, and teaching work (Matteson 50, 51, 53). This included such ventures such as cofounding the Utopian community Fruitlands to serving as the superintendent of the public schools in Concord (Francis 8, Matteson 249). Elizabeth Peabody, before working as Alcott’s assistant at the Temple School, served as assistant for the pedagogical periodical *American Journal of Education* and used her contacts among Boston’s elite white families to help attract students to Alcott’s school (Gura 88). Moreover, Alcott and Peabody were members of the Transcendental Club, a loosely organized group of white social reformers in Boston who shared a Unitarian philosophy (Gura 69). Among the club’s members were Unitarian leaders and writers such as Frederick Henry Hedge, George Ripley, and William Ellery, as well as writers, philosophers, and reformers connected to Unitarianism like Margaret Fuller and Ralph

Waldo Emerson (Gura 70-71). Similar to Bronson Alcott's conversations with students in the Temple School classroom, the club's meetings consisted of discussions on philosophical, religious, and social topics. Its only rule was, according to Emerson, "that no man should be admitted whose presence excluded any one topic" (qtd. in Gura 70). Educational reform was a pressing issue for many clubs' members. As Bronson Alcott was teaching at the Temple School, Ralph Waldo published his essay *Nature* and delivered his oration *The American Scholar*, both of which included a spatial imagining of education well outside the classroom context. In the *American Scholar*, for example, Emerson envisions "the school-boy under the bending dome of day" studying the universal spirit that connects him to the natural world, "that he and it proceed from one root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein" ("The American Scholar" 151). He criticizes an education that consists solely of book-learning in school, describing it too in spatial terms as confining. The schoolroom, he implies, was part of "every thing that tends to insulate the individual, — to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state" (160). Dominant education contributed to a culture in which people are contained by accepted behavior of prescribed social roles so that "Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing [...] The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship" (152). Traditional education, Emerson suggested, interred with ones' understanding of the interconnectedness of the universal spirit lead to social fragmentation rather than unification.

In 1840, members of the Transcendental Club established the literary journal, *The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion* that articulated the space of the white, educational threshold (Belasco 377). Edited by Fuller and Emerson, the *Dial* published writing

by members of the Transcendental Club on wide range of topics in various literary genres (376). Education, however, signified one of the magazine's core themes. The editors announced in their prospectus that the magazine's purpose was to unsettle the dominant culture's social contract. According to the editor, it published writing that would "reprobate that rigor of our conventions of religion and education which is turning us to stone, which renounces hope, which looks only backward, which only asks such a future as the past, which suspects improvement, and holds nothing so much in horror as new views and dreams of youth" ("The Editors" 2). In this vein, the *Dial's* editors suggested that its content represented the discourse that circulated through the imagined educational community comprised of its readers and contributors. Moreover, the prospectus shows how the editors envisioned this educational community in spatial terms. Instead of likening the magazine to "the dead face of a clock, hardly even such as the Gnomon in a garden," as the magazine's title suggests, they assert that the magazine itself was analogous to spatial origin of Christianity, Eden. The magazine represents "the Garden itself, in whose leaves and flowers and fruits the suddenly awakened sleeper is instantly apprised...what state of life and growth is now arrived and arriving" (4). In this way, the editors suggest that the *Dial* engaged its contributors and readers in a separate space that articulated the universal spirit and opposed the learning of the dominant culture.

The *Dial's* articles depict learning in spaces beyond the classroom, contrasting those spaces with images of restriction and confinement. Characteristic of this, the meditation "Musings of a Recluse" envisions a solitary individual who observes that Christianity is like a "imprisoned bird" (188). "The teachers of Humanity have been, and always are gilding and adorning its cage...and calling us around it to gaze and see how beautiful the captive is" (188). "Musings" extends this analogy to the traditional practices of discipline, noting that as culture

imprisons Christian values it employs them to exact social control. These teachers, inviting us to observe the caged bird, are “admonishing us to plume our wings just so; not for flight, but that they may look decorous” (188). The recluse contrasts the bird’s cage with the unstructured educational space of the white threshold. As the recluse demands a “higher teaching,” he realizes that unlike the caged bird his separation is only a matter of perception. Through his meditation, he understands that he is not really alone, because he is a manifestation of “the spirit of the universe” that connects him with all other manifestations, “trees and brooks and flowers” and speaks “in the hum of insect and the song of bird” (191). Rather than a classroom, the Recluse achieves “higher teaching,” observing the clouds floating lazily through space, dark, heavy, and dull together; when parted they became bright glorified bodies” (188). “What a moral,” he states, “might be drawn from them” (188). The freedom associated with the Dial’s educational space contrasts entirely with the disciplinary structure of the common school classroom. Rather than the rigid desks that inhibit movement and to which students must conform, the recluse envision clouds devoid of structure that “lingered in the heavens all day, rolling here and there...or floating lazily through space” (188).

Putting Theory into Practice

The Temple School was an attempt to give physical dimensions to an educational space that, as Transcendental Club members described, transmitted the “universal spirit.” Alcott’s arrangement of classroom space and his educational methods similarly contrasted with the common school. Rather than compelling memorization and recitation, Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody emphasized the performance of conversation among the pupils and their teachers. They underscored this difference by reconfiguring the classroom in a manner that

encouraged these conversations, with students in a semi-circle rather than grid of desks. Unlike the recluse learning moral lessons from clouds, the Temple School was demanding for Alcott, Peabody, and its students. By putting theory into practice, Alcott and Peabody revealed the struggle that whites faced as they attempted to overcome their own white privilege.

Whereas the African American educational threshold was a necessary means of combatting social disempowerment, the Temple School and white threshold was an expression of racial privilege. We see this privilege in the conflicted investments of those who funded the Temple School and sent their children there. They were, almost exclusively, empowered white intellectuals and philanthropists with broad interests about reforming society but also personal concerns about their children's lives within it. Only Boston's white intellectual class could afford to pay the exorbitant tuition, quadruple the rate of the city-run schools (Nehring 110). Among the members of Boston's white elite who funded and sent their children to the Temple School were included the prominent Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing, Massachusetts Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw, and the city's mayor, Josiah Quincy (Matteson 53). Along with the financial backing that allowed Alcott to rent rooms in the Boston's Masonic Temple building and procure supplies, the Temple School also initially had popular support with white intellectuals. The Temple School attracted intellectuals who were intrigued by Alcott's practices such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and the British writer Harriet Martineau (59).

The popularity of Peabody's *Record of a School* brought publicity and some praise to the school's educational methods, as well as for Alcott himself. *The Portland Magazine's* review described Peabody's book as "one of the most interesting that we have ever read" and Alcott as "one of the best men that ever drew the breath of life" (373 - 374). Expressing favor for Alcott and Peabody's practices, the *Portland Magazine's* review regarded the Temple School as

offering a compelling alternative to the space of common school classroom. It expresses this, though, with images that demonstrate the ambivalence between Christian values and white privilege. Employing descriptions of confinement and otherness, the review envisions that common school practice was to “box [children] up for six hours a day in a dirty Calcutta *black hole* to become expert in *singeries* and *parrotry*, instead of leaving it to the unfettered aid of heaven to enjoy the unrestrained amusements to which the good God of nature has adapted them” (373 italics original). By juxtaposing the imagining of these two educational spaces, the review demonstrates how the struggle of educational threshold manifested for whites. Those who supported the threshold did so out of choice not dire necessity. They were struggling with themselves and their noble intentions against their own bad habits of whiteness.

Rather than floating unfettered through clouds, Peabody and Alcott represented the process of education as a struggle against internalized white privilege. One way that *Record* and *Conversations* demonstrate this is through the school’s spatial opposition to the common school’s panoptic discipline. In print, the Temple School’s actual classroom functions as figurative educational space in which Alcott, the students, and Peabody perform as characters engaged with the reproduction of identity through spatial learning. They represent this struggle against the racist discipline of the common school by redefining performative roles within the Temple School’s educational space. Peabody’s description of the classroom at Temple School suggests that Alcott organized educational space to emphasize students’ roles as witnesses to the universal spirit. The classroom, she notes, was filled with objects for the students’ gaze. It was decorated, she explains, “with such forms as would address and cultivate the imagination and heart” (Peabody 1). In each corner of the classroom, for example, Alcott placed marble busts on pedestals of Socrates, Shakespeare, Milton, and Sir Walter Scott. Maps, pictures, and portraits

were hung on the walls. Peabody notes that on Alcott's table was a "small figure of a child aspiring," behind which was a large bookcase with "a fine cast of Christ, in basso-relievo" affixed to it (1). Peabody, again privileging the visual perception of students, describes this cast as "made to appear to scholars just over the teachers' head," while "the bookcase itself, is surmounted with a bust of Plato" (1). There were small figures of children reading and drawing elsewhere in the room. On her assistant's desk, she says, sat "a small figure of Atlas, bending under the weight of the world" (1). Students worked within a space constructed to emphasize the performance of their gaze. Alcott would initiate conversations with students on various topics so that students could practice what Peabody describes as "the art of learning to see" (4). Practicing this art would require students to perform the witnessing of "spiritual nature," the universal consciousness that, according to Peabody, "precedes the development of the understanding" and would emerge from the conversations (iv). Practicing the "art of seeing" functioned as the primary metaphor for how they understood their social roles in relation to one another in the classroom. Peabody demonstrates students struggling with the practice of seeing through conversation. The first day of Temple School's opening, she explains, began with "Mr. Alcott behind his table, and the children...place in chairs, in a large arc around him" (2). She notes that he initiated a conversation, asking each student separately "what idea she or he had of the object of coming to school" (2). Rather than providing students with an answer, Alcott encourages students to work through it. Through a long series of questions and responses between Alcott and the students, the conversation finally arrives at what Alcott and Peabody believe is the correct answer. She explains, "at last some one said 'to behave well,' and in pursuing this expression into its meanings, they at last decided that they came to learn to feel rightly, to think rightly, and to act rightly" (2). By questioning why students were there, Alcott and Peabody

sought to challenge the meaning of thinking, feeling, and acting rightly within an educational context. Rather than obeying a set of rules that determined good character, Alcott encouraged students to question the premise of these rules and to struggle to redefine the performance of good character.

Alcott devised The Temple School's reconstructed classroom to counter the role of the teacher. Alcott, in his *Conversations*, describes himself not as a teacher but as a "Conductor," asking questions that provoke students to converse and thereby practice the "art of seeing" universal nature (xiv). While common school reformers such as Alcott's brother William posed the teacher as the panoptic Inspector of white hegemonic values, the Conductor's "main purpose" is to "tempt forth, by appropriate questions, the cherished sentiments of the children on the subjects presented to their consideration" (xiv). It was, "no part of his [the Conductor's] intention to bring forward, except by necessary implication, his own favorite opinions by means of biassing [sic], in the smallest degree, the judgements and decisions of the children" (xiv). In direct contrast to the disciplinary practices of common school, the conductor "wished to inculcate only what was the universal product of our common nature" (xiv). Alcott's role of the Conductor, rather than a teacher, was an important distinction in his articulation of the educational threshold. He believed that children, more so than adults, possessed "a character so much in conformity with their own, as that of Jesus of Nazareth" (xii). With someone to conduct the children in discussion by asking the right questions, children could become attuned to the universal spiritual, witness it, and articulate moral lessons direct from the divine source. Adults, he even felt, could potentially learn moral character from children who practiced the "art of seeing." According to his *Conversations*, Alcott "hoped that, through their simple consciousness, the Divine Idea of Man, as Imaged in Jesus, yet almost lost to the World, might

be revived in the mind of adults, who might this be recalled to the spiritual kingdom” (xii).

Thus, Alcott thought that society could acquire a greater moral character through schools that practiced his method and used texts like *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*.

Alcott viewed this struggle in racial terms, articulated in the differences between his methods and those proposed by common school reformers. He represented the Temple School as grappling against dominant, white ways of learning. Whereas Alcott viewed common school moral instruction as filtered through the prejudice of human beings, students in the Temple School learned from the universal spirit, a force that preceded language and was therefore not corrupted by bigotry. In 1835, while the Temple School was at its zenith, he wrote about the “universal spirit” in his journal in a manner implying its connection to his thinking about race. The “universal Spirit” that was revealed through students’ conversation, he wrote, “floweth through every form of humanity, never losing its own essential life, yet assuming, to the external sense, every variety of manifestation without marring or fracturing the divine unity” (*The Journals* 77). Whereas the universal spirit manifests in various forms to produce “our peculiar individuality,” it also underlies all life connecting everything into a “family...united by one common tie of flesh—like the leaves and blossoms, the buds and flowers that shoot forth from the same stem” (77). In this sense, Alcott’s students struggled against dominant conceptions of race—to see it not in terms of difference, categories, social hierarchy, or through prejudiced discourse, but rather common humanity. In *Record of a School*, witnessing the universal spirit occurs through practicing the art of seeing a person’s “inward world of thought and feeling” (Peabody 38). Peabody describes one instance in which Alcott draws explicit connection among students witnessing the universal spirit, educational conversations, and race. She explains that several students rose when he asked the class, “Who would not play with colored boys, if they

were even so good well instructed?” (174). These students, he suggested, were “truly blind” because they represent people “who cannot see inward things” such as “thoughts ; feelings ; [and] a good conscience” (174).

Despite the room’s design as space for conversation, Alcott and the students struggled with the traditional discipline of schooling. Peabody notes that the room itself influences its inhabitants’ behavior by compelling discipline and order. Along with the “Great advantages” ... [that] arise from this room,” she adds that “it is a silent reproach upon rudeness” (2). Within this pace, Alcott would encourage students to discuss how discipline should be administered. Conversations such as this run through Peabody’s and Alcott’s descriptions of the Temple School, starting with broad open-ended questions that eventually unfold into moral lessons, and then into discussions about discipline and punishment. Moreover, Peabody and Alcott frequently demonstrate how these conversations resulted in codifying behavior and firming classroom roles in a manner reminiscent of common school practice. On the first day, writes Peabody, “School discipline was very carefully considered; Mr. Alcott’s duty, and the children’s individual duties, and the various means of producing attention, self-control, perseverance, faithfulness” (2). Mr. Alcott’s duty would often find him assuming the disciplinary role of a common school teacher rather than a Conductor of discourse. Peabody explains that students “all very cheerfully agreed” that Alcott should punish them when failed to perform their roles correctly (3). “Various punishments were mentioned,” notes Peabody, “and hurting the body was decided upon as necessary” (3).

Struggle in the Temple classroom, however, often meant leaving answers unresolved. Even the moment in which Alcott provides pointed lesson about inward sight to the students who refuse to “play with colored boys” dissipates into ambivalence. Alcott follows up his lesson with

some wordplay. “I am afraid your minds are colored with prejudices,” Peabody quotes him as responding, “and that you would darken their minds with your faults” (qtd. in Peabody 174). This evidently eased some tension as “the rest [of the students] laughed...and said that would play with black boys” (174). In the manner, Peabody describes the classroom space as opening conversations about white supremacy only to have performances fall back into comfortable racial roles.

Regularly, Alcott reveals the struggle over white privilege as irresolvable. Alcott’s wide-ranging *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* depicts one such moment in which students wrestle with their internalized white values. In one conversation, for instance, Alcott prompts an inspection of childhood itself. To encourage this conversation, Alcott tells the children a narrative from the Book of Luke in which Jesus, at twelve years old, lingers in a Temple in Jerusalem conversing with doctors rather than travelling home with his parents. After three days, his parents realize Jesus is missing and return to find the doctors amazed by Jesus’ knowledge. The narrative places Alcott’s students in the difficult predicament of feeling that Jesus was wrong to run away from his parents. They respond:

Welles. When you were reading, I thought, that Jesus knew his father and mother had gone, but still that he thought he would stay and teach the doctors a little while. [...]

George B. I think of him asking questions to teach the doctors.

Lemuel. I understand the answer he gave to Mary. It was God’s business.

Mr. Alcott. What is God’s business?

Lemuel. Being good, and talking and teaching about good things.

Alexander. ...I really think it was wrong for him to stay there without telling his parents.

Mr. Alcott. You mean that you do see how it was right?

Alexander. No; it seems wrong to me.

Mr. Alcott. Are any more perplexed with this thought?

(Several raised their hands) (qtd in. *Conversations* 113)

In the above performances, we see Alcott present children with a scenario that parallels their own situation as students engaged in his pedagogy. Jesus, as a child, questions authority through conversations with adults. By examining Jesus's conflicting duties and the potential of disobeying rules to advocate a higher justice, the scenario engages the students in a dilemma over their own identities as children. Except to rephrase the children's question of Jesus's being wrong to their not understanding how Jesus was right, Alcott refrains from instructing his students with simple answers. At times, *Conversations* shows students voicing frustration at Alcott's unwillingness to offer a simple resolution to his questions. This prompted one student to respond, "I cannot tell what you think; you sometimes talk on one side, and sometimes on the other. What do you think?" (*Conversations* 185). Alcott, however, refuses to say. "I prefer not to reply to such questions," he says, "because I do not wish to influence your opinions" (*Conversations* 185). In this way Alcott depicted the classroom space as compelling children to engage in the self-reflexive process of reinterpreting the social world around them.

This struggle of whites against their own whiteness manifests as ambivalence in Alcott's and Peabody's writing. In this way, they reveal that they too struggle against it. Discussing the Temple School's space, performances, and role provides them with a language for interrogating their own whiteness. In his *Conversations*, Alcott addresses how this ambivalence manifests in

his role as Conductor. Though Alcott idealized the Conductor as merely facilitating students' practicing the art of seeing spiritual natures, he concedes "it was next to impossible" (*Conversations* xv). He recognizes that he could not help guiding the conversation's direction or influencing the students' responses. He explains that he can "scare hope" that he "withheld his own sentiments from the children in all instances" (xv). He continues, noting that he "has doubtless led them, in some instances, by the tenor of his questions, and his manner of disposing replies, to the adoption or rejection of sentiments, foreign to their nature" (xv). Alcott acknowledges that the conversation's reliance on the "uncertain organ" of language corrupts the meaning of the universal spirit through its translation (xvi). Moreover, recognizing that children are easily influenced, he admits that "much of what a child utters has been received from others" (xvi). In short, Alcott uses his Preface to express these misgivings that would undermine what fundamentally sets his method apart from the "parrottry" demanded by common school discipline. Despite attempts to ease these reservations, by citing his experience as a Conductor, Alcott nevertheless exhibits ambivalence toward the threshold as central to the Temple School's makeup.

These reservations over language extend to their textual representation in *Conversations* and *Record*, both of which rely upon language to characterize the performances within the classroom space. This manifests as the ambivalence that runs through Peabody's and Alcott's representations, emerging as the lingering presence of common school panoptic discipline. The textual reconstruction in *Conversations* and *Record* of the Temple School's performances required Peabody's persistent observation. *Conversations* describes Peabody's role as the "Recorder" and devotes a preface to discuss her role. This preface, moreover, articulates the ambivalence over the influence that Peabody has both in the physical space of the classroom and

its representation in *Record* and *Conversations*. On one hand, the “editor’s preface describes Peabody as “a passive instrument” that merely recorded the conversation verbatim. It notes that she would even refuse to take an active role in the conversations when “she felt she differed from Mr. Alcott,” acting only “occasionally [as] an interlocutor” (iv). On the other hand, it indicates that Peabody heavily influences the representation of the Temple School in *Record* and *Conversations*. *Conversations*’ “Recorder’s Preface,” for example, notes that she purposefully omits many of Alcott’s “statements, illustrations, and personal application of principles”; whereas, in her writing of *Record* “every thing else was sacrificed in order to dwell on the details of the discipline, and to show how such a school could be conducted” (vi). Thus, the Preface recognizes that as Peabody makes decisions about how to represent the school accurately through imperfect language, she must navigate her own socially influenced viewpoints. Her act of describing the school’s space functions is an interrogation of her own identity. Consequently, her descriptions of the inside of Temple’s classroom reproduce an internal struggle over her own reluctance to recognize education’s racist motivation and the underlying of its paternalistic discourse.

Despite Alcott’s superficial restructuring of classroom space, his ignorance toward education’s racist motivations manifests in his replication the common school’s method of discipline. Conversations about behavior and manners about discipline frequently resulted in Alcott’s stressing the importance of students’ internalizing obedience. Peabody relates a conversation in which a student asks Alcott if corporeal punishment were necessary to compel good behavior. Alcott uses this an opportunity to stress on the importance of developing a strong conscience to self-monitor behavior. “Can you do wrong,” Alcott concludes, “and escape punishment in your mind? No never” (133). He illustrates this by gesturing toward a student that

Peabody labels “one of the worst boys in school” while asking the class, “What sort of boy should be you be at last?” (133). While making this point, Alcott further reproduces the fracturing resulting from common school discipline’s inscribing of the dichotomy between the normal and abnormal—the citizen and noncitizen. He, and later Peabody’s representation of the event, emphasize this dichotomy by suggesting that certain students who do not mechanically perform the school’s discipline appropriately embody and even epitomize abnormality.

Though Alcott’s methods appear more democratic, this process of social fracturing was a fundamental aspect of Temple School’s discipline. For instance, Peabody describes Alcott encouraging the students themselves to formulate the fracturing between normality and abnormality. At one point, notes Peabody, Alcott asks the “youngest boy in the class” to touch the heads of his classmates who “would do right” if there were no punishments and human-made laws. The boy proceeds to establish a hierarchy in the class according to his classmates’ abilities to perform normality, touching “the best heads” followed by “the next best” (159). Poorly behaving students serve as the physical representation of the ever-present shadow of the classroom noncitizen. In this regard, Peabody relates a story that Alcott told the assembled class about the many students who had been removed from school for bad behavior (79). He explains, though this recounting, that one of the former student’s punishments was “to kneel to his companions, and acknowledge a fault” (79). Once he concluded the story, he discussed the student’s punishment with the class, and they articulated approval. “All agreed immediately,” recounts Peabody, “that the kneeling punishment was the only dignity in such a case” (79). In this manner, Peabody describes Alcott drawing from education’s paternalistic language to make the embodied representation of abnormality felt within the classroom. Alcott distinguishes normal bodies from abnormal—the classroom citizen from the noncitizen—through the students’

presence in the Temple School's conversation circle. Instead of an example of educational reform, the instance shows Alcott's reconstructed classroom space as a tool that restores common school discipline and its process of normalizing dominant culture ideology.

Taken together, *Freedom's Journal* and the *Temple School* demonstrate the dynamics of the educational threshold. African Americans sought to assert agency over education by identifying its underlying racialism and repurposing its language. Whites, struggling to identify race underneath education's paternalistic veneer, failed to devise a more democratic educational practice. Despite their attempts at reconceptualization of the educational space, Alcott and Peabody in their writings show how the Temple School reproduced the common school's discipline and normalized subjects. The Temple School shows the role that white privilege plays in the reproduction of educational contingencies that normalize white supremacy. While Alcott's social status provided him with the means of reforming the trappings of education, it failed to provide him with the language to interrogate the educational mechanics that produced his privilege. The Temple School illustrates how education empowers a dominant group of citizens by constructing them as white and providing them with the social privilege to go outside of traditional practice. Yet, it also shows how they can then reform education in a manner that further empowers them. Rather than promoting democratic progress, normative whiteness has the potential to self-replicate through educational reform, recurring across educational sites.

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Chapter Three

The Agents of Standardization: Textbooks and the Common School Myth

On the night of October 16, 1859, the militant abolitionist John Brown and a small militia carried out a raid on the United States armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia (Beck 11). Their intent was to take supplies of weapons from the armory that they would use to wage an insurgency against the federal government over its support of slavery. However, this was also a recruiting mission for the cause. According to Brown's plan, militia members would liberate enslaved people who lived in nearby farms, arm them, and encourage them to become soldiers in his effort (Reynolds 130). Brown had hoped to secure the arms and retreat to a one room mountain schoolhouse in Maryland, directly across the Potomac River from Harpers' Ferry. Consequently, Brown sent several militia members along with the men they had freed to the schoolhouse to commandeer it as makeshift fort (Horowitz 145).

The raid and recruitment did not go as planned. After a long standoff with armed townspeople and the United States military that trapped Brown and his men in an engine house on the armory grounds, Brown surrendered. The trials and executions of him and his remaining militia were widely covered by the country's press. Among the copious newspaper and magazine coverage emerging in the months after the raid, the illustrated periodical *Harper's Weekly* published a sketch of, the caption noted, "the school-house in the mountains, used by Brown as an arsenal (729). *Harper's Weekly* illustrator David Hunter Strother, under the pen name Porte Crayon, establishes a picturesque setting for the rustic one-room log building. He situates the domestic, sturdy, and modest school in a well-lit clearing before a dark forested background. Figuratively, the schoolhouse appears as an idealized civilizing agent in the face of a primitive and vaguely dangerous wilderness. In the accompanying full-page article entitled

“The Trial of the Conspirators,” Strother names that danger to civilization: John Brown’s “grand scheme to overthrow the Government of the United States and the Anglo Saxon Race” (729). In Strother’s view, Brown parallels the wild, uncultivated space, encroaching upon the tended clearing occupied by the school. Strother asserts this comparison more forcefully in his descriptions of Brown. He depicts him in terms that denote savagery: a person who “walks like a man accustomed to the woods,” possessing “unflinching resolution, evil passions and narrow mind” (729).

The schoolhouse, however, appears triumphant, serving as an image of the nation prevailing over an invading ideology seeking to undermine a hegemonic ideology of white supremacy. It remains one of the only things left intact within Strother’s article filled with broken people, objects, and aspirations associated with Brown’s raid. Directly above the schoolhouse, Strother presents a rifle and broken pike, presumably examples of the weaponry found at the school after Brown’s capture. He describes the militia men in jail, focusing on their impaired bodies. He depicts Brown and militia member Aaron Stevens as “the wounded men,” noting that Stevens’ injuries were so severe that he “in all probability...will not survive the trial” (729). When Strother arrives at John Copeland, who he labels “technically a mullato,” he describes him as broken educationally. Copeland, he asserts, has only the “rudiments of education” and would instead “make a very genteel dining room servant” (729). Consequently, he describes the aspirations of the African American militiamen like Copeland as an uneducated fantasy. “What story of the Arabian Nights,” he ridicules, “can equal the golden dreams that haunted their wooly noddles [sic]” (729). As he belittles Copeland, however, Strothers reproduces a fantasy himself: the myth of the common school. Strother’s schoolhouse, standing

against the wilderness and amid the remnants of conquered invaders, imagines the common school the triumphant emblem of the nation's now-restored racial order.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a fantasy had developed around common schooling as white northerners more greatly accepted schooling fundamental to their sense of American democracy and national identity. As Horace Mann articulated this myth, common schooling was “the great equalizer of the conditions of men,--the wheel balance of the social machinery” (669). This vision of the common school was not, however, grounded in reality. While school attendance had increased across the country over the first half the nineteenth-century, common schooling was far from reaching every white school-aged children living in the United States, and even more distant a possibility for nonwhites. Still, however, the popular discourse surrounding education throughout white print culture increasingly solidified the fantasy of the common school.

Versions of Strother's one-room mountain schoolhouse provided an imaginary place where whites could pretend to go to ease their ambivalence over their own social privilege. In doing so, the common school myth supplied whites with a discourse that perpetuated a fantasy of racial and national stability in the period before the Civil War when both were volatile. Throughout the antebellum period, school reformers and textbook writers worked to establish the myth of a universal schooling experience that eradicated through its discourse any suggestion of ambivalence about systemic white supremacy. In this chapter, I examine the common school fantasy as it manifests in textbooks designed for students and teachers to use in class. In doing so, I am not endeavoring to describe the actual experience of children attending antebellum schools. Any teacher who attempts to implement a lesson plan clearly recognizes the difference between theory and practice. This difference, moreover, buttresses the chapter's reading of

common school discourse as signifying an educational theater of the mind that imagines students and teachers interacting with textbooks and each other as they perform roles that bond within a circle of racial affiliation. The textbooks promote this affiliation by encouraging racializing performances within the classroom that standardize whiteness as the national racial norm. They envision a classroom process that eradicates ambivalence and affirms white supremacy conceptions of race as integral to nation. Textbooks, their authors, and publishers likewise had roles in this common school fantasy. They projected a vision of a marketplace that seemingly enforced the standardization of racializing curriculums and ostensibly amplified the common school myth across America's geographical space.

The Limits of Common Schooling

In 1844, an organization representing Massachusetts school teachers declared earnestly, "the common school is often a world in miniature" (Association of Masters of the Boston Public Schools 15). They were not, however, embracing cultural diversity but instead commenting on the common school's role in eradicating it. "The United States," they write, "has long been an asylum for the whole human family, and consequently, there are sometimes collected in the same school, children who have come from all parts of the world, and who have the greatest diversity of character to be assimilated, before peace and harmony can well reign among the 'sovereign' people" (15). As they so swiftly merge ideas of school and nation, however, they articulate schooling's function in standardizing whiteness as the cultural norm. However, these teachers would not have to scour the world to discover that the lived experience of the common school was far from their vision of it. Common schooling, in Massachusetts and throughout the country was far from a universal experience. For the most the part, common schooling was primarily a northern movement, which did not begin to take hold in the South until after the Civil War. And

even in the North among white children school attendance was far from universal. Estimates based on imprecise enrollment figures, for instance, suggest that across mid-century antebellum North only fifty percent of school-aged white children attended school with some regularity (Kaestle 106). Regardless of how many whites chose to go to school, the teachers' "world in miniature" implies a second anxiety. As they suggest the swiftness, efficacy, and painlessness with the school undertakes cultural assimilation, they reveal an uneasiness of how problematic and impossible the process actually was. The Common School, both as a cultural and as a physical site, was fraught with racial conflict.

As these white teachers imagined racial stability through a vision of the nation as an orderly school, public education for African American was becoming increasingly fractured by segregation and a disproportionately few number of schools that would accept them. In 1844, at the time when teachers published their vision of "world in miniature," Boston's segregated system only provided two schools for African Americans, a primary and a grammar school (Curry 166). It was almost universally this way across the country. In Cincinnati, Ohio, for example, African Americans were denied access to publically-funded schooling until 1840. When the city finally provided \$257 for a charity school, it closed a year later (Bertaux and Washington 44). In 1850, throughout the entire urban North, the only secondary school that existed for African Americans was the Gilmore High School for Negroes in Cincinnati, which was not founded until 1844 (Curry 167, 151). Inadequate public schooling for African Americans was trend throughout the urban north. Census data indicates that roughly 10,000 African Americans resided in Philadelphia from 1840 to 1850. However, there were only eight public schools (four in the city and four in the rest of the county) out of 137 in that would accept black students. Consequently, it is estimated that only one third of African American school-

aged children were enrolled in public schools at any given time during that period (Curry 164). Throughout rural areas, African Americans often had even less access to public schooling. For example, census records show African Americans in Calvin Township, Michigan, comprised roughly one fourth of the population in 1850. However, only twenty-five percent of school-aged children attended school in contrast to seventy-five percent of white children. Though the township's schools were not legally segregated, the township built schools its few one-room, log schoolhouses—much closer to areas with a high concentration of white households, making the distance between home and school much greater for African American children (Enomoto and Angus 45-46).

Common school systems, especially those in urban areas, were often unstable sites of activism for civil rights. After the closure of Cincinnati's poorly-funded and short-lived charity school, for example, the city's African Americans successfully campaigned in 1849 not only for segregated schools but also the election of African American trustees to a separate black school board. As a result, the black school board began establishing a common school system for hundreds of African American children that was parallel to the white system and employed African American teachers, principals, and staff. Not only were many more African American children in the city finally able to attend school, but also the black school board became a center of political power within the city and the teachers became community leaders (Bertaux and Washington 45). While educators in Cincinnati were advocating and establishing a racially segregated system, however, Boston activists organized for integrated public schooling in a successful effort that involved public demonstrations, petitions, journalism, and litigation (cite). In Boston, activist William C. Nell led several civil rights groups to a sustained boycott of Boston's segregated Abiel Smith School (Horton and Horton 72). Before Boston's public

schools were desegregated in 1855, there were only two public schools for the city's African Americans, a primary school and a grammar school (Curry 166). By 1855, when Boston's public schools were finally integrated, the Smith School's attendance had dropped from 263 to 28. (Horton and Horton 72-75). The narrative that the common school swiftly and efficiently rendered "the world in miniature" into a unified nation clearly was not merely a mistake but was a fantasy that served a cultural purpose.

Agents of Standardization

If common schools were supposed to eradicate ambivalence over the hegemonic ideology of white supremacy by rendering race stable feature of American nationhood, textbooks were its standardizing agent. Textbooks, for the most part, corresponded to highly conventionalized curriculums. Differentiating themselves primarily by price, textbooks were regularly advertised as offering a uniform experience for students in various schools across the country. They promised, for instance, that students using a *McGuffey Reader* in Pennsylvania would have a similar learning experience to students in Ohio or Kentucky. Textbooks were like standardized educational packages that could be deployed in classrooms anywhere and students would engage in a similar learning process regardless of the teacher's ability. An 1858 advertisement in *The Independent* for the *National Reader Series*, a McGuffey competitor, emphasizes the books' "simplicity, thoroughness, practicability, and completeness of their elocutionary instruction" along with their "uniform progressiveness...urged by many of the ablest educators of the United States" (A. S. Barnes & Company Publishers 7). Despite the *National Readers'* being in direct competition with its *McGuffey* predecessors, the differences between the two are slight. A comparison between the first lessons in the 1857 edition of *McGuffey's New First Eclectic Reader* and the 1858 edition of *The National School Primer* illustrates the degree to which

literacy instruction in primary schools was standardized. Under a sketch of an ox in a field, *McGuffey's* first lesson encourages children to spell words aloud before reading them aloud:

Spell	Read
is it an ox	Is it an Ox
it is an ox	It is an ox.
it is my ox	It is my ox.
do we go	Do we go?
do we go up	Do we go up?
we do go up	We do go up. (10)

The 1858 edition of the *National School Primer*, while organized slightly differently from its McGuffey competitor, employs nearly an identical technique and language. Next to a print of an ox, likewise in a field, its first lesson reads:

An ox. It is an ox. Is it an ox? Ay, it is an ox.

Is it an ax? Oh, no! It is an ox.

Is it an ax or an ox? If an ox, do go to it.

Am I in? No. Am I on an ox? Oh, no! I am on no ox. (9).

As if acknowledging the obvious similarity between the two readers, the advertisement for the *National Reader Series* strains to distinguish it from *McGuffey's* by noting that its “pictorial illustrations and typography far surpass those of any similar books published in this country, and probably in the world” (A. S. Barnes & Company Publishers 7). It claimed, in other words, the

National Series was more aesthetically pleasing articulation of a common literacy curriculum embedded in a white national consciousness. During this period, this standardization of education presented in schoolbooks extended across disciplines. Rather than proposing radical departures in educational approach that would require teachers and students to change their practices and learn new techniques, textbooks asserted their value in the marketplace through being a familiar technology. Teachers could pick up a textbook of any discipline and intuitively understand its organization and recognize its methods, as well as how to employ them in a common school classroom. The 1838 edition of *Smith's Geography*, the 1840 edition of *Mitchell's School Geography*, and the 1854 edition of *Cornell's Primary Geography* serve as additional examples of textbook standardization. Not only do the three textbooks follow a similar overall organization, beginning with an examination of the differences between water and land, followed by lessons on the oceans, the continents, political systems, and finally societies, they utilize nearly identical methods of presenting their information in the classroom.

As agents of standardization, textbooks performed the proliferation of the common school myth. Some textbooks were greatly popular and used by millions of students. Between 1836 and 1850, for instance, *McGuffey's Eclectic Readers* had sold more than seven million copies (Westerhoff 15). Textbook publishers, however, advertised the relevance of such a sales figure in terms of how textbook represented a common body of knowledge that could be geographically mapped on the nation. An advertisement in the 1857 edition of the *Sixth Eclectic Reader* illustrates this. It asserts that the *Eclectic* series has been adopted by schools across the North and recommended by “more than 10,000 school boards,” including those of New England, Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin (*McGuffey's New Sixth Eclectic Reader* 4). The textbooks, continues the advertisement, “combine the rare

advantages of superior intrinsic merit, typographical beauty, **CHEAPNESS**, and extensive uniformity of adoption and use” (4, emphasis original). Purchasing the books within the Eclectic series would provide students with access to a standardized pool of knowledge. Children, for instance, in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania would ostensibly not only share a basic understanding but they would also have participated in the similar educational process of acquiring that knowledge. The appeal, then, of the advertisement necessitates that its readers valued the conception of education as fundamental to establishing a common national identity. Another advertisement for *McGuffey’s* emphasizes this claim to national standardization. An 1841 full-page advertisement for the *Eclectic Series* appearing in the monthly periodical *The Common School Advocate* includes an extensive directory, broken down by state, of each bookseller that stocked the textbooks. Along with many Northern and Western states, the list included booksellers in Southern states including Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky (Sargent, Wilson, and Hinkle 357).

When publishers could not claim a textbook’s ubiquitous adoption by schools across the country, they asserted that it would soon would be. In 1844, an advertisement in the *Cincinnati Weekly Herald and Philanthropist* for *Sanders’ Readers*, a less-popular rival to the *McGuffey’s*, claimed that they were “becoming introduced throughout the whole Western Country” (W. H. Moore & Company 3). An ad from the same publisher for *Peter’s Rhetorical Reader* subtly makes a similar assertion about its adoption in areas outside the eastern United States. According to the notice, *Peter’s* was in its 220th edition because of its “popularity and imprecendented [sic] sale throughout the Eastern and Middle” states, while there was “constant demand for in it the Western and Southern States” (3). Another advertisement in an 1850 issue of *The District School Journal of the State of New York* for a revised edition of *Adam’s New Arithmetic* boasts

that it “has found its way into every part of the United States” (J. W. Prentiss & Co 11).

Textbooks publishers for all subjects drew upon the idea of schooling as a shared national experience, asserting that their textbooks represented a base of knowledge common to citizenship.

Racial Standardization

As rhetorical tools promoting American national identity, textbooks were ultimately geared toward standardizing the racialized roles of their student readers. In doing so, they devised a system for affirming whiteness through social performance. They accomplished this by advancing an underlying curriculum to fostered racial affiliation. Textbooks were specifically designed for the environment of the common school classroom, and students were to recite the books’ lessons from memory or by imitating the teacher. Textbooks were regularly divided into short lessons comprised of a script for students and teachers to recite back and forth to one another. These scripts were designed to be read or recited from memory by students in small peer groups. In some instances, these recitations performances promoted an overtly racist pedagogy. For example, the 1860 edition of *Mitchell’s School Geography* includes student and teacher dialog in question and answer format such as:

What nations does the European or White race include?

A. The nations of Europe, Western Asia, the North of Africa, and all the white inhabitants of America and other regions. [...]

What is the general character of savage nations?

A. They are bloodthirsty and revengeful, often eat the flesh of the enemies they take in war, and treat their women as slaves. (41, 42).

At the end of its section on “The Races of Men,” this particular edition of Mitchell’s includes questions that necessitate the students apply what they have learned. The book asks students, “To which of the races of men do the greater part of the people of the United States belong?” (41). It concludes the section, “To which race do you belong?” (41). In this way, the textbooks imagine scenarios that functioned as analogues for racial fragmentation that normalize the link between white, Christian values and American nationhood while rendering other cultures incompatible with those values and therefore abnormal. Moreover, they envision students, performing these recitations together, establishing a racial affiliation among one another as they name their race and provide the answer the textbook deems correct.

Textbooks that required the deliberate standardization of behavior for both students and teachers implicitly suggested that students perform whiteness in the classroom. They suggested that classroom participants should perform the assimilating discourse of the common school through their whole bodies. An 1840 *Manual for the Directors and Teachers of Common Schools in Pennsylvania*, provides instructions for these student peer groups. At the ringing of a bell, it explains, students in a chosen peer group would rise from their desks and stand at attention in a semicircle around the teacher’s platform. An accompanying illustration demonstrates a recitation with students “in an *erect position*, their *toes out*, and their *arms and hands thrown behind*” while the teacher stands above them conducting the recitation, a textbook in his hand for checking their accuracy (Goodman 92 italics original). When a student stumbled in his or her recitation, the manual explains, the teacher should call upon the next scholar to correct the error. Therefore, textbooks describe a system that makes it necessary for students to pay considerable attention to their peers’ recitations (94). This reinforces the standardization of racial performances, emphasizing moments where students reveal abnormalities in those

performances. Accordingly, it teaches students to be able to recognize abnormalities in others, to identify and categorize individuals who cannot correctly perform their whiteness. Some textbooks methodized categories this racializing process as they imagined classroom interactions such as *McGuffey's New Eclectic Readers* series, includes directions for teachers about how to conduct recitations in peer groups. An 1850 edition of *McGuffey's Newly Revised Electric Fourth Reader* provides lengthy "Suggestions to Teachers" that describe variations on peer group recitations. In one such variation, the textbook directs teachers to place the group "as far from his desk as the room will permit" while requiring students to recite "in a suppressed tone, but so distinctly as to be audible throughout the room" (32). It suggests further that students should "criticise [sic] each other's reading," and that those who read too slowly, too quickly, or too quietly should be grouped together so that "especial attention be paid to each of these faults" (32). In this manner, the textbook advocates the stratified fragmentation of the students according to their racialized performances.

Textbooks and the pedagogy with which they engaged drew from and perpetuated the myth of the common school. They emerged from an idealized notion of schooling as an incubator for citizens instilled with the values white American nationalism. The 1859 edition of *Cornell's First Steps in Geography*, for instance, begins its first section with a romanticized sketch of a peer group practicing a lesson in a common school classroom. In this illustration, a well-dressed and attentive white boys and girls gather around a white teacher who uses a pointer to identify a geographical feature close to Antarctica on a world map (Cornell 4, see Figure 3). The focal point of image is a boy, rendered a miniature adult, in a suit with his hands clasped at his back and his gaze fixed upon the teacher's gesture toward the map. Surrounding him are the other students, some of whom share his gaze while a few others watch their classmates instead.

Prominently sharing the page with the book's first lesson, the illustration authoritatively prescribed behavior, as actual students viewing the picture gazed at romanticized representations of students like themselves. More than simply excluding representation of nonwhite students, the image's articulation of the common school myth shows education as a catalyst for solidifying a white affiliation upon which racialized conceptions of nationhood could be based. The romanticized classroom tableau suggests that this affiliation reinforces a white identity defined by a rigid civility that occurs through the process of communally and simultaneously observing one another gazing upon a white conception of the world. The act of this shared white gaze establishes the exigency for practicing racial affiliation and the performance of its contingent social roles.

Fig. 3. Classroom performance as imagined in Cornell's First Steps Geography (4).

Within the context of peer groups, textbooks taught students accordingly to standardized rhetorical strategy of text and illustrations to persuasively advance an increasingly standard racialized view of the connection between race and nation. While students and teachers memorized lessons and recited in groups, they would engage this rhetorical strategy. Descriptive geography textbooks such as *Mitchell's System of Modern Geography* (1844) and *Smith's Geography* (1843), for instance, taught a worldview based on U. S. exceptionalism, through employing nearly identical language. *Smith's* describes the United States as “the most important political division on the Western Continent... distinguished for the freedom and excellence of their government; for the exceedingly rapid increase in population and wealth; and the general diffusion of knowledge among the inhabitants” (100). According to *Mitchell's* similar characterization, the United States “occupy the most valuable and productive part of North America, and rank among the most power, commercial, and wealthy nations of the globe...distinguished for the freedom and excellence of their political institutions, the rapid increase of the population, and for the intelligence, industry, and enterprise of the inhabitants” (100). *Mitchell's* emphasizes this nationalistic sentiment by accompanying the text with a half-page image of Liberty, holding an American flag, and riding an eagle above a landscape that includes the Mississippi River, factories, towns, the U.S. Capitol building, and Niagara Falls among other national icons (100). The 1840 edition of Samuel Goodrich's *Pictorial Geography of the World* characterized the United States as “a region unsurpassed in the world for its productive powers and useful qualities” (15). Accordingly, Goodrich's *A National Geography for Schools* (1846) explains, “The *United States* are remarkable as being the *most enlightened* and *most populous* country in the Americas, and the *most powerful republic in the world*” (21, italics original). The textbook's illustrations seemingly support this characterization. Its lengthy

section on the United States contains roughly fifty sketches of idealized American scenes in a picturesque style consisting of classical architecture and landscapes that depict whites engaged in various activities of national creation including farming, foresting, building, going to battle, exploring, governing, attending school, and--in the case of one image--overseeing a field of laboring slaves, bent in supplicating pose before a white master on horseback (21-54).

Using text and images, geography schoolbooks discussed race with the pretense of educational objectivity, thus granting the appearance of legitimizing race as fundamental to nation. Using this language, negative descriptions of nonwhite societies are presented as objective fact. The 1839 edition of *Mitchell's School Geography* describes people living Western Africa as populated by "rude, ignorant, and barbarous" inhabitants (317). It continues, characterizing West African society and political system as antithetical to that of the United States. "Their chiefs," it states, "are cruel and despotic, and in some parts are regarded by their subjects as a sacred race. Mahomedanism is the religion of many tribes; but Fetichism, or the worship of snakes, lizards, and other disgusting objects, prevails to a great extent" (317). It presents this description under fantastical sketch of a beach on which stand two white men in European dress surrounded by palm trees, huts, faceless darkened bodies holding spears, and a slave coffle. When it comes the rather brief mention of slavery that follows, however, the textbook's changes to a more objective tone. "The slave-trade," it matter-of-factly explains, "has been carried on by Europeans from this region to a greater extent than from any other part of Africa" (317). Goodrich's 1846 edition of *A National Geography for Schools* demonstrates the development and employment of this seemingly objective educational language that allows for legitimation of white supremacy. *A National Geography for Schools*, for example, uses educational objectivity to marginalize nonwhites in its description of the U. S. population. "The

population of the United States,” it declares, “consists chiefly of whites, the descendants of Europeans; the remainder are Indians and negroes” (21). It continues this marginalization:

The whites are chiefly of English descent, and the English language is nearly universal. The white settlements extend from the Atlantic to a considerable distance west of the Mississippi. The Negroes are about three millions in number, and the larger part are slaves. The Indians are greatly reduced from their original population, and probably do not exceed four hundred thousand. There are few of them east of the Mississippi; but in the Western Territories they are numerous. Some of them have partly adopted the habits of civilized life, but many still make hunting and war the chief pursuits of life (21, 23).

We see in *A National Geography*’s description the process of teaching white supremacy through objective educational discourse. It presents slavery, for instance, as a natural state of being for African Americans, not mentioning that whites, through the laws of the “most powerful republic in the world,” enslaved them. Employing the passive voice, the textbook fails to implicate European civilization as the reason why the number of Native Americans were “greatly reduced.” In *A National School Geography*’s handling of nonwhite populations in other regions of the world, it employs a similar pretense of educational objectivity. In its “general view of Africa,” it quickly glosses over slavery, ignoring white involvement entirely. “It is a peculiar feature in the history of Africa,” it notes, “that the selling of one another has been a chief source of trade to the people, for ages” (88). The disinterested mention of the inhumanity of slavery and other forms of racial injustice illustrates how the adoption of educational objectivity taught students a language through which they ignore race while seemingly focusing on it.

Though the rhetorical strategy of illustrations and objective language, textbooks overly articulated a natural connection between racial and national identity. The 1857 edition of *Cornell's High School Geography* demonstrates the most realized execution of this strategy. Unlike other geography schoolbooks that make occasional overt reference to race within discussions of various countries, *Cornell's* employed text and pictures to include a prominent section specifically on the connection between race and nation. Entitled "The Earth's Inhabitants," this section divides the world into an illustrated hierarchical list of "five distinct races," arranged accordingly with global population figures for each:

Caucasian, or European, 420,000,000

Mongolian, or Asiatic, 460,000,000

American, or Indian, 10,000,000

African, or Negro, 70,000,000

Malay, 40,000,000 (10)

In its descriptions of each of the five races, it distinguishes Caucasians alone "for intellectual attainments, and high moral endowments" (11). *Cornell's* emphasizes its racial organization through an accompanying illustration that surrounds half the page and depicts five male racially caricatured portraits arranged according to the list's hierarchy. Not only does the illustration correspond to the list by positioning whites highest, it also expresses this hierarchy through the figures' attire--or lack thereof. While the representative white male wears a coat, shirt, and tie, the African's visible shoulders and chest are bare. Utilizing the discourse of educational objectivity, the list further justifies this racial hierarchy on a national hierarchy. The textbook further divides societies into four classes: "enlightened, civilized, half-civilized, and savage, or

barbarous” (13). The text notes that enlightened nations, which it implicitly includes the United States, are “those nations that have made the greatest attainments in arts and sciences, and who display the most skill and industry in agriculture, commerce, and manufactures” (13). It emphasizes this description with another illustration, a diptych that represents the two extremes of the national hierarchy. On the left, the illustration represents savagery through a depiction of a Native American village that includes teepees and aboriginal figures butchering a deer and riding horses. On the right, it represents enlightenment with a sketch of United States iconography, featuring the U. S. Capitol, the Bunker Memorial, and a boat on which figures are apparently engaging in commerce (12).

Textbooks drew from and reproduced the myth of common schooling for children as way of converging the incompatible notions of white supremacy and democracy in conceptions of American national identity for adults. This brought together the performance of social values associated with national citizenship and racial affiliation among centered around education. While geography textbooks advanced the most overt connections among nation, race, and education, reading textbooks sought to instill republican values underlying their English literacy curriculum practiced through the classroom peer groups. In this way, English reading textbooks articulate both educational and national fantasies. They present a romanticized image of white nationhood and an idealized educational practice through which that national image is supposedly enacted.

The *McGuffey's Reader Series*, the period's most popular reading textbooks, were designed to instill national values along with English literacy. These books advocated a curriculum that linked Eurocentric civilization, morality, and English language acquisition. The texts included in the *McGuffey's Readers* were selected for the moral instruction that they

provided in addition to fostering English literacy. The 1857 edition of the *New Sixth Reader* explains that its texts were chosen “to furnish the mind with valuable information, and to influence the heart by sound moral and religious instruction” (8). The preface to the 1849 edition of the *Newly Revised Eclectic Fourth Reader* likewise boasts of drawing heavily from the “Sacred Scriptures” (9). The *Newly Revised Eclectic Fourth Reader* makes the connection between its moral instruction and nation more overtly. It notes that no one “in a Christian country... at this day, can honestly object to imbuing the minds of youth with the language and spirit of the word of God” (9). While some of the texts included in Readers were passages taken directly from the bible, the majority were narratives and orations with underlying moral lessons written by a canon of exclusively white, primarily American and English writers. Moreover, as readers advanced, the recitation performance of *McGuffey’s* texts were more highly prescribed. This is particularly apparent in the *Newly Revised Eclectic Fourth Reader*, which begins with a twenty-four page section entitled “Directions for Reading” that describe proper elocution in matters such as tone, articulation, inflection, emphasis (19-37). *McGuffey’s Readers* for more advanced students even included directions for proper gesture to avoid the “gross faults which are so common among public speakers” and so that students would cultivate “propriety and grace” in their performance (*New Sixth Reader* 58). As descriptive terms for recitation such as grace, propriety, beauty, elegance suggest, *McGuffey’s Readers* envisioned the public recitation a performance of linguistic literacy, as well as literacy in moral conduct. McGuffey’s Readers asserted that students recite the moralistic messages of the books’ texts with conviction. In fact, the *Newly Revised Eclectic Fourth Reader* describes this as the book’s “great object” and “golden rule,” noting “the reader must *be in earnest*” (13 italics original). According to the *Fourth Reader*, the “sentiments and feelings” of its Christian texts “must be infused in [the

student's] own breast" so that he should "enter deeply into the feelings and sentiments, which he is about to express" (13, 14). Recitation groups were, in this manner, conceived not merely a way for demonstrating English literacy but also managing of social identity through the collective performance of moralistic and supposed nation values.

In the 1857 edition of *McGuffey's New First Eclectic Reader*, the acquisition of English literacy was analogous to the geographical spread of European culture across the American landscape. Beginning its depiction of the alphabet with A is for ax, the *New First* reader likens the civilizing of the child's mind through English literacy the European domestication of the wilderness. The illustration accompanying the book's first lesson shows a small white boy, hands held behind his back, gazing upon an ax larger than him that is leaning against the trunk of a felled tree (11). On the same page, two other images of domestication follow it. In each, the wilderness has been rendered as lumber as employed in the domestication of the landscape. Immediately beneath the boy and the ax, there is an illustration of a white girl playing teacher with her dog, petting it as she reads to it outside its wooden doghouse. The final illustration on the page shows boys playing on a makeshift seesaw they have constructed by placing a board over two felled trees. Moreover, the images depict white children exercising the values of benevolence, compassion, ingenuity, and good judgment as they occupy this newly domesticated American space. While engaged with imaginings of whites hewing nation from the wilderness, this same page also evinces the simultaneous imagining of the common school classroom. It including a directive for how teachers and peer groups should navigate the book's accompanying text: "Let the child spell each word in the line: then read the line as in Lesson I" (10). Within the textbook, the fictionalized space of white nationhood represented in the images converges with the imagined space of the common school. The textbook signifies a vision of schooling in which

white children, under the guidance of a white teacher, share in the fictive national narratives, mutually acknowledging whites--their peers and the children depicted in the illustrations--performing the social values of citizenship. Mutual acknowledgement would occur through the act of collaborative reading and the peer group's procedure. The text, for instance, next to the image of the children seesawing on the felled trees reads: "It is I. / It is we. / It is he. / We do it. / Do as we do" (10). The text reinforces the mutual acknowledgement of white affiliation. Not only does the text suggest that the children in the classroom should identify with the seesawing children in the image, the pedagogical procedure of children taking turns while also alternating between spelling and reading the lines mimics the back-and-forth collaborative rhythm of seesawing. In this respect, the *McGuffey's Reader*, created and published by white adults for purchase by other white adults, articulates two idealized visions of white nationhood--the scenes depicted in the illustrations and the implied scenes of a classroom peer group--and situates them as analogous. Likewise, we see a similar analogy between the idealized classroom and the textbook's images in the scene depicting the girl, book on her lap, playing teacher with her dog. With the girl in the illustration imagining herself as a teacher, the image stresses the performance of both her compassion and the canine-student's obedience as integral to social roles both within and beyond the classroom. While the cultural conception common schooling envisioned nation through white affiliation, it reproduced a discourse that ignored the centrality of race. Instead, it posited that the fabric of this affiliation was not race but Christian moral values. The discourse of common schooling, in this way, coded white supremacist ideology as citizenship practiced through Christian morality.

While *McGuffey's Eclectic Reader Series* articulate an imaging of nation through Common School white affiliation based on the shared performance of Christian moral values, it

also envisions education as means of safeguarding that affiliation against competing values. The 1857 edition of *McGuffey's New First Reader*, for instance, often asserted through its use of animal imagery a vision of white civilization in conflict with a wilderness that it seeks to tame. Throughout, the book's lessons are accompanied by illustrations that present images that feature domestic animals, as well those that pose a threat to domestication. The *First Reader's* fifteenth and sixteenth lessons utilize animal imagery in four illustrated panels related to this theme: a mother cat sitting in home washing her kittens, a fox crouched behind a rock hunting a hen, a cat indoors about to pounce on a mouse, and boy chasing dog across a dirt road leading to house (19). Images such as these play upon the tension between domesticity and wilderness. The cat that mothers her kittens indoors, for example, is juxtaposed by the potential danger posed to domesticity by the fox that encroaches upon domestic space as it hunts a hen in the farmyard. The recitation text replicates this tension. "I see a cat," students would theoretically read aloud while also viewing the cat image, "The old cat is by her per kit. / The cat and kit are on the rug. (19). However, with the fox image of the "sly old fox" and the "fat old hen," students would spell and then read "The fox did try to get the hen. / The hen did fly" (19). The image's conflict between wilderness and civilization--the fox and the hen--is resolved through the assertion of white affiliation inherent in the peer group's oral recitation of text. Together, the students pronounce the wilderness' thwart effort to claim domain over domestic space. Though easily resolved in this instance, articulations of the conflict white civilization and wilderness run throughout the book. In this manner, and articulated images like the cat pouncing on the cat, signifiers of civilization, which are then performed through their classroom analogue, police the borders of the frontier where the domesticity borders wilderness.

The *Reader's* depiction of African animals further illustrates the role of white affiliation within text's racialist design. Amid the cats, dogs, oxen, chickens, caged birds, and children hunting elk, the textbooks on one hand appear to include a zebra standing on a plain, a scowling lion, and a baboon in a tree to represent a challenge to white nationhood that cannot be easily resolved. On the other hand, they also utilize them to the represent the role of white affiliation practiced through English literacy in the common school classroom. We see this through the *First Reader's* final two lessons lesson, which juxtapose a lion and domesticated cat. The penultimate lesson contains an image of a lion accompanied by a brief description that characterizes it as the antithesis of domesticity and the supposed underlying civility of white nationhood. According to the text, the lion destroys the domestic trappings of white civilization. "It can," students would recite, "kill an ox, or a sheep, or a tiger, or a man. / It can almost anything. / ... It is called King of the Beasts" (59). Taken alongside the final lesson, however, the pairing of the lion and the domesticated cat imply a belief in the supremacy of English literacy. Entitled "To Little Readers," the final lesson cites the capacity for language is what makes humans superior to animals. "Do you why you are better than Puss?" it asks students. It continues, "You can talk and read" (60). As English literacy figuratively tame the lion and renders it a domesticated cat, the final two lessons assert a vision of nationhood as imagined through white affiliation articulated in terms of common schooling.

While race acts as the basis for the practice of national affiliation represented through the myth of common schooling and its pedagogy, *McGuffey Readers* almost never mention race overtly. The closest they come to this is through lessons that perpetuate narratives that ignore the genocide of Native Americans. Consistently, these texts place Native American characters within this paradigm of defining nation according to values rather than racial affiliation.

Drawing upon the caricature of the noble savage, such lessons involve whites observing Native American characters imposing exclusion from American nation upon themselves as they realize that their way of life is incompatible with national values. For example, the lesson “The Lone Indian” from the 1857 edition of *McGuffey’s Sixth Eclectic Reader* involves a white narrator observing a Native American, a Mohawk, as he, in turn, views a landscape vastly altered by “the white man’s ax” and the evidence of American civilization (82). Juxtaposing features of white civilization with those stereotypically savagery, the lesson depicts the Mohawk stoically observing the presence of “the Englishman’s road” along the riverbank, the “iron hoofs” of horseshoes obscuring “the war-path,” and the “the last wigwam destroyed” (82). After quoting the Mohawk’s realization that “an Indian cannot die here in peace,” the lesson describes him as destroying items representing cultural values presumably incompatible with American nationhood. “He broke his bow,” the lesson concludes, “snapped his arrows, threw them on the burial-place of his fathers, and departed forever” (82). In this way, lessons such these not only ignores genocide but also obscures race as the fundamental feature of its conception of American nationhood. The problem, it suggests, stems from Native Americans’ refusing a Christian education. As another lesson from *McGuffey’s Sixth Eclectic Reader* simple entitled “North American Indians” explains it, “the anointed children of education have been too powerful for the tribes of the ignorant” (285). The lesson puts it in terms related to literacy in the common school classroom. Native Americans “read their doom in the setting sun” while whites read and performed their dominance from a textbook (286).

McGuffey’s Readers for older students abound with moralistic tales about characters who are stigmatized because they fail to adequately perform Christian values. In this manner, textbooks articulate a view that education acts as a discourse through which whites can regulate

the behavior and thoughts of nationhood. This view of education recurs throughout the *McGuffey* series. Common schooling in the books represents the process of weeding out ideas and values that deemed as potentially undermining to national affiliation. In *McGuffey's* texts, this weeding out of ideas is often represented through characters who, because of their behavior, suffer social exclusion. A lesson entitled “An End of all Perfection” from the *New Fourth Reader*, for example, contains brief anecdotes describing adults suffering misfortune, chiefly ostracism, because they fail to live according to the values. The lesson, for instance, recounts an anecdote about an educated man who oversteps the bounds of faith by seeking “what the Almighty had concealed” (99). Among losing his health, home, and mental faculties as a result of his overreach, the lesson also notes that “his friends were counted as his enemies” (100). In this way, failing to perform the Christian values attributed to underpinning nationhood results in characters’ social exclusion and marginalization.

In some cases, *McGuffey's Readers* represent this marginalization through a character’s imprisonment and, more often, death told from a perspective of an observer representing the empowered group. “The Maniac” from the *Newly Revised Eclectic Fourth Reader* involves a “gentleman” who, while visiting a hospital in Europe witnesses a “maniac” patient, a former accountant who was driven insane after becoming fixated upon a single mathematical error. Noting that lesson “abounds with lessons of instruction,” the lesson closes by revealing that the accountant’s insanity arose from a lack of religious faith. Rather than focusing “on *this world* only,” the text explains, the man demonstrates that we should “cast all our cares upon *Him* who careth for us” (41 italics original). While the narrative implicitly contrasts the measured gentleman and the irreligious maniac, it also establishes contrast between the maniac and the students engage oral recitation. The maniac is unable to perform American national values.

Unlike the idealized conception of students standing attentively as they perform the text in peer groups, the maniac is described as “bending with age, but more with sorrow; the few scattered hairs which remained on his temples were white, almost as the driven snow, and the deepest melancholy was depicted in his countenance” (40). His deportment and appearance denoting his inability to perform civility, contrasts with the idealized common school peer group, figuratively alienates him from the underpinning affiliation of nationhood. Another such text from the *Newly Revised Eclectic Fourth Reader* entitled “Death at the Toilet” and attributed to the “Diary of a Physician” describes a woman who dies of vanity while sitting in an armchair and observing her reflection in a mirror. As with the maniac, the pedagogy of recitation establishes the character’s alienation from national affiliation through her deportment that heavy-handedly evinces a reluctance to perform national values. The character of the physician, from whose diary this text supposedly originates, illustrates this through a preoccupied focus on the dead woman’s appearance. The physician notes, “Her head rested upon her right hand, her elbow supported by the table; while her left hung down by her side, grasping a pair of curling irons” (58). He continues, “The ghastly visage of death thus leering through the tinsel of fashion, the ‘vain show’ of artificial joy, was a horrible mockery of the fooleries of life” (58). As with the maniac, the performance of the supposed national Christian values is envisioned as enforcing the boundaries of white affiliation. By identifying this narrative as drawn from a physician’s diary, textbook emphasizes English literacy as the medium by which the physician performs national values and his inclusion within the circle of white affiliation. Conversely, exhibiting values antithetical to white affiliation ends, in this case, with the character’s “humiliating and shocking” death (58). In this manner, textbooks routinely articulated a pedagogy in which students’ peer groups repeatedly recite the deaths of misbehaving characters, collectively pronouncing their the

exclusion from their inability to perform the normalized roles that sustain the white national affiliation and the social power it engenders.

“This madman has met a tragic end at last.”

The common school myth supplied whites with a vision of racial stability and national unity in decades before the Civil War. The myth, in this manner, told a story about a white ideology confronting challenges to its hegemony, and then pacifying them with education. In doing so, it projected an image of the nation as a schoolhouse, based upon performances of white citizens enacting a racial affiliation through their shared gaze at an objectified racialized other. In the common school myth, the performances of racial stability eradicated the ambivalence felt by whites as they exercised their racial privilege, even as they did so within school buildings that the majority of nonwhites could not access. In this manner, the common school myth is not really about school or, for that matter, the practice of education. We see the myth in Strother’s illustration of the mountain schoolhouse that seemingly vanquishes racial instability. It is also present in its accompanying article that characterize Brown and the white members of his militia as maniacs, unschooled outcasts who are ambivalent about their privilege and incapable of correctly performing their whiteness. Accordingly, the myth of the common school resonated outward across the press as it processed the meaning of John Brown’s raid. Among the discussions, writers debated whether or not John Brown was insane (Griffen 370). Some white, northern abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, who promoted moral suasion and agreed with Brown’s sentiments, but not his actions (“The Alleged Insanity”). Others viewed him, as Henry David Thoreau puts it, “a hero in the midst of us cowards” (46). An article originally published in Kansas newspaper *Freedom’s Champion*, however, declared upon Brown’s execution, “this madman has met a tragic end at last” (“Old John Brown”). Racial instability

clearly had not. As the Massachusetts teachers ignored the African American Bostonians—relegated to two inadequate schools—while recounting the common school myth efficiently standardizing the races of the world into a nation, they reveal the central anxiety at the center of the white fantasy. In its perpetuation of race that continually fragments society rather than unifying it, the myth never ends “at last”; the schoolhouse and the nation can never fully merge.

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Chapter Four

Reading the *Storer Record*: Education, Race, and John Brown in the Storer College Student Newspaper

In 1904, a notice appeared in the school newspaper of Storer College, a white-run school for African Americans founded after the Civil War in Harpers Ferry, announcing a change in the printing department. It explained that the school's trustees had hired W. O. Towns, the proprietor of the local *Harpers Ferry Times*, to teach students a trade, "the regular newspaper and job work" of a printing office ("Printing"). Consequently, the notice stated, he was to move "his entire plant to the college and unite it with the college outfit" to set students up with the task of printing not only his own *Harpers Ferry Times* but also school's newspaper, *The Storer Record* ("Printing"). The brief announcement about the arrival of Towns, his printing press, and the work students would be doing was, in fact, part of a cultural shift at Storer.

Established in 1867 with funding from the Freedman's Bureau, Storer was founded with the mission of educating former slaves and their families (*An American* 65). It was, for nearly its first quarter century, the only normal school in West Virginia chartered to award teaching degrees to African Americans ("Storer College: A Hope" 28). As the notice about the printing program in the *Record* suggests, however, Storer's students also worked considerably outside the classroom. Since Storer's founding, its administration heavily relied on student labor to maintain daily life at the school and to expand its campus, from cooking the meals to constructing and repairing many of the campus' buildings (260). Throughout the 1880s, Storer began to adopt manual labor into a formal curriculum by offering vocational and industrial courses along with its other programs (262). This formalization of manual labor at Storer corresponded with a widespread movement in the South that was predicated upon white supremacists notions of black

inferiority. As James D. Anderson has argued, the trend was “organized around a conservative ideology that advocated the political disfranchisement and economic subordination the black race” (67). That, however, is not how its white supporters described it. At normal schools such as Virginia’s Hampton Institute and Storer College, proponents couched manual labor within a discourse of Christian benevolence. Often claiming a progressive abolitionist legacy, they asserted that manual labor made African Americans fit for citizenship by instilling Christian values and moral character. Under the motto “Labor Omnia Vincit” (Work Conquers All), Storer’s trustees formally designated the Industrial Department as a separate course of study in 1897 (*Annual Catalogues*, “Storer College: A Hope” 262). Eventually, its administration required all Normal students to take industrial classes so that by the time the editor of the *Harpers Ferry Times* relocated his press to campus, Storer had fundamentally altered its educational emphasis. It was training more African American tradespeople than teachers (*An American* 116).

This essay explores Storer’s transition to manual labor education, particularly how the different groups that comprised Storer’s community negotiated the school’s identity through *The Storer Record*. Scholars often cast the story of African American education in the early twentieth century as a national debate between the period’s most prominent African Americans: W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Each promoting a strategy for uplift, Du Bois represented anti-segregationists advocating liberal education while Washington represented segregationists advancing industrial education (Wolters 55-56). Accordingly, this essay approaches Storer as a site where conflicting ideas about education and race converge, and the *Record* as the discourse that emerges from that conflict, revealing articulations of those discordant ideas. The *Record* reflects how its readership—the white administration, trustees, and

northern benefactors, as well as the African American students and alumni—sought in sometimes conflicting ways to represent their participation in manual labor education. The *Storer Record* functioned as a multivocal platform in which students could subtly challenge the school's ideology and participate in a struggle to define the identity of the school as an educational community. In this manner, the *Storer Record* provides a means of examining the manifestation of the African American educational threshold within the twentieth century debate over African American education. The *Storer Record* becomes a site for the articulation of Du Boisian ideas within an explicitly Washingtonian context, functions as referendum on the industrial educational platform made acceptable by Washington. While Storer's white administration used the *Record* to situate the school's labor curriculum within a tradition of racial progressivism, a distinct student perspective emerged that introduced into the newspaper's circulation ambivalence over the use of labor.

In 1899, Henry T. McDonald assumed leadership of Storer from its founding president, Nathan Brackett ("Storer College: A Hope" 344). Under his presidency, McDonald grappled with steering the school in two contradictory directions. On one hand, he strongly advocated manual labor education, overseeing major aspects of the school's transition that included numerous building projects within his first decade as president. On the other hand, McDonald used the *Record* to downplay the school's reliance on student labor, emphasize Storer's academics, and situate the school and its white leadership within a tradition of racial progressivism. McDonald located a public identity that he hoped would appeal to white benefactors in the figure of the radical abolitionist John Brown. Through *The Storer Record*, the administration launched a campaign to identify Brown's radicalism with the school's racially conservative turn toward manual labor. This, however, had unintended consequences. While

more greatly emphasizing vocational training in the printing department, however, McDonald also encouraged the publication of students' writing in the newspaper as a way of demonstrating academic achievement. Greater representation in the newspaper, however, provided students with slightly more agency for influencing the public image of the school and its community. This essay ultimately focuses on the 1912-13 and 1913-14 school years as a pivotal moment for students beginning to locate a dissenting voice in the *Record*. Students in those years faced two challenges that struck at the heart of the meaning of race and education. First, the West Virginia Board of Education deemed Storer's Normal program inadequate and denied teaching certificates to its graduates ("As to Teachers"). Second, claiming student dishonesty and laziness, Storer's administration altered how it tracked and rewarded students for the considerable skilled labor they performed beyond the usual vocational courses, threatening to reduce the already meager tuition deduction they received ("As to Expenses"). With students' teaching prospects uncertain and their manual labor devalued, a distinct student perspective emerged in issues of the *Record* that articulated—sometimes strongly and often subtly—resistance over Storer's stated mission as a normal school and its use of student labor.

Storer's Contradictions

Storer College signifies the contradictions underlying the history of white-run education for African Americans. From its founding in 1867 to its closing in 1955, Storer was a product of West Virginia's racially fractured educational landscape in which segregation and an inadequate number of schools for nonwhites were defining features (Greene 433). Because of these fractures, how someone perceives Storer depends upon the light in which one views it. The scant scholarship on Storer College illustrates this. For instance, Dawes Raines Burke characterizes the school as emblematic of "the freedom to pursue an education that would open [African

Americans] to opportunities that had long been withheld for far too long in the south” (“Storer College: A Hope” 175). Through Storer’s annual course catalogs that included sketches and later photographs of its large halls and its spacious campus resembling a northern university above Harpers Ferry, the school’s administration echoed this view of Storer as a place that promised social elevation by academic rigor (*Biennial Catalogue*, 1889). Rather than a beacon on a hill, however, some scholars see a reconstructed plantation. As Sharon D. Kennedy-Nolle posits, Storer students were taught “their labor was to be largely manual, they would be serving the property interests of white employers, and building a good reputation would be an exercise in self-effacement” (Kennedy-Nolle 124). The school’s minstrel troupe, comprised of several male students, serves as a striking articulation of this view of Storer. Dubbed the Modern Minstrel Company, the group entertained faculty and students in 1909 with medleys of “Plantation Songs and Melodies” and renditions of numbers like “If the Man in the Moon Was a Coon” (“Boy’s Entertainment”).

More accurately, Storer paradoxically signified both freedom and slavery. It was “a school for all work” as the educator Amory Dwight Mayo described it upon visiting the campus in 1883, “ranging from primary instruction up to an outfit of Northern colleges” (“Dr. Mayo’s” 149). Storer provided access to schooling, degrees, certifications, and livelihoods that African Americans could not otherwise have had in West Virginia. Its status of many years as the sole normal school in a state seriously in need of African American teachers contributed to its rapid growth. By the middle of the 1870s its enrollment remained relatively steady at roughly 250 students (“Storer College: A Hope” 212). Within twenty years of its opening, hundreds of African Americans teaching school in West Virginia, Maryland, Ohio, and Pennsylvania had attended Storer (*An American* 93). Recognizing that segregation created a broad educational

need across the region's black population, Storer offered highly inclusive programs that served students of various ages and educational backgrounds. For the greater part of its first two decades, Storer's official curriculum had three courses of study for its students' varied needs. Along with a Normal program, for instance, Storer had a three-year elementary or "preparatory" program for students "not able to pass a satisfactory examination" for entry in the Normal department (*Annual Catalogues, 1869*). Within a few years of its founding, Storer also had a high school program for students wishing to pursue degrees at four-year universities (*Catalogue of the Officers and Students, 1873*). Students in each program would study literature, languages, mathematics, and sciences. Those in the Normal department took additional courses in school management, pedagogy, school law, and psychology. High school students studied Latin, Greek, and German along with courses in political science, philosophy, and Greek and Roman history (*Biennial Catalogue: 1903-04*).

On the other hand, Storer was hardly an oasis from white supremacy. Students confronted a paternalism within Storer's walls that pervaded the curriculum. The school's administration, viewing the students as an inferior, sought to improve them through moral instruction. As Storer President Nathan Brackett noted of the school's "humble and illiterate" students, "they generally show a desire to work and submit to wholesome discipline" (Brackett 56). The administration sought to instill "good moral character" through its numerous rules that governed campus life (*Annual Catalogue: 1898-99*). For example, students were obliged to "march in military columns" between classes (*Annual Catalogue: 1898-99*). They were not permitted to "jump, dance, or scuffle" inside campus buildings or go on "pleasure excursions, rides, or walks in mixed company" (*Annual Catalogue: 1898-99*). Other rules likewise deterred students from socializing in town or mingling with townspeople (*Annual Catalogue: 1898-99*).

The attire of female students came under particular scrutiny. In an expanded explanation of the dress code, the 1884 course catalog noted that the classroom was not a place for “cast-off finery” and therefore prohibited all “ornaments” for female students, as well as recommending that they wear dresses only of “mohair alpaca” (*Annual Catalogue: 1884-85*).

In the classroom, textbooks reinforced white, paternalistic moral discipline. Social science and reading books often contained moral lessons accompanied by representations of African American inferiority and subjugation. *Frye’s Complete Geography*, used by the first-year Normal students at Storer in the early 1900s, casts “The Black Race” in the United States as naturally subservient laborers. “The climate of their native land,” Frye expounds, “fitted Negroes to work in the low and hot regions” such as “the southern plains of our own country” where they are “free descendants of African slaves” (100). Those same students would be presented with a similar portrayal in Edward Eggleston’s *A First Book in United States History*, which represents African Americans merely as objects loyal subjugation to white authority. For instance, Eggleston’s tells about slavery through the story of Martin and “the faithful fellow” Caesar, two of Thomas Jefferson’s slaves who risked their lives hiding their masters’ silver plates from British soldiers under the floorboards of Monticello (130). Thus students were in the position of constantly navigating both the rules and textbooks that identified defined proper, even moral, black behavior as showing deference to whites.

Like the rules and the textbooks, the administration viewed manual labor as a way of instilling “good character.” When Storer began operations on the former military installation at Harpers Ferry, for example, Storer founding President Nathan Brackett compelled to students help repair the buildings, which had been extensively damaged during the Civil War. As Storer grew, students continued with the responsibility of maintaining the campus, grounds keeping,

tending to livestock on the campus farm, repairing buildings, and even the constructing of new buildings (“Storer College: A Hope” 201). In 1897, during the final years of Brackett’s leadership, the trustees established a separate industrial department, which quickly became Storer’s most popular with its enrollment substantially surpassing that of the Normal department (*An American* 116). When Brackett retired, the trustees appointed an even stronger advocate of manual labor education, Henry T. McDonald, as his replacement. Though McDonald taught subjects such as Latin, pedagogy, and science throughout his tenure as president, he focused heavily on raising funds to develop the school’s fledgling industrial department. The West Virginia legislature was particularly receptive to McDonald’s requests. “Dignifying the labor of everyday life” was central to Storer’s mission, McDonald asserted in a request to the legislature for funds (“Professional Report” 782). Therefore, he continued, “the state can do no more efficient thing, than to maintain and enlarge the courses in manual training” (782). Over the next few years, McDonald expanded the vocational course offerings. By 1905, Storer had three-year courses in carpentry, cookery, agriculture (which it called “practical gardening”), sewing and dressmaking, and blacksmithing (*Biennial Catalogue: 1905-06*). Additionally, it offered drawing as a course “not to develop artists,” noted the course catalog, but rather as “supplementary to both the carpentry and sewing, adding materially to the capacity for home making and beautifying, for building a fence, and for fashioning family garments” (Storer College. *Biennial Catalogue: 1905-06*). McDonald advocated the integration of these manual labor classes into the school’s normal, academic, and preparatory courses. By 1905, every student, no matter the department, was required to take at least three industrial courses a year, blurring the difference between industrial and academic education (Storer College. *Biennial Catalogue: 1905-06*).

Because students were responsible for all aspects of the school's upkeep, from constructing new buildings to preparing food, their work in courses such as carpentry and cookery were perpetually reinforced, as they practiced those skills through the daily school life. McDonald used student labor in the completion of numerous building projects to modernize the campus during the first decade of his tenure. To accommodate the additional courses and their increased enrollment, McDonald oversaw the students involved in the construction of a second industrial classroom building, as well as a slaughterhouse, grain silo, and a remodeling of the campus barn ("Storer College" 251-252). Along with these buildings, students helped construct a dormitory, installed steam heat and a private water system on campus, and erected a new house for McDonald himself ("Storer College" 251-252). Thus, under the pretense of assisting African Americans by teaching them industrial skills that would promote moral discipline, good character, and perhaps a trade, Storer's administration established an inexpensive labor force to maintain and expand the school continuously. Student laborers were compensated two dollars a month toward room and board ("As to Expenses"). McDonald described this "interesting and important feature of the life and instruction here [at Storer] as "the work done" being given "the best known value" ("Storer College" 252).

As he expanded manual labor education, McDonald faced a dilemma that cut across racial and geographical boundaries. He recognized that Storer's continued existence required people from different cultural groups with conflicting views on industrial education to feel favorably toward the school. When addressing whites in the state, McDonald often portrayed Storer as West Virginia's Hampton Institute, instilling Christian ideals through manual labor. Advertisements for the school directed at white West Virginians portrayed the school as anything but radical. The black West Virginians attending "the oldest school for colored people in the

state and one of the oldest in the United States,” explains one such the advertisement, would receive an education rooted in “strong moral and religious influences” (3). McDonald sought to assure white West Virginians that its students would not socially challenge them. Employing language reminiscent of Booker T. Washington’s “Atlanta Exposition Address,” McDonald explained in a 1907 issue of *West Virginia School Journal*, taught its students “the vanity of seeking after exalted position,” and “the blessing of...more serviceable living” (“Historical Sketch” 17).

As the question over the meaning of citizenship for black Americans propelled the movement toward industrial education, African Americans forcefully organized opposition against it. Henry T. McDonald’s transition to the role of Storer’s president corresponded with the rising prominence of W. E. B. Du Bois, industrial education’s most outspoken opponent. In the year surrounding the beginning of McDonald’s presidency, Du Bois held a professorship at Atlanta University where he concentrated on developing the sociology of African American life, including the struggle for education (Lewis 158-160, Morris 58-59). Through his sociological studies, as well as his leadership of groups such as the Atlanta Conference, the NAACP, and the Niagara Movement, he articulated the stance that African Americans should have equal access to all forms of education, especially common schools, liberal arts colleges, and professional schools (Morris 185, Alexander 62). In addition to his scholarship, Du Bois published several essays that were critical of manual labor education, including a series in the *Atlantic Monthly*, one of the most widely distributed and influential periodicals of the day (Goodman x, 189-192). A few years into McDonald’s presidency, for example, the *Atlantic Monthly* published Du Bois’s “Of the Training of Black Men,” in which Du Bois argued that white-lead industrial training should be relegated to a minor space in the overall educational development of African Americans

emerging from slavery. He warned that the “tendency” toward industrial education at schools like Storer is “born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings as among the material resources of the land” (“Of the Training”). In 1903, the same year that Storer’s students were building the campus’s second industrial building, Du Bois published his influential essay “The Talented Tenth” in which he characterized racial progress through manual labor education alone as “industrialism drunk, with its vision of success, to imagine that its own work can be accomplished without providing for the training of broadly cultured men and women” (“The Talented Tenth” 61). However, it was on Storer’s campus that Du Bois leveled one of his most pointed critiques of industrial education. In 1906, McDonald and the leaders of the Niagara Movement arranged for Storer to host group’s second national convention. Du Bois used Storer and its expansion into industrial education as a backdrop emblematic of the problem with education that the movement faced. Outlining the movement’s core values, he declared in his convention speech:

When we call for education we mean real education. We believe in work. We ourselves are workers, but work is not necessarily education. Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people (“W. E. B. Du Bois Issues” 19).

While Du Bois did not mention Storer by name, his implication was clear: Du Bois and the Niagara Movement, representing a nationally influential delegation of African Americans, viewed Storer’s industrial expansion as reaffirming an antebellum racial order.

Labor in the *Storer Record*

The early issues of the the *Storer Record*, published in the final years of Brackett's presidency, epitomize the coalescence of moral discipline and manual labor. On one hand, the newspaper was a physical item that students labored to produce. On the other hand, the *Record* was a representation of the school and its community that was distributed across a wide readership. It circulated throughout the school's community, including students, teachers, administrators, parents, alumni, and the Free Will Baptist missionary associations more broadly (M. Brackett 415). It was first published in the early 1890s, in the midst of the school's transition away from training teachers and toward industrial education. According to Mary Brackett, the school's first printing instructor, the *Storer Record* was "a means rather than an end, its chief object being to furnish profitable work for the class" (M. Brackett 415). Each term, students enrolled in the school's printing course would work toward publishing one issue of the *Storer Record* (415). They would likewise produce flyers, programs, and other printed matter required in the school's daily operations (415). McDonald expanded the printing program by hiring W. O. Towns, the editor of the local newspaper *The Harpers Ferry Times*, as the new printing instructor. The arrangement between Towns and McDonald illustrates how McDonald's technique of getting the "best known value" exploited student labor in the print shop. In exchange for Towns' expertise and the use of his printing press on campus, the school's administration provided him with a staff of unpaid student workers to produce his newspaper ("Printing"). Indeed, McDonald's emphasis on industrial education meant that students were increasingly valued for their physical output rather than their academic success.

The *Storer Record* functioned as the voice of the administration, which recognized the newspaper as a powerful tool for impacting the way the community perceived the school.

Between 1893 and 1900, under the presidential tenure of Nathan Bracket, the *Record* emphatically portrayed the school's dedication to moral discipline through industrial education. Issues of the *Record*, for example, often announced prominently that they were "PUBLISHED BY THE STUDENTS OF STORER COLLEGE," thus reminding readers that they were holding a physical artifact produced by student labor ("Published"). In this manner, the *Record* objectified its student workforce, representing them merely as a vague collective. However, the newspaper was also an artifact that signified Storer's moral values. Articles published in early issues of the *Record* focused on moral instruction and were written by school faculty. It rarely included articles student voices. Under the supervision of an instructor, students in the print shop reconstructed, letter by moveable letter, the administration's sermonizing, patriarchal voice on topics such as saving money, temperance, charity, and manners. The *Record*, therefore, served as tangible evidence that African Americans internalized Christian moral discipline through manual labor. An article from 1893's spring issue entitled "Excursions: an Evil," demonstrates the typical moral heavy-handedness of *Record's* articles. It admonishes African Americans who devote their time to "pleasure seeking" rather than work (3). A student in the print shop would have arranged that article's sanctimonious warning: "the future prosperity of the race to which you belong is in your hands; therefore, you cannot afford to indorse a single measure that tends to impede its progress" (3). Students reproduced this tone throughout the quarterly issues of the *Record* published before 1900. Even the rare piece of student writing that found its way into the pre-twentieth century *Storer Record* mimicked the administration's voice. A student-authored article simply entitled "Discipline" stressed acquiescence to "persons in authority" (3). "They have a right," explains the student to his peers, "by virtue of their position to request and expect your strict obedience" (3). Another article, written by Normal student Annie Becks, articulates

the duty of graduates to instill Storer's discipline into their own students. With no mention of academic subjects, Becks explains that her future students will learn cleanliness, honesty, the "evil" of tight clothing, and "above all things" religious devotion (3).

Soon after beginning his presidency, McDonald reworked the *Record*. He acquired more sophisticated printing equipment, altering the *Record's* appearance so that it more closely resembled professionally produced publication. Issues published under McDonald's tenure were the first to contain reproductions of photographs, a wider array of fonts and sizes, and were printed on larger paper. McDonald refashioned it in appearance and tone to resemble a more traditional newspaper that appeared to embody the many voices of the school's community rather than the single sermonizing voice of the administration. These physical changes to the *Record* coincided with a broadening of the newspaper's content. With the change in content, McDonald sought to portray the school's campus community—its students and faculty—as likewise embodying a progressive spirit. The administration diluted its overtly paternalistic lessons in moral discipline with essays, editorials, and reports on a wide variety of topics related to Storer. Students in the print office were printed more articles written by students, mostly samples of classwork. Among the articles published in 1901 were Lulu M. Herrod's essay on the "Transmission of Heat," an interpretation of John Milton's poem "L' Allegro" by Mary Brady, and Nannie Chandler's history of public libraries (Herrod 1, Brady 1, Chandler 1). Consequently, an ironic byproduct of industrial education was that students appeared to have more space in the newspaper to represent their point of view. An anonymous article entitled "Our Mountain Trip" exemplifies these differences in the *Record* under McDonald. In a playful tone that was entirely absent from Brackett's earlier issues of the *Record*, the writer describes a science field trip in a way that expresses the experience of school community in emotional terms: "After lunch," writes

the student, “gay groups scattered here and there—some with botany and microscope analyzing flowers, others examining birds. Some were laughing and talking, or singing merry, rollicking songs out of sheer happiness; and still others, the older ones sitting apart, were perhaps telling each other the old, sweet story” (4). Thus McDonald’s editorial control mediates the student’s portrayal of classmates happily and willingly engaged in their academic work as though it were leisure.

By publishing student essays on subjects such as history, science, current affairs, and school events, McDonald wanted readers of the *Record* to view the campus community more in terms of the students’ academic work but rather than industrial education. The *Record*, for example, rarely referenced the role of students in its reports on the many building projects initiated by McDonald. For example, two brief faculty-authored items printed in a 1904 issue refer to the construction of school buildings yet fail to mention student labor directly, leaving the uncomfortable fact of exploitation to be inferred by the reader. Glossing over the physically demanding job of remodeling stonework in a building’s basement, the first merely notes that “its appearance has been very much bettered by the labor expended” (December 1904 3). The second item remarks that construction of an industrial classroom building is “being completed without debt, but money is greatly needed for its equipment” (3). Accordingly, while the school’s primarily white benefactors were identified and recognized in the *Record* for their monetary donations to the school’s numerous building projects, the students doing the hard work were rarely recognized and never identified by name. One typical report in 1910 fails to identify the names of students working on the construction of a new dormitory, calling them merely carpenters and plasterers, but it does explain that donors “have the privilege of...naming a room” (May 1910 3). Regular items such as this reveal more than exploitative labor practices but also

how that exploitation was misrepresented in the *Record*. McDonald facilitated the *Record* as façade that obscured the school's attention to industrial work by misrepresenting the school's campus community to its northern benefactors as centered on progressive, academic education.

Restoring John Brown

The Storer Record reproduced this façade by representing its community of students, alumni, and northern benefactors according to racialized roles and circulating that representation among its readership. It postured white benefactors as performing radical acts of moral justice with their monetary contributions. African American students, conversely, were rendered by the newspaper as objects for the practice white patronage. Storer's location in Harpers Ferry provided a model for these roles with its connection to the radical abolitionist, John Brown. In 1859, Brown attempted to end slavery by waging a rebellion against the United States government, an event credited as a first spark of the Civil War (Reynolds ix). While procuring weapons the United States armory at Harpers Ferry, Brown and his followers were captured by the military in an engine house (now known as John Brown's Fort) and were subsequently tried and executed for treason (Reynolds 323, 327-28, Shackel 13). McDonald initiated a campaign in *The Record* to evoke Brown, who died for slavery's abolition, as the symbol of school's white benefactors and trustees. He wanted the off-campus readers of *The Record* to view, as he put it 1904, "a peculiar fitness in the fact that the town, made famous by the heroic efforts of John Brown in precipitating the cause of freedom, should later become the headquarters of the work to be carried on in the freedmen's behalf" ("Storer College" 293). According to McDonald, the white-led effort Brown had initiated through violent rebellion had progressed to its next phase at Storer, carried on through white-run education instead. Benefactors could, in their way, enact the Brown's spirit with their donations from the safe distance of their northern homes.

In actuality, The *Record* painted that spirit as rather moderate. Brown's legacy, suggested the newspaper, accorded itself with Storer's mission of promoting good moral character through manual labor. Consequently, articles in the *Record* mentioning Brown glossed over the insurrection, tempering Brown's radicalism by focusing instead on his sons. An essay on Owen Brown, for instance, describes his involvement in the temperance movement rather than his participation in the insurrection at Harpers Ferry (March 1914 4). In this way, it cast Owen Brown not as a radical advocate of racial justice like his father but instead as an exemplar of moral discipline. He was, according to the article, "the mildest of men" who "consecrat[ed] his maturity and age to Prohibition" ("Owen Brown" 4, 1). Jason Brown was an even more fitting analogue to Storer's mission of promoting moral character. Jason was an abolitionist who, unlike his brother, refused to participate in his father's insurrection. A reprinted article in a 1908 issue of the *Record* about Jason Brown dismissively describes the insurrection as "that mad hopeless undertaking" while still embracing the tradition of white northern abolitionism. Presenting Jason Brown as the embodiment of his father's legacy, it notes that his "abolitionist sentiments were not altered, but the hatred of the Southerner has passed from his heart" (4). Brown's legacy, according to the article, was not the continued struggle for a racial justice that divided the North and South but rather the pursuit of reconciliation. Jason Brown's obituary in the *Record* portrays him as exhibiting the Christian discipline and good character that Storer sought to instill in its students. Calling Jason Brown a "man of peace," it recollects a visit he made to the Storer campus where he taught students "about his father and his purposes" during a church service. Thus the *Record* circulated images of Brown's legacy that seemingly reconciled racial progressivism and conservatism: Brown's memory, embodied by the disciplined character of his son, arrives at Harpers Ferry not to insurrect but to educate African American students at Storer.

Regardless of how individual readers felt about the articles commemorating Brown, or if anyone actually read them at all, their insertion into the *Record's* circulation projected an image of Storer's community. It fostered a vision of disparate readers united by the feelings that they share as they collectively remembered Brown. It implied that belonging to the Storer community necessitated participation in the ritual of celebrating Brown as a conciliatory figure, and that reading the *Record* was the way for individuals to perform this commemoration and the achieve a sense of this belonging.

Aligning Storer with efforts of John Brown and its northern patrons as his torchbearers, McDonald sought to appeal to African Americans who felt unfavorable toward manual labor education. While Storer's educational practices were divisive, the administration treated commemorating John Brown as a common language that would united African Americans and liberal whites. The administration's use of Brown's memory crystalizes in advertisements for the school that ran in the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, which was edited by the leading critic of manual labor education, W. E. B. Du Bois. The advertisements cast Storer as "situated in historic John Brown Land" (214). Emphasizing the school's normal and college preparatory programs over manual labor, the advertisements described "John Brown Land" as "a place for the earnest, poor young man or woman" with a "fine library, twelve buildings, good equipment, thoroughly trained faculty, [and] modern laboratories" (214). The advertisements, aimed at the *Crisis's* African American readership, implied that Storer was more like a northern university than a southern industrial institute. "John Brown Land" was culturally northern despite its southern geographic location.

"John Brown Land," however, was more than an advertising slogan in the *Crisis*. By redefining Storer as a monument to John Brown, the school's administration sought to

appropriate an African American tradition of commemorating emancipation through Brown's memory. As John Brown biographer David Reynolds puts it, "No white person in history has aroused such warm admiration from blacks as has John Brown" (Reynolds 488). On the day of Brown's execution, for example, Henry Highland Garnet gave an address proclaiming the date be celebrated as "Martyr's Day" (Garnet). "His heroic deed will be inscribed on marble," continued Garnet, "and his grave will be visited by troops of pilgrims" (Garnet). Storer's administration recognized that the commemorating the memory of John Brown was a touchstone between the school and the African American public, as the school's connection to John Brown attracted leaders in the African American community such as Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois. Frederick Douglass, for example, was an early member of the school's Board of Trustees. In 1881, early in the transition to formalized industrial education, Douglass gave the college's commencement address to the topic of John Brown's insurrection (Kennedy-Nolle 129). Along with Douglass, the school's connection to Brown attracted members of the Niagara Movement, including Du Bois and civil rights attorney J. R. Clifford, to select Storer as the location of the group's second congress. Visiting John Brown's Fort was a major event during the convention. Niagara members, as Du Bois recounts it in his autobiography, "made pilgrimage at dawn bare-footed to the scene of Brown's martyrdom" (158).

Douglass's and Du Bois's visits to Storer to commemorate John Brown, however, illustrate how Storer's administration misunderstood Brown's significance to African Americans. Standing before the school's community, Douglass articulated in his commencement address the need for African Americans to commemorate the insurrection by remembering its black participations who aided Brown. His words implied a challenge to his audience to remember the insurrection not as the ultimate act of white benevolence but rather as a cooperative effort in

which blacks, too, were actors fighting against their own subjection. Douglass advised that it was equally important to remember the heroism of Shields Green, a fugitive slave who was executed along with most of the other men. “If a monument should be erected to the memory of John Brown, as there ought to be,” he said “the form and name of Shields Green should have a conspicuous place upon it” (274). It was, Douglass suggests, as much Shield’s raid as Brown’s. Likewise, Du Bois’s did not hold Brown as the ultimate example of white, Christian paternalism. In his address at the Niagara convention held at Storer, he declared that John Brown, “that incarnate spirit of right,” should be commemorated as signifying the strength required of African Americans and whites in the continuing pursuit of social justice. Presenting this challenge to his fellow Niagara members, he continued, “here on the scene of John Brown martyrdom we reconsecrate ourselves, our honor, our property to the final emancipation of the race which John Brown died to make free” (“W. E. B. Du Bois Issues” 19).

Conceptualizing Storer as John Brown Land required the school’s administration to wrest from African Americans a claim over the cultural meaning of John Brown’s memory. One way the administration attempted this was by impeding African Americans from engaging in commemorative acts. By the 1880s, Harpers Ferry had become a popular tourist destination for urban, middle class African Americans looking for a brief escape from Washington D.C. or Baltimore. As white tourists visited sites like Mount Vernon and Civil War battlefields, African American frequented John Brown sites, especially John Brown’s Fort where Brown and his militia were captured (Kahrl 57). An 1888 article in the *Washington Bee*, a black-edited newspaper, described Harpers Ferry as “the Mecca of the Colored American citizen” and the site of “the first martyr of a true...American freedom” (“Harper’s Ferry” 1). Storer’s administration regularly witnessed this admiration, as the school doubled as a resort where black, middle-class

tourists. The administration began renting one of its dormitories for four dollars a week to African American tourists who were excluded from lodging elsewhere in Harpers Ferry (“Harper’s Ferry” 1). Storer’s administration saw this not only as a money raising venture but also as a way to apprentice students in service trades, employing students as inexpensive labor to wait upon the vacationing guests (cite). In 1897, however, Storer’s trustees made a decisive move to assert control over the figure of John Brown. Nathan Brackett, in the final years of his tenure as the school’s president, requested that the trustees ban African Americans tourists from staying in the dormitories during the summer when school was not in session (Kahrl 70). This request was not directed at the many white visitors who stayed on Storer’s campus during the summer or the students who served those white visitors, but rather toward African Americans visiting Harpers Ferry to pay homage to John Brown. The trustees enacted Brackett’s request, noting that providing lodging to African Americans was “no part of the work of Storer College” (qtd in Kahrl 67). Though Brackett and the trustees cited financial reasons for discontinuing summer boarding for African American visitors, the fact that whites were still permitted prompted outrage by prominent African Americans such as members of the National Association of Colored Women and J. R. Clifford who recognized the decision as a way discouraging black commemoration of John Brown. The National Association of Colored Women, for instance, called the act an “example of treachery and prejudice from a hitherto trusted quarter” (qtd. in Kahrl 69).

Giving money to support the school’s many building projects was the primary method that the *Record* encouraged its benefactor community to commemorate Brown. Acts of commemoration by donation coalesced around the fiftieth anniversary of Brown’s raid in 1909, as well as the purchase and reconstruction of John Brown’s Fort on the Storer campus (Shackel

18). The Fort was not the only major build project on which students labored that year. After completing the McDonald's new house and remodeling the girl's dormitory, students also constructed a three-story stone dormitory for the boys adjacent to the Fort, which had to be reassembled brick by brick ("Improvements" 2). While the other buildings were more instrumental to campus life, the *Fort* acted as the nucleus of the school's fundraising campaign that it executed through the *Record*. Individuals could perform the ritual commemoration of Brown that affiliated them to Storer's community by donating to the Fort Fund. Consequently, McDonald appealed for donations to the fund by describing the Fort's significance as a commemorative symbol rather than its practical function. "From an ordinary engine house," he explained, "it has been transformed into a new Cradle of Liberty" ("John Brown Fort" 1). Donating to the Fund, he notes, was a way to for readers to demonstrate their belonging to Storer's community through commemorating Brown. He continued:

For you this is the most hallowed shrine in the country. You have the opportunity to join in its completion. [...] Send in your contribution as soon as possible, and have the proud memory of having had a share in preserving this old building of increasing worth and more sacred memory, for generations yet to come (1).

Storer's reconstruction of the principle site of John Brown's memory was presented in the *Record* as an endeavor shared by the benefactors to the exclusion of the students actually performing the labor.

While the *Record* attended generating contributions, its pages neglected to acknowledge the laboring students. In the December 1909, for example, the administration devoted most of the front page to naming donors to the John Brown Fort fund, including where each lived, the amount of each contribution, and the date on which it was made. The list totaled over 100

donations for 1909 from readers primarily residing in Maine and other parts of New England. Displaying collectively, each individual's donation belongs to the single commemorative act displayed as nearly overwhelming the *Record's* full front page ("Contributions"). Over the next few years, the *Record* included appeals for more donations along with updated lists of contributors. With their names printed in the *Record*, readers were giving as much as \$100—a sizable sum—for this demonstration to be mutually recognized by other members of Storer's benefactor community and administration ("Contributions 1"). In turn, the donations were used to assemble benefactors into a collective as signified by the list. This became even more apparent in the following years. It converted the Fort into a museum that honored the philanthropic efforts of the Free Will Baptists instead of focusing on Brown. It contained a gallery of pictures, items, and relics not immediately relevant to Brown or his raid but were related to the Free Will Baptists' extensive missionary programs throughout the United States and various parts of world. The Fort housed, for example, a large collection of artifacts from India amassed and donated by the Free Baptist Woman's Missionary Society ("John Brown's Fort Continues" 2). An article in the *Storer Record* merely implies that the relevance of John Brown's insurrection to a collection of "India curios" was that the museum represented "the bond between Home and Foreign Mission work" (2). The school's administration used the Fort to celebrate the advocacy of white, Christian paternalistic enterprises. Therefore, the Fort campaign in the *Record* was not about honoring Brown but employing commemoration to obscure the Free Baptist community's conservative response to racial justice that advocated manual labor education behind the outward appearance of progressivism.

***The Storer Record* and the Threshold**

As McDonald's *Record* identified the school's white benefactors through memorializing Brown, it represented students and alumni through their commemoration of Storer. It portrayed current and former students as incontestably loyal and appreciative of the school and its administration. Notices in *The Record* petitioned alumni to contribute updates, and the administration would also correspond directly with recent and successful graduates. Nearly every issue contained news and letters from former students attributing their successes after graduation to "dear old Storer," as they frequently referred to it ("Class 1907" 2). Often, these letters went beyond expressing gratitude but articulated feelings of indebtedness and obligation to the school. Graduate George Frazer, for example, writes in this "appreciative strain" of recommending the school to others: "I often think of Dear Old Storer and the pleasant times gone by. I forever feel it is my duty to praise Storer for her greatness and by the time that school opens again I want to send at least two [new students] that they might partake of the flowing fountain" (qtd. in "Alumni and Old Friends" 2). The *Record* likewise contained writing by current students that praised Storer, as well as white philanthropic efforts generally. Loyal homages often appeared shoehorned into the students' published classwork. William Bridgeford's essay on the history of West Virginia, for instance, builds towards describing the state's rise as "a land of Academics" (1). Its final paragraph gives way to the narrative of Storer's founding, closing with the tribute: "In the fullness of our hearts we feel like raising our voices in one grand old shout, 'God be praised—all hail West Virginia and dear old Storer'" (1).

While McDonald's inclusion of student essays mostly portrayed students as loyal beneficiaries of Storer's academics, their voices occasionally chipped holes into the façade by revealing their manual labor. In this respect, students used their limited agency to inject a

counter-representation of the campus community within the *Record's* circulation. These, however, were not grand acts of resistance such as article-length exposés on the school's labor practices. These slights at McDonald's portrayal of student life were often just that, slight—small items buried within newspaper sections or longer articles that articulated ambivalence. Many appeared anonymously in the *Record's* "Hall and Campus" section, a regular listing of community announcements. The effect of this ambivalence was to lend the student's manual labor visibility, momentarily rupturing McDonald's vision of Storer's community as founded on the progressive legacy of John Brown. One such item from 1911, for example, turns a critical eye the idea that manual labor fostered discipline, describing a group of students "busy taking stumps from campus" as "the 'chain gang'" (May 1911 4). "They will recall other roots than those of Latin and Greek origin after they have gone from the school," the anonymous item continues (May 1911 4). Comparing the school's students to criminals on a chain gang, the item subverts McDonald's image of student loyalty and academics, suggesting that the school's manual-labor discipline comes at the cost of academic learning. Another anonymous comment subtly and sardonically accuses the administration of focusing too heavily on manual labor instead of normal instruction. "It is interesting to note," the piece states states, "that there are still calls for teachers. One fitted to do that work well need not long be idle" (May 1912 3). Such ambivalence over manual labor in the *Record*, though brief and infrequent, indicated the persistence of a dissenting, student-oriented voice.

The remark on the privileging manual labor over teaching training, however, anticipated circumstances at the school that triggered more student criticism. In 1911, West Virginia's legislature amended the state's school laws. The revised law failed to list Storer among the schools to which it would award graduates teaching certificates (*The School Law* 46).

Consequently, the state board of education denied certificates to the school's 1912-13 class of graduating normal students, citing that the curriculum did not adequately include enough professional training ("As to Certificates" 1). The problem was handled poorly by Storer's administration, did not publically respond in the *Record* until middle of the following year. Therefore, students studying to be teachers were left with great uncertainty about their futures. This group of Storer students included several denied certificates who remained at the school for an extra year to take additional credits required for a certification. While calling it "the most embarrassing situation that has arisen in the school in years," the administration's response defended Storer's practices in way that revealed the school's emphasis on manual labor was central to problem. It argued on the front page of the *Record* that if credit for "the work in manual training courses, had been given, we would have met the requirements" (1). Courses in basket making and grass weaving, it claimed, were among those should have counted toward certificates. The administration's solution to the crisis was to reduce the time spent on industrial education for Normal students only slightly, from three courses in the last year of the program to two (*Catalogue of Storer College, 1913-1914* 26). Several students, consequently, had to stay an additional year to complete to take additional classes to meet the requirements for a teaching certificate in West Virginia.

Manifesting subtly, the tension surrounding student labor saturates the *Record* for that year. It prompted an anonymous contributor to "Hall and Campus" to note with sarcasm, "The process of 'making up' lessons is almost worse than getting them everyday. Who says so? Students or Teachers?" ("Hall and Campus" March 1913 4). Within the context of the state refusing to certify Storer's normal students, even the accustomed practice of publishing the names of graduates in the *Record* evokes this tension. In the same issue that announces the

refused certifications, the *Record* printed its usual update on that traditionally highlighted the Normal graduates' professional successes post-Storer. The list, however, depicts the graduate's struggle and Storer's failing to produce African Americans teachers for West Virginia's segregated public schools. Of the thirty-one normal graduates mentioned, none were employed as teachers in West Virginia: fifteen were still "working off credits...for the teaching profession" either at Storer or other schools. The remaining are listed either as working in manual labor, domestic service, or no employment was given ("1913" 2). Thus, this perennial presentation in the *Record* of the achievement of Storer's industrial curriculum instead emphasized its deficiency.

Potentially unable to secure permission to teach in West Virginia, normal students in the 1913-14 school year were therefore left with even more manual labor. To make matters worse, this dispute over certificates coincided with the end McDonald's intense period of construction and landscaping on the campus that included such projects as converting John Brown's Fort to a museum. In the Spring of that school year, however, the administration broke from its customary silence in the *Record* on matters related to student labor to castigate students for not working hard enough. The rebuke came in the form of a notice, announcing a reduction to the already meager wage of two dollars per month toward room and board that students received for their extracurricular manual labor ("As to Expenses" 1). Asserting that some students were dishonestly abusing this arrangement by not working yet still expecting compensation, officials stated on the first page of the *Record* that it would keep a stricter accounting of work so that students "will render actual service for payment given" (1). "If he slights his work," the administration's announcement stated, rife with paternalistic discourse rooted in the misconception of laziness, "he will be given nothing, and possibly docked in credit" (1).

This likely came as blow to students who performed difficult, specialized work for the school and also relied on the tuition deduction they earned from it. Subtle displays of ambivalence increasingly manifested in *The Record* for that school year, illustrating a community at odds with its public image. In same issue that announced a reduction in student compensation, for example, an anonymous item appeared in the “Hall and Campus” that urged readers, “Please note carefully the change suggested in another part of *The Record* as touching the matter of the work done by students and the credits that will be given for the same in the future. This is important and one needs to read it a second time” (“Hall and Campus” March 1914 2). Though seemingly innocuous, the item’s neutral tone hardly expresses loyal support for the change. Moreover, it appears in the *Record*’s community announcement section where student readers might look for a response articulated from their point of view. Written by a student perhaps working in the print shop, the item could be read as an acknowledgment that the reduction in compensation was worth students’ thorough scrutiny. Telling students to “carefully” read the announcement “a second time” suggests a subtly canny means of drawing attention to its prejudiced discourse. The delicacy with which the ambivalence is asserted evinces the precariousness of voicing anything but Storer’s praise or flouting the appearance good character.

Likewise, essays attributed to students, which customarily were printed as exhibitions of academic success, held subtle expressions of ambivalence toward the underlying racial attitudes that motivated school’s white, philanthropic mission. In the issue announcing the denial of teaching certification, an essay by Marjorie E. Harris, one of the graduates denied a teaching certificate who remained at Storer for an additional year, illustrates this. Entitled “Black Death in Manchuria” Harris’s essay, tells about the efforts of white doctors to control the 1910-11

pneumonic plague epidemic in China. On one hand, Harris's narrative maps itself onto Storer's underlying philanthropic mission. It emphasizes the selflessness of the American doctors devoting themselves to the betterment of a racialized other, paying particularly attention to the doctors' educating the Manchurians on controlling the disease. Using language that resembles how the Storer's administration describes its own mission of educating blacks, Harris concludes that "The Chinese race have been...thoroughly awakened and enlightened by the good, hard labors of the two American Scientists" (4). On the other hand, Harris's depiction of Strong and Teague's efforts reveal her ambivalence toward white philanthropy. Harris tellingly observes that the philanthropic doctors "looked like 'Ku Klux Klansmen of Reconstruction Days' " in their protective "long robes of sterilized white cotton...[and] masks made of surgical gauze" (4). She further emphasizes their forcefulness in administering inoculations to wary tribespeople, describing in one instance when they got "hold of the chief and strapped him a table," injecting him with serum apparently against his will (4). A similarly-themed essay couches the efforts of white doctors to prevent the spread hookworm infestations in the south within language akin to Storer's discourse on instilling values through labor. Hookworm, according to student Harry K. Fields, corrupted a community's values. It rendered people "decidedly against labor of any kind" so that they appear "lazy and shiftless," as well as "users of bad whiskey [and] constant chewers of tobacco" (1). He makes a point of stating that, contrary to doctors' expectations, the social corruption stemming from hookworm was entirely absent in African American communities, which "seemed to be in a healthy condition," and were instead prevalent exclusively in "the poorer class of the white population" (1). Fields, therefore, employed his report on Hookworm to subtly challenge the paternalistic assumptions held by whites, including Storer's administration, that African Americans required instruction in the value of hard work.

Ambivalence over student labor subtly manifested throughout the *Record* for that year. An anonymous item from “Hall and Campus” for example, ironically emphasizes the degree to which the ambivalence was felt throughout the community by at first dismissing the mere existence of it explaining, “No one will be inclined to think—as a result of the experience of the year thus far—that a continuous session of school is an especial hardship.” Yet then the writer immediately contradicts himself. Focusing, in fact, on the community’s response to the hardship, the writer notes that some students “swung out of orbit” and were “placed in the chain gang,” as teachers missed work “and thus have broken the tedium, which might have otherwise seemed a bit burdensome” (“Hall and Campus” March 1914 2). Taken as criticism delivered ironically, the statement illustrates the existence of the very ambivalence that it claims to deny. In this manner, items in the *Record* that would otherwise seem innocuous were tinged with articulations of this tension over labor and discipline. For instance, an item from the years’ May issue reports on “some work being done on the boy’s tennis courts” (“Hall and Campus” May 1914 4). This seemingly neutral statement, however, is undercut with a comment that voices frustration that the school’s emphasis on manual work precludes students from engaging in leisure activities like tennis. The writer proclaims emphatically, “But, No, O No, there has been nothing said about getting games started there as yet. Enthusiasm? Well, not in much evidence” (“Hall and Campus” May 1914 4). Thus, the item points out the irony that under Storer’s manual labor discipline that casts African Americans as lazy even the tennis courts are a places of toil. Ambivalence over labor was especially persistent in this May issue. Graduating student Ernest L. Smith, for example, begins a report about birds with a wistful mediation on leisure. “If we could,” he writes in meandering prose, “...let our souls take its wonted course for awhile to seek out and dwell upon nature and her wonderful works, her generous provisions and the

beautiful things that we enjoy, it would be readily seen that birds are one of the greatest gifts to man” (Smith 4). In the juxtaposed column on the *Record*’s page, however, an anonymous item punctures Smith’s romantic yearning for leisure with a reference to labor. Observing that “there have been an unusual number of birds here in the spring,” the item ironically implies that the campus cats must not be working hard enough, decreeing “Fire the cats!!!!” (“Hall and Campus” May 1914 4). The comment hints mockingly at the administration’s threat to cease compensating students that, like the campus cats, it deems idle.

The tension surrounding student labor lay just beneath the *Record*’s surface. A “Hall and Campus” item from the May 1914 issue, for example, commented on the large number people attending the school’s addresses given by visiting lecturers (“Hall and Campus” May 1914). While this observation alone might seem innocuous, that year W. E. B. Du Bois, a critic of industrial education, gave a lecture on campus entitled “Opportunities for the Educated Negro.” An article in the same issue of the *Record* described Du Bois’s lecture as “incisive in his analysis of the present day situation and...was helpfully suggestive to those who listened with much appreciation” (“Recitals—Lectures” 4). While the text of Du Bois lecture is no longer extant, its title and timing suggests that it emerged from Du Bois’s sociological work, particularly his study *The Negro American Artisan*, published in 1912. An assessment of the issues facing African American labor, *The Negro American Artisan* identifies the central problem facing the training of black workers across the United States as the same white prejudice that motivated Storer’s focus on instilling discipline through manual labor. The study’s second paragraph impugns white prejudice” “To many superficial men, the problem is simple: *The Negro is lazy; make him work*” (5 italics author’s). Mostly the *Record* lauded lectures regardless of the subject matter, but the review of Du Bois’s speech alluded again to ambivalence, noting that some in the audience were

not appreciative of his viewpoint. Du Bois “always commands attention,” stated the anonymous reviewer, “whether agreement or disagreement follows” (“Recitals—Lectures” 4).

Ambivalence in the year’s *Record* over the school’s racist labor education had an impact on the community that likewise articulated through the newspaper. Storer’s former students evidently took notice. Alluding to it in a letter published in the July issue, for instance, an alumnus commended the “improvements” in the newspaper’s attention to “racy news”—perhaps intending the pun (Tyrrell qtd. in “Alumni and Old Students” July 1914 2). As the *Record* brought visibility to the tension over African American student labor, it was likewise a site where the administration could recognize that tension while diminishing the significance of it. For instance, an item in the *Record*’s July issue, the last of the school year acknowledged that the “reminiscences,” traditionally a part of the commencement ceremony, were “hardly as spontaneous and touching as they have sometimes been” but that it was hoped that the year’s difficulties fostered a “newer and better vision...to those who had sought and found good” (“Hall and Campus” 3). On one hand, the administration used to the *Record* to indicate that its “better vision” was focused on the classroom rather than the workshop. It touted in the school year’s July issue that the class of 1914 included the largest number of Academic graduates in eighteen years—three students (“Alumni and Old Students” July 1914 2). It therefore anticipated that “there will be a future demand for academic work” as the “Academic course will increasingly attract students who desire to fit themselves up for professions” (“Hall and Campus” July 1914 3). However, it could only boast of this modest increase in Academic graduates because the students who stayed were required to spend more time in the classroom to earn teaching certification. Despite this, none of that year’s graduates attended a four-year university after Storer. Two of the three, Marjorie Harris and Florida Winters, ultimately secured teaching

appointments at West Virginia schools (“1914” 3). For the administration, it seemed another part of instituting that “better vision” involved managing how the newspaper portrayed the involvement of former students. Doing what they could to advocate change in the school’s prejudiced curriculum, former students at the annual alumni meeting advocated for students having access to books by African American writers. The alumni association voted to begin a campaign to acquire, as it was described in the *Record*, “books on the Negro Problem” that would be housed in a segregated section of the school’s library known as the “Alumni Alcove” (“Report of Storer College” 2). The campaign, like the ambivalence articulated in the *Record* throughout that school year, illustrates African American’s oblique attempts to influence change at Storer. On one hand, the campaign failed to address the abuse of student labor explicitly. On the other, stressing the need for African American voices and viewpoints in the school’s curriculum implicitly challenged the school’s white normative perspective. Moreover, the campaign garnered necessary support from McDonald by exploiting the administration’s desire to cultivate the racially progressive public image. McDonald, whether out of genuine concern or opportunism, used the *Record* to show his ardent encouragement for the alumni’s campaign. Managing the Alumni Alcove campaign as he did the fundraiser for John Brown’s Fort, McDonald published a petition in the *Record* for book donations asking “each alumnus and friend to contribute one or more books, relating to the Negro in America or anywhere else” (“The Alumni Alcove” 2). “There will be a special part of the library set apart for these works,” he writes, “and this should become one of the very best centers of inspiration and interest in the whole library” (2). McDonald’s enthusiasm for the alumni’s campaign, however, further illustrates the double-edged nature of white-run education as a vehicle for pursuing racial justice. He couched his full-throated support of the campaign as issue purely pertaining to academics

rather than labor. While labor was evidently central to the “Negro Problem,” McDonald’s notice supporting the campaign makes no mention of it. Instead, he casts the “Alumni Alcove” as racially segregated site of academic learning. The alumni’s campaign was, in the *Record*, yet another way for the administration deemphasize its dependence on student labor and its industrial curriculum that was dedicated to reproducing white hegemony. The discourse that emerges in the *Storer Record* shows us how the African American educational threshold manifested in within this context over student labor. While the student writing in the *Record* evinces resilience in navigating College’s discipline, it also illustrates the influence of social memory on the practices of education. It illustrates students at Storer College employing many of the same methods of resistance as the contributors of *Freedom’s Journal* nearly a decade prior. Both writers in *Freedom’s Journal* and in the *Storer Record* faced the need of asserting their subjectivity within an educational context devised by white philanthropists who claimed good intentions. [National Citizenship to link this to the conclusion]

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Conclusion

The dissertation calls for a discourse that recognizes the centrality of race and memory in the development of American education. It asserts this even as scholars such as Paul Gilroy voice the need to “liberate human kind from race-thinking” (Gilroy 12). Gilroy’s argument about why we need to liberate ourselves from race ironically resembles the reason that scholars of the social memory posit for why race is important. Gilroy in *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* asserts that ‘race-thinking’ has “mobilized the fantasy of a frozen culture, of arrested cultural development” so that racialized societies “are fixed in their...postures of resistance” (13). He claims that this is a function of social memory, “an understandable but inadequate response to the prospect of losing one’s identity [that] reduces cultural traditions to the simple process of invariant repetition” (13). However, what I hope that my dissertation shows is that the repetition of cultural performances that reinforce white supremacy within education are exactly the reasons why we cannot be liberated from race, as well as why we need to accurately describe race’s systemic influence on our pasts, presents, and futures.

I’ve intended for this dissertation to draw a distinction between the study of race and the histories of the racialized people. In short, I’ve hoped to suggest that when we discuss race, we really need to discuss it. There is, within the rhetoric of education and its history, an inclination to claim that one is focusing on race by telling narratives about nonwhites. If we do not interrogate the very concept of race, we do perhaps, as Gilroy claims, fall into a trap of telling stories about people according to the racialized conception created by those people’s oppressors. Consequently, we might have the good intention of introducing forgotten histories of nonwhites within the scholarly discourse. But telling those histories without overtly examining the racist mechanisms—to take for granted that the people we write about are African Americans, Native

Americans, or whites without examining how they came to be that—means that we run the risk of reproducing the ideology that marginalized them in the first place. For example, visitors to the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas, can engage in the memory of the town through a driving tour that stops that “link[s] the dramatic events of Bleeding Kansas, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement” (National Park Service 1). The “Brown to Brown” tour, as the Park Service calls it, allows visitors to:

Walk in the footsteps of John Brown and others who turned their properties into havens for fugitive slaves on their journey to freedom. Learn about immigrants from faraway lands hoping for a better life. Remember the civil rights activists who fought to force open the school house doors for children of all races. These people and stories are part of the continuing struggle to secure the American dream and basic rights for all citizens. (National Park Service 1)

The “Brown to Brown” tour encourages participants to remember America’s racial history as a single line of progress that extends through Brown v. Board to the post-racial citizens, walking “in the footsteps of John Brown,” admiring the differences between the present and the past, and considering how far American has come. It troublingly suggests the Civil Rights movement was not fundamentally the product of the collective actions of African Americans extending even before *Freedom’s Journal* but originated with the actions of a sole white man. Moreover, the tour invites people to remember this progress as nearly frictionless. It happens without struggle—barring car trouble along the way. Navigating from site to site, following the map in the provided brochure, walking in Brown’s footsteps, or visiting the “former all black Monroe School,” visitors inevitably recognize the absence of overt racial struggle at the places where it used to be (National Park Service 2).

Clearly, in advocating for the performance of the post-racial memory-tourist, the educational experience that the Park Service describes is fundamentally racist. It teaches visitors that performing one's post-racial identity means being John Brown and walking in a John Brown land. The post-racial identity that it seeks to adopt is reminiscent of Storer College's remembering of John Brown, full of conviction in racial justice who would wage war against the government for equal rights—if only there was still a need. Good thing, implies the tour, that there isn't. While visitors navigate from site to site, they do not receive a tour of the development of John Brown's identity, as it was constructed and reconstructed by communities articulating various manifestations of white supremacy and the struggle against it. A tour like that would explore how all John Browns are racial: the human John Brown, the John Brown that appears in his letters from jail, the John Brown that the white press describe at the gallows, the John Brown whose soul goes marching on, the John Brown that Du Bois writes about, the John Brown that the administration at Storer creates in the *Record*, the John Brown on the Brown to Brown tour, or the imagined version of John Brown that, presumably, would not have objected to African Americans attending public school with whites.

The Brown to Brown tour further indicates how our current, dominant educational discourse relies upon a vision of schooling that replicates the nineteenth-century common school myth. That myth lends itself to imagining the school as a post-racial site. It, as nineteenth-century common school reformers expressed it, imagined the nation as a school, and the school as place where racial difference was rendered inconsequential. Popular representations and scholarly studies about schools today have, more or less, bought into the idea that the school could be a place where race is simply irrelevant. Where reading is reading and math is math. Scholarship about education does not frequently consider what I hope this dissertation has

shown: that what we call education, have practiced, and continue to practice in schools is infinitely varied manifestations of white supremacy.

The sites I have discussed in this dissertation, moreover, reveal that education comes together through a hybridity of discourses, including discourses that reproduce white supremacy and those that counter it. So it is possible and even probable that people practicing education are engaging in white supremacist and anti-white supremacist performances simultaneously. And they may feel ambivalent about it, whether society has constructed those people as white or black. The common school myth as it is collectively reimagined in the present day results in an ambivalence about race and education. On one hand, the school represents a site potential for an America in which racial difference is rendered inconsequential. On the other hand, education scholarship recognizes that race is an unavoidable component of schooling. It requires, as Patricia Hill Collins notes, “negotiating a basic contradiction” of America’s democratic ideals with the “deeply entrenched hierarchies of race, class, gender, ethnicity that...compromised this very same democracy” (7).

Despite this ambivalence, scholars articulate conceptions of the schoolhouse as a potentially post-racial place and the methods practiced there as theoretically post-racial acts. Educational scholars examine what they describe as the problem of the “achievement gap,” the discrepancy of educational outcomes among students of different racialized groups. The motivation underpinning such studies is that if scholars better understand the dynamics of race in twentieth-first century schools, they will consequently establish strategies for closing this gap. Often such studies view race or ethnicity as a feature that someone possesses. Tyrone C. Howard’s *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in American Classrooms*, for example, gets around to introducing a collection of ideas related to critical race

theory in the fifth chapter of his book. He partially attributes the problem of the achievement gap to colorblindness, stating when a curriculum fails to acknowledge the ethnic diversity in the classroom, it “seeks to conceal the power and ugliness of race, but at the same time highlights the very significance of it by claiming that to acknowledge it would lead to troublesome outcomes” (Howard). The approach that Howard’s study represents, while well-intentioned, fails to view education’s historically constructed role in reproducing race. It suggests that the problems of race such as the “achievement gap” would vanish in the classroom if only teachers altered curriculums in a way that somehow considers the cultural diversity of the students. Studies such as Howard’s consequently assert the belief that closing the achievement gap points to the possibility of post-racial educational methods. If the gap means race matters, closing it would mean it no longer does.

Similarly, studies that acknowledge the white supremacist tradition in American education stop short of recognizing the systematic inheritance of it in the twenty-first century classroom. A lengthy survey of African American involvement in education, beginning with the colonial period and ending with *Brown v. Board*, comprises the fifth chapter of Rod Paige and Elaine Witty’s *The Black White Achievement Gap: Why Closing it is the Greatest Civil Rights Issue of Our Time* in which they trace “the origins of the problem” (75). They conclude through this survey:

When you consider [the] two extremes—that the black-white achievement gap is the product of the African American history of slavery and discrimination, and the counterposition that the current gap cannot be justified by the African Americans’ history of slavery and discrimination—where does that leave us in our quest to

understand the cause of the achievement gap? As is almost always the case, the real answer does not lie at the extremes, but rather somewhere in between. (94).

Their solution to the problem is to call for “authentic leadership from within the African American community” (154). After providing a history focusing on the complex involvement of African Americans in an intractable struggle against white supremacy in education, they suggest that the presence of more African Americans would somehow result in the rapid dissipation of that struggle—if it even still exists. In language ironically reminiscent of David Walker’s *Appeal*, Paige and Witty conclude, “African American leadership must awaken us from this slumber before we wake up to a real disaster” (159). Whereas Walker acknowledges race as systemic to education in his call “to awaken in the breasts of [his] afflicted and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation,” Paige and Witty choose to ignore education’s underpinning racist ideology (4-5). The story they tell about African Americans and educational history fails, in the end, to recognize the role education played in formulating the discourse that fractured society into racialized groups, widening the gaps between them. Education, they suggest, is the answer, but they do not look at how also it is the problem. They claim their focus is race yet they participate in reproducing its performances, playing their roles in the perpetuation of the common school myth.

If we view this scholarship as the performance of a ritual, we are able to examine versions of them across time and space. We see how, as Judith Butler asserts, “every ritual of conformity to the injunctions of civilization comes at a cost, and that a certain unharnessed and un-socialized remainder is thereby produced, which contests the appearance of the law-abiding subject” (88.) Because of the instability of race, however, we are able to read the contesting discourses—the ambivalence—within each performance. As we are able to see the ambivalence

over the common school myth in recent scholarship about education, we are, for instance, also able to see it in a poem read by a nineteenth-century African American student at an African Free School student annual examination.

In the spring of 1816 at the white-run African Free School on William Street in New York City, a student named Henry Hill recited and displayed a written transcription of a poem entitled “Emblem of Education.” Hill copied the poem from an edition of the British textbook *Wogan’s Rational Spelling* (Clarke 58). The poem, which imagines the student as growing vine and education as its supporting tree, reads:

See in what Evil plight yon vine appears
Nor spreading leaves, nor purple clusters bears,
But if around the elm her arm she throws,
Or by some friendly prop supported grows,
Soon shall the stem be clad with foliage green,
And cluster’d grapes beneath the leaves be seen.

Moral

Thus prudent care must rear the youthful mind,
By love supported, and with toil refin’d
‘Tis this alone the human plant can rise;
Unprop’d, it droops, and unsupported dies. (“Emblems”)

Henry Hill was fourteen years old at the examination, a fifth year student, and the school’s monitor general (“Henry Hill”). In the hierarchical Lancasterian educational model employed by

the African Free School, the monitor general was the highest position a student could attain, second only to the schoolmaster. Consequently, Hill would have been one of the oldest, most experienced, and highest ranking students at 1816's examination. Representing the pinnacle of the African Free School's project to instill good moral character into New York City's African American youth, he and his work were being used as an emblem of white education.

If we insert Henry Hill into the traditional story about American education, we see a child who reciting the poem earnestly and with conviction. We can read into it his appreciation for the well-intentioned white philanthropists in the New York Manumission Society, and can understand him as emblematic of America's democratic progress. Or we could view his performance as a manifestation of conflicting ideas about race and education converging as he recites the words and displays their transcription. Is this Henry Hill's poem, *Wogan's*, the New York Manumission Society's, some combination of those, or none of them? Whose agency does Hill's performance represent? The poem leaves the reader with a sense of ambivalence rather than certainty of how it corresponds to a traditional historical narrative. It causes one to wonder, as Henry Hill recited the final lines about the "human plant[s]" who die without the support of white education, did he consider the other African American children living in New York who could not attend the African Free School? Did he recite those lines with ambivalence? With an educational performance of racial memory like Hill's, there is no certainty.

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