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Echoes of Exodus: Biblical Typology and Racial Solidarity in African American Literature, 1829-1962

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# Echoes of Exodus: Biblical Typology and Racial Solidarity in African American Literature, 1829-1962

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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By Joshua Laurence Cohen

*Echoes of Exodus* reveals how the story of Moses resonated in and around African American culture by analyzing adaptations of Exodus in novels, newspapers, and speeches from the antebellum period to the Civil Rights era. The Exodus narrative has played a significant role in framing how Americans have understood their national mission throughout U.S. history. As an archetypal story of liberation from slavery, Exodus has been claimed by radically different groups. Whereas the Puritans understood their migration to the new world as an exodus from corrupt Europe, enslaved Africans felt that their suffering recapitulated the bondage of the ancient Hebrews in Egypt. By asking how Exodus served as a focal point for notions of racial uplift, this study illuminates competing views of liberation in U.S. literature and culture.

*Echoes of Exodus* focuses on writers who appealed to Exodus in counter-intuitive ways that go beyond simply treating the biblical narrative as a template for political liberation. This study argues that proponents of abolition and racial uplift, including David Walker and Frances Harper, treated Moses as a paragon of racial solidarity. Exodus served as a structure to stage the clash between divergent anti-slavery positions in the 1850s. This study introduces the concept of "typological plasticity" to show how Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Delany dramatically transformed Exodus into a story about the limits of violent resistance to slavery.

By the twentieth-century, the story of Moses evolved from a narrative of liberation into a compelling way for male leaders to sanctify their power. Exodus played a pivotal role in debates over aesthetics among black intellectuals in the aftermath of the Harlem Renaissance. By tracing Alain Locke and Zora Neale Hurston's conflicting views toward black "folk" culture, this work shows how gendered perspectives on Exodus shaped the possibilities and risks of racial solidarity. *Echoes of Exodus* demonstrates that forceful critiques of Exodus emerged from Ralph Ellison and William Melvin Kelley at the very moment when Civil Rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, turned to Exodus as a narrative framework to mobilize black collective action.

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## Introduction

In his 1846 "Address to All the Colored Citizens of the United States," formerly enslaved Baptist preacher John B. Meachum employs Exodus typology—identifying contemporary events as resonating with the biblical story of the Hebrews' deliverance from Egypt—to forge a sense of racial solidarity among antebellum blacks. Meachum declares, "Union should be our constant watchword," urging his fellow blacks to share a common purpose, despite any "party spirit and sectarian feelings" (10) that might divide them. Differences among Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians notwithstanding, Meachum proclaims, "We must therefore be united in love and affection—our interests, aims, and hopes must be one" (9). Meachum, thus, provides readers with the core features of racial solidarity—affection, shared interests, and common purpose. Deploying the kinship model of race, Meachum contends that blacks should behave as spouses who "disagree among themselves" until an issue "pertaining to the interest of the whole family" arises" and "all minor differences and opinions are forthwith forgotten and they become united as one" (10). Meachum situates blacks not in Egypt, as we might expect, but in the wilderness. He reminds his readers that "Israel started very fair for the promised land," but the Israelites "rebelliously turned back in heart, and God left them to wander in the wilderness" (6). Meachum warns his contemporaries against repeating the Israelites' error: "So, my friends, we may start fair for this union, and a great many may turn back in heart, and never enter the promised land" (6). He believes that their success, like the Israelites', rests on their faithfulness: "When the children of Israel obeyed Moses, the enemy fell on every side; when disobedient they were conquered by their enemies" (13). The goal of solidarity, for Meachum, is to facilitate uplift. Meachum connects affect—a "union of sentiment, feeling and affection"—to institutional development—"the organization of societies, the erection of schools and the establishment of

colleges, institutions and seminaries of learning" (13). For Meachum, feelings of unity will motivate blacks to work together to improve themselves. He exhorts his readers to attend the upcoming Negro National Convention in 1847. Meachum's title alludes to David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), another text that uses the figure of Moses as a paragon of racial solidarity. While discarding Walker's militancy, Meachum shares his concern for education and uplift. Meachum's words prompt a question central to this study: how did African American writers transform the story of Moses to address issues of uplift and resistance?

The story of Moses delivering the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage is virtually ubiquitous in American culture. Americans of all eras have treated Exodus as a mirror of their own crises. The Puritans understood their flight from Europe as an exodus to a Promised Land in the new world. Conceiving of themselves as Israelites often led them to treat native inhabitants as heathen Canaanites to be driven out of the land. Enslaved Africans understood themselves to be recapitulating the plight of the ancient Hebrews. Concepts of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny of the 1840s were as indebted to Exodus motifs as the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. During the Civil War, abolitionists hailed Abraham Lincoln as a new Moses, while Confederates portrayed him as another Pharaoh and treated secession as an exodus from Northern tyranny.

Frederick Douglass' most famous speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" may be the most audacious example of Exodus rhetoric. Addressing a patriotic crowd on Independence Day 1852 in Rochester, New York, Douglass noted the brutal irony of celebrating Independence Day while so many blacks remained enslaved. He observed that the Fourth of July is to white Americans what Passover was to the ancient Hebrews before emphatically reminding his white audience that enslaved blacks' suffering parallels that of the Hebrews. Douglass sought

to shift his audience's perspective from thinking of America as Canaan to thinking of it as Egypt. The difficulty, of course, lay in convincing them to think of themselves as oppressive Egyptians, rather than as Israelites chosen by God. Douglass's speech reveals the tensions in how Exodus has been used to frame U.S. identity and national mission. The question of whether America is Canaan or Egypt cuts to the heart of the American experiment itself.

If Exodus has been enshrined in the American imagination since before the nation's inception, it remains profoundly relevant in the present moment. As recently as June 2018, Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg likened former Attorney General Jeff Sessions' support for harsh anti-immigration policies to Pharaoh's fear of the rapidly multiplying Hebrews in his midst. In March 2017, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks lamented the loss of the sense of national purpose provided by Exodus. Brooks longs to "revive the Exodus template, to see Americans as a single people trekking through a landscape of broken institutions." As a framework for national destiny, Exodus offers a stark contrast between good and evil, but has left an ambivalent legacy. While Exodus has served as a model of liberation, it has also enforced cultural homogeneity and legitimized repressive patriarchal leadership. The notion of a single, male leader marginalized women's contributions to the Civil Rights movement. As a story about the miraculous deliverance of an oppressed minority from a hegemonic power, Exodus has propelled radically different political projects. The better we understand Exodus imagery in U.S. literature and culture, therefore, the better we will understand competing notions of the American project. Some of the most creative interpreters of Exodus realized that America is both Canaan and Egypt, a democratic republic that promises freedom and justice for all and simultaneously a land of slavery, imperialism, and internal colonialism.

**Overview**

This dissertation reveals how the story of Moses resonated in and around African American culture by analyzing adaptations of Exodus by black writers in novels, newspapers, and speeches from abolitionism to the Civil Rights movement. How did nineteenth-century proponents of abolition and racial uplift treat Moses as a model of racial solidarity? How did Exodus serve as a structure to stage the clash between divergent anti-slavery positions? How did the story of Moses evolve from a narrative of liberation into a compelling way for male leaders to sanctify their power? How did gendered perspectives on Exodus shape the possibilities and risks of racial solidarity? *Echoes of Exodus* argues that Exodus served as a flexible script for representing African American experience and political hope. Distinctive in its scope, *Echoes of Exodus* demonstrates the complexity of gendered perspectives toward Exodus and the mounting skepticism that black intellectuals felt toward the Exodus paradigm.

This project encounters published and unpublished writings by David Walker, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin Delany, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, Ralph Ellison, and William Melvin Kelley because they adapt Exodus in unconventional ways. These writers go beyond simply treating the biblical narrative as a template for political liberation. During moments of upheaval and oppression, it was natural to turn to Exodus as a resource for organizing resistance to oppression. Walker, Melville, Stowe, and Delany wrote during the abolitionist movement;[1] Harper's long career spanned the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era;[2] Hurston wrote during and after the Harlem

[1] Stefan Wheelock suggests that the "1820s signal a decisive turn in the development of African American literature" (66).
[2] Gene Jarrett suggests that the paradigm of "New Negro politics" (12) encompasses the period from Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance.

Renaissance;[3] Ellison and Kelley wrote during the Civil Rights movement.[4] Exodus remained a touchstone across these disparate periods. Whereas Walker, Melville, Stowe, Delany, and Harper employ Exodus to critique slavery and racism, twentieth-century writers Hurston, Ellison, and Kelley complicate the association of the Exodus paradigm with oppression rather than liberation, foregrounding the dangers of charismatic leaders inclined to exploit the people's suffering. As insightful observers of African American culture, these writers invoke themes and images associated with Exodus to address pressing ethical questions, such as when violence is a justifiable response to oppression and how racial identity relates to blood kinship. This dissertation offers not only fresh interpretations of the works under consideration, but also provides a new narrative of the evolution of literary adaptations of Exodus over time. It traces the transition from Walker, who treated Moses as the epitome of self-sacrifice, to Kelley, who considered Moses a flawed model of leadership and a threat to the self-reliance of the masses. By exploring how literary texts revise a foundational biblical narrative, I aim to show how U.S. writers embraced the bible as a source of meaning, contested its authority, and freely revised it to suit their rhetorical needs. The method is fundamentally comparative: each chapter puts multiple texts in conversation to clarify how differences in race, gender, and historical period shaped authors' attitudes toward Exodus.

**Key Issues**

Religion is a critical axis of investigation alongside race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, especially in African American literature, as "questions of race inevitably invoke

[3] Peter Kerry Powers argues for treating the "New Negro Renaissance and its concerns [as] stretching back into the late nineteenth century and continuing at least to the period of WWII" (19).
[4] Lawrence Jackson characterizes the period from 1934-1960 as the "indignant generation."

questions of religion" (Cobb 5). African American literature has been "'haunted' by its religious birth-pangs," which prompted both "acceptance and contestation of its African and Christian origins" (Pierce 233). Afro-Protestantism has been a "consistent and vital—yet always contested—ingredient in efforts to define (as well as debunk) the idea of a distinctive black literature and culture" (Sorett 4). Paradoxically, even writers who contributed to the emergence of a secular intelligentsia during the Harlem Renaissance, encountered "Christianity, and religious practice more broadly" as "both a subject and a matrix for the cultural production of the New Negro Renaissance" (Powers 2). While many black writers draw on African heritage religious practices, from black preaching to hoodoo,[5] others engage discourses of dissent, blasphemy, and atheism.[6] Jonathon Kahn argues that W.E.B. Du Bois inaugurated a twentieth-century black literary tradition of "pragmatic religious naturalism" (13) which rejects "normative religious commitments" (129) while still relying on religious rhetoric. I argue that this tradition can be traced back to the nineteenth century. For instance, Kahn's characterization of Du Bois as speaking a "prophetic language of sacrifice and the jeremiad that seeks concrete redemption in the here and now while forgoing promises of otherworldly divine promise" (14-15) aptly describes Martin Delany. While Du Bois may be one of its finest exemplars, pragmatic creativity is a core feature of many black writers' attitudes toward religion. I underscore this pragmatic approach by investigating the link between biblical typology and racial solidarity in American

[5] See Dolan Hubbard's *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination* (1994), Theophus Smith's *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (1994), James W. Coleman's *Faithful Vision: Treatments of the Sacred, Spiritual, and Supernatural in Twentieth-Century African American Fiction* (2006), and Tuire Valkeakari's *Religious Idiom in the African American Novel, 1952-1998* (2007).
[6] See Michael Cobb's *Racial Blasphemies: Religious Irreverence and Race in American Literature* (2005) and Michael Lackey's *African American Atheists and Political Liberation: A Study of the Sociocultural Dynamics of Faith* (2007).

literature.[7] *Echoes of Exodus* brings together insights from literary studies, religious studies, and critical race theory to demonstrate how a series of mainly black writers and activists freely adapted the Exodus story to convey their own ideas about race loyalty.

Biblical scholars identify typology as a relationship of promise and fulfillment in which one figure or event serves as a precursor to and model for another. The earlier figure, or "type," foreshadows the coming of the "antitype" (Jasper 31-32). For instance, New Testament writers treated Isaac, Moses, and David as types anticipating Christ, Elijah as a precursor to John the Baptist, and the Hebrews' crossing the Red Sea as a type of baptism.

Typology has been ingrained into American culture since its inception. Sacvan Bercovitch discusses how the Puritans' self-identity was informed by typology. Bercovitch demonstrates how the Puritans understood themselves to be a sacred people: "It leads from promise to fulfillment: from Moses to John the Baptist to Samuel Danforth; from the Old World to the New; from Israel in Canaan to New Israel in America" (14). Bercovitch argues that the rhetorical form perfected by the Puritans—the American jeremiad—is a "ritual of consensus" (132) which reminds the people of their covenant relationship with God. Ann Taves has demonstrated that early nineteenth-century Methodist camp meetings and revivals merged charismatic worship practices, especially "shouting," with embodied performances of exodus typology. The "layout and ritual practice" of Methodist camp meetings were "modeled on the Israelites encamped with the tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem" (Taves 115). Taves notes the "prominence of Moses, Joshua, the River Jordan, the Battle of Jericho, and Canaan" in Methodist spirituals, suggesting that the "sacred narrative did not begin in Jerusalem,

[7] On biblical typology in American literature, see R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955) and Joanna Brooks' *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (2003).

but with Moses and the people encamped in the wilderness" (114). Charismatic worship practices enabled "black shouting Methodists" to become "the children of Israel" as shouting led to the "tearing down of the wall that divided the camp. Only when the walls fell were all united and only then did all have access to the holy land, the land where all were free" (116). Benjamin Fagan has demonstrated that the "relationship of black Americans to the United States powerfully echoed that of the Israelites to Babylon" (58). Nineteenth-century black newspapers circulated the image of the U.S. as Babylon because it is the paradigmatic biblical image of imperial decadence and corruption. The Babylonians conquered and enslaved the Israelites, though after seventy years God restored his chosen people to their homeland. Even free blacks faced a precarious status reminiscent of the Israelites exiled in Babylon.

Exodus typology exerted a profound influence on Anglo-American political revolution. In the sixteenth century, English Protestants interpreted the Reformation as freedom from a papal Pharaoh, while in the seventeenth century Puritans like Oliver Cromwell believed that their victory in the English Civil War was an Exodus from a corrupt Anglican Church and the monarchy of Charles I. Supporters of England's Glorious Revolution of 1688 also employed Exodus imagery. During the Revolutionary War, patriots vilified King George as Pharaoh (Coffey 68).

Abolitionists used Exodus typology to aggrandize Harriet Tubman and Abraham Lincoln as Mosaic leaders and demonize Martin Van Buren, John C. Calhoun, and Jefferson Davis as oppressive Pharaohs. They mapped the symbolic geography of Egypt and Canaan onto the South and the North/Canada, respectively. Gregory S. Jackson notes that black evangelicals "represented Southerners as imperious Egyptians on the brink of ruin" (124). At the outset of the

Civil War in 1861, Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother, Henry Ward Beecher, declared the nation to be facing the "Red Sea of war" (90).

Exodus was an integral frame for African Americans' antislavery efforts. Exodus was the "primary biblical story told repeatedly in song" (Kling 210). A number of spirituals, including "Go Down Moses," "He's Jus' De Same Today," "Didn't Old Pharaoh Get Los'?" "Sit Down," and "Oh, Mary, Don't You Weep (Pharaoh's Army Got Drownded)," invoke Exodus (Levine 30-55). Exodus imagery circulated through the Second Great Awakening, the founding of independent black churches, the rise of black newspapers, and the black convention movement.

Paradoxically, Exodus fueled both the struggle for liberation within the United States and attempts to return to Africa. David W. Kling explains that "Exodus was a double-edged sword—its message adapted both to divine intervention and human initiative" (214). In 1822, Denmark Vesey appealed to Exodus to inspire his followers to rise against their masters. According to the confession of an enslaved black man named Rolla, Vesey "read to us from the Bible, how the Children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage" (Starobin 21). Various colonization movements, from the white-led American Colonization Society to back-to-Africa movements led by Alexander Crummell, Henry McNeal Turner, and Marcus Garvey, appealed to Exodus. African Americans "imagined the return to Africa as a reversal of middle passage, indeed, as the crossing of the Red Sea—back to Egypt, the land not only of ancient Hebrew bondage but also of freedom" (Kling 221).

Exodus typology did not vanish after emancipation. In an 1884 sermon entitled "Negro Education—Its Helps and Hindrances," William Crogman recalled the aftermath of the Civil War. As African Americans adjusted to freedom, "nothing was more common in the South than leaders" (628). Crogman depicts a chaotic situation in which competing Mosaic leaders charge

off in different directions, as "[e]very little politician, every crank, constituted himself a Moses to lead the Negro somewhere; and various were their cries. One cried, 'On to Arkansas!' and another 'On to Texas!' and another 'On to Africa!' and each one had a following more or less" (628). Although Crogman treats the Exodusters as following their own misguided Moses, many African Americans devoted themselves to building all-black towns on the frontier. The single most significant migration of African Americans after Reconstruction was the "Kansas Fever Exodus" (Painter 184) in 1879. For Exodusters migrating from the South to Kansas, "St. Louis was like the Red Sea" (Painter 195). Although migration to Kansas was largely decentralized, Benjamin "Pap" Singleton portrayed himself as "The Father of the Colored Exodus" (206). Another aspiring Moses, E.P. McCabe, served as state auditor and county clerk in Kansas before co-founding Langston City in Oklahoma in 1890. McCabe published the *Langston City Herald* to promote Oklahoma a haven of black self-determination and prosperity.[8] The *Herald* called Oklahoma the "Eden of the West" (4). Writing in the *Topeka Call*, F.L. described Oklahoma as the "paradise of Eden and garden of the gods" (1), while another contributor boldly proclaimed, "Oklahoma is the promised land" ("McCabe's" 2). The Exodus motif, thus, proved endlessly adaptable to new situations.

African American preachers continued to appeal to Exodus during the Nadir. Francis J. Grimké's 1902 sermon "A Resemblance and a Contrast Between the American Negro and the Children of Israel in Egypt, or the Duty of the Negro to Contend Earnestly for his Rights Guaranteed under the Constitution" protests Jim Crow laws, segregation, and lynching. Grimké stresses the differences between African Americans and Hebrews as much as the similarities. He notes that whereas the Hebrews originally went to Egypt voluntarily, that was not the case for

[8] On McCabe, see Redkey 100, Franklin 13-16, and Taylor 140-146.

African Americans. Moreover, while Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews leave Egypt, "white Americans would be glad to have us go" (4). Grimké exhorts his fellow African Americans to claim the civil rights which have been denied them. He rebukes any who "value their little petty personal interests above the interests of their race" (11). Similarly, William H. Scott, Sr. delivered a sermon entitled "Basis of Representation" around 1903 in which he used exodus imagery to advocate for voting rights. Scott was born into slavery but escaped in 1862 to fight for the Union and later became a Baptist minister. Scott proclaims, "The ballot will lead the freedman over the Red Sea of our troubles. It will be the brazen serpent upon which he can look and live. It will be his pillar of cloud by day and his pillar of fire by night. It will lead him to Pisgah's shining height and across Jordan's stormy waters to Canaan's fair and happy land. Sir, the ballot is the freedman's Moses." Scott uses Exodus in the traditional manner of allegorizing a contemporary crisis but treats an abstract ideal—voting rights—rather than a person as Moses. Scott, thus, imbues voting rights with a sacred aura and conveys hope by suggesting that democracy will guide blacks to freedom and prosperity as surely as Moses led the Hebrews to Canaan.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois characterizes the post-Reconstruction era as one of continued wandering in the wilderness rather than enjoyment of the Promised Land. For Du Bois's parents' generation Emancipation seemed to be the "key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of the wearied Israelites" (*Souls* 4). Access to literacy —the "cabalistic letters of the white man"—seemed to be "another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day" and the "mountain path to Canaan" (5). Yet, history does not comport with these expectations, as Du Bois observes that "Canaan was always dim and far away" (5). With freedom in name only and the New South seeking to reclaim its power over black lives through

Jim Crow laws and lynching, "the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land" (4). Du Bois worries that his people, like the Israelites worshiping the Golden Calf, are "wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation" (3). Du Bois envisions not a "bodily exodus from the oppressions of the South" (Hartnell 78) but psychological and spiritual liberation. As Anna Hartnell argues, "Du Boisian double consciousness implies that black America *is* God's 'first-born', but its redemption is yet to be achieved" (91). Moreover, Du Bois "translates the master/slave dialectic from the slave system into the new 'Egypt' of Jim Crow segregation" (Hartnell 67). Double consciousness "locates African American identity as the site of divine chosenness" (79), making blacks a New Israel. In a direct appeal to white readers, Du Bois asks, "Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?" (67). Pisgah, the mountain where Moses died in view of Canaan, represents knowledge. Du Bois's education has brought him to the best of Western culture—Shakespeare, Balzac, Dumas, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius—and elevated him "above the Veil" (67). Yet, he remains outside the full benefits of citizenship. He challenges his white readers not to deny African Americans entrance to the Promised Land.

Many participants understood the Great Migration as an exodus from the rural South to the urban North. Wallace Best observes that "themes of exile, sojourn, deliverance" (3) were prominent in the thoughts and religious practices of rural migrants to northern cities like Chicago and that have these themes reflect the "very core of the black experience in the United States since the slave era" (1). As sermons were recorded on phonograph records in the 1920s, Exodus made its first appearance on wax. According to Lerone Martin, Reverend Cora Hopson was the first female preacher to be recorded on phonograph. In May 1926, Rev. Hopson "broke the gender barrier in phonograph religion" when Paramount recorded her "preaching a composition

with proven appeal: Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1896 poem, 'Antebellum Sermon,' a black dialect 'sermon' highlighting the double entendre and irony of the Exodus story in slave preaching" (Martin 116). Dunbar's preacher suggests that if God delivered the Israelites from slavery long ago, he will rescue them, as well: "Fu' de Lawd will he'p his chillum, / You kin trust him evah time" (14). The preacher critiques slavery, while adopting a facetious tone to declaim that he is doing so. He urges his listeners "Now don't run an' tell yo' mastahs / Dat I's preachin' discontent" (14). The sermon ends on a note of hope, as the preacher looks forward to "when Moses wif his powah / Comes an' sets us chillum free" (15). The popularity of Dunbar's poem in the 1890s and Hopson's recording of it thirty years later reveals how pervasive the Exodus motif remained among African Americans living through Jim Crow.

A rich body of scholarship has catalogued many instances of Exodus typology in African American culture. Albert Raboteau argues that powerful identification with the ancient Israelites enabled enslaved blacks to reject the idea that they were destined to be slaves by "nurture[ing] internal resistance" (Raboteau 32). Building on Raboteau's work, Eddie Glaude argues that Exodus provided the foundation for black conceptions of nationhood/peoplehood as neither biological, nor territorial, but based on the shared condition of oppression. African Americans' "dramatic reenactments of the deliverance of the nation of Israel" functioned as "inversions of American's national community—the New Israel was Egypt, and blacks were demanding that Pharaoh (white Americans) let God's people go" (Glaude 62). Exodus gave enslaved Africans a framework for narrating their suffering and maintaining hope for future liberation. Allen Dwight Callahan argues that identifying with the Hebrews enabled African Americans to forge a "collective identity" that did not rely on "ties of ancestry and territory" (116). John Coffey emphasizes that "Black Protestants did not simply rehearse and recite conventional biblical

rhetoric; they reworked and subverted received traditions" (148). Gregory S. Jackson argues that typology enabled African Americans to transform slavery from a "senseless atrocity" into a "powerful eschatology with a rich web of sacred meaning and spiritual value" (124). By "[f]iguring slaves as the Israelites in captivity, African American evangelicals transformed their status from spiritual outcasts to chosen people" (124). Rhondda Robinson Thomas describes Exodus as the "central cultural metanarrative of the Afro-Atlantic community" and suggests that it "resonated because it encouraged Afro-Atlantic peoples to remember the story and reimagine themselves as citizens in their adopted homelands" (2). Theophus Smith treats Exodus as one of many "textual icons" that emerged through the "bicultural fusion of African and Christian sources" (129). Smith observes a pattern of "iconic expression" in which biblical images—"Moses (liberator), Exodus (emancipation), and Promised Land (destiny)" (129)—serve to interpret African American life.

Rather than present a single, static meaning, however, Exodus invites interpretation and negotiation. I expand on the approaches to Exodus above by introducing what I have termed "typological plasticity." In contrast to the expected one-to-one correlation between type and antitype, typological plasticity allows multiple, sometimes conflicting, parallels to proliferate—sometimes within a single text. For instance, in his 1851 freedom narrative, Thomas Smallwood collapses Exodus typology by likening white Americans to both Egyptians and Israelites. Smallwood depicts Congress as the "wise men, the sorcerers, the magicians, and astrologers of the United States" and accuses them of "casting their rods in opposition to the servants of God" (68), as Pharaoh's magicians sought to thwart Moses and Aaron. He describes the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act as "opening a way through Mason's and Dixon's sea" to "recapture those that had crossed" (68). Yet, immediately after comparing white Americans to the Egyptians drowned

in the Red Sea, Smallwood likens white Americans to the Jews, who "became proud and puffed up, because God had chosen them for his peculiar people" (68). As the Israelites were granted many opportunities to repent, so Americans "have been warned of their wickedness" (69). Smallwood expects that God's judgment is imminent: "the long suspended blow against that republic and the final emancipation of their victims are close at hand, and will be attended with a terrible and bloody breaking up of their present system" (69). He abandons the typical opposition between Israel and Egypt to liken white Americans to the worst qualities of Egyptians and Israelites. Attention to typological plasticity reveals that creativity, flexibility, and utility characterized many African American versions of Exodus. Rather than remain bound to the entire Exodus story, the writers in this study employed the elements that suited their rhetorical needs.

Perhaps more so than other biblical stories, Exodus appears to legitimize both revolutionary and gradualist approaches to political change. The Hebrews languished in slavery for over four hundred years before Moses delivered them. After crossing the Red Sea, they wandered in the desert for forty years before entering the Promised Land. These tensions between promise and fulfillment enabled black writers to interpret Exodus in starkly opposed ways. Herbert Marbury identifies two distinct forms of African American biblical interpretation, which he likens to the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud from Exodus. As an alternative to the dichotomy between "radical" and "conservative," Marbury suggests a contrast between pillars of fire, such as David Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. who adopted a confrontational approach to injustice, and pillars of cloud, including Absalom Jones, Frances Harper, and Martin Luther King, Jr, who relied on subversion and masking. The former adopt combative rhetoric, while the latter level their critiques in more palatable terms. Whereas pillars

of cloud "*fit* their lives within the contemporaneous social arrangements" (8), pillars of fire are "unwilling to fit within the unjust social arrangements" (9). While Marbury's view is a bit misleading when it comes to Hurston, who often relies on subversion and masking, and King, who grew increasingly fiery later in his career, it is an intriguing example of how Exodus has been used to frame African American biblical hermeneutics.

Michael Walzer was the first scholar to treat "the Exodus as a paradigm of revolutionary politics" (7). Walzer divides the Exodus narrative into four parts: slavery in Egypt, discontent in the wilderness, the formation of the covenant, and entering the Promised Land. For Walzer, Exodus offers political radicals a more viable model than messianism because it does not require the "miraculous transformation of the material world," but rather "sets God's people marching through the world toward a better place within it" (17). This study builds on Walzer's framework by considering texts that treat Exodus as inhibiting liberation. *Echoes of Exodus* demonstrates that while most black writers have treated Exodus as a reality yet to be fulfilled, some twentieth-century writers, including Hurston, Ellison, and Kelley, considered Exodus more repressive than emancipatory.

The view of the Exodus as unfulfilled articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barack Obama has been the dominant one in twentieth-century black culture, but an alternative view of Exodus as a hindrance to liberation emerged alongside it. Exodus has sometimes been interpreted as licensing a single charismatic leader to lead the liberation struggle. Robert J. Patterson observes that in the "black political imagination," Exodus has failed to promote a "vision of empowerment for non-normative black subjects" (3) because it has vested "messianic leadership" (4) in heterosexual middle-class black men. While Patterson examines late-twentieth-century African American fiction that challenges the norm of black male

political leadership enshrined in the "exodus politics" of the Civil Rights movement, my work shows that black writers contested exodus politics during the Civil Rights movement itself. While Patterson acknowledges Hurston and James Baldwin as predecessors of a counter-Exodus tradition that emerged after 1970, I show how Ellison and Kelley problematized Exodus typology in the 1950s and 1960s. Erica Edwards calls the idea that a single, divinely-appointed male figure speaks for the race and offers unique political and moral leadership the "charismatic scenario" (17), consisting of a "series of extemporaneous bodily, spiritual, musical, and rhetorical affectations as well as the performance of an idealized narrative of liberation that is rooted in history" (18). Edwards suggests that "lurking within Exodus-inspired dreams of liberation and democracy" is a "masculinist vision of leadership that threatens women's autonomy and stifles the radical democratic impulse" (84). Although Edwards brilliantly interrogates the entanglement of charisma, race, and masculinity, she overstates the extent to which Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) "rewrites the political romance of Exodus as a horror fiction" (78). Hurston, I argue, is as ambivalent about Moses' charismatic leadership as she is about the Hebrews' incapacity for citizenship. Part of the problem of the Exodus paradigm, for Hurston, is its reliance on a heroic male savior figure.

African American writers were often keenly aware of how the figure of Moses had been used by earlier writers. This project draws on the concepts of signifying and intertextuality to describe intergenerational dialogue among black writers. Signifying refers to the African American linguistic practice of parodying or revising another's words, whereas intertextuality describes how a text alludes to other texts. Henry Louis Gates famously argued that "Repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms" (xxiv) and that "Black texts Signify upon other black texts in the tradition" (xxvii). Black writers exemplify what Gates calls "tropological

revision" (xxv) by transforming the figure of Moses. Robert Stepto conceptualizes African American literary tradition in terms of call-and-response, as later writers "revise and revoice" (x) earlier ones. Cheryl Wall broadens these notions developed by Gates and Stepto by arguing that "nonliterary texts, such as blues, sermons, and recipes for conjure, insert themselves in African American tradition" (11). Moreover, contemporary black women writers "rewrite canonical texts" (13) of Western literature as much as they "interrogate and extend texts in the black tradition" (15). Michael Awkward defines intertextuality as a "paradigmatic system of explicit or implied repetition of, allusion to, signs, codes, or figures within a cultural form, such as the novel" (5). Awkward contrasts Gates's reading of black male writers engaging in "oedipal linguistic battles" (5) with black women writers' "more harmonious system" (6) characterized by homage and respectful correction. Awkward juxtaposes the jockeying between Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison with Alice Walker's affection for Zora Neale Hurston. While the former is characterized by what Harold Bloom calls the "anxiety of influence," the latter reflects what Awkward terms "inspiriting influences" (8). Although Awkward treats inspiriting influence as distinctive to black women writers, this study notes how such relations of call-and-response cross both race and gender lines. For instance, Frances Harper signifies on David Walker's portrayal of Moses; William Melvin Kelley adopts Henry David Thoreau as his ancestor. Martin Delany's response to Harriet Beecher Stowe, however, is more contentious. Delany's Daddy Joe signifies on Stowe's Uncle Tom, reflecting Delany's dissatisfaction with Stowe's portrayal of black subjectivity. Andrew Sargent argues that Kelley's *A Different Drummer* "rewrites—indeed signifies on" (38) Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

Foregrounding the significance of typology in African American race writing reveals different conceptions of racial solidarity. African American thinkers have theorized racial

solidarity in a variety of ways. John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick define racial solidarity as the "simplest expression of racial feeling that can be called a form of black nationalism" (xxvi). They contend that racial solidarity does not imply any "ideological or programmatic implications beyond the desire that black people organize themselves on the basis of their common color and oppressed condition to move in some way to alleviate their situation" (xxvi). According to this paradigm, racial solidarity is the foundation of more elaborate forms of overlapping black nationalism, such as cultural nationalism, religious nationalism, economic nationalism, bourgeois reformism, revolutionary black nationalism, emigrationism, and Pan-Africanism (Bracey et al xxvi-xxix).

Scholars of the pragmatist tradition have sought to conceptualize non-essentialist racial solidarity. Eddie Glaude defines racial solidarity in terms of "nation or peoplehood or 'we-ness'" (16). This we-ness emerges not from shared biology or racial essentialism, but from the common reality of oppression and "racial violence" (16). Glaude underscores that solidarity does not entail unanimity. Racial solidarity encompasses a "plurality of voices" (11) and a range of potentially conflicting interests, as well as competing strategies for addressing oppression. Robert Gooding-Williams insists that to avoid essentialism racial solidarity must be constituted as a "function of politics" (116). Drawing on Frederick Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Gooding-Williams argues that "democratic politics may forge shared, race conscious African American solidarities and identities but absent the expression of a racially or ethnically specific form of life that is given prior to politics" (117). Gooding-Williams treats solidarity as a negotiation that can produce myriad outcomes.

Tommie Shelby shares Glaude and Gooding-Williams's concern that black solidarity avoid spurious claims of racial authenticity. Shelby defines "black political solidarity" as "black

collective action in the interest of racial justice, not on behalf of an ideal of blackness" (*We* 151). Shelby seeks to "separate the need for an emancipatory black solidarity from the demand for a common black identity" (11). Solidarity goes beyond "limited cooperation for mutual advantage" to encompass "standing readiness to act collectively" (153). Most importantly, solidarity is forged in the "souls of individual blacks themselves" (138) who share a commitment to opposing racism and achieving equality. This notion of personal commitment was integral to many of the writers in this study. Shelby rejects the "kinship conception of blackness" as a "romantic vision of black unity" (154). Yet, the kinship model of racial solidarity was deeply influential throughout the nineteenth century, as exemplified in the works of Frances Harper. Harper treats racial solidarity as a matter of filial loyalty. Her protagonists identify most strongly with their mothers and, by extension, their mothers' race. Building on Shelby's work, Sharon A. Stanley defines racial solidarity as the "felt existence of unique bonds between citizens on the basis of shared racial identification" (99). Stanley notes that solidarity can be cultural, social, or political. She highlights solidarity's temporal dimension, as it emerges among "groups that live together, struggle together, worship together, and cultivate networks of mutual support and intimate friendship" (114).

Drawing on the above thinkers, I treat *solidarity* as feelings of loyalty to, affection for, and unity with others. Solidarity is affective and political: it entails feelings of belonging with people one does not necessarily know personally and a commitment to collective action. Racial solidarity, therefore, entails feelings of loyalty to, affection for, and unity with others of the same race, however race is defined in context. The pro-Exodus writers in this study appeal to the biblical text to arouse their readers' sense of racial solidarity, while the writers who are more critical of the Mosaic paradigm seek other ways of cultivating racial solidarity. William Melvin

Kelley is an important exception, as he minimizes the significance of racial solidarity in favor of radical individualism. Gender plays a central role in the connection between Exodus and racial solidarity. For instance, Frances Harper invests her female characters with the same—and often greater—Mosaic duties as her male characters. Unlike Harper's characters, Hurston's Moses is not a paragon of race loyalty, but rather demands that the Hebrews pledge total allegiance to the Voice.

**Chapter Summaries**

How did nineteenth-century proponents of abolition and racial uplift treat Moses as a model of racial solidarity? Chapter one, "Mosaic Subjectivity in David Walker and Frances Harper," demonstrates how Frances Harper signified on David Walker's treatment of Moses as a paragon of race loyalty. This chapter considers Walker and Harper's investment in what I call "Mosaic subjectivity," that is, portraying Moses primarily as the epitome of self-sacrificing race loyalty, rather than as a uniquely-empowered prophet, liberator, or law-giver. In his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), Walker exhorts his fellow blacks to imitate Moses' selflessness in leaving the luxury of the Egyptian court to suffer with his fellow Hebrews. For Walker, every African American must face what Rhondda Robinson Thomas calls a "Mosaic moment" in which he or she chooses "racial activism" over "worldly pleasure and success" (49). Moreover, Walker treats America as a palimpsest of Egypt and Canaan. Walker's use of Exodus is paradoxical because he argues that American slavery is worse than Egyptian bondage, yet he claims the U.S. as African Americans' rightful homeland. I situate Walker's use of Exodus in the context of the models he inherited from African Methodist Episcopal Bishops Richard Allen and

Absalom Jones before looking closely at how Harper signifies on Walker's conception of Mosaic subjectivity during and after Reconstruction.

As Walker exhorts enslaved and free blacks to emulate Moses, Harper depicts her light-skinned, mixed-race protagonists as the most extreme case of what Michael Stancliff calls "Mosaic character" (26). Engaging the tradition of sentimental fiction, Harper synthesizes Walker's portrayal of Moses as the paragon of race loyalty with an emphasis on the sacredness of maternal bonds. I trace how Harper deploys Mosaic subjectivity to persuade free blacks to fully commit themselves to abolition in "Our Greatest Want" (1859), weds exodus motifs to sentimental tropes and domestic ideology to address the trials of Reconstruction in "Moses: A Story of the Nile" and *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869), and finally uses Exodus as a framework for negotiating post-Reconstruction class tensions in *Iola Leroy or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892). Harper transposes Walker's portrayal of Moses as the paragon of race loyalty into a sentimental key, putting the family at the heart of her uplift ideology. Walzer notes that Exodus is fundamentally a story about the "moral progress" (12) of the people of Israel, a concept central to Harper's concerns. At different points throughout her long career, Harper draws on exodus motifs to further the causes of abolition, temperance, women's suffrage, and anti-lynching. Although from 1859 to 1892 Harper persistently returns to Moses as a model for blacks to emulate, *Iola* uses Exodus as a framework for negotiating class tensions more robustly than her earlier retellings of the biblical story.

How did Exodus serve as a structure to stage the clash between divergent anti-slavery positions? Chapter two, "Exodus and Typological Plasticity in Delany, Melville, and Stowe," discusses Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856), Martin Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of America* (1859-1862), and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or,*

*The Whale* (1851). Exodus served as a touchstone for the debate over how best to respond to slavery. Whereas journalists like James Redpath exemplify what we might call "typological rigidity," Delany, Melville, and Stowe's novels employ "typological plasticity." By connecting Moses and Pharaoh to contemporary figures, Redpath creates a dichotomy between virtuous Mosaic abolitionists on one side and vicious Pharaonic slaveholders on the other. Treating the Exodus story as a pattern for the slavery crisis suggests the inevitable outcome of deliverance for the enslaved and damnation for the enslaver. In contrast, Delany, Melville, and Stowe creatively adapt Exodus in ways that stretch the biblical text and even undermine its viability as a framework for addressing the crisis over slavery. Stowe disperses Mosaic authority across multiple characters, enabling her to raise the possibility of insurrection without drowning slaveholders in a Red Sea of violence. Stowe legitimizes Dred's impulse toward insurrection by likening him to Moses, while containing the potentially disturbing threat of black violence by suggesting that Dred's disposition to mysticism is inherent in African racial essence. In her characterization of Dred as a mystic, Stowe follows early psychiatry's tendency to pathologize religious enthusiasm. I draw on Frantz Fanon to frame Stowe's understanding of this conjunction between blackness and madness. While Stowe has reservations about insurrection as a means of ending slavery, Delany's Mosaic hero preaches black self-sufficiency and dramatically reinterprets Exodus's portrayal of divine deliverance. I read Delany's *Blake* as a precursor to James Cones's black liberation theology. Melville embraces typological plasticity even more than Delany or Stowe. Whereas Stowe and Delany both aggrandize their protagonists as new Mosaic leaders, Melville depicts the black cook Fleece as a parodic-Moses. Melville critiques slavery as an ungovernable appetite by likening slaveholders to ravenous sharks. Yet, he muddies the typological waters by also comparing the sharks to the Israelites grumbling for meat

in the wilderness. For Melville, Exodus is a text open to endless interpretation but not readily useful for resolving social conflict. I situate a close reading of the "Stubb's Supper" chapter of *Moby-Dick* in the context of appeals to the power of moral suasion to end slavery by Unitarians like William Ellery Channing and the use of animalistic imagery to characterize Africans by proslavery advocates like Samuel Cartwright and Josiah Priest. Delany, Melville, and Stowe dramatically transformed Exodus into a story about the possibilities of racial solidarity and the limits of black agency.

What role did Exodus play in debates over aesthetics among black intellectuals in the aftermath of the Harlem Renaissance? Chapter three, "Moses vs. the Masses: Alain Locke, Aesthetic Uplift, and Zora Neale Hurston," argues that Hurston and Locke represent two poles in a broader debate about how black writers represent "folk" culture. Hurston's refusal to write "'race' propaganda" (*Life* 297) brought her into conflict with her former mentor. Whereas in the mid-1920s and early 1930s Locke and Hurston both opposed W.E.B. Du Bois's conception of African American writing as a vehicle for promoting positive images of the race, by the late-1930s Locke and Hurston's views had diverged significantly. Between the publication of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) Locke became increasingly committed to social realism, while Hurston remained invested in African American folk culture. Locke was a proponent of what I call "aesthetic uplift," the idea that artistic achievement by minorities contributes to social equality and that "folk" culture serves as the raw material for "high" art. For Locke, black folk culture, especially the spirituals, held the seeds of true artistic achievement, but needed to be refined. Locke treated folk culture as the essential foundation on which the truly new edifice of the New Negro could be built.

In contrast, Hurston treated rural black culture as the moral and aesthetic heart of African American life. After studying anthropology with Franz Boas at Columbia, Hurston spent virtually her entire career collecting and synthesizing folklore in Florida and the Caribbean. She was writing in a context that included James Weldon Johnson's "Let My People Go," Sterling Brown's "Crossing," and Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures* (1930). Hurston's novels not only incorporate motifs from African American folklore but transpose oral storytelling into written form. This difference in perspective was exacerbated by Locke's tendency to treat the riddle of African American aesthetics as having a single right answer. We can read Hurston and Locke as representing two poles in a larger debate about African American aesthetics. James Weldon Johnson, whose work Hurston admired, but whose views often mirrored Locke's, is a mediating figure. Privileging *Their Eyes Were Watching God* over the rest of Hurston's work, landmark scholarship on Hurston either praises her ingenious construction of a "speakerly text" (Gates 186) or chastises her for her "discursive displacement of contemporary social crises" (Carby 76). Cheryl Wall offers a mediating perspective by arguing that Hurston engages in a "deconstructive practice to refigure and reinterpret the centrality of the margin" (216) by revealing the influence of rural black folk culture on mainstream art and literature. In contrast, most scholarship on *Moses, Man of the Mountain* focuses either on Hurston's critique of nationalism and authoritarianism or her distaste for black male elites. Rather than pit politics against aesthetics, however, this chapter reads the two as intimately intertwined for Hurston. *Moses* is as concerned with the politics of black self-representation as with the rise of fascism. I identify a series of parallels between Locke and Hurston's Moses in the context of Hurston and Locke's complicated relationship as it evolved throughout the 1930s.

As Locke adopted a Mosaic position of ethnic resurgence in his vision of African American art as a generative force in the creation of the New Negro, so Hurston's Moses employs cultural nationalism and a rigid ethical code to transform the Hebrews into a chosen nation. Drawing on Hurston and Locke's correspondence and Locke's reviews of Hurston's work, I argue that *Moses* rejects the Lockean ideal of aesthetic uplift. Hurston's devotion to oral black vernaculars contributed to her determination to avoid transforming folk culture into polished, easily digested literary nuggets for white elites. For Hurston, turning to Exodus typology represents the dilemma of trusting charismatic, male ideologues to rescue the masses by transforming them into citizens.

Why did some of the most forceful critiques of Exodus emerge at the very moment when Civil Rights leaders turned to Exodus as a narrative framework to mobilize black collective action? Chapter four, "The End of Exodus?: The Dissolution of Mosaic Leadership in Ralph Ellison and William Melvin Kelley," addresses critiques of Mosaic leadership in fiction even as it reached new heights in the Civil Rights movement. This chapter maps four approaches to Exodus among black intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s: pro-Exodus desegregationism (Martin Luther King, Jr.), anti-Exodus democratic pluralism (Ralph Ellison), pro-Exodus racial separatism (Malcolm X), and anti-Exodus radical individualism (William Melvin Kelley).

Both Ellison and Kelley suggest that the Exodus paradigm limits individuals' capacity for self-reliance by insisting that they follow a divinely-authorized leader. Ellison's blind preacher Homer A. Barbee resembles George Alexander McGuire, who served as an Episcopal priest for decades before becoming bishop of the African Orthodox Church. As McGuire treats Jamaican pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey as a Moses figure, so Barbee legitimizes the Founder, a fictional version of black educator Booker T. Washington, as a Mosaic leader. By portraying the Founder

as a new Moses who delivered African Americans from the slavery of ignorance to the freedom of education, Barbee invests the college, a fictionalized Tuskegee Institute, with a sacred aura, even as it trains black students to embrace white norms. While Barbee's sermon represents how Exodus can legitimize harmful ideologies, Ras the Exhorter resembles a hypertrophied version of the Mosaic leaders found in nineteenth-century African American literature. Ras embodies an uncompromising separatism which Ellison ultimately rejects in favor of American unity-in-diversity. Both Barbee and Ras represent the dangers of the Moses complex—the self-aggrandizing desire to lead one's people. Despite the dangers of the Moses complex, Ellison values the concept of a sacred covenant at the heart of Exodus.

I turn from Ellison's skepticism toward a Mosaic model of leadership to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's embrace of Exodus as a narrative frame for black liberation. King minimized the ethno-partisan aspects of Exodus, while Malcolm X accentuated them. Seeking to forge a large, multiracial coalition against discrimination, King invoked Exodus to condemn injustice and offer hope to his followers. In contrast, Malcolm X addressed a beleaguered black audience by calling for the complete separation of people of African descent from white America. He uplifted, in other words, a Moses who would truly lead his people away from Egypt, not just tolerate a reformed version of it.

Whereas Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) expresses strong reservations about how charismatic messiah narratives could be used to stymie popular movements, Kelley's *A Different Drummer* (1962) conceptualizes the second Great Migration as an Exodus that is only possible by completely rejecting messianic figures. Kelley's Tucker Caliban is an accidental Moses who sparks mass migration by deliberately rejecting charismatic leadership and embodying total self-reliance. *A Different Drummer* is shaped by Kelley's interest in Henry David Thoreau's belief in

the revolutionary power of the actions of a single person. Drawing on Kelley's correspondence, I argue that Kelley critiques race leadership so severely that he threatens the possibility of racial solidarity itself, as he replaces the idea of Mosaic leadership with radical self-reliance. The novel suggests that traditional avenues of racial solidarity, including religious sects and uplift organizations, hinder individuals' ability to act for themselves. Tucker's foil, Rev. Bennet Bradshaw, represents the failure of African American preachers to perform their Mosaic role. Bradshaw's Black Jesuits resemble urban religious sects like the Nation of Islam, Father Divine's Peace Mission, and Daddy Grace's United House of Prayer for All People. Bradshaw's anti-Semitism recalls that of Sufi Abdul Hamid and Marcus Garvey, while his demagoguery evokes the political career of Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., pastor of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church and New York's first black Congressman.[9] Kelley's vision of a revolution of individuals, therefore, exceeds the very notion of racial solidarity itself. Hurston shared Kelley's mistrust for self-appointed race leaders, though she celebrated the hoodoo practices and communal storytelling that facilitated solidarity among rural and working-class black folk.

Despite some black writers' dissatisfaction with the Exodus paradigm, it remains prominent in African American culture. From Al Sharpton to Barack Obama, from Isaac Hayes to Toni Morrison, a wide range of politicians, activists, and artists continue to liken the story of Moses to that of contemporary African Americans. Anger at how mass incarceration, police brutality, and the war on drugs disproportionately affect African Americans has led to a resurgence in activism in the form of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Jewish and Catholic allies of BLM often turn to the Exodus paradigm to frame BLM's purpose and goals.

[9] On Garvey's attraction to fascism, see Thompson 45-71. In his introduction to the thirtieth anniversary edition of *Invisible Man*, Ellison describes how he "marched behind Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., in his effort to desegregate the stores along 125th Street" (479).

For instance, Mike Jordan Laskey, writing for the *National Catholic Reporter*, argues that BLM reflects the message of Exodus, that "God has a special love for those who are hurting, and so he gets involved on their behalf." Similarly, in the wake of the killings of Eric Garner and Mike Brown and the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, the organization Jews for Racial and Economic Justice created a "Racial Justice Haggadah for Pesach" called "Mixed Multitudes: Nobody's Free 'til Everybody's Free" (1). One of Leo Ferguson's contributions to this collaborative racial justice Haggadah is a fifth question to supplement the traditional Four Questions, posed to the family by the youngest child present at the Seder. Ferguson's fifth question is, "Why on this night when we remember the oppression and resistance of Jews should we also think about the lives of people of color?" and the answer is "Because many Jews are people of color. Because racism is a Jewish issue. Because our liberation is connected" (10). One of Evan Taylor's contributions to the Haggadah urges that as "the Israelites did not turn back from the Red Sea, we must not turn back from the enormous challenges that are wounding and killing Black people in the United States" (20). The racial justice Haggadah weaves together the experiences of Jews, Palestinians, and African Americans to call for interracial and interfaith solidarity among oppressed peoples and their allies. Exodus, therefore, remains a powerful way to mobilize resistance to oppression, even as it evolves to accommodate new social conditions.

## Chapter One: Mosaic Subjectivity in David Walker and Frances Harper

Is America Egypt or Canaan? That depends on whom you ask. Puritan settlers believed Massachusetts Bay to be a new Canaan, often treating native inhabitants as heathen Canaanites to be driven out of the land. Enslaved Africans, however, likened America to Egypt. Singing "Go Down, Moses" and "Roll, Jordan, Roll," enslaved Africans understood themselves to be recapitulating the plight of the ancient Hebrews. Although fugitive slaves depicted the Northern states or Canada as the Promised Land, it did not take those who escaped slavery long to realize that the North was complicit in the South's slave regime. Abolitionists consciously drew on Exodus imagery when they aggrandized Harriet Tubman and Abraham Lincoln as Moses or demonized Martin Van Buren, John C. Calhoun, and Jefferson Davis as Pharaoh. In one of the most rhetorically devastating uses of exodus typology, Frederick Douglass's 1852 speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" reveals the tension in these competing interpretations of antebellum American culture. Douglass observes that the Fourth of July is to white Americans "what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God" (138) before emphatically reminding his white audience of the "mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them" (145). Douglass sought to shift his audience's perspective from thinking of America as Canaan to thinking of it as Egypt. The difficulty, of course, is doing so required his white audience to think of themselves as Egyptians rather than Israelites.

The Exodus narrative has left an ambivalent legacy. While Exodus has served as a model of liberation, it has also enforced cultural homogeneity and legitimized repressive patriarchal leadership. As a story about the miraculous deliverance of an oppressed minority from hegemonic power, the Exodus narrative can propel radically different political projects. Both

sides of the Civil War appealed to Exodus. Concepts of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny are as indebted to exodus motifs as the Civil Rights Movement. The question of whether America is Canaan or Egypt cuts to the heart of the American experiment itself. Some of the most creative interpreters of Exodus realized that America is both Canaan and Egypt, simultaneously a democratic republic that promises freedom and justice for all and a land of slavery, imperialism, and internal colonialism. Virtually every mapping of the American story onto Exodus entails appealing to Mosaic authority because of Moses' status as God's appointed instrument for delivering the Hebrews from bondage.

This chapter considers David Walker's and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's investment in what I call "Mosaic subjectivity," that is, portraying Moses primarily as the epitome of self-sacrificing race loyalty, rather than as a uniquely-empowered prophet, liberator, or law-giver. In his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), Walker exhorts his fellow blacks to imitate Moses' selflessness in leaving the luxury of the Egyptian court to suffer with his fellow Hebrews. For Walker, every African American must face what Rhondda Robinson Thomas calls a "Mosaic moment" in which he or she chooses "racial activism" over "worldly pleasure and success" (49). Moreover, Walker treats America as a palimpsest of Egypt and Canaan. Walker's use of Exodus is paradoxical because he argues that American slavery is worse than Egyptian bondage, yet he claims the U.S. as African Americans' rightful homeland. I situate Walker's use of Exodus in the context of the models he inherited from African Methodist Episcopal Bishops Richard Allen and Absalom Jones before looking closely at how Frances Ellen Watkins Harper signifies on Walker's treatment of Moses as a paragon of race loyalty during and after Reconstruction.

As Walker exhorts enslaved and free blacks to emulate Moses, Harper depicts her light-skinned, mixed-race protagonists as the most extreme case of what Michael Stancliff calls "Mosaic character" (26). This chapter will trace how Harper deploys Mosaic subjectivity to persuade free blacks to fully commit themselves to abolition in "Our Greatest Want" (1859), weds exodus motifs to sentimental tropes and domestic ideology to address the trials of Reconstruction in "Moses: A Story of the Nile"[10] and *Minnie's Sacrifice*[11] (1869), and finally uses Exodus as a framework for negotiating post-Reconstruction class tensions in *Iola Leroy or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892). Harper transposes Walker's portrayal of Moses as the paragon of race loyalty into a sentimental key, putting the family at the heart of her uplift ideology. Few scholars besides Melba Joyce Boyd note the parallels between Walker and Harper.[12] Boyd observes that both Walker and Harper employ a "convergence of Moses and Jesus Christ" (82).[13] I build on Boyd's work by arguing that Harper signifies on Walker's conception of Mosaic subjectivity. Michael Walzer notes that Exodus is fundamentally a story about the "moral progress" (12) of the people of Israel, a concept central to Harper's concerns. Walzer was the first scholar to theorize "the Exodus as a paradigm of revolutionary politics" (7). For Walzer, Exodus offers political radicals a more viable model than messianism because it does not require the "miraculous transformation of the material world," but rather "sets God's people marching through the world toward a better place within it" (17). At different points throughout her long

[10] See Foster *Written* 135-141 and Peterson 209-215.
[11] See C. Jackson 63-64 and Foster and Haywood 30-31.
[12] Willie J. Harrell, Jr. includes both Walker and Harper in his discussion of the African American jeremiad, 112-114; 125-127.
[13] Melba Joyce Boyd describes Harper as promoting "revolutionary Christianity" (87), whereas Carla Peterson underscores the significance of "Evangelical Unitarianism" to Harper's vocation as a "poet-preacher" (124). In contrast, Katherine Clay Bassard rejects the idea that Harper was a "radical Afro-Christian revisionist" (136) and argues that rather than Unitarianism, a "Christocentric view of human liberation" (134) saturates Harper's poetry. Shira Wolosky contends that Harper is "traditional regarding Scripture's sacred status," yet her "commitment to the rights of Blacks and women led her to nontraditional emphases" (201). Michael Stancliff ascribes a "biblical radicalism" and "antinomian lineage" (39) to Harper, likening her to Anne Hutchinson and Phyllis Wheatley.

career, Harper draws on exodus motifs to further the causes of abolition, temperance, women's suffrage, and anti-lynching. Although Harper persistently recurs to Moses as a model for blacks to emulate from 1859 to 1892, *Iola* uses Exodus as a framework for negotiating class tensions more robustly than her earlier retellings of the biblical story.

**"Moses' Excellent Disposition": Race Loyalty in David Walker's *Appeal***

The Exodus narrative marks the intersection of two formative influences on David Walker—African Methodist Episcopal theology and Anglo-American political philosophy.[14] Throughout the *Appeal*, Walker blends the discourse of natural rights with sermonic rhetoric.[15] In Article I, for instance, Walker is equally comfortable with the discourse of rights—"those enemies who have for hundreds of years stolen our *rights*" (emphasis original)—and the language of scripture—"be you assured that Jesus Christ the King of heaven and earth who is the God of justice and of armies, will surely go before you" (14). Walker's pamphlet is both prayer and political argument. Walker argued that America's "political languages of progress—democracy, equality, and freedom" were "deteriorating from their ethical basis in biblical covenant with God" (Wheelock 11). By appealing to both natural rights discourse and scripture, Walker follows Phillis Wheatley, yet his militant rhetoric goes beyond Wheatley's. Walker's blend of revolutionary Christianity and natural rights discourse makes Walker distinctive among

[14] As Peter Hinks observes, "In the Wilmington Methodist church, Walker would have seen blacks administering their own affairs, leading classes, and preaching—founding a church that would then be co-opted by whites as their attitudes toward Methodism changed" (19). Hinks argues that for Walker "Republicanism was divinely ordained," as "evangelical notions" were "integrally bound together" with a "theory of natural rights" (31).

[15] Sarah Jane Cervenak argues that the *Appeal*'s "central structuring tension" is its "contradictory and complicated relationship with enlightenment" (70). Similarly, Jane Duran argues that Walker is a "product of the Enlightenment" (160), and the "constant tension" of the *Appeal* stems from the juxtaposition of the "oppressive racism of even leading white citizens (such as Jefferson and Clay)" with the "freedom-inspired speeches and actions of the Revolution and later" (164). Peter Hinks considers "extemporaneous black preaching" (193) an important influence on the structure of the *Appeal*. Walker deploys what Theophus Smith calls a "rhetoric of inducement or incantation" (60) to "conjure-God-with-scripture-for-freedom" (61).

black abolitionists of his generation, as he anticipated the prophetic fervor of Nat Turner and could debate a thinker like Jefferson on his own ground. Despite myriad differences between Enlightenment political philosophy and black Methodist spirituality, the Exodus trope played a significant role in both.

Exodus typology exerted a profound influence on Anglo-America political revolution. In the sixteenth century, English Protestants interpreted the Reformation as freedom from a papal Pharaoh, while in the seventeenth century Puritans like Oliver Cromwell believed that their victory in the English Civil War was an Exodus from a corrupt Anglican Church and the monarchy of Charles I.[16] Supporters of England's Glorious Revolution of 1688 also employed Exodus imagery.[17] The Puritan settlers of Massachusetts Bay imagined themselves as a New Israel escaped from the Egypt of the Old World to the Canaan of the New World.[18] During the Revolutionary War, patriots vilified King George as Pharaoh.[19]

Enslaved and free Africans in the U.S. inverted the version of the Exodus that helped underwrite the founding of the nation, seeing themselves as analogous to the Israelites and white slave holders as akin to the Egyptians. As early as the colonial period, African Americans understood Exodus as a "narrative that depicted God's love for all oppressed populations and his willingness to intervene on their behalf" (Thomas 3). In 1723, for instance, a group of enslaved blacks in colonial Virginia referred to themselves as Israelites in a letter to the bishop of London.[20] Phillis Wheatley's 1774 "Letter to Samson Occum" criticizes proponents of slavery as "modern Egyptians" and argues that God has given all people the "Love of Freedom."[21] Singing

[16] See Coffey 19, 52-54.
[17] See Coffey 61-64.
[18] See Fagan 5.
[19] See Coffey 68.
[20] See Goetz 138.
[21] See Thomas 15 and Coffey 97.

the spiritual "Go Down Moses," enslaved blacks imagined their own labor as a recapitulation of the bondage of the Hebrews, who were "Oppress'd so hard they could not stand." In the chorus, singers recalled God's words to Moses—"Tell old Pharaoh / Let my people go"—as a source of hope for their own deliverance.[22]

By the time David Walker first published his *Appeal* in 1829, therefore, the analogy between the ancient Israelites and enslaved blacks was well established. Walker deploys prophetic rhetoric to undermine slave holders' justifications for slavery, demonstrate African humanity, and exhort enslaved people to seek their freedom. Hoping to inspire blacks to believe that they are "self-determining agents" (Glaude 39), Walker strives to navigate a double paradox: he has complete faith in God's justice, yet feels the need for human action to secure liberation; he has total confidence in black humanity, yet feels despair at what he considers black servility. He makes violent resistance to oppression the touchstone of black manhood. Following Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Walker contends that enslaved Africans and their descendants are treated even worse by white Christians than the Israelites were treated in Egypt.[23] In particular, Walker argues that Pharaoh never denied the humanity of his slaves as whites deny the humanity of blacks. By "identifying his people with the Hebrews of old as a chosen *nation*" Walker promotes a "heightened consciousness of black oppression and a hoped-for liberation" (emphasis original) (Kling 217). However, Walker resists the idea that Africa is the Promised Land for free blacks. Whereas his predecessors generally assumed a stable one-to-one correspondence between enslaved Hebrews in Egypt and enslaved Africans in the U.S., Walker retains some aspects of exodus typology while transforming or dispensing with others.

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[22] See Raboteau *Slave* 311-312.

[23] See "Prophecy of Isaiah: Comments on the predictions contained in the 18th Chapter of the Prophet Isaiah" July 1822 and "Egyptian Bondage" June 14, 1828.

Most importantly, Walker does not advocate a physical exodus in terms of black migration to Africa, but rather envisions a figurative exodus in terms of a transformed U.S. society which grants blacks equal rights.

Walker treats Moses' voluntary identification with his people as his most salient characteristic. He is less interested in Moses' stature as a divinely-appointed, miracle-working leader and more interested in Moses as a model of integrity that ordinary people can—and must—emulate. Walker laments that "coloured people" lack "Moses' excellent disposition" (13). While the biblical text depicts Moses fleeing Egypt in fear for his life after killing an Egyptian overseer, Walker casts Moses' decision to leave Egypt as a voluntary choice to "suffer shame, with the people of God" rather than "enjoy pleasures with that wicked people for a season" (13). Unlike the biblical Moses, who is initially reluctant to obey God's command, Walker's Moses exemplifies purity of conviction. Walker's interest in Moses as the epitome of self-sacrifice departs from typical abolitionist representations of Moses as a proto-abolitionist.[24] Abolitionists often used Exodus as an allegory of contemporary politics, aggrandizing their leaders' opposition to the slave power by likening it to Moses' defiance of Pharaoh. In contrast, Walker upholds Moses' loyalty to his race. Walker uses Moses' "abjuration of all things Egyptian" (Apap 329) as a model for free blacks who must be willing to risk their own relative comfort to gain freedom for those still enslaved. Walker recurs to the ideal of loyalty to the race throughout the *Appeal*, from his vociferous claim that he "would not give a *pinch of snuff* to be married to any white person I ever met" (11) to his excoriation of "*groveling submissions* and *treachery*" (emphasis original) (32) in his fellow African Americans. Throughout Article II, in fact, Walker derides the

[24] See, for instance, "The Free People's Hate of the People Enslaved" *Provincial Freeman* October 13, 1855 and "Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Massachusetts" *Liberator* August 4, 1837.

trifecta of ignorance, treachery, and servility, which constitutes the opposite of Mosaic subjectivity.

While Walker explicitly urges his fellow African Americans to adopt Mosaic subjectivity, he implicitly likens Henry Clay to Moses to accentuate Clay's failure to sympathize with the plight of enslaved blacks. Walker criticizes Clay, who served as Speaker of the House and Secretary of State in the 1820s, for advocating African colonization.[25] He treats Clay's success as evidence of God's providence. Like the baby Moses, abandoned by his mother in a reed basket on the Nile, Clay was once an "orphan boy, pennyless, and friendless" whom "God sent into Kentucky" (53). God elevated Clay "almost to the very highest honour in the nation" (53). As Moses entered Pharaoh's household, so Clay ascended to the highest levels of government. Yet, unlike Moses, who was moved by the suffering of the Hebrews, Clay has ignored the "moans and groans" (54) of enslaved blacks. Although Clay is "highly favoured of the Lord," he has failed to "liberate those miserable victims of oppression" (54). Whereas Moses abdicated his place as prince of Egypt to join the Hebrews, Clay relies on slave labor to "enrich his family" (56). As an anti-Moses, therefore, Clay's pretensions to Christian charity in his support of colonization prove hollow. Walker, therefore, uses Moses as a standard of ethical behavior that applies equally to elite whites and enslaved blacks. Walker's understanding of Mosaic subjectivity was distinctive, but the African Methodist Episcopal church exerted an important influence on his use of exodus typology.

Exodus imagery pervaded black Methodist spirituality. Early nineteenth-century Methodist camp meetings and revivals merged charismatic worship practices, especially "shouting," with embodied performances of exodus typology.[26] The "layout and ritual practice"

[25] See Wheelock 136-137.
[26] See Raboteau *Slave* 149, 237.

of Methodist camp meetings were "modeled on the Israelites encamped with the tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem" (Taves 115). Ann Taves observes the "prominence of Moses, Joshua, the River Jordan, the Battle of Jericho, and Canaan" in Methodist spirituals, suggesting that the "sacred narrative did not begin in Jerusalem, but with Moses and the people encamped in the wilderness" (114). Charismatic worship practices enabled "black shouting Methodists" to become "the children of Israel" as shouting led to the "tearing down of the wall that divided the camp. Only when the walls fell were all united and only then did all have access to the holy land, the land where all were free" (116). The centrality of Exodus typology to Methodist revivals was echoed by some of the era's most notable black preachers.

Bishops Richard Allen and Absalom Jones draw on Exodus imagery in a series of addenda to their 1794 pamphlet *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia*.[27] Allen and Jones founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1794 in Philadelphia. They led their own Exodus—moving from St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church because of its segregated worship—to start Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.[28] In "An Address To Those Who Keep Slaves, and Approve the Practice," Allen and Jones deploy exodus language in an attempt to convert white readers to abolition. They remind their white audience that God is the "protector and avenger of slaves" (45) and the "first pleader of the cause of slaves" (46). To refute claims of black inferiority, the bishops points to the deleterious effects of slavery. Allen and Jones suggest that blacks are socialized into negative behavior through slavery: "vile habits often acquired in a state of servitude, are not easily thrown off" (45). As precedent for this, they present the example of the Israelites: "Would you not suppose the Israelites to be utterly unfit for freedom, and that it

[27] On Allen's career, see Raboteau *Fire* 80-95 and May, *Evangelism* 98-115.
[28] See Raboteau *Fire* 26.

was impossible for them, to obtain any degree of excellence?" (45). The Israelites' history shows how "slavery had debased their spirits" (45). Turning to the language of logic, the bishops urge that blacks' apparent "contented condition under oppression" is not "sufficient cause for keeping us under the grievous yoke" (46). Similarly, Walker fears that slavery has permanently damaged black manhood, as enslaved blacks have "nearly lost the spirit of man" and "adopted that of brutes" (30). Walker equates manhood with dignity, independence, and resistance to oppression. Like the bishops, Walker recognizes that justifications for slavery relied on circular logic: blacks were naturally fit for slavery because of their servile demeanor, yet servility was enforced on them through all the destructive practices of slavery. Walker, however, is far more concerned with the "groveling servile and abject submission to the lash of tyrants" (26). Walker's great fear is that his people are becoming degraded in exactly the ways that slaveholders portray them.

However, Walker's message to enslaved and free blacks is the opposite of Allen and Jones's. The next addendum, "To the People of Colour," shifts from seeking to enlist whites in the cause of freedom to exhorting blacks to remain patient and faithful. To the enslaved, Allen and Jones echo Paul's advice to serve God by obeying one's master in Ephesians 6:5-8. The bishops urge free blacks to show "gratitude toward the compassionate masters who have set you free; and let no rancor or ill-will lodge in your breast for any bad treatment you may have received" (48). They cite Deuteronomy 23:7's injunction against hatred for the Egyptians to emphasize the importance of forgiving slaveholders, treating freed blacks as analogous to Israelites dwelling in the Promised Land. If God would "not suffer it even in his beloved people Israel" (48) then he will not accept black anger toward whites. Here Walker's thinking diverges most sharply from Allen and Jones's. Rather than counsel patience, Walker seeks to arouse his people to militancy.

Finally, Walker gained from Allen and Jones the sense that American slaveholders were even more tyrannical than Pharaoh. In "A Short Address to the Friends of Him who Hath No Helper," the bishops thank those of their white readers who are already committed to abolition. As Allen and Jones describe slavery as "more than Egyptian bondage" (48) because enslaved blacks are "more effectually destroyed than was in Pharaoh's power to effect upon Israel's sons" (49), so Walker devotes most of Article I to demonstrating that Southern slavery is worse than Egyptian bondage. Walker argues that the "condition of the Israelites was better under the Egyptians than ours is under the whites" (12) because the Egyptians never denied their slaves' humanity. Walker responds to the claim that Africans descended from the "tribes of *Monkeys* or *Oran- Outangs*" (12). In Walker's pre-Darwinian context, the idea that blacks were descended from primates, rather than Adam and Eve, reflects what David Brion Davis calls the "bestializing aspects" (*Emancipation* 9) of slavery. Walker observes that while the Egyptians may have appropriated the Hebrews' labor, they did not subject them to the "most gross insult" (12) of destroying their dignity by investing them with animal otherness. Yet, because of his confidence in God's coming wrath on slavery and his belief that America, not Africa, is blacks' homeland, Walker points to a future "this side of *eternity*" (20) (emphasis original) when America will become the Promised Land for African Americans.[29]

Even better known than Allen and Jones's pamphlet, Jones's "A Thanksgiving Sermon," delivered January 1, 1808 to mark the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, has become one of the most famous examples of black Exodus preaching.[30] Jones's now legendary sermon begins by recounting the suffering experienced by the Israelites in Egypt, from the arduous labor of

[29] Benjamin Fagan observes that "From 1827 to the onset of the Civil War, black newspapers had imagined and enacted a chosen nation that existed in relation to but was not synonymous with the United States of America" (146).
[30] See Thomas 38-42 and Coffey 145-146.

brickmaking to the agony of having their sons murdered. Yet, God "saw their affliction, and heard their cry" (Jones 70). In fact, Jones declares that God keeps minute records of every act of oppression: "[E]very tear they shed, was preserved, and every groan they uttered, was recorded" (70). Walker strikes this same note in the Preamble to the *Appeal*, as he observes that God has "his ears continually open to the cries, tears and groans of his oppressed people" (10). Jones then pivots from the biblical Exodus to his own present moment, assuring his congregation that God is as "unchangeable in his nature and character, as he is in his wisdom and power" (71). He interprets the abolition of the slave trade as "striking proof, that the God of heaven and earth *is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and forever*" (emphasis original) (71). In a litany of thirteen sentences that all begin "He has seen," Jones describes how God has witnessed all of the horrors of the slave trade as he observed the suffering of the Israelites. God has seen Africans "exposed for sale, like horses and cattle," the "pangs of separation between members of the same family," and the myriad "modes of torture" (71). Jones makes the typological connection between the ancient Hebrews and nineteenth-century blacks explicit when he tells his audience that God has as in the "case of his ancient and chosen people the Jews*, come down to deliver* our suffering country-men from the hands of their oppressors" (emphasis original) (72). Gratitude for this miraculous act of deliverance is the impetus for offering thanksgiving.

Walker's openness to the violence at the heart of the Exodus narrative differentiates him from Jones's sense of propriety in avoiding confrontational rhetoric. While Jones explicitly connects the end of the slave trade to the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt, central to Walker's polemic is the idea that slave holders will experience bloody retribution comparable to the Ten Plagues. Jones insists that God himself "came down into the Congress of the United States" (72), as well as the British Parliament, when laws were passed to end the slave trade. God has "come

down to deliver our suffering countrymen from the hands of their oppressors" as in the "case of his ancient and chosen people the Jews" (72). Jones's use of exodus typology eschews any analogy to the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Walker, however, imagines God's intervention in more violent terms. In his Preamble, Walker uses the classical rhetorical device of apophasis when he says, "I will not here speak of the destructions which the Lord brought upon Egypt, in consequence of the oppression and consequent groans of the oppressed" (6). Rather than enumerate all Ten Plagues, Walker simply mentions the "hundreds and thousands of Egyptians whom God hurled into the Red Sea for afflicting his people in their land" (6). Walker returns to this point in Article IV when he reminds those whites who doubt his warnings of divine retribution for slavery of how Pharaoh doubted God until "he and all his mighty men of war, were smothered to death in the Red Sea" (83). If Jones interprets legislative victory as a bloodless Exodus, then Walker reinstates the violence at the heart of the Exodus narrative.

The difference in Jones and Walker's attitudes toward violence reflects the fact that Jones delivered his sermon during a hopeful moment when the historical tide seemed to be turning against slavery,[31] but Walker could not indulge the same optimism when he wrote his *Appeal* twenty years later. Whereas Jones likens his fellow free blacks to Israelites living in the Promised Land, Walker treats the U.S. as a palimpsest of Egypt and Canaan. Jones upholds January 1 as a new Passover, commemorating the end of the slave trade as the Israelites annually celebrated their deliverance from Egypt. Moses commands his fellow Hebrews to retell the story of their deliverance: "And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses" (Exodus

[31] On the abolition of the slave trade in Britain and the U.S., see Davis *Revolution* 134-137.

12:26-27). Jones's exhortation to commemorate the abolition of the slave trade closely parallels Moses' command to celebrate Passover: "when [our children] shall ask, in time to come, saying, 'What mean the lessons, the psalms, the prayers and the praises in the worship of this day?' let us answer them, by saying, 'the Lord, on the day of which this is the anniversary, abolished the trade which dragged your fathers from their native country, and sold them as bondmen in the United States of America'" (74). In what Rhondda Robinson Thomas calls a "radical fissure" (40) in the Exodus narrative, Jones treats his free black congregation as analogous to the Israelites in Canaan. Whereas Jones treats foreign lands, especially Africa, as pagan and in need of the gospel, he treats the U.S. as God's "highly favored country" (75). Moreover, Jones's emphasis on gratitude explicitly echoes God's command that the Israelites make sacrificial offerings from their harvest when they enter Canaan. Jones recalls how God commanded the Israelites to "never to forget their humble origin" when they "offered sacrifices to the Lord" (73) and exhorts his people to adopt the same humility. He enjoins his audience to be "sober minded, humble, peaceable, temperate in our meats and drinks, frugal in our apparel and in the furniture of our houses, industrious in our occupations, just in all our dealings, and ever ready to honour all men" (73). For Walker, however, even free blacks living in the North do not experience true freedom. As a result, instead of urging humility and temperance on his readers, as Jones does, Walker exhorts them to violent resistance.

As the legitimacy of violent resistance to slavery was a major question in Walker's day, so was the viability of African colonization. Jones draws on the story of Joseph, the prelude to the Exodus narrative proper, to offer a tentative explanation for the "mystery" of why the "impartial Father of the human race" (74) would allow millions of Africans to endure the horrors of slavery. Jones muses, "Who knows but that a Joseph may rise up among them, who shall be

the instrument of feeding the African nations with the bread of life, and of saving them, not from earthly bondage, but from the more galling yoke of sin and Satan" (74). Jones wonders whether God allowed Africans to be enslaved so that they would receive Christianity, which they would then bring to their native land, as Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, but saved the region from famine when he became Pharaoh's prime minister. In the decades after Jones's landmark sermon, the American Colonization Society (ACS) would rely heavily on the image of blacks returning to Africa to Christianize it.

Proponents of colonization—black and white alike—depicted the colonies of Liberia and Sierra Leone as a new Promised Land for free blacks. Founded in 1816, the ACS financed the colonization of Liberia in 1822 through influential supporters, including Henry Clay, John Randolph, and Bushrod Washington.[32] The ACS reflected the desire of many whites for a racially homogenous nation. By 1831, however, the ACS faced opposition from both slave holders and abolitionists. Those who favored immediate emancipation "increasingly made the disavowal of colonization the core of their confession of faith" (Davis *Emancipation* 84). In the journal he kept during his voyage to West Africa under the auspices of the ACS, black Methodist preacher Daniel Coker[33] describes Africa as a "rich and fertile land" (25), like Canaan flowing with milk and honey, yet also a land covered in spiritual darkness (34). Coker interprets both his own experiences and the plight of the black masses in terms of exodus typology. During moments of crisis, Coker draws hope from Exodus, praying, "May He that was with Moses in the wilderness, be with us" (15-16) and trusting that "He that divided the waters for Israel will open our way" (27). Moreover, Coker perceives Africa's "vast tracks of land" as the ultimate refuge for her "weeping and bleeding children" (31). Longing for a mass emigration of blacks to

[32] On the inception of the ACS, see S. Young 98-101.
[33] See Thomas 42-46.

Africa, Coker asks God, "When will for us a Moses stand, / And bring us out from Pharaoh's hand?" (31). John Russwurm, David Walker's friend and the co-founder (along with Samuel Cornish) of *Freedom's Journal*, sparked controversy among Northern free blacks when he emigrated to Liberia. Reversing his previous position, Russwurm declared his support for colonization in February 1829, just months before Walker published his *Appeal*.[34] Russwurm portrays "Liberia as our promised Land" and a future bastion of "pioneers of civilization and Heralds of the Cross." The ACS used similar biblical rhetoric in its annual reports. The report from 1848, for instance, asserts that blacks can claim the U.S. as their home only as "might the Israelites, while captives in Egypt, have claimed Egypt as their native country" because "Africa is the real home of the black man" (22) as Canaan was the true home of the Israelites. Similarly, a speech by George P. Marsh, a diplomat and philologist from Vermont, printed in the society's 1856 annual report describes the "exodus of the degraded Ethiopian from the new world" as an "event scarcely less important in human history than the return of the Hebrews to the Land of Canaan" (17). While proponents of colonization treated Liberia as a new Canaan for blacks, Walker insists that the only Promised Land for African Americans is the United States.[35]

If the American Colonization Society drew on the providential logic implicit in Bishop Jones's "Thanksgiving Sermon," then Bishop Allen explicitly rejected the colonization project. In a letter originally published in *Freedom's Journal* on November 2, 1827, and reprinted in Article IV of David Walker's *Appeal*, Allen rejects colonization on the grounds that illiterate free blacks would not make particularly good missionaries to African "Heathens."[36] Moreover, Allen observes that sending free blacks to Africa mostly benefits slaveholders because it will "make

[34] See James 44-46 and S. Young 107-108.
[35] On Walker's rejection of colonization, see Thomas 47-49.
[36] Frances Harper's Stillman echoes Walker's argument that a "horde of ignorant, poverty-stricken people" would not make ideal "missionaries of civilization or Christianity" (*Iola* 187).

their slaves uneasy to see free men of colour enjoying liberty" (134). Allen further argues that colonization is more like expulsion and that the U.S. has become blacks' homeland: "This land which we have watered with our *tears* and *our blood*, is now our *mother country*, and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds and the gospel is free" (134) (emphasis original). Walker shares Allen's view that African Americans belong on U.S. soil because of the suffering they have endured: "This country is as much ours as it is the whites[']" (55). Colonization seems to fit a literal fulfillment of the Exodus narrative—flight from Egypt—better than the idea that blacks should remain in the U.S. and be granted equal rights—Egyptian citizenship.[37] This tension glimpsed in Allen's letter develops more fully throughout Walker's *Appeal*.

Instead of an Exodus out of America, Walker wants to transform America itself. Walker projects the image of a harmonious and prosperous nation, contingent on whites accepting blacks, rejecting the idea that America is necessarily a white space and Africa is a black one. Chris Apap argues that Exodus was later interpreted as a "metaphorical journey of spiritual, material, and even political ascendance in the United States" because Walker and others "rejected a more literal embodiment of the biblical tale" (341). For Apap, Walker turns the "spatial logic of Exodus—that of a literal movement out of the land of slavery—on its head (321). I want to suggest, however, that the opposition of literal vs. metaphorical does not fully encapsulate Walker's approach to Exodus. Walker interprets some aspects of the Exodus narrative in terms of literal fulfilment and others in more figurative terms. While Walker is confident that God will bring judgment on white Americans analogous to the Ten Plagues, he

[37] In the decades leading up to the Civil War, advocates of abolition and colonization promoted opposed interpretations of the Exodus narrative. If, for many abolitionists, the South was Egypt and the North or Canada was Canaan, then, for the American Colonization Society, the only Canaan for blacks was Liberia. David Brion Davis observes that after 1831 "white abolitionists increasingly made the disavowal of colonization the core of their confession of faith; they attacked the American Colonization Society and its colony Liberia as vehemently as they attacked slavery itself" (*Emancipation* 84). Nicholas Guyatt notes that although proponents of African colonization "came perilously close to identifying the United States with Egypt, this hardly deterred elaborate analogies" (189).

does not advocate black repatriation to Africa. I argue, therefore, that Walker treats the U.S. as a palimpsest of both Egypt and Canaan. Although enslaved blacks experience treatment worse than the Hebrews in Egypt, Walker considers the U.S., not Africa, their true homeland.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of language offers insight into how deeply the Exodus narrative pervades David Walker's *Appeal*. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin argues that "The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object" (279). For Bakhtin, speech, whether spoken or written, is always already a response to a prior word and an anticipation of a responding word. For Bakhtin, this anticipation shapes the structure of speech: "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (280) (emphasis original). This dynamic of response and anticipation is at play throughout Walker's *Appeal*.

Walker's *Appeal* responds to a range of published works, many of which are explicitly quoted in the text, such as various newspaper articles, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and speeches by Henry Clay and Elias Caldwell.[38] Moreover, Walker's pamphlet also anticipates the response with which it will be met. Walker signals two of the answers toward which he directs his word in the Preamble. He expects hostile responses from whites who will slander him as an "ignorant, impudent and restless disturber of the peace," and anticipates that those of his own people who are "ignorantly in league with slave-holders or tyrants" will "rise up and call me cursed" (9). From the outset, then, Walker expects that some blacks will fatalistically claim that "there is no use in trying to better our condition, for we cannot" (9). Walker devotes

[38] John Ernest argues that this "conspicuous intertextuality" is central to Walker's goal of demonstrating the "cultural politics of interpretation" (*Chaotic* 118). Victor Anderson describes the *Appeal* as a "counter-discourse on the cultural aesthetics of thinkers like Hume and Kant, and in particular Jefferson" (62).

significant portions of the *Appeal* to responding to this anticipated answering word to his own exhortation to revolt.

The reception that Walker imagines for his pamphlet evokes the "bricks-without-straw" moment in the Exodus narrative. After Moses and Aaron command Pharaoh to release the Hebrews from slavery, Pharaoh punishes his slaves by forcing them not only to make bricks, but also to gather the straw that had previously been provided for them. Instead of condemning Pharaoh's tyranny, however, the Hebrew elders blame Moses and Aaron for their increased burdens. Walker implicitly imagines himself as Moses and those "too ignorant to see an inch beyond their noses" (9) as the Hebrews who scorned Moses for troubling Pharaoh. As the Hebrews fail to perceive that their increased labor is only the first step toward their eventual liberation, so Walker's imagined black critics do not understand that courage and sacrifice will be necessary to achieve freedom and justice. In fact, Henry Highland Garnet's biographical sketch of Walker in his 1848 republication of the *Appeal* adopts Walker's own assessment of his enemies, who "said he went too far, and was making trouble. So the Jews spoke of Moses. They valued the flesh pots-of Egypt more than the milk and honey of Canaan" (vii).[39] Garnet even included an image of a black Moses as the frontispiece to Walker's *Appeal*.[40] Walker, thus, uses the "bricks-without-straw" moment from Exodus to dissuade his readers from dismissing his militancy out of hand.

[39] See Hinks 113 and Leavell "Antebellum" 679.
[40] See Leavell "Recirculating" 167-169.

**"The badge of servitude and toil": Mosaic Solidarity and Class Tension in Frances Harper's Works**

Despite his untimely death under mysterious circumstances in 1830, David Walker's memory was preserved by his fellow abolitionists. For instance, Henry Highland Garnet re-published Walker's pamphlet in 1848 and Wendell Phillips paid tribute to Walker in a speech delivered in 1866.[41] Frances Ellen Watkins Harper most likely encountered Walker's pamphlet through her uncle, Rev. William Watkins, who raised her after her parents died. Walker refers to Watkins by his pseudonym when he mentions the "very judicious coloured Baltimorean" (49) in the opening of Article IV.[42] Moreover, Watkins circulated William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* in Maryland in 1830, the same year it reprinted Walker's *Appeal*.[43] Harper may also have encountered Walker through William C. Nell, whose *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855) includes a brief biography of Walker, as well as excerpts of Harper's writings.[44] Furthermore, both Nell and Garnet knew David Walker's son, Edward Garrison Walker.[45] While at first glance Walker and Harper seem to belong to vastly different traditions, closer scrutiny reveals parallels in their theories of selfhood, emphasis on the importance of education and literacy,[46] critiques of pro-slavery Christianity, ideals of manhood,[47] and interest

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[41] On Harper's friendship with Garnet, see M. Boyd 54. For Phillips's tribute to Walker, see "The Swindling Congress" *National Anti-Slavery Standard* November 17, 1866.
[42] On Watkins's anti-colonization writings, see Graham 101-103.
[43] See M. Boyd 81.
[44] Nell, Garnet, and Harper all attended a meeting in response to one black man's betraying two others into slavery in Michigan in 1858. See "Letter from William C. Nell" *Liberator* September 17, 1858.
[45] Nell was present when Edward Garrison Walker opposed Garnet's African Civilization Society at the New England Colored Citizens Convention in Boston in 1859. See "New England Colored Citizens Convention" *Liberator* August 26, 1859.
[46] Paul Gutjahr observes that "In the first half of the nineteenth century, reading—more than any other educational skill—was considered the mark of being educated" (16).
[47] Elizabeth Young observes that Harper "rewrites the conventions of war narrative, foregrounding black heroism in combat" (274) to combat the "horrific onslaught of negative imagery that motivated and authorized Southern lynching crusades against black men in the 1890s" (278).

in transnational conceptions of blackness.[48] Most important to my argument, however, is their shared interest in the ethical and political import of the exodus trope.

In her poetry, fiction, and non-fiction alike, Harper embeds Walker's emphasis on Moses' decision to leave the decadence of the Egyptian court to stand in solidarity with his oppressed people within the tropes of sentimental fiction.[49] Following Walker, Harper makes Moses' decision to join the Hebrews the central drama of the Exodus story. Yet, her version of the Exodus narrative differs from Walker's by putting family reunion at the heart of the story. Scholars have noted how Harper, in the words of Frances Smith Foster, "gives the women larger, more active parts in the liberation story" (*Written* 136).[50] Moreover, Harper projects white racist attitudes onto the Egyptians, whereas Walker argues that whites are worse than the Egyptians precisely because the latter lacked the racial prejudice of the former. Finally, Harper's adaptation of Exodus responded socioeconomic changes that created deeper class divisions within black communities in the early 1890s than in the late 1860s.

Tracing Harper's use of Exodus across her career reveals how she promotes women's capacity for socio-spiritual leadership and attempts to resolve class tension among free blacks. If Harper's early retellings of Exodus exhort educated African Americans to adopt Mosaic subjectivity by devoting themselves to uplifting their less privileged brothers and sisters, then in *Iola* Harper imagines a more reciprocal relationship between Mosaic leaders and the black

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[48] As "one of Walker's most distinctive pronouncements" is the "essential interrelatedness of exploited blacks throughout the world" (Hinks 179), so Harper's "transhemispheric sensibility" suggests a "symbiotic relationship between U.S. nationalism and 'other' nations'" (M. Callahan *Between* 24).

[49] Carla Peterson contends that Harper "engage[s] sentimentality in order, then, to reject it" (156). P. Gabrielle Foreman argues that the genre of the sentimental novel is only a "narrative shell" which Harper uses to "interrogate systems of power and knowledge" (332).

[50] See also Patterson *Exodus* 68-71 and M. Boyd 92-98. Reginald A. Wilburn traces Harper's interest in "Maternal heroism" (209) to Milton's influence.

masses.[51] Harper's twist on Exodus is especially significant given Robert J. Patterson's observation that in the "black political imagination" the Exodus narrative has "not functioned as a rallying cry against all forms of political oppression that are related to identity politics—race, class, gender, and sexuality" (3). In her attention to class conflict within black communities, Harper uses exodus motifs to bridge the gap between folk characters and educated race leaders, rather than represent strictly "leader-dependent communities" (4). Moreover, by depicting Minnie and Iola as female Moses figures, Harper departs from the trend of "exodus politics" that positions "black heteropatriarchy alongside white heteropatriarchy" (3). Harper works against the post-Reconstruction process of making "black manhood the privileged site of political subjectivity and activism" (Edwards 7). That is not to say that there are no problematic elements in Harper's politics, such as her reliance on the discourse of civilization,[52] but that Harper's use of Exodus is distinctive for pushing against, rather than enshrining, the norm of black male political leadership.

Harper signifies on Walker's conception of Mosaic subjectivity in her 1859 essay "Our Greatest Want." Harper's essay resembles Walker's pamphlet in terms of both genre and audience. Kevin Pelletier argues that Walker encourages "sympathetic connection between his white audience and slaves" (39). Pelletier rightly notes Walker's sentimental strategy of engaging his readers' sympathy, yet white readers are only a secondary audience for the *Appeal*. Walker's primary audience is his fellow free blacks, as he addresses "Men of colour, who are also of sense" for whom "particularly is my APPEAL designed" (33). In contrast to Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who popularized a sentimental economy in which sympathy

[51] Harper ends her 1857 speech, "Liberty for Slaves," by exhorting her audience to persevere until "over the black ocean of slavery shall be heard a song, more exulting than the song of Miriam when it floated o'er Egypt's dark sea, the requiem of Egypt's ruined hosts and the anthem of the deliverance of Israel's captive people" (307).
[52] See Cantiello 575.

flows from whites to blacks, Walker seeks to inspire sympathy in intelligent free blacks for their enslaved kin. He asks that free blacks observe the "wretchedness of your brethren" and "do your utmost to enlighten them" (33). Walker hopes that his peers will sympathize with enslaved blacks as Moses sympathized with the Hebrews in bondage. Thirty years later, Harper also used the genre of the appeal to spur her free black peers to greater sacrifice on behalf of their enslaved brothers and sisters. Published in the *Anglo-African Magazine*, "Our Greatest Want" refutes the idea that lack of economic prosperity is holding back racial progress.[53] Rhondda Robinson Thomas claims that Harper calls "influential white Americans to embrace the Mosaic Moment" (66-67), but Harper's audience is primarily educated black readers of the *Anglo-African Magazine*, rather than their white allies. Harper's appeal revises Walker's by demanding financial sacrifice, rather than violent revolt. This exemplifies what Henry Louis Gates calls "unmotivated Signification" (xxvii) because Harper is not parodying Walker, but softening his rhetoric for her own context. Harper focuses on class divisions within black communities, exhorting her readers to be like Moses by refusing the "magnificence of Pharaoh's throne" with its "oriental splendors," rather than "worshippers at the shrine of success" (160). Harper's invocation of Moses is a "tropological revision" (Gates xxv) of Walker's treatment of Moses as a paradigmatic example of race loyalty. As Walker states that Moses chose to "suffer shame, with the people of God" rather than "enjoy pleasures with that wicked people for a season" (13), so Harper declares that Moses "chose rather to suffer with the enslaved, than rejoice with the free" ("Greatest" 160). Harper criticizes free blacks for hoarding their wealth rather than contributing to the abolition of slavery: "Are our wealthiest men the most liberal sustainers of the Anti-slavery enterprise?" (160). With words important enough to her that she would repeat them in

[53] On the *Anglo-African Magazine*, see Bullock 59-63 and Fagan 122-125.

*Minnie's Sacrifice*, Harper seeks to level class divisions by arguing that "every gift, whether gold or talent, fortune or genius" must "subserve the cause of crushed humanity" (160). Harper seeks to persuade her fellow free blacks to share her "uncompromising loyalty to African American slaves" (27). Ten years later Harper would return to the ideal of Mosaic subjectivity to address lynching during Reconstruction.

The protagonists of Harper's works written during Reconstruction achieve reform through self-abnegation. *Minnie's Sacrifice*, serialized in the *Christian Recorder* in 1869, addresses the problem of lynching by characterizing its Mosaic characters as martyrs. The narrator describes how "violence and murder were rampant in the land" and those "advocating equal rights did so at the peril of their lives" (85). Minnie and her husband Louis are undeterred by the Ku Klux Klan, which is spreading "terror and death" (85). Although the chapter of *Minnie's Sacrifice* depicting Minnie's death is not extant, we can infer that she is killed because of her uplift work in the South. At the end of *Minnie's Sacrifice*, Harper repeats her message from "Our Greatest Want"—that African Americans should devote "whatever gifts we possess, whether they be genius, culture, wealth or social position" (*Minnie* 92) to aid the race as a whole—yet with a new emphasis on suffering. If in "Our Greatest Want" Harper's ideal of Mosaic subjectivity meant selflessly giving one's resources to the abolitionist cause, in *Minnie's Sacrifice* Harper extends this ideal to include martyrdom in response to the problem of lynching during Reconstruction.

Harper's inscription of martyrdom in the project of racial uplift is organically related to Walker's "theory of subjection" (Pelletier 51). Walker embraces a form of "Messianic violence" (48) that legitimizes slave revolts by calling for submission to God's will. Walker advocates "self-abnegation and self-subjection," rather than assertive "revolutionary manhood" (49), as he,

paradoxically, urges enslaved blacks to seize their freedom and wait for God's wrath on slaveholders. While Harper promotes social reform rather than violence, she shares Walker's conception of Messianic selfhood. Whereas Walker urges enslaved blacks to be willing to die for freedom, Harper's protagonists risk their lives to elevate their race.

Along with *Minnie's Sacrifice*, Harper's narrative poem "Moses: A Story of the Nile" upholds Moses' decision to leave Egypt as an example for African Americans during Reconstruction. Although the first edition is not extant, the second edition was published in 1869. Harper makes Moses' decision to leave the Egyptian court the focal point of her retelling of the Exodus narrative. Harper casts this decision to leave Egypt not merely as a choice between luxury and poverty, but as a choice between two different mothers. For Harper, the Hebrews' liberation from slavery truly begins when Moses leaves his adoptive Egyptian mother in favor of his Hebrew birth mother. Whereas Harper spends less than a page on Moses' encounter with God at the Burning Bush and condenses all Ten Plagues, which span the one hundred and thirty-one verses of Exodus 7-11, into a couple of pages, she spends ten whole pages on a conversation in which Moses explains his decision to abdicate his claim to the throne to Pharaoh's daughter, Charmian. Alice Rutkowski argues that Harper's central concern in the poem is with the "place of black women in the white feminist movement" (90) and interprets Pharaoh's daughter as an allegorical representation of Lydia Maria Child. Rutkowski bases her argument on the "representation of interracial adoption and extensive floral imagery" (85) in Harper and Child's texts. Yet, Harper could have used the trope of interracial adoption to critique Child without rewriting the Exodus narrative. While it is possible that Harper had Child in mind when she wrote "Moses: A Story of the Nile," I argue that her use of the Exodus trope signifies more

clearly on David Walker's. Rewriting Exodus allowed Harper to fuse Walker's sense of Mosaic subjectivity with her interest in sentimentalism and domestic ideology.

Harper's Moses resembles Walker's in his decision to leave the luxury of the palace to dwell among the enslaved Hebrews. Moses tells his bemused adoptive mother that he is leaving his place at court "to join / The fortunes of my race" (Harper "Moses" 3), a formulation that Harper will repeat in *Minnie's Sacrifice* and *Iola*. Charmian is incredulous because no "king e'er cast / His diadem in the dust, to be trampled / Down by every careless foot" (4). Moses tells his adoptive mother, "I cannot live in pleasure while they faint. / In pain" (5). The narrator echoes Walker's claim that Moses "had rather suffer shame, with the people of God, than to enjoy pleasures with that wicked people for a season" (13) in describing how Moses "[w]ent forth to share the fortune of his race, / Esteeming that as better far than pleasures / Bought by sin and gilded o'er with vice" (12). The narrator reinforces the magnitude of Moses' decision by emphasizing the "great change from the splendor, light / And pleasure of a palace to the lowly huts / Of those who sighed because of cruel bondage" (13). The narrator even catalogues various beautiful objects—flowers, fountains, statues, obelisks, sphynxes (13)—which Moses leaves behind. This conversation between Moses and Charmian is erotically charged, accentuating the extent to which Moses resists the seductive pull of Egyptian decadence.[54] While the biblical text does not describe Pharaoh's daughter's physical appearance, Harper's depiction is deeply sexualized. After hearing Moses' final decision to leave the palace, Charmian "stood before him in the warm / Loveliness of her ripened womanhood" (12). The narrator's descriptions of the "hurried breathing of one and the quick / Throbbing of the other's heart" (9) make the interlocutors seem more like lovers than mother and adopted son. Harper depicts Charmian in

[54] Geoffrey Sanborn notes the "libidinal dimension" (708) between many of Harper's characters and their mothers.

such strongly sexualized terms to underscore that Moses refuses the temptation of a life of luxury in Egypt.

Charmian fails to understand what Moses recognizes—enjoying the luxury of the royal court makes him complicit in the oppression of his fellow Hebrews. Moses knows that the beautiful garments he wears are bought with the suffering of the enslaved Hebrews: "The very purple on my limbs seems drenched / With blood, the warm blood of my own kindred race" (5). Harper develops this theme further in *Minnie's Sacrifice*. Early in the novel, Camilla, the analogue to Pharaoh's daughter, boasts to the elderly slave Miriam that her father once bought her "two thousand dollars[']  worth of jewelry when we were in New York, just because I took a fancy to a diamond set which I saw at Tiffany's" (5). The naïve plantation heiress does not yet understand that her wealth is purchased by the oppression of her father's slaves. Similarly, Mrs. Le Grange does not care that the pearls her husband gives her are "bought with the price of blood" because she "knew no law but her own will; no gratification but the enjoyment of her own desires" (21). Although Camilla has little self-awareness of her privileged status, she is a good sentimental reader, especially of the bible. She convinces her father to let her raise a light-skinned boy slave after reading the "beautiful story in the Bible about a wicked king, who wanted to kill all the little boys of a people who were enslaved in his land, and how his mother hid her child by the side of a river, and that king's daughter found him and saved his life" (5). Like the ideal reader of a sentimental novel,[55] Camilla responds to the story of Moses with sympathy—"I read it till I cried"—and the desire to act—"Now I mean to do something like that good princess. I am going to ask Pa, to let me take him to the house, and have a nurse for him,

[55] As Paul Gutjahr observes, "the goal of the sentimental was never intended to make one simply cry, sympathize, or feel remorse, but to move one to take some kind of moral action. This action most often took the form of benevolence—the extension of one's will and resources for the betterment of another" (46).

and bring him up like a white child, and never let him know that he is colored" (5). Harper, therefore, consistently underscores the connection between the luxury of slaveholders and the oppression of slaves.

Harper accents the drama of Moses' decision to renounce Egyptian luxury by fabricating a ceremony in which Moses is supposed to swear his allegiance to Egypt's gods. She devotes five pages to a dialogue between Moses and his Hebrew birth mother, in which Moses explains his decision to join his suffering people. Moses tells his mother that he has "come to share the fortunes of my race, / To dwell within these lowly huts,—to wear / The badge of servitude and toil, and eat / The bitter bread of penury and pain" (14). Moses' mother is relieved to hear that the rumors that Moses had sworn his allegiance to the Egyptian gods are untrue. Harper's most significant addition to the biblical Exodus story is Moses' description of the events of this aborted ceremony to his mother. Moses explains that on the day of the ceremony Pharaoh expected Moses to "bind my soul to Egypt, and to swear / Allegiance to her gods" (16). This demand can be seen as an inverse of the oath of allegiance that Southerners were forced to swear in the early years of Reconstruction.[56] When the Egyptian priests urge Moses to "forswear my kindred, / Tribe and race" (16), however, Moses remembers his mother's stories of the "grand traditions of our race, / The blessed hopes and glorious promises" (16). Moses likens the memory of his mother's words to angels guiding him to abdicate his place in Egypt's royal line.[57] Moses concludes, "I left the pomp and pride of Egypt / To cast my lot among the people of my race" (18). More than one-third of Harper's poem, therefore, consists of elaborating on Moses' decision to leave his comfortable place among Egyptian royalty to stand in solidarity with the

[56] See Rubin 164-171.
[57] Robert Patterson suggests that Harper's portrayal of Moses' mother reflects how "women manipulate patriarchal ideologies to defy patriarchy itself" ("Triple-Twined" 70).

enslaved Hebrews. Moses feels a deep sense of loyalty to his mother in particular, rather than an abstract sense of duty toward the Hebrews in general.[58] When Moses flees Egypt after killing an overseer, Harper describes his decision to become a shepherd in Midian as a deliberate choice to "cut off all retreat / To Pharaoh's throne" by choosing the "calling / Most hateful to an Egyptian" (22) rather than an act of necessity or survival. Harper's portrayal of Moses, like Martin Delany's Blake, elides the biblical Moses' initial reluctance to obey God's command. By describing Moses as one who "stood a bright / Example through the changing centuries of time" ("Moses" 13), Harper upholds him as a model of race loyalty for African Americans to imitate during Reconstruction.

Although Harper follows Walker in emphasizing Moses' solidarity with his people, she departs from him in portraying the Egyptians as racists. Walker begins his extended contrast between Egyptian and American slavery, which dominates the first half of Article I, by noting that Pharaoh elevated Joseph, a Hebrew, to the highest administrative office in the land and even gave him the daughter of an Egyptian priest as a wife. Whereas in Walker's day blacks were almost universally prohibited from public service or marrying whites in the U.S., Joseph achieved greatness despite being a Hebrew. The Hebrews, of course, were not enslaved until after Joseph's death. Walker's point is that the Egyptians did not hold the kind of deep-seated racial prejudice against the Hebrews that American whites hold toward American blacks. Joseph's ability to rise in society was virtually unencumbered compared to that of free blacks, even in the North. Whereas American slaveholders asserted that blacks were descended from the "tribes of *Monkeys* or *Orang-Outangs*," the Egyptians never told the Hebrews that "they were not of the *human family*" (emphasis original) (12). Walker, thus, argues that the Egyptians were

[58] Michael Stancliff argues that Harper draws on the "rhetorical theory of republican motherhood" (57).

slaveholders without necessarily being racists. To cement his argument that the Egyptians were not racist, Walker observes that Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses as her own.

While Walker argues that the Egyptians did not believe in the innate racial inferiority of their Hebrew slaves, Harper projects white racism onto her Egyptian characters. Rhadma, one of Pharaoh's advisors created by Harper rather than derived from the biblical text, attributes Moses' decision to abdicate to the "servile blood / Within his veins" ("Moses" 27). By 1869 when Harper wrote "Moses: A Story of the Nile," Northern and Southern whites had been denigrating black "blood" or heredity for decades. In 1843, for instance, Josiah Priest, a popular writer of pseudoscientific history and archaeology from New York, claimed that in Africa only the "mixture of the other races with that of the negro blood" had "elevated the negro blood a little above their native dead level of their degraded natures" (179).[59] The widely read Priest affirms polygenism, the idea that the black and white races do not share a common ancestor, but rather "there was never any negro blood in the veins of Adam nor blood which produced the black or African race, naturally" (133). In 1860, Virginian Baptist minister Thornton Stringfellow offered a more explicitly religious explanation for the idea that the "African race is constitutionally inferior to the white race" (6). Stringfellow interprets Genesis 9 to mean that "Ham's descendants were doomed by the Almighty to a state of slavery" (11) to the superior descendants of Shem and Japheth.[60] Stringfellow construes slavery as beneficial to Africans, whom he calls the "most degraded, superstitious, and ignorant of all the heathen races on earth," because slavery has bequeathed to them a "progressive state of civilization" and the "blessings of the gospel" (15). The cultural achievements of the ancient Egyptians, however, threatened to undermine the idea that the African race was intrinsically inferior.

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[59] On Priest, see Harpster and Stalter 137-138 and Sloan 67-74.
[60] On the Curse of Ham, see Hood 155-180.

Because Egyptian civilization excelled in art, architecture, and learning it was unthinkable to many nineteenth-century whites that the Egyptians could have been dark-skinned. In 1844, for instance, the Philadelphian physician and anatomist Samuel George Morton used craniology to identify the races of ancient Egyptian remains by the contours of their skulls.[61] Morton concludes that the "complexion of the Egyptians did not differ from that of the other Caucasian nations in the same latitudes" (29). In the same year, another physician and proponent of ethnology, Josiah C. Nott, originally from South Carolina, sought to demonstrate that the "Caucasian or White, and the Negro races were distinct at a very remote date" (212).[62] Nott's collaborator, George R. Gliddon, the English-born Egyptologist who had furnished Morton with mummified remains, reaffirmed Morton's findings that the Egyptians were Caucasian, rather than African.[63] In 1849, Gliddon claimed that the "builders of the pyramids" were "Caucasians, and white men, and Egyptians" (25). Black writers, however, contested the idea that the Egyptians were white and, therefore, that the white race is the source of art, learning, and culture.

Whereas various black writers sought to overturn the claim that the Egyptians were white, Harper takes it to its logical conclusion. In 1827, John Russwurm cited Herodotus's description of Egyptians as black to refute those unwilling to "acknowledge that the Egyptians bore any resemblance to the present race of Africans" ("Mutability" 15). Walker himself informs his readers that the "Egyptians were Africans or coloured people, such as we are—some of them yellow and others dark" (10). Walker may seek to present the Egyptians in as positive a light as possible because he considered them to be his ancestors. Harper, however, had to contend with the apparent scientific authority which Morton, Nott, and Gliddon brought to the claim that the

[61] On Morton, see Stanton 25-35.
[62] On Nott, see Stanton 65-72 and Faust 206-208.
[63] On Gliddon, see Vivian 99-111.

Egyptians were Caucasian. Harper's portrayal of the Egyptian court as racist ironically appropriates Nott's claim that "*the Egyptians were Caucasians*" (emphasis original) (212). While Nott tries to distinguish between Caucasian Egyptians and black Africans, Harper characterizes the Egyptians as holding whites' attitude of racial prejudice. Much as Nott boasts of his ability to detect those "tainted with negro blood" (232), Rhadma asserts that "blood / Will tell" and a "base slave" like Moses would "rather be a servant / Than a prince" (27).[64] For Rhadma, Moses' behavior is the direct result of his tainted heredity, whereas for Harper it is a conscious choice. Although Harper does not describe the complexions of her Egyptian characters in detail, she describes Potiphar's wife, who tried to seduce Joseph, as having a "soft white hand" (17) and refers to the "olive" (12) hue of Charmian's cheeks. Ultimately, Harper is less concerned with the historical Egyptians' skin tone than with portraying them as mirrors of the racist whites opposing newly emancipated African Americans.

Although Harper departs from Walker in characterizing the Egyptians as racially prejudiced, she follows his example in emphasizing the danger of internalizing servility. Walker especially despises blacks who collaborate with whites instead of helping their own people escape from slavery. Walker's polemic relies on an ideal of courageous manhood: "Are we MEN!!—I ask you, O my brethren! are we MEN?" (21).[65] Walker's emphasis on manhood partly reflects his fear that enslaved blacks have lost the will to rise against their oppressors. His frustration that many slaves have internalized their masters' emphasis on submission animates his language. He is shocked that his people "could be so *submissive* to a gang of men" (21) (emphasis original). For Walker, mere men are not worthy of the submission that is due God

[64] In *Iola*, the Southern Dr. Latrobe expresses the racist position that "white negroes are of illegitimate origin" because their "blood is tainted" (173).
[65] Marcy J. Dinius argues that Walker's expressions of emotion, intensified by his use of capitalization and exclamation points, perform a "writerly experience of the Romantic sublime" (61).

alone. He worries that his people may have "lost the spirit of man, and, in no very trifling degree, adopted that of brutes" (30) because of the conditions of slavery. Walker admits that there is some truth to white descriptions of blacks as brutes, but only because they have been brutalized by slavery. Much of Walker's palpable emotion stems from the fear that this process is rapidly growing irreversible. He is most disturbed by the "*groveling submissions* and *treachery*" (32) (emphasis original) of blacks who aid whites in recapturing runaway slaves. According to Walker, anyone who lacks the manly courage to join the "glorious and heavenly cause of freedom and of God" (18) deserves to remain enslaved. If Walker fears that his peers lack the courage to oppose slavery, then Harper cautions her peers about the dangers of abandoning the struggle for liberation.

Following Walker's concern with internalized servility, Harper's narrator suggests that the conditions of slavery had a residual effect on the Hebrews even after their miraculous deliverance. Writing in the wake of the Civil War, Harper is concerned that her generation will respond to freedom much as the Israelites who died in the wilderness. "Moses: A Story of the Nile" emphasizes how liberation from physical bondage remains incomplete if it is not accompanied by mental, emotional, and spiritual dispositions appropriate to freedom. Although the "chains were shaken from their limbs, / They failed to strike the impress from their souls" (39). Harper devoted herself to cultivating what she perceived to be the right attitudes and behaviors for newly emancipated people, as she actively campaigned for temperance, literacy, and women's suffrage throughout the South from 1866-1869.[66] As in the biblical story, in Harper's poem the Israelites respond to adversity with the desire to return to the simplicity of slavery in Egypt. Committing the double sin of ingratitude for their deliverance and fear of

[66] See M. Boyd 130.

entering the Promised Land, the Hebrews "turned their faces / Egyptward, and asked a captain from their bands / To lead them back where they might bind anew / Their broken chains" (39). During Reconstruction, many African Americans experienced a comparable disorientation at their new status. One way the desire to "return to Egypt" manifested itself was in the form of exchanging one's vote for bribes. In *Minnie's Sacrifice*, published serially in the *Christian Recorder* in 1869, Richard tells Minnie and Louis how he has been offered $500 to "desert my party" (77). Minnie observes that such a sum "means a great deal for a man landless and poor" (77). As sharecroppers, many newly emancipated African Americans faced dire poverty and intimidation from Southern whites. Harper is sympathetic to these difficulties but suggests that succumbing to the temptation to sell one's vote is, in Louis's words, a "betrayal of the interests of his race" (77). In both *Minnie's Sacrifice* and "Moses: A Story of the Nile," therefore, Harper presents self-sacrificial race loyalty as the ideal response to the challenges of Reconstruction.

As Moses relinquishes the power and wealth entitled to him as an adopted member of the Egyptian royal family in "Moses: A Story of the Nile," so the mixed-race heroes of *Iola Leroy or, Shadows Uplifted* sacrifice the advantages they could gain by passing as white in favor of identifying with and striving to elevate African Americans. Harper's 1892 novel set during the Civil War and Reconstruction portrays the rise of a generation of mixed-race characters who emulate Moses in identifying with blacks rather than whites. The novel revolves around the "trinity of manumission, education, and marriage" (Cantiello 575). Building on Andreá N. Williams's argument that in *Iola* Harper "attempts to defuse intraracial conflict, including class differences, by promoting racial uplift as a unifying social agenda" (*Dividing* 47-48), I argue that Harper specifically uses exodus motifs to resolve class tensions within the free black community by staging scenes of collaboration and mutual tenderness between educated, light-skinned

Mosaic leaders and illiterate, dark-skinned characters. In the context of the Nadir experienced by African Americans after the failure of Reconstruction, Harper maintains Walker's emphasis on Moses' race loyalty, but transforms Walker's militancy into a focus on domesticity. P. Gabrielle Foreman brilliantly argues that *Iola* practices what she calls "histotextuality," a strategy which "marginalized writers use to incorporate historical allusions that both contextualize and radicalize their work by countering the putatively innocuous generic codes they seem to have endorsed" (329). Yet, Foreman contends that histotextual novels like *Iola* are characterized by the "ironic use of *apparent* sentimental transparency" (emphasis original) (331), but there is no need to disavow Harper's use of sentimental tropes. Harper relies on many of the conventions of sentimental fiction—a didactic tone, attempts to engage the reader's sympathy through depictions of innocent suffering and tearful scenes of separation and reunion, the centrality of the marriage plot, the sanctity of the family, and a self-sacrificing heroine—without ironizing them. Rather, Harper uses sentimentalism to structure the stories of her trio of light-skinned, mixed-race Moses figures because it effectively connects her political convictions to her domestic ideology.

Much as in Walker's *Appeal* "pleas for sympathy and expressions of apocalypse often exist side by side without being fully yoked together" (Pelletier 24), Harper transposes the places of violence and sympathy. Harper treats the classroom as a scene of violence, depicting teachers coming to the South during Reconstruction as an "army of civilizers; the army of the pen" (*Minnie* 68) and a "new army that had come with an invasion of ideas" (*Iola* 111). This transposition reflects Harper's sense that the postbellum struggle to "supplant ignorance with knowledge" (111) was as fierce a contest as the Civil War itself. As Walker treats literal violence as necessary to end slavery, Harper treats racial uplift as metaphorically violent. In *Iola*, Harper

not only characterizes the classroom as a scene of violence, but also portrays the battlefield as an arena of sympathy. Harper's depictions of war, such as Tom Anderson's sacrificial death, are laden with sentimental tropes, including Iola's "flood of tears" (*Iola* 43). A man of "herculean strength and remarkable courage" (32), Tom sacrifices his life to save Union soldiers out of devotion to Iola.[67] Iola's resolution to serve her people parallels Tom's sacrifice on the battlefield, as "more was needed than bayonets and bullets" for the "true reconstruction of the country" (179). Harper's ideal, therefore, is equally open to men and women. By characterizing military valor in sentimental terms, Harper suggests that the post-bellum struggle for racial uplift will be a battle won by filial loyalty and self-sacrifice.[68]

Whereas Walker makes suicidal courage the standard of manly resistance, Harper subsumes martial courage to an ideal of pious self-sacrifice. Framing his argument in the strongest possible terms, Walker derides anything short of total opposition to slavery as insufficient. Unlike Native Americans, who, from Walker's perspective, would "die to a man" (32) rather than suffer enslavement, African Americans "*meanly* submit" (31) (emphasis original) to their masters. Walker's fearlessness stems from his conviction that eventually God will "hurl tyrants and devils into *atoms*" (35) (emphasis original). Harper, however, conveys her ideal of manhood in the figure of Sir Galahad, whose strength is derived from his purity (*Iola* 193). If, as Eric Sundquist suggests, Frederick Douglass's portrayal of his "'manly' resistance" to the slave-breaker Covey in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) stands as an alternative to

[67] Harper includes this same incident in *Minnie's Sacrifice* (67). Michael Borgstrom argues that Harper "presents several black male characters whose priorities are overtly domestic" for whom "unselfish loyalty to family (however defined) is as important as freedom or personal gratification" (783).

[68] Elizabeth Young observes that Harper "embeds the war in a narrative trajectory of maternal quest and reunion, simultaneously feminizing war narrative and using this literary form to represent the importance of maternal and familial structures in the black community" (274).

the "capitulation of Uncle Tom to the murderous whip of Simon Legree" (123), then Harper's depiction of Tom Anderson's death attempts a synthesis of the two. Harper signifies on both Douglass and Stowe by characterizing Tom as an icon of both courageous black masculinity and fervent piety.[69] Yet, Tom's manly courage is subsumed by his piety, as his dying request is to hear Iola sing hymns. Whereas Douglass uses his victory over Covey to represent himself as "arrayed in masculine liberty, endowed with the 'signs of power'" (123), Harper endows Tom and Iola alike with what we might call the "signs of devotion." While many nineteenth-century black writers used manhood as their "trope of citizenship" (Romero 8), Harper makes pious self-sacrifice hers.

Arguably Harper's most sophisticated literary work, *Iola* marks the culmination of her conception of Mosaic subjectivity after the failure of Reconstruction and during the solidification of Jim Crow. Even contemporaries who shared Harper's interest in Mosaic subjectivity typically associated it with men, rather than women. For instance, Rev. Augustus W. Watson, writing in the *Christian Recorder* in 1887, depicts Moses as giving up the "glories of earthly power and high distinction, fame, wealth and royalty" because the "integrity of his mother's character had been indelibly stamped upon him." While Watson's depiction of Moses strongly resembles Harper's own, Watson is concerned with how righteous mothers raise "[g]reat men," whereas Harper's conception of Mosaic subjectivity encompasses women, as well. Iola is a light-skinned, mixed-race woman, whose mother was her father's slave before he manumitted, educated, and married her. Like Moses spending his childhood in the Egyptian palace, Iola is raised as the daughter of a wealthy Southerner. After a happy and privileged childhood, Iola suffers the indignities of slavery when the death of her father leaves her, her mother, Marie, and her brother,

[69] Henry Louis Gates argues that *Iola* signifies on the first chapter of Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* (122-123).

Harry, vulnerable to her father's cousin, Alfred Lorraine. Iola is tricked into returning to the South and forced into slavery, until she is rescued by Union soldiers. During the Civil War, Iola works as a nurse for the Union army alongside Dr. Gresham. Although she admires Dr. Gresham, she rejects his marriage proposal on two separate occasions—years apart—because she desires to uplift her race.[70]

Iola develops Mosaic subjectivity by marrying the African American Dr. Latimer instead of the white Dr. Gresham. What Walker treats as Moses' choice between two abstract moral categories—the "people of God" and "that wicked people" (13)—Harper transforms into the far more particular choice between two suitors—Drs. Gresham and Latimer.[71] After Emancipation, marriage was considered as both a "personal act" and as an "institution with ramifications for the entire Afro-American collective" (M. Mitchell 202). The first time Iola rejects Dr. Gresham, she explains that even in a "palace-like home, with velvet carpets to hush my tread, and magnificence to surround my way" (Harper *Iola* 90) she would long for her mother, whom she has vowed to find now that the war has ended. In this scene, Harper deploys the classic sentimental trope of the heroine choosing duty over passion: "No quivering of her lip or paling of her cheek betrayed any struggle of her heart" (90).[72] Although Harper characterizes Dr. Gresham as altruistic, she treats his marriage proposal as a temptation for Iola to indulge in Egyptian decadence. Like Walker's version of Moses, Iola gives up a luxurious lifestyle. Unlike Walker, however, Harper emphasizes Iola's desire to reunite her family: "Oh, you do not know how

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[70] Harper ascribes to Iola the same ability to imagine her people's future as she ascribes to Moses. If Moses' "dark prophetic eyes" seemed to "look beyond the present pain / Unto the future greatness of his race" (Harper "Moses" 11-12), then there is a "rapt and far-off look in [Iola's] eye, as if she were looking beyond the present pain to a brighter future for the race with which she was identified, and felt the grandeur of a divine commission to labor for its uplifting" (Harper *Iola* 167).

[71] As Michelle Birnbaum notes, the fact that both of Iola's suitors are doctors is not accidental, as in the novel "racial conflict becomes a crisis of gender, and female hysteria, a sign of racial dis-ease" (9).

[72] Jane Tompkins argues that the "pain of learning to conquer her own passions is the central fact of the sentimental heroine's existence" (172). See also Tate 125.

hungry my heart is for my mother!" (90). The imagined "anguish of her heart-stricken mother and the pale, sweet face of her dying sister" (91) prevents Iola from succumbing to her own desire for "love, home, happiness, and social position" (90). Harper's fuses the Exodus trope with her investment in racial uplift and domestic ideology. For Harper, educated African Americans—no matter how light their skin—should form their own families, rather than be absorbed into white ones.[73]

The second time Iola rebuffs Dr. Gresham reveals her desire to repay African Americans for the benefits she received from slave labor during her youth. Since Iola has been reunited with her mother, uncle, and brother, Dr. Gresham observes that her commitment to rediscovering her family is no longer an excuse for denying him. Yet, she persists in her position: "I don't think I could best serve my race by forsaking them and marrying you" (Harper *Iola* 178). To marry the white doctor would mean entering white society, and Iola feels a moral debt to African Americans. Geoffrey Sanborn argues that Harper portrays "race work as a mode of sexual experience" (707) rather than strictly moral obligation, citing Iola's statement that she is not "wholly unselfish" (Harper *Iola* 178) in her decision to identify as African American. Sanborn, however, obscures the extent to which Iola considers herself "indebted to [enslaved blacks] for the power I have to serve them" (178). As Moses recognizes that his fine purple robe was bought with the Hebrews' labor in "Moses: A Story of the Nile," so Iola is aware that her education was purchased with the "unrequited toil" (178) of her father's slaves. Iola's desire to serve her race begins, not with pleasure, though she does enjoy improving others' lives, but with the profound sense of an ineradicable debt. It is, ultimately, this sense of moral obligation which prevents Iola from marrying Dr. Gresham.

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[73] Alice Rutkowski argues that in *Iola* Harper "pointedly rewrote the marriage plot of [Lydia Maria Child's] *A Romance of the Republic*" (90).

One can read Harper's reliance on the marriage plot as a response to the surging popularity of "sentimental reconciliationist literature" (Blight 216) during the mid-1880s and 1890s. Such novels indulged in a fantasy which David W. Blight calls the "romance of reunion" (237) characterized by "shared grief at war's costs coupled with Northern respect for the *sincerity* of Southern devotion to their cause" (215) (emphasis original). In this genre, the "reality of the war itself" was "displaced in a flood of marriage metaphors" (217) as fictional conflicts were resolved with the weddings of Northern and Southern characters. Elizabeth Young observes that *Iola* appears to follow this pattern when the Northern Dr. Gresham proposes to the Southern Iola, but subverts the reader's expectations when Iola refuses Dr. Gresham's proposal (290). Harper uses marriage, not as a metaphor of national reunion, but as a microcosm of a burgeoning class of mixed-race Mosaic leaders.

Whereas Dr. Gresham is the equivalent of a repentant Egyptian, Dr. Latimer is Iola's ideal match because he also exemplifies Mosaic subjectivity. The novel culminates in Iola's marriage to Dr. Latimer, who is also light-skinned and educated and aspires to uplift his people.[74] Dr. Latimer has made the same choice as Iola by rejecting "all the possibilities which only birth and blood can give a white man in our Democratic country" (182) and forsaking his white grandmother's offer to make him her heir if he ignored his African heritage. Eschewing a "desire for economic privilege and social distinction" is what "characterizes Iola and Latimer as Mosaic heroine and hero" (Stancliff 159). Like Iola and Harry, it is Dr. Latimer's mother who was enslaved.[75] While for Walker Moses identified himself with the oppressed people of God, Harper's characters sentimentally identify themselves with their mothers' people. Iola and Dr.

[74] Harper's use of the marriage plot in *Iola* is partly belied by her own singleness during most of her public career. On Harper as embodying the discourse of "single blessedness," see A. Williams "Rhetoric" 109-112.
[75] Geoffrey Sanborn observes that Dr. Latimer's "blackness is entirely contingent upon the degree to which he loves his mother" (709).

Latimer make an ideal pair because of their shared heritage and commitment to their people, as in their "desire to help the race their hearts beat in loving unison" (202). Harper's "domestic idealism" is a "distinctly politicized sexual discourse of perfect intraracial affirmation" (Tate 170). Iola considers Dr. Latimer her "ideal of a high, heroic manhood" because he, like Moses and Nehemiah, is willing to "put aside [his] own advantage for [his] race and country" (201). Dr. Latimer explicitly invokes Exodus when he hears that black children are expected to honor Jefferson Davis by strewing flowers in his path. Dr. Latimer exclaims that the "Israelites had just as much right to scatter flowers over the bodies of the Egyptians, when the waves threw back their corpses on the shores of the Red Sea, as these children had to strew the path of Jefferson Davis with flowers'" (183). As Walker laments that his people are "too servile to assert our rights as men" (71), so Dr. Latimer so declares, "We want our boys to grow up manly citizens, and not cringing sycophants" (Harper *Iola* 183). Harper invests Dr. Latimer, like Iola and Tom Anderson, with the signs of devotion, as he declares that he would have "despised myself" (181) if he had forsaken his mother's people by passing as white. With his "matrifocal knowledge" (L. Lewis 73), Dr. Latimer embodies an ideal of manhood in which physical strength and courage have been translated into dignity and self-respect. Harper employed the "rhetoric of manhood as an emancipatory discourse to be mediated by both men and women" (Tate 132). Instead of heroism on the battlefield, Dr. Latimer heroically fulfills his duty to his race as a "leader in every reform movement for the benefit of the community" (Harper *Iola* 213). Harper, therefore, not only follows Walker in using Moses as an exemplar of race loyalty, but also strongly suggests that African Americans can rejuvenate their race by forming respectable families.[76]

[76] Michele Mitchell notes that Harper's use of the language of heredity and environment reflects how "racialist theories could be co-opted in the name of black uplift" (86).

Iola's brother Harry, likewise, follows the Walkerian Mosaic imperative to identify with oppressed blacks by choosing the path of family. Harry's name recalls another mixed-race character forced to choose between loyalty to whites or blacks in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*. Harper signifies on Stowe by having her Harry decisively choose to identify with his African heritage, in contrast to Stowe's Harry, who is torn between his loyalty to his white half-sister and owner and his fellow black slaves. Harper's Harry Leroy proves his loyalty to his race throughout *Iola* by refusing to pass as white. In the aftermath of discovering that his fair-skinned mother was actually once his father's slave and that he has African ancestry, Harry is faced with the choice of enlisting in a black or white regiment in the Union army. Although his "soul shrank from equalizing himself with [black people]" (Harper *Iola* 96), he tells the surprised enlisting officer "I am a colored man" (97). What convinces Harry to make this decision is not a feeling of solidarity with blacks in the abstract, but his love for his enslaved mother and sister in particular.[77] Harry believes that in a black regiment he could "strike the most effective blow for [Marie and Iola's] freedom" (97). Raised as white, Harry's initial conception of manhood conforms to the code of Southern honor. When he learns that his father's cousin, Alfred Lorraine, contrived to have his mother and sister remitted into slavery, for instance, he hopes to "meet Lorraine on the battlefield" (96). Yet, the true test of Harry's manhood, for Harper, is not his martial courage, but the filial love that makes him willing to identify himself as black. Although he never has the chance to avenge himself on Lorraine, Harry dispenses with the idea of vengeance after witnessing the "fearful ravages of war" and learning to "pity and forgive" (154). After the war, Harry seamlessly transitions from literal to metaphorical combat, as he joins the "new army of Northern teachers" (146). As with Tom

[77] Allen Dwight Callahan argues that for African Americans "filial ties historically have not been the cause for solidarity but its consequence" (113).

Anderson and Dr. Latimer, for Harry, ideals of manly courage are subsumed by sentimental values of love, forgiveness, and the sanctity of the family.

Harry's martial courage follows Walker's emphasis on militancy, but it would be incomplete, for Harper, if it was not complemented by a proper marriage. Harper draws out the full implications of Walker's comments on interracial marriage when Harry marries a black woman named Lucille Delany.[78] As Walker declares that he would "not give a *pinch of snuff* to be married to any white person I ever saw in all the days of my life" (emphasis original) (11), so Harry chooses a black woman without the "least hint of blood admixture" (Harper *Iola* 152). Like Iola, therefore, Harry imitates Walker's conception of Moses by "casting his lot with the colored people" (213), especially in the context of marriage. Whereas Iola and Dr. Latimer make a perfect match because of their shared Mosaic subjectivity, Harry and Lucille complement each other by representing different kinds of black excellence. While Harry demonstrates Mosaic subjectivity by refusing to pass as white, Lucille's dark skin makes her a "living argument for the capability which is in the race" (152). Harper uses this combination of light-skinned and dark-skinned characters to sever the perceived connection between race and integrity.

Paradoxically, Harper preserves the logic of the one-drop rule in order to disaggregate race from ideals of manhood/womanhood. Iola, Harry, and Dr. Latimer consider themselves "colored" despite their fair skin.[79] Harper makes these characters fair-skinned enough to pass as white to emphasize the critical importance of psychologically identifying with one's race through ties of blood and marriage.[80] In Dr. Gresham's description of Dr. Latimer, these characters

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[78] P. Gabrielle Foreman identifies Lucille as the "proto-feminist heroine of the novel" (343) modeled on Harper's contemporary Lucy A. Delaney. Claudia Tate argues that Lucile reflects a "new model of black womanhood, indeed a revised field of intraracial desire constructed as the desirable dark-skinned black woman as lady" (147).
[79] Similarly, in *Minnie's Sacrifice* blood trumps skin tone, as Minnie describes how she "found out I was colored" (72) despite her ability to pass as white.
[80] Geoffrey Sanborn argues that Harper's characters' blood reveals itself not in the "profoundly white idiom of the blush" but in the "distinctly black" (695) idiom of the flush.

belong to the "negro race both by blood and choice" (181). Harper, thus, seeks to "locate racial identity in one's political consciousness, rather than one's color" (Gaines 221). For Harper, political affiliation is a matter of family feeling through matrilineal descent. Iola not only identifies as black, but exemplifies the traits of true womanhood. Teresa C. Zackodnik rightly notes that Harper signifies on the cult of domesticity's idealization of "racialized womanhood" by using the "mulatta's performance of true womanhood" to "subvert the exclusive status of the white woman as a 'true woman'" (77), though the corollary is true of Harper's black male characters, as well. Yet, Zackodnik overstates the extent to which Harper relies on a "strategy of parodic imitation" (91). Iola is deeply committed to the ideals of piety, purity, and domesticity which were integral to Victorian standards of womanhood. Although Iola challenges notions of female submissiveness, she does so in a way that preserves prevailing notions of decorum. The narrator does not treat Iola's fealty to these ideals ironically, but rather praises her because of it. Harper exemplifies what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham famously calls the "politics of respectability," encompassing temperance, industriousness, thrift, decorum, and Victorian sexual mores. Harper expands the definition of true womanhood to include African Americans, rather than reject it as an ideal.

Beyond its explicit exhortation for mixed race subjects to identify with their African heritage, *Iola* uses Mosaic subjectivity as a framework for negotiating class tensions within black communities.[81] Class differences within black communities were a major source of conflict throughout the prime of Harper's career.[82] After the Civil War, there was a "dramatic rift"

[81] Kevin Gaines argues that "By placing the reunion of family members separated by slavery at the center of the novel's action, Harper reinforced her theme of a natural, organic relationship between black elites and masses, figuring the race as a family transcending class, cultural, and color differences" (36).
[82] Andreá N. Williams argues that in her postbellum novels, Harper explores the "fear of misclassification, a fear of not being recognized by one's self-identified social class" (26).

(Richardson 52) in the black community between property owners and laborers.[83] Post-Emancipation African American leaders tended to be "freeborn, educated, somewhat prosperous, and biracial" (52), whereas the majority of the South's black population were mainly "uneducated, dark-complexioned former field hands" (53). Some "black elites" secured "status, moral authority, and recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably undeveloped black majority" (Gaines 2). Harper works against an understanding of racial uplift that pits African Americans of the professional class against those of the laboring class. Harper deploys exodus motifs to defuse class resentments by depicting harmonious relationships between her elite, educated, and fair-skinned Mosaic leaders and the illiterate black folk they have dedicated themselves to uplifting. It is not enough, for Harper, that the Talented Tenth exhibit itself as evidence of black intelligence, refinement, or capacity for citizenship. She wants her peers not to accumulate their own wealth, but to use their resources to aid black laborers.

One sign of the class stratification within black communities during and after Reconstruction was the size and amenities of one's home. When Harper wrote *Iola* many black southerners still "inhabited dwellings hauntingly similar to slave cabins—if not former slave quarters themselves" (M. Mitchell 144-145). Harper observed this phenomenon herself in 1870 when she visited an Alabama plantation, where the "people are living in the old cabins of slavery" (Still 771). Harper often treats the home as a marker of class difference. Despite her relatively privileged status, Iola is always welcome in "lowly homes and windowless cabins" (Harper *Iola* 213). Similarly, in *Minnie's Sacrifice* Minnie seeks to share with newly freed

[83] According to Heather Richardson, in North Carolina in 1870 "only 6.7 percent of all African-Americans held land" (52). Richardson recounts the split between "black conservatives" and "black radicals" (57) in the summer of 1867, as freedmen protested their low wages.

African American women "how to make their homes bright and happy" (74). Moreover, Iola's uncle Robert buys a "large plantation" in North Carolina which he "divided into small homesteads, and sold to poor but thrifty laborers" (Harper *Iola* 214). Instead of living in luxury, Robert uses his financial abundance to uplift his neighbors, which leads to greater overall prosperity, as the "one-roomed cabins change to comfortable cottages" (214). Harper's educated reformers consistently seek to improve the living conditions of the black laborers who form their constituency because a clean and pleasant house is a necessary condition for the thriving family life that Harper valorizes.

Throughout *Iola*, Harper emphasizes the affection that illiterate, rural black folk have for their Mosaic leaders-in-the-making, especially Iola. For instance, in *Iola*'s final chapter, Aunt Linda gratefully hails Iola's return to North Carolina with her "vision dat somebody fair war comin' to help us" (210). Iola downplays the lightness of her complexion—"I am not very fair" (210)—to minimize the sense of difference between them. The class distinction between Iola and Aunt Linda is marked not only by the differences in their complexions, but also in their speech.[84] Harper renders Aunt Linda's speech in dialect, as she declares that she "allers wanted some nice lady to come down yere and larn our gals some sense. I can't read myself, but I likes ter yere dem dat can" (210).[85] Harper constructs a cultural script in which the elderly, illiterate, dark-skinned African American woman gives her blessing to the mission of the young, educated, light-skinned African American woman. Harper shows that "lack of education among these

[84] Andreá N. Williams argues that "Aunt Linda's vocabulary and dialect ordinarily would signify her social position as an unskilled laborer; yet the content of her speech suggests her attempt to align with bourgeois notions of respectability" (49).

[85] John Ernest observes that Harper "equates literacy and freedom" while the novel as a whole demonstrates that "the dominant culture's conception of literacy offers only a dubious freedom at best" (*Resistance* 196). Michael Borgstrom notes how Aunt Linda's "opposition to reading reconfigures the values attached to traditional literacy practices" (787). Alternatively, James Christmann argues that Harper participates in the "voice-narrative of progress," in which uplift is conceived of as the transition from dialect to Standard English as part of a "movement away from the folk 'past' and toward white bourgeois ideals of education, deportment, and appearance" (10).

women does not equal stupidity" (Elkins 46). Aunt Linda's enthusiastic approval of Iola's mission softens the potentially alienating image of a light-skinned outsider coming to educate local black women.

Harper's portrayal of Aunt Linda in *Iola* is an important development from *Minnie's Sacrifice*, whose lower class black characters do not receive nearly as much attention as those in *Iola*. If the audience for "Our Greatest Want" and *Minnie's Sacrifice* was primarily Harper's peers—educated African Americans—then the audience for *Iola* includes both potential Mosaic leaders and the masses in need of uplift. "Our Greatest Want" was published in the *Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859 and *Minnie's Sacrifice* was serialized in the African Methodist Episcopal Church's *Christian Recorder* in 1869. The *Anglo-African Magazine*'s editor, Thomas Hamilton, explained that the purpose of the publication was to "afford scope for the rapidly rising talent of colored men in their special and general literature" and convey accurate information about the religious, moral, economic, educational, and legal condition of African Americans. Hamilton aspired for his newspaper to become "connective tissue, binding together black readers scattered across the country" (Fagan 123). Similarly, the founders of the *Christian Recorder* wanted a venue that "showcased otherwise ignored talent and opinion by Blacks" and "envisioned the paper as increasing literacy and strengthening the African American literary tradition" (Foster and Haywood 25). By the time Harper published *Iola*, however, she commanded a national audience. The novel was simultaneously published in Boston and Philadelphia in 1892 and went through two more editions by 1895.[86] In terms of publication

[86] Whereas Claudia Tate argues that post-Reconstruction black women's domestic fiction "targets a youthful reading audience" (172), Teresa Zackodnik contends that Harper used a "double-voiced strategy of address that would have appealed rather differently to [her] white and black readerships" (86).

venue, therefore, *Iola* addresses a much broader readership, encompassing blacks and whites, than *Minnie's Sacrifice*.

*Iola*'s implied audience, conjured by the narrator's voice, includes illiterate African Americans in a way that the implied audience of *Minnie's Sacrifice* does not. The conclusion of *Minnie's Sacrifice*, in which Harper didactically interprets the novel's significance, is aimed at those tempted to "creep out of all identity with [fellow blacks] in their feebleness, for the sake of mere personal advantages, and to do this at the expense of self-respect, and a true manhood, and a truly dignified womanhood" (91). Echoing her words from "Our Greatest Want," Harper preaches against a "narrow and selfish isolation" that hoards "genius, culture, wealth or social position" (*Minnie* 92) instead of deploying them to uplift the race. In keeping with the *Christian Recorder*'s goal of facilitating "personal improvement and moral uplift" (Foster and Haywood 26), Harper exhorts her readers to rededicate themselves to serving the less fortunate among their race. The only agency Harper imagines newly freed blacks having is setting a pious example.[87] In *Iola*, however, Harper imagines a much more reciprocal role for lower class blacks in welcoming and collaborating with their educated, Mosaic leaders. Although the real life analogues of Harper's Aunt Linda could not read her novel, I argue that *Iola* includes illiterate African Americans in its implied audience, addressing them through its portrayal of lower-class black characters. Harper's sensitive, respectful portrayal of illiterate, rural black folk in *Iola* enables her to re-write the Exodus narrative as if the older generation of Israelites embraced Moses' leadership, instead of refusing to enter the Promised Land. Unlike the stubborn Israelites who died in the wilderness, Aunt Linda "knows nuff to git to hebben" (Harper *Iola* 211).

[87] "Sometimes Minnie would think, when listening to some dear aged saint, I can't teach these people religion, I must learn from them" (Harper *Minnie* 84).

Tom Anderson's affection for Iola reveals Harper's commitment to certain class distinctions, even as she strives to replace strict class differences with more flexible kinship bonds among African Americans. Although Andreá Williams rightly observes that Harper makes "moral responsibility" the "non-pecuniary basis of status" (*Dividing* 26), Harper, nevertheless, preserves class distinctions to the extent that her characters do not marry across class lines. Tom Anderson admires Iola's beauty, but does not seek her hand in marriage. Like the other uneducated characters in the novel, Tom speaks in dialect, describing Iola as "sweet an' putty ez an angel" (33). Harper represents the class differences that prevent Tom from courting Iola in religious terms: Tom adores Iola as a "Pagan might worship a distant star and wish to call it his own" (32). Tom's love for Iola, however, must be sublimated into bravery on the battlefield because of the class distinctions between them. Although there are undertones of elitism in Harper's vision of marriage, her portrayal of Tom and Iola's mutual affection suggests that African Americans must form deep kinship bonds across class lines. When Tom is on his deathbed, Iola tells him, "You are the best friend I have had since I was torn from my mother" (42). Despite the class differences between them, Tom serves as a surrogate mother for Iola until she is reunited with her own. Ironically, Tom simultaneously serves a similar function for Iola's uncle Robert. Robert grieves Tom's death as much as Iola, but neither yet realizes they are uncle and niece to each other. If Iola is an idealized Mosaic leader, then Tom and Aunt Linda are her idealized lower-class counterparts. Commitment to racial uplift could cut across class lines within black communities, as "uplift work" served as a "veritable fusion politics" (M. Mitchell 78) for black activists. Harper uses the Exodus trope, therefore, both to urge educated, privileged African Americans to devote their lives and their resources to uplifting their lower-class brothers

and sisters and to enjoin those deemed in need of uplift to graciously accept the help that is offered.

**Conclusion**

This chapter sharpens our understanding of David Walker as a pivotal nineteenth-century interpreter of the Exodus narrative and of Frances Harper as signifying on Walker's sense of Mosaic subjectivity. Beginning with Walker helps us see how black writers turned to Exodus, not merely as a story of liberation, but also to explore notions of racial solidarity. Walker was the first black American writer to treat Moses predominantly as a model for ordinary people to imitate. Whereas the bible portrays Moses as a singular figure, a prophet and law-giver with unique access to God, Walker focuses on Moses' decision to identify with the suffering Hebrews, rather than the powerful Egyptians. Engaging the tradition of sentimental fiction, Harper synthesized Walker's portrayal of Moses as the paragon of race loyalty with an emphasis on the sacredness of maternal bonds. Harper's characters identify with their mother's people even when they can pass as white and enjoying higher status. Pairing Walker and Harper reveals that while Walker advocated violent resistance to slavery and Harper pursued reform primarily through non-violent means, they shared an underlying commitment to race loyalty as an important first principle for activism.

## Chapter Two: Exodus and Typological Plasticity in Delany, Melville, and Stowe

On the eve of the Civil War, *Douglass' Monthly* printed excerpts from a speech by James Redpath which invoked the Hebrews' flight from Egypt to justify violently ending slavery. Redpath likens "Southern traffickers in the souls and bodies of God's persecuted people" to Pharaoh. He notes the futility of appeals to Pharaoh's conscience: "What cared Pharaoh for the moral suasion of Moses and Aaron? Not a brick without straw cared he. But when Moses called forth the plagues, we are told that he let the people go." In the exodus paradigm, the Ten Plagues and the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea secured the Hebrews' liberation. Redpath emphasized Pharaoh's stubbornness to refute other abolitionists who argued that moral suasion *could* lead to the end of slavery. Redpath's rhetoric was not new, but rather the culmination of an abolitionist tradition that framed the slavery crisis using biblical typology.

When Exodus typology entered antislavery fiction, however, it lost some of the stark clarity charactierizing abolitionist rhetoric like Redpath's. Akin to metaphor and allegory typology finds its true home in narrative, where it drives plot structure and character development. While abolitionist editorials and speeches tended to maintain a simple dichotomy between Moses and Pharaoh, antislavery novels featured more complex versions of Exodus. This chapter examines how Exodus figures in three novels from the 1850s: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856), Martin Robison Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of America* (1859-1862), and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851). Each of these novels simultaneously invests in and questions whether Exodus offers a viable framework for addressing the slavery crisis. Because they differed in race, gender, and theological persuasion Delany, Melville, and Stowe approached issues of slavery and revolt in different ways and to somewhat different ends. While these writers' critiques of slavery complement one another, they

offer conflicting attitudes toward violent resistance to injustice. These differences in perspective reflect divisions within the larger antislavery movement, with Exodus serving as a structure to stage the clash between divergent antislavery positions.

Radical abolitionists called for an immediate end to slavery while the more moderate Free Soilers sought only to halt slavery's expansion into western territories.[88] Former Whigs and former Free Soilers formed the Republican Party in 1854 to oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which threatened to bring more slave states into the Union. Significant differences divided even the most committed abolitionists, who "argued eternally over principles, strategy, and tactics." (Rael *Eighty-Eight* 195). At one end of the spectrum, William Lloyd Garrison rejected party politics and sought to end slavery through a pacifist strategy that emphasized moral suasion and invok Exodus to condemn slavery's evils.[89] At the other end of the spectrum, Henry Highland Garnet appropriated Exodus rhetoric to advocate widespread slave insurrection.[90] The Fugitive Slave Law's passage in 1850 influenced many black abolitionists to abandon Garrisonian pacifism.[91] The bloodshed in Kansas convinced some white abolitionists, like Lydia Maria Child, that stopping slavery required force.[92] Across the North, Free black vigilance committees armed themselves to thwart slave-catchers.[93] Frederick Douglass increasingly advocated violent resistance but refused to join John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry.[94]

Exodus served as a touchstone for these bifurcated responses. Whereas Redpath's speech reflects what we might call "typological rigidity," Delany, Melville, and Stowe's novels employ what I call "typological plasticity." By connecting Moses and Pharaoh to contemporary figures,

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[88] On the antislavery parties, see Varon 10ff.
[89] On Garrison's use of biblical rhetoric, see Coffey 124-126.
[90] On Garnet's rejection of Exodus, see Glaude 145-159.
[91] See Varon 237.
[92] See Tegtmeier 215-216.
[93] See Wilson 123-124.
[94] See Cook "Fighting."

Redpath creates a dichotomy between virtuous Mosaic abolitionists on one side and vicious Pharaonic slaveholders on the other. Treating the Exodus story as a pattern for the slavery crisis suggests the inevitable outcome of deliverance for the enslaved and damnation for the enslaver. In contrast, Delany, Melville, and Stowe creatively adapt Exodus in ways that stretch the biblical text and revitalize it as a framework for addressing the slavery crisis. These novelists dramatically transformed Exodus into a story that suggested the possibilities of racial solidarity and the limits of black agency.

I begin this chapter by examining how biblical hermeneutics shaped antebellum slavery deabtes. Section two argues that Stowe disperses Mosaic authority across multiple characters, enabling her to envision insurrection without drowning slaveholders in a Red Sea of violence. While Stowe has reservations about rebellion as a means of ending slavery, Delany's Mosaic hero preaches black selfsufficiency. In section three I move to consider how Delany dramatically reinterprets Exodus to emphasize human, rather than divine, agency. Section four shows how, in *Moby-Dick*, Melville stretches Exodus even further than Delany or Stowe. Depicting the black cook Fleece as a parodic Moses, he critiques slavery as an ungovernable appetite by likening slaveholders to ravenous sharks, yet he also muddies the typological waters by comparing the sharks to the Israelites grumbling for meat in the wilderness. For Melville, as I will show, Exodus allows endless interpretation but does not help resolve social conflict.

**Biblical Hermeneutics in the Antebellum U.S.**

Pioneered by the writers of the New Testament and employed by Christian interpreters throughout history, typology treats an Old Testament figure as a precursor, or "type" of a New Testament "antitype." Typology has been a crucial strategy for explaining how diverse parts of

scripture form a coherent whole, typically by subordinating the Old Testament to the New. In a U.S. context, typological thinking goes all the way back to the Puritans' sense of themselves as the "New Israel."[95] Proponents and detractors of slavery alike appealed to the Old Testament to make their case.

Operating under the assumptions of what Mark Noll calls a "Reformed literal hermeneutic" (376) Southerners cited instances of slavery in the Old Testmaent to justify their practices.[96] Observing that the Mosaic Law includes "laws that authorize the holding of men and women in bondage, and chastising them with the rod," Virginian Baptist minister Thornton Stringfellow[97] concluded that such laws "must be in harmony with [God's] moral character" (9). Similarly, Josiah Priest,[98] a writer of pseudoscientific history and archaeology from New York, emphasized the distinction between Hebrew servants and foreign slaves: while Moses commanded that the former not be oppressed, the latter "had no civil rights, no voice in the community—could not be a witness in courts of law or religion" (115). Priest simultaneously exercised rigidly literally attention to biblical phrasing and anachronistically applied nineteenth-century racial categories to the ancient near-eastern text. Priest also assumed that the curse on Canaan in Genesis 9:25 referred to Africans and that their status as slaves was God-ordained.[99] Slavery apologists, therefore, saw a compelling analogy between the Israelites' foreign slaves and their own African ones, treating texts like Leviticus 25 as warrant to pass their slaves on to their children.

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[95] See Bercovitch 14.
[96] See Oshatz 5-7 and Harvey 18-19.
[97] On Stringfellow, see Noll 388-389 and Faust 136-138.
[98] On Priest, see Harpster and Stalter 137-138, Sloan 68-70, and Powery and Sadler 84-88.
[99] On racist interpretations of the Curse of Ham, see Hood 155-180 and Powery and Sadler 52.

In contrast to slaveholders' biblical literalism, abolitionists appealed to a vision of "God as a Liberator" (Coffey 108) exemplified in the Israelites' deliverance from slavery, but such non-literal interpretations carried the risk of being construed by critics as "infidel attacks on the authority of the Bible itself" (Noll 392). To avoid this misunderstanding, some abolitionists argued that even if the bible did not condemn slavery categorically, it condemned practices integral to plantation slavery. Albert Barnes, for instance, argued that, unlike Egyptian slavery, Southern slavery involved the "withholding of the Bible," the "prohibition to learn to read," and the "separation of husband and wife" (101). Other abolitionists invoked what John Coffey calls the "Jubilee principle" (108) articulated in a cluster of biblical texts—Leviticus 25, Isaiah 58, and Luke 4—which echo and expand Exodus's liberation theme. Beyond their focus on Old Testament passages related to the liberating captives and forgiving debts, abolitionists explicitly compared their leaders to Moses and their political opponents to Pharaoh, paralleling Southern and Egyptian slavery. For instance, an article published in William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* on October 28, 1853 entitled "No Union with Slaveholders" laments that the "American People, like Pharaoh of old, hardened their hearts, refusing to obey the mandate of Jehovah."

Conversely, some abolitionists denounced American slavery as far worse than its Egyptian precursor. In the August 26, 1853 edition of the *Liberator* the "No Union with Slaveholders" column stressed that "there is no analogy, there is no parallel between slavery as it existed in the West India Islands, or as it exists in our own land, and the oppression served out to the Israelites by Pharaoh" because the "we have no evidence to show as that [the Israelites] were ever owned as mere property." Another article published in the *Liberator* on April 2, 1852, entitled "In American Church and Nation," observes that unlike American slaveholders the Egyptians were not "buying or selling any of the Israelites" nor were "Pharaoh, or any of the

lords of the land violating any of the Jewish women." Here, abolitionists drew on typology's logic of promise and fulfillment to envision themselves as repeating roles played by ancient biblical figures. This perspective shaped abolitionists' perceptions of everything from national elections to African colonization proposals. They also claimed Moses as their predecessor[100] and mapped the symbolic geography of Egypt and Canaan onto the South and the North/Canada, respectively.[101] Abolitionists, therefore, frequently deployed the Exodus narrative to present opposition to slavery as heroic obedience to God.

African Americans also used Exodus to frame their antislavery efforts. Exodus imagery circulated through the Second Great Awakening, the founding of independent black churches, the rise of black newspapers, and the black convention movement. Eddie Glaude demonstrates that Exodus served as a "political history" (5) that guided antebellum black Americans' notions of peoplehood. African Americans' "dramatic reenactments of the deliverance of the nation of Israel" functioned as "inversions of American's national community—the New Israel was Egypt, and blacks were demanding that Pharaoh (white Americans) let God's people go" (Glaude 62). Exodus gave enslaved Africans a framework for narrating their suffering and maintaining hope for future liberation. Identifying with the Hebrews enabled African Americans to forge a "collective identity" that did not rely on "ties of ancestry and territory" (A. Callahan 116).

Between the extremes of vehement abolitionists and committed slavery apologists were more moderate positions. Some exegetes distinguished between the seemingly proslavery

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[100] The author of "The Free People's Hate of the People Enslaved," published in the *Provincial Freeman* on October 13, 1855, identifies Moses as a "God ordained *abolitionist*" (emphasis original). The author of "Manhood," published in the *North-Star* on December 4, 1855, calls Moses the "first great practical Abolitionist." The author of "Wade's Daguerreotype of the Doughfaces," published on April 30, 1858, compares "Northern men with Southern principles" to "Israelites with Egyptian principles" and suggests that "Pharaoh and all the chivalry of old Egypt denounced [Moses] as a most furious Abolitionist."

[101] See, for instance, "Dear Freeman" in the *Provincial Freeman* January 20, 1854.

"letter" of the bible and its supposedly anti-slavery "spirit," following the precedent set by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6, when he describes a "new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Northern biblical scholar, Moses Stuart,[102] for instance, suggested that the prohibition against the slave trade, or "foreign man-stealing piracy," is "altogether in the spirit, although not after the letter, of the Mosaic statues" (28). Stuart acknowledged that the Mosaic Law accommodates slavery, even justifies returning fugitive slaves to the South,[103] but emphasized how Moses "provided for many mitigations of the usual rigors of slavery" (26). Although there is no "bending or twisting of Moses' words" (35) that allowed the Israelites to hold foreigners as perpetual slaves, Stuart argued that the gospel supersedes the Mosaic Law. Because antislavery moderates could not use a "literal interpretation of the Bible to demonstrate the sinfulness of slavery in itself" (Oshatz 61) and because, by its very nature, typology lends itself to imaginative writing rather than polemical argumentation, some of the most compelling antislavery texts of the 1850s were narratives, rather than theological treatises or works of biblical exegesis. To show how biblical typology functioned as a narrative strategy, I will now turn to Stowe's *Dred*.

**"'Vegetable monsters': (Un)Natural Militancy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*"**

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* is a darker follow-up to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Between 1852 and 1856, the interval between the publications of the two novels, tensions over slavery only continued to mount. The violence of Bleeding Kansas, where proslavery and antislavery forces clashed, forecasting the coming Civil War, may have inspired

[102] On Stuart, see Oshatz 53-55.
[103] See L. Mitchell 139-149 and Oshatz 77.

*Dred*'s bleaker tone.[104] Stowe may have lost some of her faith that the power of sympathy—so evident in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—would bring about emancipation. *Dred* reveals greater acceptance of revolutionary violence and "apocalyptic activism" (Schoolman 164). Yet, while the "rhetoric of violence" (Stoneham 143) resounds throughout *Dred*, Stowe does not allow her black characters to commit much actual violence. Stowe pairs exodus imagery with the threat of slave insurrection to imagine the psychology of oppression. Although Stowe legitimizes Dred by likening him to Moses, she mitigates his authority by suggesting the African race has a propensity toward mysticism and madness. Rather than concentrate Mosaic authority in a single figure, however, Stowe disperses that authority across multiple characters. This typological plasticity allows her to ambiv alently dramatize black militancy and extend Mosaic authority to figures, like Harry, who better conform to white norms of respectability. Moreover, Stowe complicates the domestic ideology of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by likening Harry's divided loyalties to Moses' position as an adopted member of the Egyptian royal family.

While Stowe does not abandon Christ's importance as a moral exemplar in *Dred*, she significantly revises the role of self-sacrifice. If Uncle Tom is a Christ-figure who suffers death to save others, including the slaves tasked with beating him to death, then Dred takes up arms against white oppressors. Dred is the fictional son of Denmark Vesey, sharing Nat Turner's mysticism and David Walker's prophetic militancy.[105] While Tom believes that all earthly suffering will be rewarded in heaven, Dred believes that people must resist oppression until God vanquishes their foes. However, *Dred* is not a complete departure from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Dred's anticlimactic death suggests that despite the fact that in the four-year interval between the

[104] See R. Boyd 54, Grant 152-153, and Stoneham 145, 151-152.
[105] Dred echoes Walker's idea that the Native Americans were never enslaved because they fought to the death. As Dred says, whites tried to enslave "wild Indians" but they "would n't be slaves, and we will! They that will bear the yoke, may bear it!" (435).

novels Stowe profoundly developed the complexity of her black characters, "dying" remains the "supreme form of heroism" (Tompkins 127). Yet, Dred's conception of Christ differs markedly from Uncle Tom's. In a radical re-interpretation of the crucifixion, Dred depicts Christ's death not in terms of submission, but in terms of militancy: "Die? – Why not die? Christ was crucified!" (Stowe 435). He reclaims Christ as a moral exemplar but rejects the model of passive suffering practiced by Uncle Tom in favor of active resistance. These important connections between Dred and Christ notwithstanding, *Dred* is far more saturated with the Old Testament than the New, even when one considers Milly's role in the novel.

On the surface, it seems that Dred and Milly represent polar opposite positions rooted in the Old and New Testaments, respectively. Often likened to a female Uncle Tom, Milly personifies New Testament emphases on love and forgiveness, while Dred embodies Old Testament wrath. Whereas some scholars interpret Milly's pacifism in opposition to Dred's violence,[106] others discern a deeper harmony underlying the apparent conflict between the two.[107] Much of the critical conversation revolves around a passage in which Milly seems to forestall Dred's insurrection. Milly interrupts Dred's gathering of conspirators, appealing to the gospel to dissuade them from violence. She invokes the image of Christ "bleeding three hours, when dey mocked Him, and gave Him vinegar" and describes her ongoing faith in "Jesus, de Mediator of

[106] D. Miller claims that Dred "lacks true Christian charity," whereas Milly's "love embraces all of humanity" (101) and at the end of the novel "Milly's vision emerges victorious" (95). Duquette describes Milly as a "Republican Mammy" (5-6) who embodies "republican ideals of maternity and civic virtue" (5). Milly is Stowe's positive "moral model" as she "tempers emotion with reason" and "identifies the good of the community as the proper focus of an individual's ethical instincts" (13). According to Whitney, Stowe "sets up a tension in the novel, which is never resolved, between a feminine New Testament vision of meekness, submission, and forgiveness and a masculine Old Testament vision of power, self-assertion, and retribution" (557).

[107] Pelletier argues that Dred and Milly "actually work in concert to structure the sentimental foundation of this narrative" (142). Although Pelletier distances his reading from Rowe's equating Milly's position with Stowe's, Rowe also suggests that Stowe treats Dred and Milly as "two parts of the same emancipatory project" (51). Murison argues that Dred and Milly "mirror each other" as they both "slip in and out of trances, and both use these trances as a force to convert others" (124).

de new covenant" (576) despite the anguish she felt after the deaths of her children. It might seem, therefore, that Milly's New Testament message trumps Dred's Old Testament one. Milly's appeal is successful, however, not solely because of its focus on the redemptive love of the suffering Christ, but because of its Old Testament-inspired embrace of patience. Milly says, "Leave de vengeance to him. Vengeance is mine—I will repay, saith de Lord" (577). Alluding to Deuteronomy 32:35, Milly urges her audience to wait patiently for God to act. Dred's response echoes Milly's emphasis on waiting for God to dispense his wrath: "Woman, thy prayers have prevailed for this time!" because "The hour is not yet come!" (577). Milly does not convince Dred to abandon violence, but she finds a point of common ground between them—acting as God's instrument. Milly's appeal, therefore, is as grounded in the Old Testament as the New. Jacob Stratman describes the dynamic between Dred and Milly as part of the novel's "dialectical sermon" (381) with Milly representing the "voice of Christian peacekeeping" in contrast to Dred's "plans of judgment" (392). Yet, even Milly's pacifism involves a specifically Old Testament sense that God's judgment is coming. Milly and Dred agree on this point, even if Dred believes that he is appointed to enact divine retribution on slaveholders. Moreover, after Dred's death, Milly joins the fugitives who escape to the North. Unlike Uncle Tom, who suffers martyrdom in imitation of Christ, Milly emulates the Hebrews in fleeing slavery for the sake of her grandson Tomtit. The dynamic between Dred and Milly reveals a shift in Stowe's theology of violence between 1852 and 1856. While *Dred* does not completely dispense with *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* investment in New Testament paradigms, it gives far more attention to Old Testament ones, especially in Dred's likeness to Moses.

As the daughter, sister, and wife of Calvinist minsters,[108] Stowe was certainly familiar with how the abolitionist press invoked the analogy between the Israelites and enslaved blacks.[109] This familiarity is evident throughout the novel when Dred recapitulates important events in Moses' life.[110] As Moses flees to the wilderness after killing an Egyptian overseer, so Dred becomes a maroon in the Great Dismal Swamp after killing an overseer. Speaking during one of his many trances, Dred invokes the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn: "There shall be a cry in the land of Egypt, for there shall not be a house where there is not one dead!" (436). Dred imagines the South as a new Egypt and prophesies the same bloodshed that forced Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery. Although critics have noted many points of likeness between Moses and Dred, none have observed that Dred's mystical temperament itself connects him to Moses, as I will discuss below. Yet, Dred's character arc does not follow Moses' in every detail. Dred does not, for instance, encounter an older, wiser figure to guide him, as Moses finds in his father-in-law Jethro. Dred's resemblance to Moses is strong enough for readers to perceive, but is not so absolute as to disrupt Stowe's interest in what I call "typological uncertainty."

Dred experiences "typological uncertainty" when he is not sure which part of the biblical narrative corresponds to his particular circumstances. Specifically, he does not know whether he, like Moses, will die before his people enter the Promised Land, or if he will lead them there, like Joshua. Dred tells Harry "It may be that I shall not lead the tribes over this Jordan; but that I shall

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[108] At the outset of the Civil War in 1861, Stowe's brother, Henry Ward Beecher, declared the nation to be facing the "Red Sea of war" (90).

[109] Angelina Grimké frequently refers to parallels between American and Egyptian slavery in her letters to Stowe's sister Catherine Beecher published in the *Liberator* June 30, 1837; August 25, 1837; September 8, 1837. On March 24, 1854, the *Provincial Freeman* printed a laudatory letter from the Belfast Antislavery Association to Stowe, which concludes with the confident claim that "He who liberated Israel from bondage will yet liberate the African" and the hope that such deliverance would "not be coupled with 'a day of vengeance,' such as the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea."

[110] See Levine 146, Crozier 44-45, Hedrick 258, and Karafilis 26.

lay my bones in the wilderness!" (622). Dred's intuition proves accurate, as he is soon fatally wounded in a skirmish with white men. This typological uncertainty reflects the sheer plasticity of the Exodus trope, as "emigration, armed uprising, and peaceful protest" were "all legitimized by appeal to Exodus" (Coffey 158). Exodus "furnished a model for every kind of deliverance, whether by escape, revolution, or spiritual rebirth" (Davis 88).[111]

Dred's typological uncertainty extends to whether Harry is an antitype of Joshua or Moses. Emerging from the swamp to speak with Harry, the mulatto half-sibling of Nina Gordon and her cruel, drunkard brother Tom, Dred contrasts Moses, who left his adoptive mother, Pharaoh's daughter, with Harry, who remains loyal to his half-sister and owner, Nina: "Did not Moses refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter? How long wilt thou cast in thy lot with the oppressors of Israel, who say unto thee, 'Bow down that we may walk over thee'? Shall not the Red Sea be divided?" (Stowe 263). Dred urges Harry to stop dallying with his oppressor, suggesting that Harry is a derelict Moses content to remain in Egyptian comfort rather than stand in solidarity with his oppressed people. Here Stowe probes one of the Exodus narrative's many lacunae; the biblical text never reveals Moses' internal feelings about leaving the Egyptian palace. In Harry's character arc, Stowe draws out the emotional conflict Moses must have felt. Harry spends most of the novel torn between two paths—slavery and freedom, loyalty to Nina and desire to follow Dred, stoic acceptance and passionate revolt. Dred drops his prophetic voice to speak more frankly with Harry, criticizing Harry for following the same religion of meekness as Uncle Tom: "Be meek and lowly; that's the religion for you!" (262). Brandishing his rifle, Dred boasts of his freedom to Harry. Dred has the effect on Harry that David Walker hoped to have on enslaved blacks who read his *Appeal*, making Harry feel an "uprising within him, vague,

[111] Paul Harvey observes that Moses was as important to the "white southern mythos" (18) as to the religious imagination of enslaved blacks.

tumultuous, overpowering; dim instincts, heroic aspirations; the will to do, the soul to dare" (264).

After Harry joins Dred in the swamp, Dred frames Harry's address to the other fugitives in the same Mosaic terms, explaining that Harry "shall expound unto you the laws of the Egyptians" (567), in this case, "The Declaration of Independence." According to Dred, as "the Lord caused Moses to become the son of Pharaoh's daughter, that he might become learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians, to lead forth his people from the house of bondage" (567), so Harry must use his knowledge of white political philosophy to liberate enslaved blacks. As Moses was educated in Egypt, so Harry is fluent in Southern white norms of speech and decorum and acts as a bridge between the plantation and the swamp. Harry uses the "rhetoric and style of the hegemony to resist that power" (Stratman 391).

Diligent, temperate, financially responsible, and devoted to his wife, Harry is Stowe's ideal domestic subject, but his desire to protect his half-sister Nina from financial ruin jeopardizes the safety of his wife Lisette, the object of Tom Gordon's lust. By characterizing Harry in Mosaic terms, Dred suggests that Harry's kinship with enslaved blacks supersedes his kinship with Nina. Only after Nina's death by cholera, however, does Harry join Dred in the swamp. Stowe, thus, uses exodus typology to reveal the impossible demands domestic ideology places on enslaved mixed-race subjects.

Toward the novel's end, however, Dred imagines Harry as the Joshua to his Moses. In the biblical account, Joshua is Moses' confidant and successor; while Moses dies before entering Canaan, Joshua leads the Israelites in conquering the Canaanites, most famously at the Battle of Jericho. Dred's premonition about his impending death forces him to consider Harry as the Joshua who will complete his mission to deliver his people.

Rather than equate any single figure with Moses or Joshua in strictly allegorical fashion, Stowe allows the parallels between biblical figures and her characters to proliferate.[112] In fact, Dred inherits his likeness to Moses from his father, Denmark Vesey, who "likened his own position of comparative education, competence, and general esteem among the whites, to that of Moses among the Egyptians; and nourished the idea that, like Moses, he was sent as a deliverer" (Stowe 274). Similarly, Hannibal, one of Dred's compatriots, is also "prompt to believe that the Lord who visited Israel in Egypt had listened to the sighings of their captivity, and sent a prophet and a deliverer to his people" (639). Rhondda Robinson Thomas's observation that David Walker sought a "community of Mosaic leaders rather than a singular liberator" (50) applies to Stowe, as well. Stowe exemplifies typological plasticity by dispersing Mosaic authority among Vesey, Dred, Harry, and Hannibal rather than vesting it in a single character. As we will see below, Delany does not share Stowe's typological plasticity.

Even as Stowe aggrandizes Dred by likening him to Moses, however, she suggests that madness taints his plans for vengeance against whites. By conflating mysticism and insanity, Stowe echoes broader antebellum ideas about race and madness stemming from the asylum movement,[113] newspaper accounts of black violence, and the 1840 census. As Benjamin Reiss notes, "concepts of blackness and madness had become so intertwined as to be nearly mutually defining" (68). Both "blacks and the insane were viewed as children" (15), yet unlike lunatics "blacks could never outgrow their wildness and dependency" (69).[114] For many genteel whites,

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[112] Stowe's dispersal of Mosaic authority across multiple characters in *Dred* resembles her characterization of both Tom and Eva as Christ-figures in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

[113] According to Pietikainen, "Associating civilization with higher intellect, many asylum doctors maintained that 'savages' were incapable of independent living in a democracy" (94).

[114] Bishop Richard Allen distinguished between the degradation of slavery and insanity, arguing that although enslaved blacks were subjected to the "most abject state human nature is capable of, short of real madness" they can still "think, reflect, and feel injuries" (45).

blackness signified an "exemption from all the pressures of civility and modernity" (67). While Stowe does not totally reject the pressures of civility and modernity, her narrator deplores the "hot and positive light of our modern materialism," which "searches out and dries every rivulet of romance" and "sends an unsparing beam into every cool grotto of poetic possibility" (353). Stowe suggests that "romance" and "poetic possibility" necessarily verge on insanity. The longing for liberation itself, arguably a clear sign of enslaved blacks' humanity, was identified as a symptom of madness when Samuel Cartwright diagnosed African Americans who "obsessively yearned for freedom" (Pietikainen 94) with drapetomania in 1851.[115] If running away earned slaves the label of drapetomaniacs, then black perpetrators of violence were especially treated as insane.

Northern and Southern newspapers alike reflexively responded to instances of black violence, such as Nat Turner's revolt in Southampton, Virginia, by labeling the aggressors as mad. An article published on August 24, 1831 in the *Richmond Compiler*, for instance, describes the "wretches who have conceived this thing" as "mad—infatuated—deceived by some artful knaves, or stimulated by their own miscalculating passions" (Tragle 37). Similarly, an article about Turner's insurrection entitled "News of the Day" printed in the *Richmond Enquirer* on August 26, 1831 claims that those responsible would "pay for their madness and misdeeds." In the complexly authored[116] *Confessions of Nat Turner*, Thomas R. Gray describes Turner as a "gloomy fanatic" (14). Gray's characterization of Nat as a fanatic echoes that of early newspaper accounts.[117] Stowe's narrator is more sympathetic to Dred than Gray is to Turner, but her views

[115] See also Washington 35-37.
[116] For readings of Turner's *Confessions* as the dialogic product of Turner and Gray see Sundquist 36-53 and Kilgore 1355, 1358-1360. In analyzing its biblical rhetoric, Harriss argues that the first half of the *Confessions* is a "far more 'authentic' reflection of Nat Turner's voice than most sources are willing to acknowledge" (160).
[117] See Kilgore 1356-1357 and Tragle 44, 70, 74, 92, 134-135.

about the connection between madness and black violence differ in degree rather than kind. Even Northern newspapers, while sometimes more sympathetic to Turner and his compatriots than Southern ones, still treated them as afflicted with madness. New York's *Daily Advertiser*, for example, suggested that when "Miserably ignorant and degraded" enslaved blacks become "excited" enough to "make an effort for their own emancipation, it is to be expected that they will be aroused to madness" (Tragle 83).

Such logic shaped the errors of the 1840 census, which marked the first major attempt to count the nation's "insane" and "idiot" populations. The controversial census suggested not only that blacks had a higher rate of madness than whites, but also that "free blacks had a rate of insanity and idiocy nearly eleven times more than the enslaved" (Nielsen 64).[118] Although Edward Jarvis published a "complete refutation of the census" (Stanton 60) for its numerous statistical errors, the official results were never overturned. Proslavery advocates, of course, used the 1840 census to support their argument that "blacks were congenitally unfit for freedom" (Gilman 137). In 1843, for instance, an article in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, entitled "Reflections on the Census of 1840," concluded that the "controlling causes" of insanity "must be moral" (342) given the apparent disparity between the rates of madness in Northern and Southern blacks. According to the author, free blacks "furnish little else but materials for jails, penitentiaries, and mad-houses" (350). The following year, Josiah C. Nott observed how "cold climate and social condition combined in producing idiocy and insanity in the free blacks of the northern States" (33).[119] The relevant "social condition" in the North, of course, was freedom. John C. Calhoun relies on the 1840 census in a letter to British diplomat Richard Pakenham written on April 18, 1844 during the controversy surrounding the U.S. annexation of Texas.

[118] See also Cohen 192-193, Reiss 68-69, and Washington 146-151.
[119] On Nott, see Stanton 65-72 and Faust 206-208.

Calhoun claims that manumitted African Americans suffer from the "mental afflictions" of "insanity, and idiocy" whereas enslaved blacks have "improved greatly" in "comfort, intelligence, and morals" (337). Similarly, in 1845 James Henry Hammond, who was a South Carolina Congressman, Governor, and Senator, asserted that there are "incomparably fewer cases of insanity and suicide among [enslaved blacks] than among the whites" and that "among the slaves of the African race these things are almost wholly unknown" (191).[120] For Hammond, insanity was a risk of freedom, whereas slavery preserved the sanity of the enslaved. While Stowe did not accept the specious claim that the pressures of "civilized" life drove Africans toward madness, she mitigates Dred's radical rhetoric by suggesting that his prophetic militancy verges on insanity.

Stowe contains the potentially disturbing threat of black violence by suggesting that Dred's disposition to mysticism stems from African racial essence.[121] Dred's mystic temperament—his tendency toward trances, visions, and prophecies—reinforces his likeness to Moses, whose uniquely personal encounters with God inspired later Christian mystical theologians like Pseudo-Dionysius.[122] Christian mystics sought intimate, (relatively) unmediated encounters with God akin to the special revelations Moses from God at the Burning Bush, on Mount Sinai, and in the tabernacle. Despite Dred's characterization as a prophetic figure, the narrator does not unequivocally support the idea that he is the voice of God. The fire in his eyes, for instance, reflects "habitual excitement to the verge of insanity" (Stowe 261). The narrator

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[120] On Hammond, see Faust 168-169.

[121] Murison argues that Stowe "accepts [Amariah] Brigham's and [Charles] Finney's relation of racial embodiment to religion but inverts their negative conclusions. She instead views the susceptibility of Africans' nervous organization and their concomitant religious beliefs as politically and spiritually efficacious" (117).

[122] Denys Turner traces the "central metaphors" of Christian mysticism, including light/darkness, ascent/descent, and the "love of God as *eros*" to Pseudo-Dionysius, whose mystical theology is the "product of the convergence of sources in Plato and in Exodus" (13).

explains that Dred often escapes danger through intuition, but attributes this ability to the "peculiar temperament which fits [the African race] for the evolution of mesmeric phenomena" (354).[123] Such descriptions reflect broader trends in early psychiatry associating both blackness and religious enthusiasm with insanity.

Stowe's use of madness to question the legitimacy of black violence reflects how both abolitionists and slavery apologists invoked the discourse of madness to discredit their opponents. Even as many abolitionists denied the charges of fanaticism leveled against them,[124] one abolitionist writer sought to characterize John C. Calhoun, the paragon of proslavery sentiment, as either insane or tyrannical. The author of "John C. Calhoun," which appeared in *The Liberator* on March 15, 1850,[125] argued that the South Carolina senator was "worse than Pharaoh" on the "score of tyranny." The *Liberator*'s contributors often equated prominent political figures with Pharaoh: Martin Van Buren,[126] Jefferson Davis,[127] and even Abraham Lincoln[128] (both before and after issuing the Emancipation Proclamation) received the same treatment. What is more distinctive here is using madness as a possible explanation for Calhoun's behavior. After enumerating Calhoun's vices, the author suggests that the only acceptable explanation for Calhoun's pro-slavery position is if he is "diseased on this subject to an insane degree," in which case "his proper place is in an Insane Asylum, and not in the Senate of the United States." Madness, therefore, serves as an escape hatch from the typological

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[123] Christina Zwarg situates *Dred* in the context of Franz Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism and the Haitian Revolution.
[124] See Murison 126-128 and Pietikainen 94. In "A Plea for Captain John Brown" and "The Last Days of John Brown," Henry David Thoreau defends John Brown from charges of insanity after Brown was executed for raiding the federal armory at Harper's Ferry.
[125] The timing may reflect the fact that 1850 was a pivotal moment in the "national discussion about mental illness" (Reiss 2).
[126] See *Liberator* March 11, 1837; July 28, 1837; November 10, 1837; and March 23, 1838.
[127] See *Liberator* February 14, 1862.
[128] See *Liberator* November 1, 1861; January 24, 1862; February 7, 1862; July 29, 1864.

framework that equates any opponent of liberation with Pharaoh. As this abolitionist argues that only insanity could spare Calhoun the label of Pharaoh, so Stowe uses madness to explain Dred's violent tendencies.

In her characterization of Dred as a mystic, Stowe balances affirmation of Protestant spirituality with early psychiatry's tendency to pathologize religious enthusiasm. A key figure in this development, Amariah Brigham, superintendent of New York's Utica Asylum, treated the revivals of the 1830s as evidence of a "nervous system run amok" (Murison 107). For Brigham, the emotional excitement of revivals, such as the "great terror and mental anxiety" produced by "vivid descriptions of hell" (269) causes "commotion in the brain and nervous system" (268). He concluded that "[r]eligious excitement, therefore, by affecting the brain, may cause insanity and other diseases" (285). Stowe was intimately familiar with this "medical critique of enthusiasm" (Murison 111) as her father, Lyman Beecher, opposed the embodied spirituality of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening.[129] Stowe maintains her ambivalence toward her protagonist by situating Dred in the "twilight-ground between the boundaries of the sane and insane," a liminal state which "modern anthropology" (353) has trouble comprehending. The narrator suggests that when reading the bible Dred's "gloomy fervor" (562) causes him to focus, selectively, on the "prophetic pages, passages whose images most affected his own mind" (563).[130] Paradoxically, Stowe legitimizes Dred's militancy through his appeals to scripture, while questioning his hermeneutical practice as overly individualistic. While Dred believes he is the "subject of visions and supernatural communications" (354), like Nat Turner,[131] the narrator is less certain. While Harry initially feels that Dred's plans are "all madness, perfect madness" (266), after Nina's

[129] For a discussion of Stowe's relationship to religious enthusiasm, see Murison 109-115.
[130] According to Gail Smith, Stowe remains "reluctant to give full assent to Dred's interpretations of scripture" (299) and Dred embodies "solipsistic biblical interpretation" (300).
[131] See R. Turner 20-21.

death, when Tom Gordon seeks to claim possession of Lisette, Harry finds himself joining Dred in the swamp. Dred's "madness," Stowe suggests, is partly desperation born of terrible circumstances. In her portrayal of Dred, Stowe eschews a "simple pathological binary between rationality and irrationality" (Murison 132).[132] Stowe disputes the absolute rationalism of "modern anthropology" that would deny the bible's authority yet does not fully endorse the idea that God ordains slave revolts. The novel's ending suggests not only Stowe's unwillingness to portray a successful slave revolt, but also the "need to let go of enthusiasm" (Murison 125). Stowe uses the imagery of the swamp to suggest how Dred's mysticism is simultaneously natural and unnatural.

For Stowe, the swamp is, paradoxically, a site of serene refuge and a metaphor for Dred's tangled and twisted mind. Dred is a microcosm of the swamp, which is a grotesque space for Stowe, simultaneously attractive and repulsive in its wildness. Dred embodies the dread of the swamp: like the swamp's strange foliage, he has grown into an eerie form. The swamp is a place of fertility, refuge, and religious conversion, on the one hand, and mysticism, violence, and insanity, on the other. According to William Mullaney, Dred is "too primitive, too much a part of the swamp he inhabits, to process his mystical experiences" (146). The swamp's "moral indeterminacy" reflects Dred's "vacillation between vengeance and forgiveness" (156). Yet, "moral indeterminacy" is a somewhat misleading way to understand how Stowe uses the swamp in the novel. The swamp—as a metaphor for Dred's psyche and blackness itself—is a fundamentally good thing that has grown out of control or in the wrong way. It is not so much morally indeterminate as morally ambivalent: Stowe simultaneously affirms Dred's zeal for

[132] Murison argues that the corollary to this disruption of rationality/irrationality is *Dred*'s form, which is a "mixture of romance and realism" because the "conventions of abolitionist realism cannot account for the effects of slavery" (134).

justice and fears his thirst for bloodshed. Dred is both hero and monster, perfectly rational in his hatred of slavery and deeply disturbed in his desire for to end "white hegemony in America by murdering whites" (Pelletier 135).

Stowe's portrayal of Dred as akin to the swamp's "vegetable monsters" suggests that black people must be properly civilized. Critics are divided about the extent to which Stowe offers the swamp as a viable alternative to Edward Clayton's Magnolia Grove and the Gordon plantation, Canema. While some treat the swamp as a utopian space or integral to Stowe's moral project,[133] others interpret the swamp as a conflicted space that only offers a temporary reprieve from corrupt Southern society.[134] A third perspective suggests that Stowe synthesizes the values of the swamp with those of the hearth.[135] It is useful to distinguish between the swamp's role in the plot and its metaphorical function. On the level of plot, the swamp is an almost wholly positive locale; it is a place of refuge explicitly compared to En Gedi, David's wilderness retreat near the Dead Sea, where the fugitive future king of Israel hid from the current king, Saul.[136] Within the "wild and desolate swamp" the fugitives hide in an "island of security, where nature took men to her sheltering bosom" (Stowe 631). The narrator combines this Romantic personification of the natural world with the Christian belief that "God still reveals himself

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[133] Rowe interprets Dred's maroon community as an "utopian alternative to the corrupt slavocracy" (45). Karafilis argues that the swamp is the "primary arena that holds out the possibility of meaningful sociopolitical transformation" (24). Drawing on Foucault's concept of "heterotopia," Karafilis considers the swamp a borderland interconnected with and in defiance of the dominant social order. Karafilis argues that the swamp "deconstructs fixed hierarchies and polarities" because it is "constantly shifting, shrinking, and enlarging" (40).

[134] Richard Boyd argues that the swamp creates a "space for regeneration and renewal" and is associated with the "forces of cultural dissolution and chaos" (62). Similarly, Stratman considers the swamp a "contradictory place of danger and hospitality, wildness and domesticity, purity and adulteration, as well as innocence and evil" (383). Because of its marginal status the swamp becomes "very fertile ground for subversive or alternative ideologies" (383).

[135] D. Miller argues that Stowe creates a "positive value system based on the imagery of the clearing in the swamp" (102). The clearing "contains both the rootedness and energy of the swamp and the welcoming inner space of the domestic ideal" (102). For Kuhn, Stowe's "botanical aesthetic" (492) and "horticultural rhetoric" (508) mitigate *Dred*'s racial essentialism. Living in communion with nature, Dred exemplifies "resistance to hierarchy implied in a sympathetic relationship to plants" (509).

[136] See 1 Samuel 24.

through the lovely and incorruptible forms of nature" (631). As a symbol, however, the swamp represents the problem of blackness. In its wildness, the swamp represents the black psyche's supposed propensity toward madness, while in its glimpses of divine beauty the swamp reflects the fact that African Americans are created in the image of God. Rather than opposing swamp to plantation, Mary Kuhn argues that Stowe undercuts the apparent opposition between swamp and hearth by linking the swamp to the domestic realm: Stowe "radically extends her domestic idea by showing how the swamp serves as a home for an interracial, cultivated community" (497). Kuhn is right to emphasize Stowe's interest in cultivation. As Harry and the others cannot live in the swamp permanently, black people, for Stowe, cannot remain uncultivated. While Dred, who seems beyond cultivation, dies in the swamp, the other black characters escape to the more civilized locales of Canada and New York.

We might better understand Dred's plight in conjunction with Frantz Fanon's consideration of the relationship between race and rationality. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon expresses chagrin that even if black people accept the standards of white rationality, the "world had rejected me in the name of color prejudice" (102). When there is "no way we could agree on the basis of reason," Fanon continues, "I resorted to irrationality" (102). When Enlightenment reason and European culture are so closely aligned with racism, irrationality seems to be the only alternative to internalizing racism as servility and self-loathing. Fanon declares, "I am made of the irrational; I wade in the irrational. Irrational up to my neck" (102). Fanon's embrace of irrationality provides insight into Dred's mentality. While Stowe attributes Dred's tendency toward madness to racial essence, Fanon attributes black people's "irrationality" to socio-cultural conditions, what he calls "sociogeny" (xv).

Stowe portrays Dred ambivalently, alternately attributing his personality to innate racial tendencies and the slave system. Dred resembles the "vegetable monsters" that "stretch their weird, fantastic forms" (616). Deprived of the "improvements of cultivated life" (616) and contorted by oppression, Dred's mind to grow into a bizarre shape. Following the logic of what Patrick Rael has termed "negative environmentalism," Stowe recognizes that when people are "bowed down beneath the weight of mighty oppressions" (557) they are far more likely to seek revenge. Like Dred, Fanon rejects the conditions white European culture has offered him: "Yet, with all my being, I refuse to accept this amputation. I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity. I was made to give and they prescribe for me the humility of the cripple" (119). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that the violent tendencies of the colonized are not a "consequence of how his nervous system is organized or specific character traits, but the direct result of the colonial situation" (233). Distinctions between the enslaved and the colonized notwithstanding, Stowe comes close to perceiving Fanon's insight that social conditions affect the psychological development of the oppressed. Dred's urging Harry to seize his freedom instead of submitting to the Gordons, mirrors Fanon's claim that violence "rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude" (*Wretched* 51).

Considering Dred in light of Fanon enables us to better understand the novel's ending. Why is Dred mortally wounded off stage instead of carrying out his planned insurrection? Whereas some critics[137] treat Stowe's decision not to portray a full-fledged slave revolt as a

[137] Karafilis, for instance argues that the "ending of the novel collapses into a much more modest vision" than the "revolutionary model" (34) of democratic community portrayed in the swamp.

failure or a compromise, others[138] find the novel's ending implicitly revolutionary. The novel's ending remains problematic as long as we assess Stowe's ethical vision by twenty-first century standards. It is hard not to feel that Stowe should have allowed Dred to launch his insurrection. Yet, Stowe's use of typological plasticity ensures that Dred's death does not prevent the other fugitives from escaping to the North. The anticlimactic manner of Dred's death may reveal the limits of Stowe's imagination regarding black agency, but it also suggests that more than a singular Mosaic leader, enslaved blacks need a network of Mosaic leaders. When Dred is struck down, Harry and Clayton take his place. Moreover, Stowe may have chosen not to depict a slave revolt because to do so would be to claim divine sanction for violence.[139] In the biblical Exodus, God himself drowns the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Dred agonizes over the fact that "the time is not yet!" and tells Harry that he "cannot do less nor more till the Lord giveth commandment" (Stowe 621). Dred's willingness to wait for a sign from God strengthens the parallel with Moses, who follows God's explicit directions in bringing the Ten Plagues on the Egyptians and leading the Hebrews across the Red Sea. Paradoxically, Stowe suggests that slave revolt would only be justified by a sign from God and that Dred's belief that God will bring his wrath on slaveholders is a product of his misguided imagination. Delany's view is almost exactly opposed to Stowe's: African Americans need a single new Moses who acts decisively without miraculous signs.

Such a reading of *Dred* suggests how Stowe employs Exodus to explore the boundary between sanity and insanity, probe the limits of divinely-sanctioned violence, and represent the divided loyalties of mixed-race subjects. Whereas in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Tom and Eva act as

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[138] Levine argues that Stowe portrays "violent rebellion as a logical, perhaps even sacred, response to slavery" (174). According to Rowe, although Stowe does not represent an outright slave insurrection, she suggests that revolution "may take many different and coordinated forms, ranging from legal challenges to religious activism to physical violence" (50).

[139] Stoneham argues that Stowe treats violence as "the recourse of brutes; men and women of moral sensibility demean themselves when they resort to it and utterly compromise the novel end they hope to achieve by embracing it" (146).

Christ figures to show that Christ's love transcends race and overcomes oppression, in Stowe's later novel Dred and Harry function as two very different versions of Moses. Stowe eschews insurrection as a solution for ending slavery, setting the defense of the innocent as the limit of divinely-sanctioned violence. She avoids drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea by ending the novel, not with Dred's planned insurrection, but with Harry leading the fugitives, who "assumed the character of a family" (Stowe 666), to start a new life in the North. Under Stowe's expansive notion of family that crosses race and class lines, Harry acts as a father figure, rather than a revolutionary. Stowe circumscribes black male agency within domestic ideology by portraying Harry as a respectable Mosaic leader suited to build free black communities.

**"No religion but that which brings us liberty": Mosaic Authority in Martin Delany's *Blake***

In contrast to Stowe's ambivalence toward violent resistance, Delany, who was deeply dissatisfied with Stowe's portrayal of slavery and wrote *Blake* at least partially in response, openly advocates for black autonomy.[140] In a letter to Frederick Douglass written on April 18, 1853, Delany complains about Stowe's praise for Liberia and dismissal of Haiti.[141] More importantly, Delany suggests that Stowe emblematized a trend of white people proposing unhelpful solutions to African Americans' plight. Delany asserts that "no enterprize [sic], institution, or anything else, should be commenced *for us*, or our general benefit, without *first consulting us*" (emphasis original) (Delany *Documentary* 235). Not only did white abolitionists, like Stowe, feel that blacks needed to be rescued from slavery, but even black abolitionists, such as Douglass and Garnet, at times, held that Africans were a "docile race" (Harrold 92). Delany's

[140] Levine argues that if *Blake* was mainly composed between 1856 and 1859, then it may be a response "both critical and admiring" (177) to *Dred* as well as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
[141] See Delany *Documentary* 232.

generation of free black Northerners sought "active roles in the impending Apocalyptic contest" (Rael, *Black Identity* 273) over slavery, and Delany put this desire for black autonomy at *Blake*'s core. Delany's protagonist, Henry Blake, is an educated, intrepid slave who, when his wife, Maggie, is sold, runs away and plans an endlessly deferred slave insurrection.

Delany creatively adapts Exodus by characterizing his protagonist as a divinely-sanctioned Mosaic leader, who transforms passive dependence on God into decisive action. Delany used typological palsticity to invest his principles of black militancy and self-advocacy with biblical authority. Robert Levine claims that *Blake* is Delany's attempt to "define, fashion, and celebrate his representative identity as a Mosaic black leader" (177).[142] I am less concerned with *Blake* as an index of Delany's biography and more interested in how it participates in the exodus discourse of abolitionist print culture. Delany's interest in Exodus may also reflect his friendship with John Brown,[143] who did not merely draw on the Exodus trope for its metaphorical power, but actively sought to emulate Old Testament warriors and prophets.[144] If *Blake* is Delany's answer to *Dred*, then he used the shared discourse of exodus typology to distinguish his vision from Stowe's.

Delany draws on Exodus by patterning his hero on Moses.[145] As a fugitive, Blake recalls Moses' flight from Egypt. Not only does Blake, like Moses, kill an overseer, but his "crossing of

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[142] On parallels between Blake and Moses, see Clymer 719, Hite 197, Thomas 78-79, and Walker *Noble* 111.
[143] In May 1858 Delany "chaired a convention in Chatham that enthusiastically supported John Brown's mission to organize the slaves' resistance" (Levine 178). Yet, rather than join Brown at Harper's Ferry, however, Delany went to West Africa in July 1859, hoping to start a colony (see Levine 179-184).
[144] For Brown, "Old Testament stories were living guides to understanding and conduct in the present" (Carton 98). Brown thought of himself as "Moses, leading people from slavery, giving the law of God, and slaughtering those who bowed to the Golden Calf" (Smith *Weird* 59). In stealing horses and supplies to expedite the escape of fugitive slaves Brown followed the same principle "upon which Moses spoiled the Egyptians!" (Carton 272)
[145] Clymer observes that enslaved blacks treat Blake as a "Messiah figure who has come to liberate them," (719) while Hite argues that during his meditations in the wilderness, Blake "emerges as a Moses, a black Messiah" (197) who preaches the "gospel of insurrection" (193). Thomas suggests that Delany presents his protagonist as a "Mosaic savior-judge" (78) and a "Pan-Africanist Moses seeking to establish an autonomous diasporic community" (79).

the Red River into Louisiana" (Levine 196) evokes the crossing of the Red Sea. Blake encourages other fugitive slaves to finance their escape with "all the money they can get from their masters" (Delany *Blake* 43) suggesting that they "plunder the wealth of their oppressors as Israel plundered the Egyptians" (Coffey 165). Moreover, the narrator compares Blake's spreading the secret of insurrection to the "warning voice of the destroying Angel in commanding the slaughter of the firstborn of Egypt" (Delany *Blake* 83). Blake's circuitous journey to retrieve Maggie and foment rebellion takes him throughout the South, to Canada, to Africa, and to Cuba. After the first phase of his travels, Blake returns to Colonel Franks's plantation to lead Mammy Judy, Daddy Joe, and several others to freedom in Canada. Blake's motto—"Arm of the Lord, awake!" (69)—alludes to the anthropomorphic image of God's arm in Exodus 6:6 and 15:16. Also like Moses and other biblical prophets, Blake communes with God in the wilderness. Alone, he "renew[s] his faith and dependence upon Divine aid" and he longs to "climb where Moses stood" (69) to see the Promised Land. Furthermore, as the son of a tobacco manufacturer, Blake has a "problematic family history" (Levine 204) involving slave labor. The novel's second half reveals that Blake's family belongs to the wealthy Cuban elite, positioning him, much like *Dred*'s Harry, as one who has known both the comforts of Egypt and the bitterness of slavery. In fact, Blake's initially enigmatic declaration to Colonel Franks that "I'm not your slave, nor never was and you know it" (Delany *Blake* 19) emphasizes that his presence among enslaved blacks, like Moses', is purely voluntary. As Moses chooses to identify with his fellow Israelites after receiving God's command to liberate them, Blake chooses to remain among Colonel Franks's slaves after marrying Maggie.

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Corey Walker argues that Delany structures *Blake* on the "institution of Freemasonry and the biblical hero of the Exodus narrative, Moses" (111). Levine interprets *Blake* as Delany's attempt to "define, fashion, and celebrate his representative identity as a Mosaic black leader" (177) in competition with Frederick Douglass.

Like Harry, Blake resembles Moses in his capacity to mediate between the elite and the folk. As Harry expounds on the meaning of the "Declaration of Independence" for the fugitives, so Blake's linguistic fluency starkly contrasts with the Southern slaves' dialect.[146] Delany's use of dialect indicates "different levels of mental and moral awareness," with Blake and the narrator using the most "enlightened black speech" (McGann 85). Delany's linguistic politics, thus, vests the most authority in the figure who has mastered white norms of eloquence. Finally, when Blake leads the assembly of conspirators in prayer, he invokes a God who will "be a leader in our wilderness traveling; director in our wilderness wanderings; chief in our wilderness warfare; benefactor in our wilderness sojournings" (Delany *Blake* 292). Blake imagines the conspirators as the Israelites preparing for their sojourn through the wilderness, with himself as Moses leading them to the Promised Land.

If Delany intended *Blake* to produce a "national disidentification" (Hendler 76), then Blake faces the same challenge in getting enslaved blacks to disidentify with the U.S. nation-state as Moses faced in persuading the Hebrews to envision themselves as a nation apart from the Egyptians among whom they had lived for centuries. Michael Walzer observes that insofar as the "house of bondage" was also a "land of luxury" (34) the Hebrews' attraction to Egyptian lifestyles prevented them from revolting against Pharaoh without Moses' leadership. Walzer claims that both a "sense of injustice" at Egyptian slavery and "moral revulsion" (40) at Egyptian decadence are necessary for revolution. Blake experiences revulsion at decadence when he "beh[olds] the costly ornaments and embellished tombs erected at the expense of unrequited toil, sweat and blood wrung from our brother slave" (Delany, *Blake* 290). Tombs built by slaves, of

[146] Blake's speech is not as inflected with the idioms of the King James Bible as Dred's is.

course, evokes Egyptian pyramids. Unlike the Hebrews, however, Blake feels moral revulsion that prevents him from indulging in complacency cloaked in piety.

Blake counters his fellow slaves apapthy by emphasizing human, rather than divine, agency.[147] Blake and Daddy Joe debate the meaning of Exodus 14:13: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today." Grant Shreve argues that this verse is a "definitively unauthoritative biblical utterance" (458) because God responds to Moses by saying, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward" (Exodus 14:15). According to Shreve, in *Blake*'s first half Delany exposes a "crisis of protestantized Mosaic leadership" (458). However, I would ague that Delany deploys this verse to stage a debate over biblical hermeneutics, rather than undermine Blake's Mosaic authority. The pious, elderly Daddy Joe first references Exodus 14:13, urging Blake that "De wud say 'stan' still an' see de salbation" (Delany, *Blake* 21). Blake neither accedes to Daddy Joe's interpretation, nor rejects scriptural authority outright. Instead, Blake claims that "I intend to obey it, but that part was intended for the Jews, a people long since dead. I'll obey that intended for me" (21). Blake's penchant for interpreting scripture as it applies to him, rather than in its historical context, reflects "commonsense literalism" (Noll 379), a biblical hermeneutic that enabled people to seek individual, personal meaning in scripture. Countering Daddy Joe's quotation from Exodus 14:13 with his own quotation from Isaiah 49:8, Blake insists that "Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation" (Delany, *Blake* 21). Delany, therefore, employs typological plasticity to reinterpret Exodus through a theology of self-reliance. Even as he adopts a Mosaic persona, Blake insists that God does not expect his people to simply await another Moses.

[147] Evans argues that although Delany "rejected the specific attributes usually ascribed to the naturally religious slave (docility, submissiveness, and meekness), his arguments were inextricably bound to the broader discourse of black innate religiosity" (53).

Blake's interpretation of Exodus recalls Delany's demand for black self-sufficiency a decade earlier in the *North-Star*, which he co-edited with Frederick Douglass. In a piece entitled "Domestic Economy," which appeared April 20, 1849, Delany contends that "all their religion, moral honesty, and goodness of heart" do not help blacks improve their condition. According to Delany, passive reliance on "strictly doing the will of God" is the "great barrier in our pathway, and the most difficult point to pass in our efforts at self-elevation." Delany laments that instead of "pressing onward, to 'stand still, and see the salvation of God,'" his fellow blacks believed "He *required* this passiveness and indifference on our part" (emphasis original). Paradoxically, Delany equates standing still with pressing onward. As Allen Dwight Callahan puts it, "Exodus is the antithesis of 'standing still'" (123). While Dred waits for God's sign to act, Blake reinterprets patiently awaiting deliverance as actively striving for freedom.[148] Dred places nearly absolute faith in God's eventual wrath on slaveowners; Blake is more of a skeptic. Robert Levine argues that Blake "takes on the guise of Stowe's Dred in wanting an authorizing sign from God before unleashing violence" (212).

Yet, this is how Dred and Blake differ most. As the novel ends, Blake declares "I am for war—war upon the whites" (Delany *Blake* 290) but seems to reverse this position by praying "without thy divine aid, we can do nothing" (292). This apparent disparity, however, reflects the difference between oratory and prayer. When Blake appeals to "divine aid," he adopts a liturgical tone and the meekness appropriate to a supplicant, as he beseeches God with humility. However, Blake does not ask God for a sign that the conspirators' course is the right one or even for a sign that it is the right time to strike; he assumes that their cause is righteous. Blake does not ask for

[148] Gregg Crane argues that Stowe's acceptance of the "practical necessity of emigration and majority power as the only means of securing one's rights" (76) foreshadows *Blake*'s black nationalism. Maria Karafilis observes that in their willingness to defer their insurrections "[David] Walker, Dred, and Blake all stem from a similar tradition" (45).

wisdom, but strength. He prays for victory in a battle he has already chosen: "go with us to the battlefield—be our buckler and shield, sword and spear" (292). For Blake, confidence in God does not mean waiting to act. Blake does not reject "faith and dependence on God," but seeks to add to it "self-reliance" (284).[149] Delany's protagonist is emphatically active and pragmatic, rather than passively seeking to interpret visions. Unlike Stowe, Delany treats resistance as a rational response to oppression.

Blake does not share Dred's mystical temperament but at least twice Blake experiences signs of God's favor. As Blake observes a "blazing star whose scintillations dazzled the sight, and for the moment bewildered the mind" the narrator points out that despite Blake's impulse to "attach more than ordinary importance" to comets or meteors the "mystery finds interpretation in the fact that the emotions were located in his own brain, and not exhibited by the orbs of Heaven" (Delany *Blake* 124). Delany's narrator refutes Blake's impulse to attribute cosmic significance to the shooting star much as Stowe's narrator questions Dred's visions. The critical difference is that Blake is not as engrossed in seeking signs as Dred, and Delany never suggests that his protagonist verges on insanity. Later in the novel, Blake and Maggie interpret their improbable reunion as a providential sign: God "established their faith in His promises, by again permitting them to meet each other under circumstances so singular and extraordinary" (191).[150]

Although this sign of God's faithfulness encourages Blake and Maggie, Delany characterizes his protagonist as a new Moses with even greater initiative and less need to rely on miraculous signs than the original. Blake is on the verge of rejecting religion entirely when he

[149] Blake's attitude echoes one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's paradoxical exhortations in "Self-Reliance": "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events" (211). On echoes of "Self-Reliance" in Delany, see Kytle 169.
[150] McGann observes that Delany employs the "discourse and perspective of an ongoing biblical history, which marks the action as primal and shot through with providential design" (86).

tells a group of conspirators in New Orleans, "I feel more like cursing than praying—may God forgive me!" (103). Shreve contends that the "felt absence of divine affirmation" in the novel "unsettles Blake's Mosaic role" (458). Yet, this "theophanic gulf" (458) is essential to Delany's innovative use of Exodus. Delany carefully balances seemingly contradictory demands that his protagonist exemplify black self-sufficiency and be guided by God's providence. Shreve suggests that the narrative undermines Blake's fixation on the "most arbitrary of incidents" (458) such as the timely arrival of floating logs that enable Blake to cross a stream, as evidence of divine providence, but, as Jerome McGann observes, Blake's journey is "shot through with providential design" (86).[151] For instance, the storm that thwarts Blake's sale at the slave auction in the first part of the novel parallels the storm that causes the *Vulture*, a slave ship, to land in Cuba instead of Key West in the second half of the novel.[152]

Some of the articles published alongside excerpts of *Blake* in the *Weekly Anglo-African* and monthly *Anglo-African Magazine* echoed Delany's appropriation of the Exodus narrative. For instance, the May 1859 *Anglo-African Magazine* opens with chapters 13-16 of *Blake* and closes with Frances Ellen Watkins's (later Harper) "Our Greatest Want." Watkins commends Moses as the "first disunionist we read of in the Jewish Scriptures" because he "would have no union with the slave power of Egypt" (160). Like Delany, Watkins emphasizes that Moses rejected the "magnificence of Pharaoh's throne" (160) in favor of suffering alongside his people. The following issue, published in June 1859, printed chapters 17-20 of *Blake* along with Edward Blyden's "A Chapter in the History of the African Slave Trade."[153] Blyden treats the cruelty of

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[151] Delany, *Blake*, 70.
[152] Delany, *Blake* 26; 234-236.
[153] Writing to Rev. John B. Pinney on July 29, 1859 to report on Delany's visit to Liberia, Blyden wondered, "Is Dr. Delany to be the Moses to lead in the exodus of his people from the house of bondage to a land flowing with milk and honey?"

the trans-Atlantc slave trade as analogous to the Jews' enslavement in Egypt. As the Jews rose to a "high and important position" in the world, so the conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity will lead to the "redemption and delivery of Africa from the barbarism and degradation of unnumbered years" ("Chapter" 178). *Blake*'s seventeenth chapter, "Henry at Large," explicitly likens Blake to Moses, as Delany's protagonist experiences a renewal of his faith in the "lonely wilderness" and expresses his desire to "climb where Moses stood" (69).

Finally, the twenty-eighth issue of the *Weekly Anglo-African*, published on February 8, 1862, serialized chapters 43-46 of *Blake* and printed a selection of a speech by Congressman John A. Bingham of Ohio. Bingham forcefully argued that emancipated slaves would join the Union army. After addressing objections to emancipation, he drives his point home by appealing to Exodus: "these children of oppression will make such an exodus from the house of their bondage as the world has not seen since that exodus of God's people which the dark-eyed daughters of Israel celebrated in that sublime song." For *Blake*'s first readers, juxtaposing such texts with Delany's fiction likely augmented their awareness of the Mosaic imagery.[154] Moreover, these juxtapositions reveal how Delany participated in the broader of abolitionist print culture. Watkins treats Moses as a moral exemplar for her readers to imitate, Blyden uses the biblical narrative to reinterpret unmerited black suffering, and Bingham invokes Exodus for rhetorical effect. In contrast, Delany reinterprets Exodus to promote black self-sufficiency and organized opposition to slavery.

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[154] Benjamin Fagan argues that in its second serialization from November 1861 to April 1862 the "language of Delany's novel invited the *Weekly Anglo-African*'s regular readers to connect *Blake* to the paper's ongoing Civil War coverage and commentary" (135). Fagan observes that Delany's use of Exodus imagery in *Blake* echoes the "spirited debate over black enlistment" (129) between Robert H. Vandyne and Alfred M. Green in the pages of the *Weekly Anglo-African* from September to December 1861. Whereas Vandyne argued that African Americans had "reached the Promised Land, but hostile armies threatened their kingdom" (129), Green "contended that black Americans were living in an age reminiscent of Exodus" (130).

Delany's twist on Exodus coheres with African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne's view that divinely-appointed leaders are not always conscious of their chosen status. In a speech delivered in 1862 to commemorate the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, Bishop Payne suggested that "Sometimes the hand of the Lord is so signally displayed that Moses and Aaron are not recognized. Seldom do they recognize themselves" (237). Similarly, Delany enhances Blake's heroism by making him not fully aware of his Mosaic role, even as he signals Blake's Mosaic stature to the reader. In contrast to Stowe's typological plasticity, which distributes Mosaic authority to several characters, Delany uses typology to enhance the stature of his protagonist alone.

Close attention to how Delany uses Exodus typology offers new insight into the problem of *Blake*'s ending. The novel's final chapters may be missing, as the extant text ends somewhat abruptly without the conspirators' long anticipated revolution. If we might argue that Stowe, as a white woman, balked at portraying violence so starkly, perhaps out of fear that it would make African Americans less, rather than more, sympathetic figures, then why does Delany, the militant father of black nationalism himself, fail to do so?[155] To answer this question we must recall *Blake*'s publication history. Parts of *Blake* were serialized in the *Anglo-African Magazine* between January and July of 1859 and then a somewhat different manuscript[156] was serialized in the *Weekly Anglo-African* between November 1861 and May 1862.[157] Although Delany

[155] Against the prevailing consensus of Delany as the "father of black nationalism," Tunde Adeleke argues that Delany's radicalism has been overstated. Adeleke seeks to recover Delany's "very complex, diverse, and ambivalent views and idiosyncrasies" (xxi) across his long career. Delany used both "radical and conservative strategies and solutions" (xxii). Likewise, Biggio suggests that Delany's thinking cannot be neatly divided into "distinct periods of insurrectionary thought and emigrationist thought" (445). Similarly, Tommie Shelby argues that Delany's "commitment to racialism was, at most, halfhearted, invoked merely to lend credence to his claims of black national distinctiveness and to link modern blacks to their symbolic and ancient progenitors" (678).

[156] Schoolman contends that the second serialization of *Blake* in 1861-1862 recast the "literature of revolt as the literature of war" (14). Okker argues that Cuba is more prominent in the 1861 version than the 1859 text (102).

[157] On *Blake*'s serialization, see Levine 178-179, Chiles 326-330, and Okker 100-103.

expressed his desire for his manuscript to be published in novel form in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison written in February 1859,[158] *Blake* was not published as a novel until 1970. While some critics faulted Delany for *Blake*'s plot arc,[159] others do not consider collective violence central to his vision.[160] Given the parallels between Blake and Moses, we might expect the novel to end in a bloodbath equivalent to the Egyptian army's drowning in the Red Sea. While Delany may have depicted outright insurrection in missing chapters of *Blake*, the text we have portrays Blake as a Mosaic lawgiver. Blake's new law is a religion for the oppressed that anticipates liberation theology.[161] The absence of a full-fledged uprising highlights how Blake enacts a theological revolution as radical as his militant resistance to slavery.

Blake's religious innovation reflects his encounters with white Southern Christianity. Early in the novel, after learning that his wife has been sold, Blake expresses his frustration with "false preaching" (Delany *Blake* 20). Mammy Judy and Daddy Joe share the pious resignation to their circumstances of Stowe's Uncle Tom. They fear that Blake is being blasphemous when he denounces the hypocrisy of his former master, Colonel Franks, but Blake relentlessly exposes Colonel Franks's hypocrisy: "Tell me nothing about religion when the very man who hands you the bread at communion has sold your daughter away from you" (20). Blake insists that he has not lost faith but gained wisdom: "I do trust the Lord as much as ever, but I now understand him better than I use to, that's all" (20). Delany's critique of hypocriticxal Christianity echoes David

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[158] See Delany *Documentary* 295-296.
[159] Eric Sundquist argues that *Blake* ends in a "state of paralysis" (184).
[160] Robert Levine speculates that Delany may have "actually ended the novel with a series of relatively nonviolent scenes that enabled Blake to emerge at the helm of a regenerated society in which blackness is seen not as an exclusive or essential good but as equally worthy (or unworthy) as whiteness" (216). Doolen appreciates the fact that *Blake* ends before the staging of a revolt, claiming that the novel "breaks the affective chain that links the martyr's suffering and death to political renewal in a U.S. context" (174). Biggio argues that "more than the creation of an insurrectionary army" Blake lays the "foundation for an autonomous black nation" (441).
[161] Edward Blum argues that W.E.B. Du Bois "proposed his own theology that linked oppressed people with God" (13).

Walker's *Appeal*, Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Beyond simply critiquing hypocritic Christian slaveholders, Delany offers an alternative religion for the oppressed. Cone argues that by liberating the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, "God is revealed as the God of the oppressed" (*Black* 2).[162] Anticipating Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial churches[163] and Cone's black liberation theology,[164] Blake tells Daddy Joe that "I have altogether lost my faith in the religion of my oppressors" (Delany, *Blake* 21). As Blake rejects white Christian hypocrisy, so Cone observes that white U.S. theologians have "interpreted the gospel according to the cultural and political interests of white people" (*God* 47). Mammy Judy tries to have faith in God's will, but Blake is not content with heavenly consolation for earthly suffering. Blake wants "something on this earth as well as a promise of things in another world" and insists that he has "waited long enough on heavenly promises; I'll wait no longer" (Delany, *Blake* 16). Blake's resistance to the idea of a strictly spiritual deliverance from oppression anticipates Cone's claim that any "view of liberation that fails to take seriously a people's freedom in history is not biblical" (*God* 153). If Blake looks forward to Cone's liberation theology he also looks back to the Protestant Reformation. Blake says, "let us at once drop the religion of our oppressors, and take the Scriptures for our guide and Christ as our example" (Delany, *Blake* 197). His call for a return to *sola scriptura* echoes Martin Luther's beliefs. As Luther believed that the Catholic Church had grown corrupt, so Blake feels that Christianity is tainted by slavery. Blake desires a form of Christianity that uplifts, rather than

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[162] Womanist theologian Delores Williams rejects what she considers Cone's tendency to "lift up uncritically the biblical exodus *event* as a major paradigm of for black theological reflection" without reckoning with the "violence involved in a liberation struggle supposedly superintended by God" (133).

[163] "The Church in the colonies is a white man's Church, a foreigners' Church. It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor" (*Wretched* 7)

[164] It is an apt coincidence that Cone's landmark *A Black Theology of Liberation* was published in the same year, 1970, as *Blake* was published as a novel for the first time.

oppresses, his people, much as Luther's concept of the "priesthood of all believers" and his translation of the bible into the vernacular eliminated the gulf between the clergy and the laity. Unlike Luther, however, Blake is committed to unity rather than denominational splintering.

Blake inspires transnational ethnic unity through his belief in a single faith for all the oppressed. He convinces the grand council of conspirators, including Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Swedenborgians, to share a common faith, declaring that "[n]o religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but He who owns us as his children will we serve" (258). Their newfound solidarity will erase former denominational differences. In keeping with Blake's repeated emphasis on self-sufficiency, the new community will only adopt ceremonies "originated by ourselves" (258). Whereas Stowe's Harry conforms to white norms of respectability, Blake severs his connection with Euro-American religious traditions. As Moses brought the Israelites God's laws written on stone tablets, the new rituals of the oppressed will be "impressed upon the tablet of each of our hearts" (258). Blake's new religious sensibility is pragmatic: whatever does not serve the cause of liberty must be rejected. Paul Gilroy describes Blake's attitude toward religion as "strictly instrumental" (28), and Sundquist argues that Blake is "nearly opportunistic in his willingness to manipulate Christian doctrine for his own revolutionary purpose" (193). Yet, Blake does not "manipulate" Christian doctrine so much as he reinterprets it in the context of racism and oppression—just as Cone would later do. Delany treats the "role of religion as a framework for individual and collective action" (Ernest 114) but he also shows Blake finding spiritual solace in his renewed faith in God's providence. By likening Blake's religious innovation to Moses' instruction, Delany suggests that forging a new religious community is more pivotal than insurrection. While his insurrection is suspended, Blake's theological revolution is enacted. The leading figures of the

Protestant Reformation failed to achieve consensus, but Blake unites a group with diverse religious perspectives. Here, too, Delany anticipates Cone, who wonders, "How can we remove the barriers that separate Baptists and Pentecostals, Catholics and Anglicans, and a host of other assorted black church people?" ("Black Ecumenism" 6). The problem of black ecumenism proved more intractable in reality than in Delany's novel.

Attending to *Blake*'s investment in Exodus typology illuminates how Delany's conception of nationhood and peoplehood reimagined the story of Israel's inception at Mt. Sinai. Delany depicts a self-sufficient black liberator who inspires transnational ethnic unity through a single faith for all the oppressed. Anticipating twentieth-century liberation theology, Delany uses Mosaic imagery to convey that the oppressed must liberate themselves physically and theologically.

**The "angel is not'ing more dan de shark well goberned": Slavery, Savagery and Self-Governance in *Moby-Dick***

While *Dred* and *Blake* share an explicit focus on slave revolt, *Moby-Dick* addresses slavery more indirectly. Melville's earlier novel also represents a far more daring experiment in literary form, an omnivorous book that seemingly contains just about every available genre. Although Melville names various characters after Old Testament figures—Ahab, Ishmael, Elijah, Bildad—he avoids a strict one-to-one correspondence between them and their biblical models.[165] Since the problem of interpretation is one of *Moby-Dick*'s main themes, it is no surprise that the novel's anti-slavery stance relies on parody and inversion. Nevertheless, close attention to Melville's Exodus allusions illuminates the novel's sharp critique of slavery as an ungovernable

[165] See Pardes 4.

appetite. By likening the appetites of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness to those of slaveholders, Melville suggests a connection between slaveholding and intemperance that mirrors similar moves made by both Delany and Stowe. His image of slaveholders as sharks reveals the inadequacy of moral suasion and Unitarian notions of conscience for confronting slavery. Treating Exodus even more flexibly than Stowe or Delany, Melville strains its typology almost to the breaking point. Melville's parodic Moses, Fleece, preaches a mock sermon to insatiable sharks that Melville, paradoxically, likens to both the Israelites and slaveholders. Abandoning the essential binary between Egyptians and Israelites, Melville dramatically departs from how abolitionist print culture characteristically used Exodus. Like the whiteness of the whale and Ahab's doubloon, it provides a text open to interpretation. Unlike Stowe or Delany, Melville treats biblical typology as an opportunity to contemplate human savagery, rather than as a framework for resolving the slavery crisis, perhaps because *Moby-Dick* appeared early in the slavery crisis.

Like Stowe and Delany, Melville hints at a revolt that never materializes. The monomaniacal Captain Ahab dominates a multiracial crew in his obsessive quest to avenge himself on the mysterious White Whale, Moby Dick.[166] Scholars have observed that while Ahab and his officers, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, are white, most of the crew is not.[167] The *Pequod*'s crew, of course, are not slaves but paid sailors. Nevertheless, through force of will and his strange charisma—what Nancy Fredricks calls "Ahab's totalitarian cult of personality" (59)—

[166] While Stowe yokes blackness and madness together in the person of Dred, Melville portrays madness as the result of traumatic or sublime experiences regardless of race. The white Ahab is driven to monomaniacal revenge after losing his leg to Moby Dick, whereas the black Pip is driven mad after witnessing a mystical vision while almost drowning in the ocean. Melville alternately suggests that "man's insanity is heaven's sense" (322) and that madness leads to destruction. Although Dred and Ahab are both associated with insanity, Ahab is restlessly active whereas Dred is a "passive instrument in the hand of God" (Pelletier 137).

[167] Colatrella suggests that "Ahab's tyrannical authority" makes the ship a "penal school in which immigrants provide the brawn and are acculturated into society" (168). Delbanco observes that the *Pequod*'s "labor system" consists of "white overseers and dark underlings" (158).

Ahab exercises much greater authority than the average sea captain. As the self-proclaimed "lord over the Pequod" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 362) Ahab tolerates no resistance to his plan, even when hunting Moby Dick conflicts with financial gain. Ahab's control over his crew is like that of a "theater director" (Laufer 28) over his cast of actors. Although the crew of the *Pequod* does not attempt a mutiny against their captain, Melville considers mutiny at length in one of the novel's many interpolated tales, "The *Town-Ho*'s Story."[168] Only the first mate, Starbuck, verbally opposes Ahab's vengeful scheme.

Melville problematizes the reliability of conscience when Starbuck contemplates shooting the sleeping Ahab in "The Musket." He believes that killing Ahab would save lives and that Ahab will not be swayed from his quest for vengeance on Moby Dick, yet his attempts to justify murder fail to satisfy his conscience. Like Stowe, Melville is concerned with the limits of justifiable violence.[169] Starbuck wonders, "Is heaven a murderer when its lightning strikes a would-be murderer in his bed" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 387), but ultimately leaves Ahab undisturbed. Starbuck's ethical center associates him with antebellum Unitarians, such as William Ellery Channing, for whom the purpose of religion is to help people hear the divine voice within themselves. In "The Musket," Melville dramatizes how conscience can prevent one from revolting against unjust authority. Starbuck's conscience prevents him from killing Ahab and saving the lives of the doomed crew, and no sense of compunction restrains the appetites of

[168] Duban considers this episode a "concise allegory" (105) of the Free Soil Convention of 1848 and suggests that the novel as a whole establishes a "parallel between whaling and expansionism" (87). For Duban, Ishmael imposes the "jeremiad *form*" (emphasis original) on his "abolitionist narrative" which equates the *Pequod*'s doom with that of a "bellicose, proslavery, and unrepentant republic" (83). Yet, this view belies the extent to which Ishmael views Moby Dick as indecipherable and indeterminate, rather than a stable signifier of a "retributive—but just—God" (131).

[169] Yothers suggests that tension between the "human capacity for both violence and the finding of divine approval for violence" is a "major strand in Melville's work throughout his career" (30).

Stubb and the sharks. Melville here critiques slavery by depicting slaveholders as having the sharks' appetite.

Melville shares this focus on restraining appetite with Delany and Stowe. *Dred*'s primary antagonist, Tom Gordon, is entirely governed by his appetites, whether for alcohol or Harry's wife, Lisette. Tom's paired vices are unsurprising because Stowe's father, Lyman Beecher, was an outspoken temperance advocate.[170] Cynthia S. Hamilton argues that in *Dred* "anti-slavery and temperance became complexly interwoven" (261) as Stowe likens the "abuse of power under slavery to the abuses of alcohol" (264). Echoing the temperance tale,[171] *Dred* asks readers to "trace the consequences—to self, family, and community—of irresponsible slaveholding" (270). Similarly, Elizabeth Duquette contends that Stowe critiques self-interest as havinh an intoxicating effect, whether in the emotional enthusiasm of revivals and the market economy. Stowe shapes the "temperance argument to emphasize the *communal* damage resulting from interest in one's own profit, pleasure, or genius" (8).

Delany, likewise, associates intemperance with racial oppression. On their way to Canada, Blake and his fellow fugitives are captured and locked in a stable. Their white captors are so pleased that they were "rioting in triumph through the night" (Delany *Blake* 149). While the "inmates of the tavern reveled with intoxication" (150) Blake contrives to free himself and his friends with a butcher knife. Even the man on guard duty is "already partially intoxicated" (151) when Blake makes his move. Throughout the scene, Delany associates intemperance with the kidnappers' morally craven nature. Albeit more indirectly than Stowe or Delany, Melville also parallels the vices of slave holding and intemperance in his creative adaptation of Exodus.

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[170] See Noll 296-297.

[171] According to Cynthia Hamilton, the Susan Peyton subplot is a typical "cautionary temperance tale," while the main plot "hovers between the cautionary and exemplary modes of the temperance tale" (265).

Melville employs typological plasticity to liken slaveholders to gluttons. In "Stubb's Supper," Stubb and the sharks consume a whale's flesh. As the sharks devour the whale's carcass, so slave owners with their boundless appetite for profit metaphorically consume their slaves' bodies. Ishmael observes that sharks are the "invariable outriders of all slave ships crossing the Atlantic" as they wait for a "dead slave" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 237) to be cast overboard. Melville is not unique in depicting sharks feeding on black bodies. In 1843, Josiah Priest claimed that when blacks and whites swam in the same water, the shark "always selects the blacks, as an article of food suited to its taste" (190). By linking Stubb to the sharks, Melville "decenters the white hegemonic structure" (Fanning 212). Through Fleece, Dawn Coleman notes, Melville gives voice to "legitimate black anger at white greed and racial injustice" (*Preaching* 154).

Melville's characterization of the relation between Stubb and Fleece as one of master to slave offers further evidence reading this scene as appealing to Exodus typology. Fleece acts, reluctantly, in "obedience to the word of command" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 237) given him by Stubb. While Fleece is not a slave *de jure,* he is a slave *de facto* because of Stubb's higher position in the nautical hierarchy. Stubb's attitude toward Pip later in the novel reinforces his resemblance to a slave owner. Threatening Pip not to jump out of the whale boat, Stubb says, "a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama" (321). Although Stubb does not actually own Pip, he uses the threat of selling him to the Deep South—a common technique employed by slaveholders to coerce their slaves into being more pliable—in an attempt to stop him from jumping from the boat in the future. Calling Stubb "Massa Stubb" (238) and "more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself" (240), Fleece associates Stubb's hunger for whale meat with that of the sharks'. Susan Garbarini Fanning argues that Stubb's meal is a grotesque satire of a

symposium or feast, whose logical outcome is Queequeg's slaughter of the frenzied sharks in "The Shark Massacre." Melville complicates this imagery, however, by likening the sharks not only to slaveholders but also to Israelites.

In "Stubb's Supper," Melville portrays the black cook Fleece delivering a sermon to a group of sharks that are heedlessly devouring a whale's carcass hanging from the vessel's side.[172] The absurdity of trying to communicate with sharks casts the conventions of Protestant sermons in an ironic light.[173] In contrast to a charismatic preacher's clarity and enthusiasm, Fleece grudgingly addresses the sharks in a "mumbling voice" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 238). Fleece's sermon satirizes slaveholders' unbounded appetites. Numbers 11, in which the Israelites fail to govern their appetites, is the most important of several Old Testament intertexts for Fleece's mock sermon. Various sources have been proposed for this passage.[174] Jonathan Cook, for instance, observes a series of similarities between Fleece's sermon and 1 Peter, which focuses on themes of charity and self-governance.[175] Cook contrasts the "Old Testament doctrine of fearful submission to God" in Father Mapple's sermon with Fleece's "New Testament message of loving cooperation with one's fellow man" (170). Similarly, Brian Yothers considers Fleece's sermon an "universal ethical appeal based on the morality of the Sermon on the Mount" (83). As enlightening as these readings are, such formulations elide the Old Testament echoes in Fleece's

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[172] Pardes argues that Fleece delivers an "anti-Joban sermon or a mock-Hobbesian one in which evil and brutishness are presented as 'governable'" (43).

[173] Fleece's sermon mimics the prominent Protestant preaching style of moving from doctrine to application. After establishing the sharks' voracious nature, Fleece offers the sharks a series of practical applications, such as "just try wonst to be cibil" (Melville 238).

[174] Robert K. Wallace suggests parallels between Fleece's tone and the remarks made by an older black man, Thomas Van Rensselaer, to a mob of white men outside of a meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society on May 8, 1850 (103-104). David S. Reynolds notes that Fleece may have been inspired by the "subversive American humor" (547) of the burlesque sermons of William H. Levison's Julius Caesar Hannibal, whose typically dark reflections on human nature fit Fleece's disgust with the savagery of the sharks.

[175] As Fleece condemns the sharks' relentless appetite, so Peter admonishes his audience to "abstain from fleshly lusts" (1 Peter 2:11) and rebukes Christians who continue to pursue "lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Peter 4:3).

sermon. Fleece's initial lack of enthusiasm, for instance, recalls reluctant prophets like Moses, Jeremiah, and Jonah. Melville parodies the relationship between God and the prophet by having Stubb play the role of God, as he commands Fleece to bring his message to the sharks: "Cook, go and talk to 'em; tell 'em they are welcome to help themselves civilly, and in moderation, but they must keep quiet" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 237). As God sends Moses to Pharaoh and Jonah to the Ninevites, Stubb makes Fleece his emissary to the sharks.

Beyond Fleece's likeness to reluctant Old Testament prophets, his parting curse to the sharks resembles God's condemnation of the Israelites for desiring meat in the wilderness in Numbers 11. Although God miraculously feeds the Israelites with manna, they complain, "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" (Numbers 11:4). The Israelites fail to exercise the proper self-governance by succumbing to their cravings. As punishment for their ingratitude, God overloads them with meat: "Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you" (Numbers 11:19-20). Instead of ending his sermon with a benediction, Fleece curses the sharks: "fill your dam bellies 'til dey bust—den die" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 239).[176] As God angrily forces the Israelites to pursue their cravings until they are sick of what they once desired, so Fleece abandons trying to convert the sharks in favor of surrendering them to their appetite. This is just one of many examples of Melville's "interest in preserving and sustaining biblical structure and content" (Hutchins 20). Fleece's anger is more radical than scholars have acknowledged because Melville implicitly likens the black cook to God himself. Fleece tells

[176] David Walker evokes this image more directly: "[slaveholders] keep us miserable now, and call us their property, but some of them will have enough of us by and by—their stomachs shall run over with us; they want us for their slaves, and shall have us to their fill" (70).

Stubb that “no use a-preachin’ to such dam g’uttons as you call ‘em, till dare bellies is full, and dare bellies is bottomless” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 238).

Allusions to Exodus in *Moby-Dick* and marginalia in Melville’s Old Testament reinforce the association between the ravenous sharks and grumbling Israelites. While Melville did not mark Numbers 11 in his bible, he did mark Numbers 15:38-39 (Heidmann 357). God commands the Israelites to wear fringes to remind them of his commandments: “And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring” (Numbers 15:39). Here, fringes function as an injunction to self-governance. Moreover, Fleece’s admonishment to the sharks—“Don’t be tearin’ de blubber out your neighbour’s mout” (Melville 238)—is a condensed, colloquial paraphrase of the tenth commandment against coveting: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Exodus 20:17). Fleece’s phrase, “neighbor’s mout” even rhymes with the biblical phrase “neighbor’s house,” accentuating the parody. Finally, Melville links the blood-thirsty sharks to the Israelites a few chapters later in “Stubb and Flask kill a Right Whale; and Then Have a Talk over Him.” These sharks “rushed to the fresh blood that was spilled, thirstily drinking at every new gash, as the eager Israelites did at the new bursting fountains that poured from the smitten rock” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 258). Melville alludes to Exodus 17:6, when God commands Moses to bring forth water in the desert by striking a rock. Like Numbers 11, it is an example of the Israelites grumbling against Moses because they cannot govern their appetites. The sharks thirst for blood is as unquenchable as the Israelites’ for water.

The ravenous sharks and the grumbling Israelites share with slaveholders a lack of control over their appetites. Fleece appeals to notions of property to dissuade the sharks from their voracious meal. Observing that "dat whale belong to some one else" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 238), Fleece chides the sharks for ignoring Stubb's legal claim to the whale. Stubb's claim to the whale, of course, rests only on violence. The absurdity of exhorting sharks to restrain their bottomless appetites suggests that appeals to slaveholders based on moral suasion are futile. Redpath echoes Melville's comparison of slaveholders to animals by suggesting that "you might as well preach to buffaloes, as to [David] Atchison, and [Thornton] Stringfellow." Melville, therefore, anticipates Redpath's use of the exodus trope to reject moral suasion, but uses typological plasticity to transform the clarity of the conflict between Egypt and Israel into an observation about human appetite.

Melville's subtle critique of slaveholders' ceaseless appetite is especially significant because pro-slavery advocates frequently justified slavery by arguing that Africans were incapable of governing their own appetites. Slavery apologists claimed that "if released from slavery blacks would relapse to their natural selves into a state of animal-like depravity and heathenism" (Evans 45). In an article published in *American Quarterly Review* in 1832, for instance, Virginian educator Thomas Roderick Dew[177] claimed that in the "free black" the "animal part of the man gains the victory over the *moral*" (emphasis original) (52). Similarly, in a speech delivered in 1837 and published as a pamphlet in 1838, William Harper[178] described "savage life" as one of "furious passions and depraved vices" (13) and claimed that the "institution of slavery is an essential process in emerging from savage life" (14). A vocal advocate of nullification, Harper asserted that because of slavery's allegedly restraining

[177] On Dew, see Faust 21-23.
[178] On Harper, see Faust 78-79.

influence "[n]othing is so rarely heard of, as an atrocious crime committed by a slave" (25). According to Harper, slaves' "offenses are confined to petty depredations, principally for the gratification of their appetites" (25). Similarly, Priest characterized Africans in terms of "indolence, stupidity, and the animal passions" (321). Proslavery advocates used this logic throughout the 1850s.[179]

Continuing the analogy between Africans and animals, Samuel A. Cartwright developed the idea that slavery was essential for restraining Africans' animal passions by arguing that black people's brains and nerves had a unique structure.[180] In 1843, he claimed that "[a]ll history and science go to prove, that the Ethiopian is the slave of his appetites and sensual propensities" because of "his peculiar physiology and anatomical structure" (12). As a result, a person of African descent was, for Cartwright, "more under the influence of his instincts, appetites and *animality*, than other races of men, and less under the influence of his reflective faculties" (12). Only the external influence of a master can "restrain the excesses of his animal nature and restore reason to her throne" (12). Perversely and paradoxically, physical slavery is the only freedom from the African's "slavery to his appetites" (12). Cartwright, therefore, shares the broader antebellum Protestant culture's focus on a "life of industry, temperance and order" (12), but shifts that focus from the individual's self-management to the relationship between master and slave. Melville inverts Cartwright's terms: it is slave owners whose animal appetites are out of control.

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[179] Writing in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1854, an author identified as J.A.W. claimed that "slavery constitutes a salutary restraint upon the ambition and the licentiousness of men" (425).

[180] Gilman discusses how, for Cartwright, the "[a]ssociation of blackness and madness is made incontrovertible" because it is the "physiology of the blacks which predisposes them to mental illness" (139). Like Cartwright, Josiah Nott cited the supposed fact that the "nerves of the Negro" were "larger than those of the Caucasian" (24) as evidence of the trend that "In animals where the senses and sensual faculties predominate, the nerves coming off from the brain are large" (23).

By equating slaveholders with sharks, Melville portrays them, rather than slaves, as the ones with animalistic appetites, revealing the insufficiency of Unitarian optimism about human nature for confronting slavery. Conscience plays the same role for William Ellery Channing that the slave-master plays for Cartwright. Channing held that people can behave angelically, so long as they exercised the appropriate self-governance. The central argument of Fleece's sermon—that the sharks must "gobern dat wicked natur" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 238)—parodies Channing's faith in moral suasion to solve the slavery crisis. Channing's prominence reflects a shift in New England religion from once-dominant "doctrinalist" (Rabinowitz xxix) approaches to moralist ones. Moralism replaced the "epistemological self," defined by knowledge of proper doctrine, with the "behavioral self" (108) obedient to established moral norms. As the "mechanism for selecting what should be obeyed and what should be suppressed" (93) conscience became increasingly important. Fleece claims that "if you gobern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is not'ing more dan de shark well goberned" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 238). Similarly, in his famous 1828 sermon, "Likeness to God," Channing explained that every person has "passions to war with reason, and selflove with conscience" (251). Only by following one's conscience through "great spiritual effort, put forth in habitual watchfulness and prayer" (251) can one cultivate one's inner divinity. Humans ascend to the level of angels when they abide by their conscience, but descend, in Melville's analogy, to the level of sharks when their will is "perverted and overpowered by the appetites and passions" (Channing 228).

In his 1835 work on slavery, Channing proposed that slaveholders should "resolve conscientiously and in good faith to remove this greatest of moral evils and wrongs" (*Slavery* 127) by gradually emancipating and educating their slaves. The "resolve to exterminate slavery"

(128) must come from slaveholders themselves, rather than be imposed externally.[181] Channing acknowledged that a slave will indulge in "intemperance, licentiousness, and, in general, to sensual excess" and cannot "be expected to govern himself" (68) but he attributes this behavior more to the degradations of slavery than to racial inferiority. Channing condemned abolitionists' fierce rhetoric and demands for immediate emancipation because such "vituperation" has "shut every ear and heart" (145) against reasonable discourse. Melville, who may have read Channing's famous sermon in his wife's 1848 set of Channing's complete works, did not share Channing's confidence in slaveholders.[182] Fleece's appeal to the sharks is futile because controlling their voracious appetites would require them to act against their nature.[183]

Melville's adaptation of Exodus typology is noteworthy because he does not use it to resolve social conflict. Instead, he deploys it to develop philosophical observations about human nature, portraying the ravenous sharks as mirror images of brutal humanity. Ishmael observes a kind of symmetry between humans fighting aboard ship and sharks circling in the water below: "were you to turn the whole affair upside down, it would still be pretty much the same thing" (237). Whereas Delany and Stowe rely on Exodus even as they reinterpret it, Melville is more interested in parodying biblical source material than in making a definitive statement in favor of abolition. Beyond emphasizing the futility of moral suasion and the failure of Unitarian notions

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[181] Channing accepts the idea that a slave will indulge in "intemperance, licentiousness, and, in general, to sensual excess" and cannot "be expected to govern himself" (*Slavery* 68), but attributes it to the degradations of slavery rather than racial inferiority.

[182] Three passages in "Likeness to God" are marked in Elizabeth Melville's copy of Channing's complete works, although it is unclear if the markings were made by Herman or Elizabeth since the presence of annotations by both husband and wife "in the set introduces the possibility that both hands might appear in any given essay" (Dawn Coleman "Introduction"). Either Herman or Elizabeth Melville marked several passages in another of Channing's famous sermons, "Unitarian Christianity," first delivered in 1819. In one of the marked passages, Channing praises the individual who "practically conforms to God's moral perfection and government" and excels at "regulating his thoughts, imagination, and desires" ("Unitarian" 95).

[183] As Yothers notes, Fleece "draws upon the sense of human possibility characteristic of liberal Protestantism," yet shows that "self-denial is crucial for salvation, but rare to the point of being heroic" (83).

of conscience, Melville's depiction of the sharks does not offer a way to address the slavery crisis.

**Conclusion**

Stowe, Delany, and Melville reimagined Exodus to explore the legitimacy of violent resistance to slavery and the possibilities of black agency. Utilizing typological plasticity, they transformed Exodus from a clear political allegory into ambiguous literary figurations. Tracking Exodus motifs across *Dred*, *Blake*, and *Moby-Dick* reveals major divisions within the antislavery movement leading up to the Civil War. While journalists like Redpath mapped the conflict over slavery onto the simple opposition between Moses and Pharaoh, these novelists stretched Exodus significantly, questioning its utility as a template for ending slavery. Whereas Redpath valorized John Brown, the paragon of antislavery violence, as a new Moses, Stowe accepted violence to defend the innocent but refrained from sentencing slaveholders to the Egyptians' fate. While Stowe circumscribed black male agency within domestic ideology, Delany interpreted Exodus through a theology of black self-reliance. Unlike his counterparts, Melville deployed biblical typology to expose human voraciousness rather than to resolve social conflict.

While Glaude's analysis of the Black Convention movement demonstrates how Exodus shaped notions of racial solidarity animating antebellum black politics, this chapter reveals how novelists of varying subject positions creatively adapted biblical typology to critique racialized violence. Beyond Delany, Melville, and Stowe, other nineteenth-century writers like David Walker, Albion Tourgée, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper turned to typology to address Westward expansion, Reconstruction, lynching, temperance, and education reform. These writers' revisions to biblical narratives illuminate more than their stylistic innovations or their

insight into class tensions and gender politics. As we have seen, typology's power lies in its flexibility; it provided a shared discourse for U.S. writers to imagine their nation as Egypt or Canaan, Babylon or the New Jerusalem. The better we understand biblical typology in nineteenth-century literature, therefore, the better we will understand competing notions of the American project.

## Chapter Three:

## Moses vs. the Masses: Alain Locke, Aesthetic Uplift, and Zora Neale Hurston

In a letter to Thomas E. Jones, president of Fisk University, written October 12, 1934, Zora Neale Hurston explained that she was "depressed" after hearing black concert artists because while they were "often great artists in the white manner," they "fell so far below the folk-art level of Negroes" (315). By distinguishing between "artists in the white manner" and the "folk-art level of Negroes," Hurston rejects European models in favor of black folk culture—an enthusiasm not always shared by her contemporaries. The 1930s marked a crucial transition period in African American aesthetics, as the ferment of the Harlem Renaissance gave way to social realism. Perhaps more than any other black writer, Hurston was caught in that transition.

Hurston's refusal to write "'race' propaganda" (*Life* 297) brought her into conflict with her former mentor Alain Locke. Whereas in the mid-1920s and early 1930s Locke and Hurston both opposed W.E.B. Du Bois's conception of African American writing as a vehicle for promoting positive racial images, by the late-1930s Locke and Hurston's views had diverged significantly.[184] Between the publication of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) Locke became increasingly committed to social realism, while Hurston remained invested in African American folk culture. Locke advocated what I call "aesthetic uplift," the idea that artistic achievement by minorities contributes to social equality and that "folk" culture serves as the raw material for "high" art. For Locke, black folk culture, especially the spirituals, held the seeds of true artistic achievement, but needed to be refined. Locke treated folk culture as the essential foundation on which the truly new edifice of the New

[184] On the opposition between Du Bois and Locke, see D. Lewis 177, Pochmara 98-99, and Watts 119-121. Robert Hemenway argues that Hurston perceived the difference between Du Bois and Locke to be "mostly superficial" (38).

Negro could be built.[185] In contrast, Hurston treated rural black culture as the moral and aesthetic lifeblood of African American life.[186] After studying anthropology with Franz Boas at Columbia, Hurston spent virtually her entire career collecting and synthesizing folklore in Florida and the Caribbean. Hurston's novels not only incorporate motifs from African American folklore, but transpose oral storytelling into written form. Locke's tendency to treat the riddle of African American aesthetics as having a single right answer exacerbated his differences with Hurston. We can read Hurston and Locke as representing two poles in a larger debate about African American aesthetics. James Weldon Johnson, whose work Hurston admired, but whose views often mirrored Locke's, is a mediating figure.[187] These distinctions reflect the extent to which the Harlem Renaissance was a "deeply fissured and multifaceted cultural moment" (Powers 6).

Privileging *Their Eyes Were Watching God* over the rest of Hurston's work, landmark scholarship on Hurston tends to either praise her ingenious construction of a "speakerly text" (Gates 186) or chastise her "discursive displacement of contemporary social crises" (Carby 76). Cheryl Wall offers a mediating perspective by arguing that Hurston engages in a "deconstructive practice to refigure and reinterpret the centrality of the margin" (216) by revealing the influence of rural black folk culture on mainstream art and literature. In contrast, most scholarship on *Moses, Man of the Mountain* focuses either on Hurston's critique of nationalism and

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[185] Eric Watts argues that the "emotions bonded to the values of the 'old' provided for a sense of folk tradition needed to underwrite the assertion by Locke that black collective life supplied racial norms as resources for American art" (76).

[186] Eric Sundquist asserts that Hurston treated "folk culture as the only undiluted voice of black America" (54). In contrast, Robert Seguin rejects the image of Hurston as the "unalloyed champion of the 'premodern' rural 'folk' and advocate of elemental racial authenticity" (233). Carla Kaplan argues that Hurston's writing "signifies upon the very folklore that it celebrates" (216).

[187] In a letter in which Hurston addressed James Weldon Johnson and his wife Grace Nail Johnson as "THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES KING JAMES AND QUEEN GRACE," Hurston lauded Johnson's knowledge of "folk things" (*Life* 410).

authoritarianism or her distaste for black male elites.[188] Rather than pit politics against aesthetics, however, this chapter reads the two as intimately intertwined for Hurston. *Moses* is as concerned with the politics of black self-representation as with the rise of fascism. More specifically, I argue that *Moses* rejects the ideal of aesthetic uplift, exemplified by Locke.

This chapter will discuss a series of parallels between Locke and Hurston's Moses in the context of Hurston and Locke's complicated relationship as it evolved throughout the 1930s. It will also situate *Moses* in relation to contemporaneous adaptations of Exodus, including James Weldon Johnson's "Let My People Go," Sterling Brown's "Crossing," and Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures*. Hurston's Moses is a paradoxical figure: a solitary man who leads a multitude; a man who refuses to be king, but acts as the mouthpiece of God; a military genius who only wants to commune with nature.[189] Through Moses Hurston alludes to another figure seeking to lead his recalcitrant people to the Promised Land. Like Locke, Hurston's Moses is a cultural-nationalist, values self-reliance, and levels authoritative judgments. Hurston recasts Moses as a powerful conjuror whose vision of transforming the Hebrews into a great people consistently conflicts with the people's more quotidian desires for food and pleasure. Moses' leadership becomes more repressive when the Hebrews fail to adopt his call to self-reliance. Hurston departs from the traditional appeal to Exodus as a paradigm for liberation by critiquing both prominent black leaders' authoritarian tendencies and the black masses' incapacity for citizenship. The benefit of reading *Moses* in the context of Locke's criticism of Hurston's work is that it allows us to see how Hurston is engaged not only in critiquing authoritarian politics, but also in interrogating the

[188] On *Moses* as a critique of imperialism, see Farebrother 334, M. Wright 45, and Thompson 395. On *Moses* as a critique of patriarchy, see Patterson 21-23 and Edwards 87-89.

[189] Michael Lackey argues that Hurston portrays Moses as a "positive albeit conflicted figure" (583). Melanie Wright describes Hurston's Moses as a "racially ambiguous hero with a Machiavellian streak" (49). Erica Edwards calls Hurston's Moses a "Jekyll and Hyde figure caught between his utopian vision of a democratic country free from force and the distinctly undemocratic violence required to authorize his charismatic position" (93).

politics of aesthetic uplift. *Moses* stands as an alternative model to Locke's conception of how to incorporate folk culture into fiction. Hurston rejects the authoritarian strand of Locke's cultural politics by valuing folk culture on its own terms, rather than treating it as a mere source of inspiration for true art. Hurston participates in what she perceives to be an ongoing oral and literary tradition, instead of seeking to transform folk culture into something more palatable for highbrow audiences.

**Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and Aesthetic Uplift**

Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson promoted aesthetic uplift, which combines the idea that artistic achievement contributes to social equality with the assumption that there is a hierarchy between "folk" culture and "high" art.[190] Locke facilitated the "conversion of folk material into high art" (Harris and Molesworth 246) by encouraging young artists, including Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Sterling Brown. Locke praised this younger generation of black artists for elevating the "folk-gift" to the "altitudes of art" ("Negro Youth" 48). Locke not only used spatial metaphors to convey the relation between folk resources and artistic products, but also turned to organic and evolutionary language. Locke held that "folk art is always despised and rejected at first; but generations after [its beginning], it flowers again and transcends the level of its origin" ("Negro Spirituals" 199). In a recursive process, folk art evolves beyond its crude beginnings. Locke treated the spirituals as prototypes for more sophisticated art.[191] He asserted that the "[s]pirituals are caught in a transition stage between a folk-form and an art-form" (207). The danger of this transitional period is that the original folk-form's purity is being adulterated before the "inevitable art development" (208) is complete. For instance, Locke

[190] On Locke's "pragmatist aesthetics," see Schusterman.
[191] On Locke's view of the spirituals, see Watts 89-91.

objected to arranging the spirituals for soloists rather than choirs because he felt that harmony was intrinsic to the "proper idiom of Negro folk song" (208). Similarly, Locke expressed his desire to elevate folk forms into high art by calling for a "class of trained musicians who know and love the folk music and are able to develop it into great classical music" (*The Negro and His Music* 4).[192]

Locke's position echoes Johnson's trifecta of prefaces to the *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), the *Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), and *God's Trombones* (1927). Despite his personal antipathy for Johnson, Locke credited Johnson with striving to "break the Dunbar mould [sic] and shake free of the traditional stereotypes" ("Sterling Brown" 52) in his review of Sterling Brown's *Southern Road*. Johnson presents ragtime, the spirituals, the Uncle Remus stories, and the cakewalk as the sources of the only distinctively American art. Johnson not only defended these "primitive" forms' aesthetic merits, but, more importantly, argued that they foreshadow the even greater art which African Americans will produce. Johnson, thus, accepted a hierarchy based on the opposition between primitive and civilized, while arguing that African Americans' creative production should be placed higher in the scale than it was by most white critics. Both Johnson and Locke felt that the Harlem Renaissance used "the arts to advance freedom and equality" (Hutchinson 90). Moreover, Locke's praise of Brown's poetry echoes Johnson's introduction to *Southern Road*'s first edition.[193] Johnson claimed that Brown "absorbed the spirit of the material" and, without "diluting its primitive frankness and raciness,"

[192] In a letter, Johnson praised Locke's "Toward a Critique of Negro Music" as "timely and important" because it identified the "three prime reasons why the Negro, with his conceded native musical endowment has produced no outstanding composer, unless an exception is made of Duke Ellington."

[193] According to Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, Johnson "forced his way" into writing the introduction to *Southern Road* and he and Locke "held each other in low regard" (268).

re-articulated it with "artistry and magnified power" (17). Brown embodied aesthetic uplift by transforming "raw material" from the "deep mine of Negro folk poetry" (17) into true art.[194]

Johnson's mining metaphor reflects his own approach to crafting *God's Trombones*, a collection of verse sermons refined from the raw material of folk preaching. *God's Trombones* marks the culmination of his efforts to reclaim African American folk heritage for an Afro-modernist aesthetic. Locke included the centerpiece of *God's Trombones*, "The Creation," in *The New Negro* (1925). Johnson eschews dialect because he considers it an "instrument with but two complete stops, pathos and humor" (*God's Trombones* 7). This is not intrinsic to dialect, but the result of the established use. Johnson especially objects to how dialect was typically used to freeze "the Negro as a happy-go-lucky or a forlorn figure" (7). While dialect "conjures an anachronistic blackness and functions as a linguistic version of the racial stereotypes dramatized in minstrel shows" (Thaggert 19), Johnson's "idiomatic vernacular poetics" (Hutchinson 417) dignifies colloquial black speech. Dialect can only "sound the small notes of sentimentality" (*God's Trombones* 8), and sentimentalizing black people is exactly what Johnson resists. The black preacher's voice, like the trombone, has the "power to express the wide range of emotions encompassed by the human voice—and with greater amplitude" (7). Johnson did not consider folk preaching a "work of 'high' art," but felt it "contained the essence of art" (Levy 300). For Johnson, folk preachers' oratorical skill makes them forerunners of modern black poets like himself. *God's Trombones*, therefore, reflects a "celebratory ambivalence toward the sources of Afro-Protestantism" (Sorett 48). By transforming folk sermons into finely crafted verse, Johnson

[194] Shawn Anthony Christian contrasts Johnson's tendency to "read any portrayal of African American life as in need of refinement before it could be celebrated as art" (20) with Jesse Fauset's valorization of middle-class black life and Sterling Brown's investment in the working class.

reinforces the idea that his poetry, and the Harlem Renaissance more broadly, represents aesthetic progress.

Although folk culture inspired Hurston's fiction, she did not share Locke and Johnson's sense of aesthetic uplift.[195] Viking Press, which published *God's Trombones*, declined to publish *Barracoon*, Hurston's account of the life of Cudjo Lewis, or Kossula, ostensibly the last man to survive the Middle Passage, because Hurston refused to revise Kossula's dialect (Plant xxii). M. Cooper Hariss argues that Hurston eschewed the "scientific rationalism" (271) that Locke proclaims in *The New Negro*, but Hurston's dispute with Locke involved more than opposition to rationalism. Whereas Johnson and Locke tend to operate with a binary opposition between the folk past and the modern present, Hurston felt that "Negro folklore is not a thing of the past" because it is "still in the making" ("Characteristics" 27). For Locke and Johnson folklore is, by definition, not modern, while Hurston sees no such distinction, even telling Langston Hughes that a "new kind" of folklore was "crowding out the old" (*Life* 116).[196] *Moses* does not seek to transform raw materials from folk culture into high art, but rather imitates the art of oral storytelling.[197] Moreover, in her autobiography, Hurston describes listening to the competitive storytelling of men sitting on the store porch. She enjoyed hearing them "straining against each other in telling folk tales" (*Dust Tracks* 48) and attributed the development of her own literary imagination to this experience. As the men on the porch strained against each other, so Hurston strains against the biblical text itself. Whereas Johnson and Locke treated the spirituals and folk

[195] Ross Posnock argues that Hurston and Locke shared the sense that "art and culture can be practices resistant to racial identity" (6).
[196] Leigh Anne Duck observes that in *Mules and Men* Hurston's "folk appear to be surprisingly modern" (127).
[197] Walter Benn Michaels argues that whereas Locke makes the "refusal of imitation" central to the identity of the New Negro, Hurston dissolves the "opposition between imitation and originality" (87).

sermons as raw material to be refined into high art, Hurston conceives of herself as participating in an ongoing creative tradition.

Despite her antipathy to aesthetic uplift, Hurston treated Johnson as her sole kindred spirit in recognizing the beauty and grandeur of folk sermons, praising *God's Trombones* in letters to Johnson. On May 8, 1934, Hurston wrote to Johnson, complaining about a review of her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. Hurston considered Johnson and herself the "only ones even among Negroes who recognize the barbaric poetry in [folk preachers'] sermons" (*Life* 302). Hurston employed dialect while Johnson did not, but she recognized his ability to capture the dynamics of folk preaching. Whereas Johnson acknowledged that black preachers knew the "secret of oratory" (*God's Trombones* 5), Hurston went further by commenting in a letter to Lewis Gannet that the "greatest poets among us are in our pulpits" (*Life* 304). Hurston, thus, admired Johnson's work regardless of the subtle, but significant, differences in their attitudes. Combining folk humor and political cynicism, *Moses* departs from the precedent set by *God's Trombones*. Hurston's treatment of folk material aspires to be mimetic, not only in linguistic verisimilitude, but by conveying rural African Americans' typical feelings and attitudes. Whereas Hurston's *Moses* re-imagines Exodus in terms of folklore, Johnson's verse-sermon "Let My People Go" maintains a more traditionally Afro-Protestant interpretation.

While Johnson strove for a beauty and simplicity of language that reflects the sparseness of the biblical text, Hurston embellisheed Exodus in every way she could. Re-writing Paul Laurence Dunbar's "An Antebellum Sermon" in a modern poetic idiom instead of using dialect, Johnson's "Let My People Go" maintains the blibcal text's reverential tone, starkness, and minimalism.[198] The verse sermon focuses on Moses' encounter with the burning bush, Moses'

[198] Joanne Braxton observes that Dunbar became a "convenient symbol of the 'Old Negro' and the 'white man's burden' stereotype" in the minds of "'respectable' New Negroes like Johnson" (xxix).

confrontation with Pharaoh, and the Red Sea's parting. Johnson pursues an aesthetic of condensation, managing to convey a great deal in relatively few words. In contrast, Hurston employs an aesthetic of expansion, adorning the biblical text with material from other sources, such as Moses' military exploits as an Egyptian general, Moses' friendship with Mentu, and Moses' journey to Koptos to retrieve the Book of Thoth.[199] Using unrhymed stanzas of varying lengths, Johnson dwells on Exodus' dramatic moments in rich detail and uses repetition to convey the grandeur of the biblical story. For instance, the preacher uses anaphora to describe the Egyptian army pursuing the Israelites: "And the rumble of the chariots was like a thunder storm, / And the whirring of the wheels was like a rushing wind, / And the dust from the horses made a cloud that darked the day, / And the glittering of the spears was like lightnings in the night" (51). Much like biblical poetry itself, Johnson's poetry employs parallelism: "And the Children of Israel all lost faith, / The children of Israel all lost hope" and "The Lord will break the chariots, / The Lord will break the horsemen" (51). Johnson's "poetically political biblical interpretation" (Melton 124) concludes with an open-ended typological bridge to the contemporary world.

While Johnson's "Let My People Go" follows traditional typological interpretations of Exodus, Hurston's *Moses* reverses the usual logic of Exodus typology. Johnson ends his verse-sermon with a warning to those who fail to learn from Pharaoh's demise: "Listen!—Listen! / All you sons of Pharaoh. / Who do you think can hold God's people / When the Lord God himself has said, / Let my people go?" (52). Rather than name specific "sons of Pharaoh," Johnson allows readers to identify their own oppressors. Whereas "Let My People Go" suggests that all tyrants are in danger of suffering Pharaoh's fate, Hurston reverses the "hermeneutical flow" so

[199] Barbara Johnson notes that Hurston consulted Josephus and the story of the Book of Thoth comes from Guy Maspero (80).

that African American experience "informs the representation of the biblical story" (M. Wright 59) instead of Exodus motifs shaping African American experience.

Typology treats the present as parallel to or a fulfillment of the past, but Hurston's method throws present concerns into relief by retrojecting them into the ancient past.[200] Rather than use Exodus to allegorize the present, Hurston elevates the struggle for leadership of the black community to biblical proportions. One precedent for projecting contemporary social critique onto the Exodus narrative is Lawrence Langner's *Moses: A Play, a Protest and a Proposal* (1924), which anticipates Hurston's novel by casting Moses as a tyrannical law-maker.[201] Playwright, producer, and founder of New York's Theatre Guild, Langner made Miriam his play's heroine. Miriam advocates art, creativity, and beauty, while Moses embodies legalism. Although both Hurston and Langner portray Moses as ruthlessly enforcing his vision of nationhood on the Israelites, Hurston's treatment of Moses is more ambiguous than Langner's. Whereas Langner's Moses is fanatically legalistic until the end of the play when he realizes the futility of his life's work, Hurston's Moses has more complex motivations. Langner held Moses responsible for the legalism he believed afflicts modern society, while Hurston used Moses to explore the corrupting burden of leadership. Although he mainly wants to "ask God and Nature questions" (Hurston *Moses* 592), Moses ends up enforcing his own ethical envision on an entire people. Hurston suggests that Exodus' central irony is that the people do not share Moses' vision of national greatness and spiritual purity. In a letter to Carl Van Vechten, written September 12, 1945, Hurston argued that the "Hebrews did not value those laws, nor did they ask for that new religion that Moses forced on them by terror and death" and Moses treated the Hebrews as

[200] Arna Bontemps's *Black Thunder: Gabriel's Revolt, Virginia 1800* (1936) takes a similar approach by anachronistically interpreting slave insurrection in terms of the formation of a global proletariat.
[201] On Langner, see Langston 9-12.

"laboratory material" (*Life* 529). She was "convinced that he thoroughly hated them after Sinai, if not before" (529) because of their failure to adhere to his principles. In his role as liberator and law-giver, Moses becomes a "thing, a tool, an instrument for a cause" (274), with little pity for those without his fortitude. The burden of leadership diminishes Moses' humanity. Hurston dramatizes how the pressures of leadership contort liberators into becoming reflections of their oppressors. Hurston's critique of authoritative race leaders reflects her complicated relationship with Locke.

**Hurston, Locke, and Race Leadership**

While Hurston's Moses is a complex, polyvalent figure, his views mirror Locke's in important ways. Dorothy Stringer argues that Hurston's portrayal of Moses as "deeply learned, a political adversary, a skilled rhetorician and prolific writer, yet also profoundly sexist, unconversant with poverty, and given to authoritarian hectoring" (196) resembles Du Bois. Yet, these characteristics apply to Locke, as well. Moreover, Locke's criticism of *Their Eyes* wounded Hurston while she was finishing *Moses*. In a 1938 letter to James Weldon Johnson, Hurston derided Locke as a "malicious, spiteful litt[l]e snot that thinks he ought to be the leading Negro because of his degrees" (413). Hurston further declares, "God help you if you get on without letting [Locke] 'represent' you!" (413). She did not seek rapprochement with Locke until 1943.[202] Even if Hurston did not pattern Moses solely on Locke, *Moses* reflects her dispute with Locke over the nature of black aesthetics and the relation of the African American artist to the masses.

[202] On January 10, 1943, Hurston wrote to Locke: "Really, I want your approval . . . Really, Alain, I am through being a smart-aleck, You must forget that I ever was one" (Hurston *Life* 473).

Hurston's relationship with Locke, alternately one of student to teacher, writer to editor, and supplicant to sponsor, spanned decades.[203] Yet, Hurston did not merely parrot Locke's opinions. In fact, the two disagreed vehemently about black modernity's relation to African American folk culture. Raised in an affluent Philadelphia family, Locke's academic credentials included: Phi Beta Kappa, the first African American Rhodes Scholar, PhD in philosophy. Hurston was Locke's student at Howard University, where he taught philosophy. In 1921, Hurston joined Locke's literary club, the Stylus.[204] Locke's opinion of Hurston's work became even more important after he ingratiated himself with "Godmother" Charlotte Mason, the wealthy white New York widow who funded numerous projects by black writers.[205] Mason often relied on Locke to ensure that Hurston made good use of her patronage.[206] During the height of the Harlem Renaissance, Locke promoted burgeoning writers like Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay as the future of African American literature. These writers shared an outlook that defied Du Bois's commitment to art as propaganda and Victorian standards of propriety by portraying the fullness of black experience, including its unpalatable aspects.[207] Nevertheless, in his acute sensitivity to propriety, Locke was often disconcerted with Hurston's "impulsive revelatory spirit" (Watts 75).

Hurston's letters to Locke in the late 1920s and early 1930s are effusive with praise. For instance, in a letter written October 11, 1927, Hurston told Locke she was confident that he could "bind groups with more ease than any other man in America" (*Life* 109). This, of course, was

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[203] On Hurston's relationship with Locke, see Hemenway 39-40 and Harris and Molesworth 246-248.
[204] See Hemenway 19.
[205] On Hurston's relationship with Mason, see Hemenway 104-110, Harris and Molesworth 245-250, and Stewart 573-574; 614-617.
[206] According to Jeffrey Stewart, "Mason and Locke shared a bias against popular culture, and she intensified his hatred of it" (582).
[207] Locke felt that propaganda was the "[e]cho of white supremacist discourse" (Watts 94). On Du Bois and Locke's mutual indebtedness to pragmatist aesthetic theory, see Hutchinson 42-50.

precisely the role that Locke was claiming for himself as a professor, philosopher, editor, and critic. Writing after the failure of the short-lived *Fire!!*—a collaboration among Hurston, Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, and several other young black artists—Hurston sought to enlist Locke in a new venture. Hurston addressed the letter "Dear Friend" and proposed that she, Locke, and Hughes launch a "purely literary magazine" (109) to go beyond *Crisis* and *Opportunity*. Hurston represented this proposed collaboration with a drawing of a triangle and the question "why cant [sic] our triangle—Locke—Hughes—Hurston do something with you at the apex?" (109). At this point in her career, Hurston seems to have been both gratified by Locke's attention and willing to stroke his ego. The following year, Locke reciprocated Hurston's enthusiasm for collaboration. In a letter written June 2, 1928, Locke congratulated Hurston on completing her bachelor's at Barnard. Mentioning that he had recently seen Hughes and Mason, Locke observed that "every time the circuit is made more energy is stored up for our big experiment." Locke's electrical metaphor suggests that the four of them form a conduit through which powerful creative energy flows.

Hurston depended on remaining in Locke's good graces because he mediated between her and her white patron Charlotte "Godmother" Mason. Hurston included praise of Locke in her flattery of Mason. In a letter to Mason written on January 21, 1932, Hurston adopted a self-deprecating posture to tell her patron "you and Alain to a lesser degree are garden flowers, while I am a jimpson weed flourishing on a fertilizer heap in the barn-yard" (242). Hurston's description of herself as a "jimpson weed" played to Mason's belief that Hurston was an unadulterated "primitive." Locke reinforced the importance of obeying Mason's directives in his letters to Hurston. In a letter written April 28, 1930, for instance, Locke conveyed both Mason's praise for and editorial feedback on Hurston's research and writing. Mason funded Hurston's

documentation of folklore, which would eventually be published as *Mules and Men* (1935). Locke related that Mason was "eagerly looking forward to pushing the book" and explained that "godmother's suggestion" was that it would be a "mistake even to have a scientific tone to the book" and that Hurston should "let loose on the things that you are really best equipped to give—a vivid dramatizing of your material and the personalities back of it."

Her effusive flattery notwithstanding, Hurston held some things back from Locke and Mason. In a letter to Langston Hughes written April 12, 1928, for instance, Hurston described the progress she had made toward what would eventually become "Characteristics of Negro Expression." Hurston confided to Hughes that she had derived "5 general laws, but I shall not mention them to Godmother or Locke until I have worked them out. Locke would hustle out a volume right away" (115). Hurston kept her patrons on a need-to-know basis to avoid Locke's overzealousness in transforming her research into publications. Although it can be hard to discern the line between Hurston's flattery of and genuine admiration for Locke, Hurston respected Locke more than most African American leaders.

Hurston distinguished Locke from other race leaders who pursued their own interests rather than the common good. In a letter to Mason written on October 15, 1931, Hurston criticized African American leaders for being "degenerate and self-seeking" (234). She felt that the race's self-appointed leaders were more concerned with a "few paltry dollars and some white person's tea table" than the "poor Negro, the real one in the furrows and cane brakes" (234). Hurston exempted Locke alone from her sweeping condemnation: "Alain is different but all the others are awful" (234). Hurston would satirize these pretentious, self-important leaders in her portrayal of Aaron in *Moses*. As these race leaders are more concerned with securing "white wives for Negro doctors" than bettering the "lot of the man in the street" (234), so Aaron is

obsessed with his own prestige rather than the good of the people. Although he is a Hebrew, he has adopted the proclivities of his Egyptian oppressors. Aaron wants "clothes like an Egyptian noble with ornaments" (Hurston *Moses* 458). Aaron has the same "look of weak brains and strong pride" (521) as Pharaoh. For Hurston, most black leaders simply imitated the worst qualities in whites, but Locke was different. Hurston, however, sometimes felt that her admiration for Locke was not reciprocated.[208]

Hurston's insistence that Locke write to her more frequently runs through their correspondence. In a letter written on May 1, 1928, for instance, Hurston wondered if a "monstrous ole paper-eating ogre is grabbing my letters to you and swallowing them up tiddy-umpty" and hoped that a "St. George arises to chop him into doll-rags" (*Life* 118). A few months later, on November 22, 1928, Hurston playfully begged Locke to "wrassle me out something and put it in the mail" because her "tongue is all lolled out, waiting to lap up that letter from you which is so long overdue" (132). Writing from Rollins College where she was teaching drama on March 20, 1933, Hurston expressed her continued desire for intimate connection with Locke. Hurston says, "Personally, I am growing. Now I am <u>doing</u> some of the things that we used to dream of. For one thing I have the chance to build a Negro theatre" (281). After inviting Locke to visit in the fall, Hurston urged him to consider partnering with her in their shared "dream" of creating authentic black drama: "Honest, Alain, a <u>lot</u> can be done here. With your help we can build here a theatre that will be talked of around the world" (282). Hurston then shifted into an even more personal tone, confiding that she is "so unhappy" at the death of her sister but has not "spoken of it to a soul" and felt "hard hit" (282). She hoped not only to elicit Locke's sympathy,

[208] Jeffrey Stewart suggests that Hurston's "evaluation of [Locke] began to dip" (586) when he failed to visit her in Mobile. Hurston's "distrust of [Locke] and his insecurity about acknowledging her eminence as a great scholar of Negro folklore doomed" (587) any potential collaboration between them.

but to deepen their intimacy. Although she felt she was "doing more and better work than ever, somehow," she urged Locke to "Please answer my letter" (282). At times, Locke did respond to Hurston's desire for intimacy. In an undated letter, for instance, he confided that "[t]his year, it seems, has put more responsibility on my shoulders than any two previous years." If Locke did not always answer Hurston's letters as readily as she would have liked, he promoted her work throughout her most prolific period.

Locke himself adopted a Mosaic attitude throughout his career. In "The New Negro," for instance, Locke declares that "The Negro too, for his part, has idols of the tribe to smash" (8), recalling Moses' destruction of the Golden Calf.[209] The "idol" Locke refers to is the falsely craven sense of self held by the African American who "too often unnecessarily excused himself because of the way he has been treated" (8). Locke describes how African Americans have typically been caught between the alternatives of "supine and humiliating submission" and "stimulating but hurtful counter-prejudice" (13). Some, however, succeed in "fighting mental prejudice by passive resistance" (13). Alluding to the wafers eaten by the Israelites in the wilderness, Locke describes this passive resistance as "manna [that] may perhaps be effective, but the masses cannot thrive upon it" (13). By "passive resistance," Locke means ignoring racism, which is not tenable in the long-term. As manna was a temporary solution that became unnecessary when the Hebrews entered the Promised Land, Locke suggests that "passive resistance" must be replaced by commitment to the "mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem" (14). Locke's cultural-nationalism suggests further parallels between him and Hurston's Moses.

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[209] Steve Pinkerton argues that "*The New Negro* is a New Testament without (yet) a Christ" (545).

In his vision of African American art as a generative force in the creation of a "new" people, Locke adopted a nearly Mosaic position of cultural nationalism and ethnic resurgence.[210] The publication of Locke's 1925 anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation* marked a seminal moment for the Harlem Renaissance.[211] In his contributions to the anthology, Locke "self-consciously and repeatedly uses nationalist metaphors to develop his cultural-political project" (Charles 41-42). As the "home of the Negro's 'Zionism'" (14), Locke represented Harlem as the Promised Land at the heart of a transnational, diasporic pan-Africanism. In the Foreward, for instance, Locke observed that the formation of an "American literature, a national art, and national music implies a Negro-American culture seeking the same satisfactions and objectives" (x). Moreover, in "The New Negro," Locke suggested that "Harlem has the same rôle to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia" (7).[212] As Moses deemed the older generation that left Egypt unfit to enter the Promised Land, so Locke valorized the "Younger Generation" ("Negro Youth Speaks" 47) of New Negroes. In "Negro Youth Speaks," Locke asserted that with this new generation's arrival on the artistic scene African Americans are "spiritually free, and offer through art an emancipating vision to America" (53). Locke felt that the "elder generation of Negro writers" was so affected by the "repressions of prejudice" that it lapsed into "cautious moralism and guarded idealizations" (50), as Hurston's Moses "turned the hosts of Israel back into the wilderness to serve their forty years and grow men and women in place of slaves" (*Moses* 570).

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[210] Ross Posnock associates Locke with the "strategic essentialism" (197) of an "antirace race man" (195).
[211] Herbert Marbury suggests that Moses "gradually transitions from human to deity and then to human again" as Hurston tests the limits of the "New Negro as a mosaic hero" (126).
[212] George Hutchinson observes that Locke's cultural pluralism was part of a larger "*American cultural nationalist* movement" (93) (emphasis original).

**Romance, Realism, and *The Green Pastures***

The dispute between Hurston and Locke did not arise in a vacuum, but was partly the result of their disparate reactions to white writers' appropriating black folk culture. One of the most influential examples from this era is Marc Connelly's play *The Green Pastures* (1930). Although he had praised Hurston's work early in her career, Locke had difficulty differentiating Hurston's fiction of the late-1930s from the folklore-inspired works of white writers, like Connelly. Loosely adapted from Roark Bradford's collection of folk tales *Ol' Man Adam and his Chillun* (1928), *The Green Pastures* debuted in 1930 as the first Broadway show with an all-black cast, winning the Pulitzer Prize for drama that year. After an international tour, the production returned to Broadway in 1935, and a film version was released in 1936. Connelly's play dramatizes a series of biblical vignettes ostensibly from the perspective of rural African Americans. As a showcase for black talent, such as Richard B. Harrison's acting and the Hall Johnson Choir's singing, the original Broadway production of *The Green Pastures* was a major achievement.[213] Nevertheless, its portrayal of black folk characters barely rises above minstrel stereotypes. While white audiences lauded the play, black critics' responses were more mixed.[214] *The Green Pastures* exemplifies the "anxiety of white Americans about urban black culture" (Weisenfeld 79), as righteous characters like Noah and Moses are represented as country folk, whereas wicked characters like Pharaoh and the revelers of Sodom and Gomorrah live in the city. Moreover, it was part of a larger trend of images of innate black religiosity providing "enduring solace for white Americans in moments of cultural stress" (Evans 205). Valerie Boyd suggests that *The Green Pastures*'s success enabled Hurston to "sense possibilities for herself as

[213] Locke described Harrison's "reverent, magnetic" performance as a "triumph against the grain of previous Broadway tradition" ("Broadway" 95).
[214] See Evans 208-215.

a playwright" (220). A young Ralph Ellison claimed that *Moses* "sets out to do for Moses what *The Green Pastures* did for Jehovah," but "for Negro fiction it did nothing" (24). In comparing Hurston's novel unfavorably to Connelly's play, Ellison was following Locke's lead.

Locke made *The Green Pastures* the reference point in framing his retrospective review of the African American literature published in 1939. Locke constructed a literary spectrum with romance at one end and realism at the other, using *The Green Pastures* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, respectively, as representative examples. He distinguished between sentimental portrayals of black folk culture—the "poetically picturesque"—and more realistic ones—the "prosaically pictorial"—arguing that the former enjoys a "more than ten-to-one advantage" ("Dry Fields" 4) over the latter. Locke acknowledged the "deep human appeal" (4) of picturesque portrayals of African Americans, but prefered realism's "dry fields" over romance's "green pasture." Locke offered "poetic realism" (4) as a synthesis of these diametrically opposed approaches. Poetic realism blends romance's aesthetic pleasure with realism's truth value. Reflecting his commitment to aesthetic uplift, Locke used mining as a metaphor to suggest that practitioners of poetic realism must purify their raw material from both "realistic slag" and "romantic dross" (5).[215] For Locke, Hurston's *Moses* failed to achieve this delicate balance. Locke's review of *Moses* describes the novel as "cleverly-adapted *Green Pastures* in conception, point of view, and execution" (7). Yet, Locke felt that *Moses* lacked the "vital dramatization that superb acting gave to *Green Pastures*" and, thus, Hurston's novel "sinks back to the level of the original Roark Bradford" (7). Born in Tennessee, Bradford worked as a reporter for a series of Southern newspapers before achieving success as a fiction writer. Bradford's portrayals of plantation life

[215] Locke employed this mining metaphor elsewhere, as well: "But the real mine of Negro dramatic art and talent is in the sub-soil of the vaudeville stage, gleaming through its slag and dross" ("American Stage" 80).

and black folk tales were highly popular among white audiences in the 1930s, but black intellectuals like Locke considered them overly indebted to minstrel stereotypes.[216] Even Hurston did not consider *Moses* to be completely successful, but to equate it with Bradford's offensive stereotypes was a biting dismissal.[217] Locke's impatience with *Moses* reflects how the new medium of film was recirculating minstrel stereotypes. Despite his appreciation for the original Broadway production of *The Green Pastures*, Locke decried the "superficial theatricality" ("Broadway" 95) of the film version. Moreover, Locke lamented that Hollywood "prostitutes genuine Negro talent" to perpetuating "racial stereotypes" ("Negro's Contribution" 458). In this context, Locke felt that Hurston was contributing to this trend, instead of working against it by writing protest fiction. Locke objected to the fact that Hurston's "black Moses is neither reverent nor epic" (7). Irreverence toward the biblical narrative, however, is integral to Hurston's retelling of Exodus. While *The Green Pastures* infantilizes African Americans and distorts their theology, *Moses* explores the power dynamics in social movements.

By comparing Hurston's *Moses* to *The Green Pastures*, Locke grouped Hurston with the very white appropriators of black culture whom she so despised. Some of Hurston's black peers felt that she merely pandered to white audiences.[218] In his review of *Their Eyes*, for instance, Richard Wright accused Hurston of keeping her characters within the "narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears" (23).[219] Hurston, however, frequently vented her displeasure at stereotypical representations of black people, writing to

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[216] On Bradford, see Tracy 21-26.

[217] In a letter to Edwin Osgood Grover written October 12, 1939, Hurston confessed that she had a "feeling of disappointment" about *Moses* because she "thought that in this book I would achieve my ideal, but it seems that I have not reached it yet but I shall keep trying as I know you want me to" (Hurston *Life* 422).

[218] Langston Hughes described Hurston as "always getting scholarships and things from wealthy white people" (239). In his roman à clef, *Infants of the Spring*, Wallace Thurman fictionalized Hurston in Sweetie May Carr, who "knew her white folks" well enough to dazzle them with her "repertoire of tales" (142).

[219] Hurston herself expressed surprise that she was "so much better known among the whites than among my own people" (*Life* 421) in a 1939 letter to Claude Barnett.

Langston Hughes on September 20, 1928 that "cheap white folks are grabbing our stuff and ruining it" (*Life* 126). Hurston's "one consolation" was that white appropriators of black folk culture "never do it right and so there is still a chance for us" (126). Hurston was especially disappointed in black leaders, including W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and Charles S. Johnson, for praising *The Green Pastures*. In "Too Much Pampering of White Writers by Negro Leaders," published in Baltimore's *Afro-American* on September 27, 1930, Hurston denounced *The Green Pastures* as one of many "phoney imitations" (8) of black religious life. She asserted that the play's portrayal of heaven reflected the "white man's idea of heaven" (8) rather than African Americans' actual beliefs. Angelic maids serve De Lawd in a representation of the afterlife that reflects the "persistent fantasy" that African Americans "envision heaven in terms of the pastures of southern plantation life" (Weisenfeld 71). Moreover, Hurston criticized Connelly's source material—Bradford's collection of folk tales *Ol' Man Adam and his Chillun* (1928). She derided Bradford in a letter to Walter and Gladys White in late summer 1932.[220] Although someone advised Hurston to "put a little humor" into the sermon by C.C. Lovelace which she included in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, she refused because it "certainly would have not been true. I'd be no better than Roark Bradford" (292). Hurston felt that Bradford's work was an artificial representation of African Americans and sought to make her own work as authentic as possible.[221] In a letter to Fannie Hurst written March 8, 1934, Hurston swore not to "attempt to create the artificial concerning my people for outside consumption, however much I am tempted" (*Life* 292) because it would be a deception. Yet, many of her critics failed to perceive the

[220] See Hurston *Life* 269.

[221] Carla Kaplan argues that Hurston felt that "authenticity was not a matter of origins but instead inhered in self-expression and faithful transcription" (223). Shelly Eversley argues that Hurston's "authentic racial art requires an anthological diversity" (27), as her disparate works "reflect in their very disconnection a coherent vision of 'the real Negro'" (28).

distinction. Percy Hutchison's review of *Moses*, for instance, equated the speech of Hurston's characters with the "dialect made familiar by Roark Bradford's books." Despite her dissatisfaction with Bradford and Connelly, Hurston reserved her right to condemn the black masses' dependence on their leaders.

**Freedom as Self-reliance in *Moses***

As Moses wants the Hebrews to become less dependent on him, Locke treated self-reliance as an important feature of the emerging New Negro.[222] In "The New Negro," Locke argued that the "development of a more positive self-respect and self-reliance" and the "repudiation of social dependence" characterizd a "new mentality for the American Negro" (10). Locke praised the New Negroes' "renewed self-respect and self-dependence" (4). During the Great Migration, it is the "rank and file who are leading, and the leaders who are following" (7). The preacher is "following his errant flock, the physician or lawyer trailing his clients" (7) who have already left the rural South for a new life in the urban North. In a letter to anthropologist Melville Herskovits written in the summer of 1925, Locke commented, "this time I hope the slaves will write their own Emancipation Proclamation." Locke envisioned the New Negroes as asserting their own freedom. Similarly, Hurston's Moses struggles to inculcate self-reliance in the newly freed Hebrew slaves. Moses seeks to "lead out a free and singing people from inside the cringing slaves" (Hurston, *Moses* 575). The "masses exist in symbiotic relationship" (Dickson-Carr 105) with their leaders, and Hurston embellishes the Israelites' stubbornness to suggest the supreme difficulties of maintaining social movements.

[222] George Hutchinson observes that Ralph Waldo Emerson was "one of Locke's intellectual heroes from his pre-college days" (83).

*Moses* dramatizes a socio-cultural paradox: it is impossible to "lead" people into self-reliance. Ironically, once Moses delivers the Hebrews from bondage they become dependent on him and unwilling to take responsibility for themselves. *Moses*, thus, explores the idea that people want to be ruled more than they want to be free. Many scholars treat *Moses* primarily as a critique of charismatic, patriarchal, hierarchical leadership.[223] Herbert Marbury, for instance, claims that Hurston reveals the pitfalls of "charismatic leadership" and recommends instead a "radical democracy where authority and its legitimation are broadly distributed" (131). This interpretation, however, fails to adequately consider Hurston's critique of the Israelites' lack of self-reliance and unfitness for freedom. Scholars who only recognize Hurston's critique of charismatic authority flatten the novel's complexity and ambiguity.

Hurston diagnoses failures among leaders and flaws in the masses. Rachel Farebrother persuasively argues that Pharaoh represents the alignment of race-based nationalism and religion, whereas Moses embodies Boasian cultural nationalism.[224] As the novel progresses, however, Moses increasingly resembles Pharaoh. Hurston uses the "trope of memorials" (Farebrother 346) to suggest parallels between Moses' leadership and Pharaoh's tyranny.[225] As Pharaoh builds pyramids to further Egypt's nationalist mythology, so Moses erects tombs for Aaron and Miriam, transforming them into "symbols of Hebrew national identity" (350). Farebrother argues that Hurston treats both Moses' cultural nationalism and Hitler and Pharaoh's racial nationalism as problematic because they both "require sacrificial victims" (350). However, Hurston's critique targets leaders who become alienated from the people they ostensibly serve, rather than cultural

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[223] Dorothy Stringer argues that *Moses* is concerned with the "rise of elite black male leadership" (182). Erica Edwards contends that Hurston transforms the "political romance of Exodus" into "horror fiction" and a "satirical cautionary tale about the gendered logic of black charismatic leadership" (78).
[224] Melanie Wright argues that Hurston's treatment of race in *Moses* "bears traces of a Boasian legacy" (60).
[225] Mark Christian Thompson argues that Hurston "aligns the African American oral tradition with the 'truth' and monuments, or written history, with *a revision of history*" (409) (emphasis original).

nationalism as such. Hurston treats her portrayal of the Hebrews as an accurate representation of rural black people, even as she reifies them as unfit for citizenship. Radical democracy is impossible—and authoritarian leadership inevitable—when the masses do not aspire to civic responsibility. Hurston uses Exodus not as a model to be copied in the present, but as an example of how badly liberation movements can go awry.

Hurston removed several passages from the manuscript version which portray the Hebrews as eager for freedom. For instance, the narrator describes how the Hebrews "listened to the talk of freedom, of escape from hatred and oppression, to the heart song of becoming a people respected and honored at last" (Hurston, *Moses* MS 82). Various unnamed Hebrews debate the merits of following Moses to freedom. One observes "We ain't never going to be nothing and we ain't never going to be looked up as long as we stay in Egypt" (82), while another comments that "it is about time we got us a new god that ain't so stuck on these Egyptians, and don't believe in all this punishing" (83). The narrator notes that "This I-am-what-I-am sounds like a good god to me" became the "common conclusion" (83). The Hebrews are not concerned that Moses may not even be a Hebrew: "I don't care who frees me just so I get free. I wish somebody had come along years ago with this nation. I'm ready to go anytime he says go" (83). Despite the "fears of the timid and the stubbornness of the doubtful" through Moses' efforts "I-am-that-I-am and freedom was winning" (83). In the manuscript version, therefore, many of the Hebrews believe in Moses and his god and aspire to freedom. By eliminating these passages from the published version, Hurston intensifies the estrangement between Moses and the Hebrews and casts the Hebrews as far less eager for freedom.

In the novel's published version, Moses is surprised to discover that the Israelites fear for their lives more than they desire freedom. When Pharaoh finally allows the Hebrews to leave

Egypt, they do not respond with the alacrity Moses expects. One Hebrew resents Moses' urgency because he was "figuring on going fishing tomorrow morning" (Hurston, *Moses* 501). At the first sign of danger, the Hebrews reveal their "inside weakness" (510), panicing when they realize that the Egyptian army is pursuing them. Hurston accentuates the biblical characterization of the Israelites as craven by having nine anonymous speakers voice their distress, rationalizing the benefits of returning to bondage in Egypt. One voice says, "Didn't I always tell you all that them Egyptians was nice people to work for? You couldn't find better bossmen nowhere" (508). Even after being liberated from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites have trouble acting like free men and women. They are so accustomed to being enslaved that they "kept clamoring for somebody to act for them" (519). Moses tries to cultivate the "full courage of responsibility" in the Israelites, to transform a "horde of slaves" (591) into worthy citizens. Yet, this proves nearly impossible because the Hebrews are so acclimated to tyranny.[226]

Throughout the novel, Hurston suggests that people fear freedom more than tyranny. Michael Lackey argues that Hurston believed that the "idea of the Chosen People" is an "anti-democratic invention" that can be an "invaluable instrument in the political project of domination, exploitation, and extermination" (581). Yet, the more fundamental problem that *Moses* explores is the difficulty of transforming a culture of slavery into one of self-reliance. Moses tells the Israelites that freedom is like the manna he has provided for their sustenance because "you just got to keep on gathering it fresh every day" (577). After centuries of slavery, however, the Hebrews feel "lonesome and defenseless under this light pressure of leadership that

[226] In the Hebrew bible, the exodus represents the transformation of the Hebrews into a divinely-chosen nation (see Deuteronomy 4:20 and I Kings 8:53). The exodus is the necessary prelude to God's covenant with Israel, comprised of Moses' institution of the Law (see Exodus 20:1-2 and Leviticus 11:45) and the occupation of the promised land (see Leviticus 25:38, Jeremiah 32:21-22, and Ezekiel 20:6). Throughout the historical and prophetic texts of the Hebrew bible, the exodus serves as the event undergirding the nation's chosen status. Violations of the Law are considered an affront to the memory of the exodus (see Judges 2:12 and 1 Samuel 12:8-9).

Moses exerted" (559). This idea of loneliness for authority is one of Hurston's keenest insights. After the Israelites cross the Red Sea and Moses drowns the Egyptian army, he resists the temptation to abandon the Israelites and claim Egypt's throne. Moses ignores the "little tee-nincy voice raised up in the back of his mind" which urges him to "go back to Egypt and be King" (514). When the Israelites later try to convince him to become their king, Moses "recoiled inwardly and felt cold" (592). Moses tells them that that they should not have a king because "[i]t's pretty hard to find a man who wouldn't weaken under the strain of power and get biggity and over bearing" (577). Although Moses adamantly refuses formal kingship multiple times, he who had "never wanted to rule anyone had been thrust into the position of absolute rule- and law-giver" (590). Moses tries to teach the Hebrews to be more self-reliant, but they lack his fortitude, intellectual curiosity, and introspection. Ironically, altruistic commitment leads Moses to resort to violence to discipline the Hebrews into reforming their attitudes.

The Hebrews prove allergic to Moses' vision of freedom as self-reliance. When Moses receives the law from the Voice on Mount Sinai, he believes that "Now men could be free because they could govern themselves" (547). Yet, the Israelites prove virtually incapable of doing so, never subscribing to Moses' grand vision of Israel's "high destiny" (563). They are not interested in ethical conduct and cannot envision future national prosperity beyond their immediate discomfort in the wilderness. Moses pities the petty, selfish, and vain elders because they "don't feel hungry nowhere else except in [their] bellies" (563). One elder complains that it is "hard to love freedom if it keeps you hungry" (564). After leading the Israelites through the wilderness for forty years, Moses discovers that "[f]reedom was something internal" and the "outside signs were just signs and symbols of the man inside" (590). The people want happiness, whereas Moses wants them to pursue justice. Moses tells Aaron that "[h]appiness is nothing but

everyday living seen through a veil" (581). Hurston, thus, suggests the great difficulty in teaching self-reliance.

Hurston's portrayal of the Hebrews reflects her own frustration with what she perceived as African Americans' lack of initiative and reliance on white altruism. Characterizing the Hebrews as a "whining mass" (Pederson 451), Hurston paralleled African Americans' complacency with the Hebrews' grumbling. As Hurston depicts the Hebrews as retaining slaves' attitudes during their journey through the wilderness, so she wrote to William Bradford Huie on September 6, 1954 that "[n]o matter what the Emancipation Proclamation says, we are still slaves in spirit, lousy with inferiority complexes" (*Life* 719). Similarly, in a letter to Sara Lee Creech written October 20, 1958, Hurston related how she was being "very annoying to the 'Race Champions'" because she advocated "presenting a program of our own efforts to help ourselves" instead of a "begging expedition" (769) to whites. Hurston insisted that "you cannot hang around the backdoor for a handout, and expect to be invited in as an equal" (769). Part of Hurston's frustration with the social realism epitomized by Richard Wright's *Native Son* was its perpetual reification of blacks as victims and what she considered the total absence of "dignity and self-respect" (719). A *Chicago Defender* article entitled "Oh, for a Leader!" published September 22, 1928 anticipated Hurston's diagnosis of the masses. The author suggests that African Americans "beg to be led while we refuse to follow," as Hurston portrays the Hebrews as simultaneously reluctant to obey Moses and convinced that he should be their king. As Hurston emphasizes the Hebrews' antipathy to self-reliance, this writer considers it "odd" that African Americans "complain of the ills that affect us, but take no steps to remedy them." Unlike Hurston, however, this writer feels that the "only solution" to "American bondage" is to "be led

out" by a new Moses. For Hurston, freedom is an internal disposition more than an external condition.

Moses' ability to train the Hebrews to embrace self-reliance is constrained by his racial and cultural differences from them. One of Hurston's most radical changes to Exodus was to make Moses Pharaoh's daughter's son by birth rather than adoption. Although Miriam is supposed to watch her brother as he floats along the Nile in his reed basket, she falls asleep. To avert her mother's anger, she concocts the story that Pharaoh's daughter noticed the baby and brought him to the palace. Despite her initial skepticism, Jochebed accepts Miriam's story, relishing the thought that "my child is in the palace!" (367). Each time Miriam retells the story, she adds new details. Hurston, thus, treats the Exodus narrative as the product of mythmaking and oral tradition from its inception. Even when Jochebed learns that the princess bore her son by her late husband, an Assyrian prince, the story of the "Hebrew in the palace" persists because it was "something for men to dream about" (371). Hurston suggests that the persistence of myths, even when they are demonstrably untrue, lies in their power to instill hope in suffering people. By retelling the story of the Hebrew in the palace, a story which subverts the status quo, the Hebrews engage in what David Nicholls calls a "discourse of dissent" (44) in his discussion of Hurston's *Mules and Men*.

Despite the myth surrounding Moses' Hebrew origins, his ability to lead the people is hindered by his cultural differences from them. Joshua Pederson argues that Hurston's Moses is a "problematic model for black leaders because he is not black" (451). Yet, the tensions between Moses and the Hebrews do not arise from innate racial traits, but from differences of class and temperament. Although some of Hurston's writings tend toward racial essentialism, her portrayal

of Moses and the Hebrews asserts the primacy of culture over race.[227] The Hebrews' behavior reflects the Egyptian culture in which they lived for centuries. Aaron, for instance, carries himself with the same self-importance as the Egyptian Pharaoh Ta-Phar. Moreover, Hurston describes the Hebrews' sacrifices to the Golden Calf as a "real old down home Egyptian ceremony" (*Moses* 545). Moses' elite education, intellectual curiosity, and spiritual hunger distinguish him from the Hebrews more than his Egyptian-Assyrian heritage per se.[228] Although Moses attempts to speak to the Hebrews in their own language, he often relapses into "talking his proper talk" (522).[229] Moses is highly educated and philosophically-minded, whereas the Hebrews are uneducated laborers with more tactile sensibilities. Hurston herself learned the painful lesson of code-switching during her first stint of fieldwork collecting folklore in the South. Fresh from Barnard College, Hurston failed to induce her informants to share folk tales and songs because she spoke "carefully accented Barnardese" (*Dust Tracks* 144). Whereas Hurston eventually learned how to converse with people in their own idiom, neither Locke nor Hurston's Moses ever fully learn this lesson.

As Hurston's Moses encounters difficulty in transmitting his ideals to the Hebrews, so Locke faced the problem of alienation between New Negro artists and the black masses. In her autobiography, Hurston claims that Locke had "never known the common run of Negroes" (*Dust Tracks* 282) during his upbringing in Philadelphia and his education at Harvard and Oxford.[230]

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[227] Whereas Shelly Eversley argues that Hurston's black folk share an "unteachable, racial instinct" (28), Carla Kaplan argues that Hurston's "fluid and alive folklore aesthetic" facilitates a "non-essential idea of race" (230). In her autobiography, Hurston rejects an essentialist construction of "*The Negro*" (*Dust Tracks* 192).

[228] Lena Hill describes Moses as a "budding ethnographer" (143) in his desire to observe other cultures.

[229] Melanie Wright argues that *Moses* dramatizes the "requirement that leaders, however educated or 'elevated' culturally, be able to speak (literally and figuratively) the language of the people" (81).

[230] Unlike Locke and Moses, Hurston's ideal political leader, Bahaman legislator Leon Walton Young, exemplified closeness to the people he represented. During a trip to the Bahamas in 1929, Young impressed Hurston as a "great champion and a hero in the mouths of the lowly blacks of the islands" and a "Bahama for the Bahaman man" (*Dust Tracks* 159).

The problem for Locke was that African American "creative talent did not yet have an adequate 'cultured' black audience that could appreciate what it produced" (Hutchinson 48). Although Locke acknowledged that a "transformed and transforming psychology permeates the masses" ("New Negro" 7) the real work of racial reconciliation will be conducted by the "enlightened minorities of both race groups" (9). For Locke, there was "nothing wrong with American society that interracial elitism could not cure" (D. Lewis 115). Locke lamented that readers gravitated to sentimental treatments of black life, rather than realistic ones and that a "romantic version of life" was far more popular than "sociological realism" ("Dry Fields" 4). As an advocate of "truth in art" (4), however, Locke refused to "capitulate to popular taste" (Harris and Molesworth 320).

**Folklore Fiction vs Social Realism**

Locke praised Hurston's work throughout the 1930s, but as the decade progressed their aesthetic priorities diverged. Locke had high hopes for Hurston after her debut novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934). Locke praised *Jonah's Gourd Vine* for its "rare revelations of true Negro idiom of thought and speech" ("Eleventh Hour" 10). Locke noted that Hurston achieved such "pure folk quality" through her "careful study of the South from the inside" (10). Moreover, Locke wrote that he looked forward to Hurston's future work with "more curiosity and anticipation than to that of any of our younger prose writers" (10). Locke lauded Hurston's "great power of evoking atmosphere and character" ("Deep River" 8) in her collection of folklore *Mules and Men* (1935). Although he acknowledged that the genre of folklore does not necessarily call for fully developed "social perspective," nevertheless, Locke's only qualm with *Mules and Men* was that there was "something too Arcadian" (9) about it. Locke's concern that Hurston idealized folk culture would only grow stronger as the decade continued. Late in his

career, Locke "comfortably maneuvered himself into the camp of social realism and its concern with the black working class" (L. Jackson, *Indignant* 76). Hurston herself had observed Locke's slipperiness in a 1929 letter to Langston Hughes. Hurston claimed that Locke was "intellectually dishonest" because he was "too eager to be with the winner" and "want[ed] to autograph all successes, but [wa]s afraid to risk an opinion first hand" (Hurston, *Life* 144). Hurston opposed social protest fiction long before it received its apotheosis in *Native Son*.[231] She did not consider writing that exclusively focused on black victimhood to be a productive response to Jim Crow society. In a letter to Dorothy West written March 24, 1934, for instance, Hurston argued that African Americans underrated Rudolph Fisher's work because he was "too honest to pander to our inferiority complex and write 'race' propaganda" (*Life* 297). Whereas Locke became an advocate for social realism, Hurston maintained her interest in rural Southern black culture and folklore. While Locke was willing to overlook the pastoral quality of *Mules and Men* he would be less forgiving two years later when he reviewed Hurston's second novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Locke's mixed review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* grievously wounded Hurston's once great admiration for him.[232] Apparently, *Their Eyes* did not improve on *Jonah's Gourd Vine* to the extent that Locke hoped. Locke's review of *Their Eyes* is a series of back-handed compliments, treating Hurston's strengths as a writer as preventing her from grappling with the emerging genre of social realism. According to Locke, Hurston's "gift for poetic phrase, for rare dialect and folk humor" kept her "flashing on the surface of her community and her characters" and prevented her from "diving down deep either to the inner psychology of characterization or

[231] On the "Hurston-Wright debate," see Gates, *Signifying* 194-196, Maxwell 153-157, Harriss 51-54, and Wall 216-221.
[232] On Locke's review of *Their Eyes*, see Boyd 307-310 and Stewart 748-749. On the reception of *Their Eyes*, see L. Jackson, *Indignant* 77-79.

to sharp analysis of the social background" ("Jingo" 260). By the late 1930s Locke was becoming increasingly impatient with fiction that hearkened back to folk culture, rather than press black aesthetic achievement into the future. Although he considered *Their Eyes* to be "folklore fiction at its best" and an "overdue replacement" for "faulty local color fiction about Negroes" (260), Locke suggested that the time for writing folklore fiction was over. As "'folk' has no meaning without 'modern'" (Kelley 1402), so Locke defined modern black writing in opposition to folklore fiction. Locke implied that Hurston's characters enacted an unwanted return of the "entertaining pseudo-primitives" which "[p]rogressive southern fiction" (260) had already succeeded in transcending. Operating under the assumption that folk and modern are binary opposites, Locke wanted black writing to progress beyond folk culture into modernity. Despite its virtues, Hurston's novel commited the cardinal sin of being regressive. Like most of Hurston's black male contemporaries, Locke failed to register the significance of the novel's exploration of black female subjectivity. Ultimately, Locke implored the "Negro novelist of maturity" to "get over over-simplification!" (260). What had been a strong first effort in 1934 looked like over-simplification to Locke in 1937.

Given that Hurston prided herself on her intimate knowledge of black folk culture, Locke's criticism of her novel as an "over-simplification" was infuriating. Hurston, however, did not meekly accept Locke's self-assured judgments. She responded with "The Chick with One Hen," an ad hominem diatribe against Locke which *Opportunity* did not publish. Hurston accused Locke of being simultaneously ambitious and unoriginal. According to Hurston, Locke lacked the "courage to even champion an idea that belonged to someone else until it was already generally accepted" ("Chick" 1). Hurston characterized Locke as one who waited to "see which way a procession is going" before racing "up to the head of it" (1) to anoint himself its leader.

Although this caricature of Locke is far more negative than Hurston's portrayal of Moses, Hurston suggests that Moses' knowledge is not his own, but comes from Mentu, Jethro, and the Book of Thoth. Her use of dialect and folklore in *Moses* amounted to a retrenchment of her position against Locke's criticism of *Their Eyes*.

Hurston's portrayal of Moses as insistent on ideological purity reflects Locke's penchant for disavowing other black writers once their views diverged from his own. In a letter to Hurston written February 24, 1928, for instance, Locke warned against the "possible crossing of your lines" by any "influences" other than Mason's or his own. Such foreign influences could not only endanger Hurston's work, but might jeopardize the "entire movement for the rediscovery of our folk material." Speaking on Mason's behalf, Locke took a proprietary stance toward Hurston's research, which was funded by Mason. Later that year, on October 20, 1934, Locke wished that Hurston's book would be a "credit [to] real Negro things" and lamented that there are "so few such true things." Although Hurston shared Locke's concern for authenticity, Locke's standards were narrower than Hurston's. His praise for her ceased when her work failed to conform to his conception of "real Negro things." In these letters, Locke conveys his belief in loyalty, purity, and authenticity. This attitude is even more apparent in Locke's letters to Mason. On April 2, 1934, Locke remarked that "fundamental disloyalty"—exemplified by Langston Hughes—is "unforgivable." Whereas Locke and Mason had completely disavowed Hughes by this point, Locke still saw glimpses of potential in Hurston. A few months later, on November 5, 1934, Locke described Hurston as being "on the right track" and hoped that despite her former "disappointment and ingratitude" she would "be true to what you have taught her." Locke flattered Mason by treating her as the arbiter of truth. After Hurston won a Guggenheim Fellowship, Locke wrote to Mason on March 30, 1936 that "Zora has been truer than the

others—and yet how far from real truth!" Locke acknowledged Hurston's "closeness to primitive sources" and suggested that by departing from Mason's tutelage, Hurston committed a "greater betrayal." In a letter to Mason written August 7, 1937, Locke described Hurston's work as striking "some false notes, of course—but some true ones, too." Locke's reliance on a binary opposition between truth and falsehood, loyalty and disloyalty, resembles Moses' demand that the Hebrews abandon their Egyptian ways and fully embrace the god of Sinai.

Hurston's Moses becomes obsessed with purity and loyalty during Israel's sojourn in the wilderness. While Moses is on Mount Sinai, Aaron builds a Golden Calf for the people to worship. In Hurston's retelling of the incident, the narrator does not directly criticize the Israelites for their "idolatry," but merely relays Moses' condemnation of the people's behavior. The people prepare for a "real old down home Egyptian ceremony" (545) as they "oiled their whole bodies before they put on their Sunday clothes" (546). The Israelites worship the Golden Calf with an orgy: "Shining bodies moved and turned and collided joyfully. Maidens danced in ecstasy with closed eyes and nobody looked too closely at faces" (546). The narrator adopts the stance of a participant-observer which Hurston developed in her anthropological field work, describing the orgy without evaluating it morally. Whereas Moses is enraged and disappointed with the people, the narrator simply notes that "Joy was the feeling, joy!" (546), which suggests that the people are more foolish than disloyal. Moses, however, interprets the event as a clash of "Egypt against Sinai" (550). The Voice tells Moses "[t]hey have betrayed me. They have betrayed you, and most of all they have dirtied their souls by betraying themselves" (549). Hurston, thus, subtly suggests that the people are behaving according to the only culture that they have, whereas Moses and the Voice treat the event as the epitome of spiritual adultery. Locke holds Hurston to Mason's standards as Moses wills the Hebrews to obey the Voice. Hurston's

portrayal of Moses' binary thinking, therefore, resembles how Locke became critical of her work when it failed to conform to his aesthetic standards.

Locke's reflections on the Harlem Renaissance resemble Moses' meditation on leading the Hebrews through the wilderness. With Israel on the cusp of the Promised Land, Moses feels that although his "dreams had in no way been completely fulfilled" (Hurston, *Moses* 590), he has "done as much as it was possible for one man to do for another" (591). He has shown the Hebrews what he believes to be the right way to live, but he realizes that he cannot force them to embrace their freedom because "no man may make another free" and "man himself must make his own emancipation" (590). Locke similarly felt that his vision of the New Negro was not fully understood or adopted by his contemporaries. Writing in *Opportunity* in January 1939, Locke dismissed the past fifteen years of African American writing as a "frothy adolescence and a first-generation course which was more like a careen than a career" ("'New' or Newer?" Part I 5). Locke argued that the "indefiniteness" of the original vision of the New Negro enabled it to be perverted by "cheap race demagogues," "petty exhibitionists," and "race idolaters" (5). As Moses admonishes the Israelites for their past disobedience with one final sermon before they enter the Promised Land, so Locke lectured his audience about the "misunderstanding and betrayal of the ideals he had advanced fifteen years earlier" (Harris and Molesworth 319). As the Book of Deuteronomy recapitulates the events of the Exodus and reinterprets the Law for the generation that will cross the Jordan to dwell in Canaan, so Locke prepared the younger generation to receive its inheritance by cautioning them against the sins of the previous generation of writers, who "went cosmopolite when they were advised to go racial, who went exhibitionist instead of going documentarian, who got jazz-mad and cabaret-crazy instead of getting folk-wise and sociologically-sober" ("'New' or Newer?" Part I 6). If Locke treated the

jazz-mad, cabaret-crazy cosmopolites and exhibitionists as violators of the law, then he anointed Sterling Brown the Joshua to lead the next generation across the Jordan.

Hurston's use of black dialect and folklore in *Moses* fell short of what Locke perceived as the progress represented by Sterling Brown.[233] By 1934, Locke suggested that African American poetry was gradually ascending toward greatness, as it "scrambled up the sides of Parnassus" from the "ditches of minstrelsy and the trenches of race propaganda" ("Sterling Brown" 52). This formulation reflects Locke's sense of aesthetic uplift, since Parnassus, as the Muses' home, represents the height of classical art and learning. Locke's spatial metaphor positioned minstrelsy and race propaganda as the lowest form of poetry and made the great works of Western tradition the ideal for which to strive. Locke felt that Brown's ability to "achieve an authentic folk-touch" (50) surpassed that of Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Langston Hughes. Locke admired Brown's *Southern Road* (1932) for its incredible finesse with dialect and sensitivity to the "characteristic jargon of the *milieu* of which he is writing" (50). Hurston felt that Locke disliked *Their Eyes* because she did not "write like Sterling Brown" ("Chick" 1). She described Locke as the sole chick to Brown's hen because, despite Locke's role as critic, the "ideas belong to Sterling" (1). What Locke appreciated most about Brown's poetry, however, was the way that it distills the "intimate thought of the people" and transforms it into something approaching "Aesopian clarity and simplicity—and above all, with Aesopian candor" (51). For Locke, Brown's poetry elevated the emotions, beliefs, and attitudes of ordinary people into true art. Brown's "Crossing" exhibits the clarity, simplicity, and candor that Locke so valued.

[233] Henry Louis Gates argues that what "Sterling A. Brown would realize in the language of his poetry, Zora Neale Hurston would realize in the language of her fiction" (*Signifying* 189).

Brown's "Crossing" treats wandering in the wilderness, rather than deliverance from slavery, as the essence of African American life.[234] As the Hebrews wandered for forty years, African Americans have "passed, repassed" (204) the same rivers, such as the Mississippi, over and over. No matter how many rivers they cross, fugitives from slavery will always have "[o]ne more wide river to cross" (204). The journey from "swamp land" to "marshes" to "bloodred clay" to "gravel and rock" to "baked lands" to "scorched barrens" (204) never culminates in the arrival at Canaan. Like the Hebrew patriarch Jacob, these travelers sleep with their "head pillowed upon a rock" (205). Despite Emancipation, African Americans still await crossing the Jordan into true freedom. Brown, thus, echoes W.E.B. Du Bois, who wrote at the turn of the twentieth century that "Canaan was always dim and far away" (5). Brown selectively focuses on the Hebrews' wilderness wanderings to convey the sense of weariness and disappointment felt by many African Americans during Jim Crow.

Whereas Locke heralded Brown as revealing a "new dimension in Negro folk-portraiture" (53), his review of *Moses* compounded his review of *Their Eyes* by deeming the novel caricature, rather than "[g]enuine folk portraiture" ("Dry Fields" 7). Ironically, in exercising his critical judgment to determine what qualifies as stereotype and what counts as authentic representation of black folk life, Locke displayed the very thing that *Moses* critiques. Moses goes awry when he seeks to impose his own ethical vision on the Israelites. When Moses returns from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, for instance, he hears the "wild and savage shout of voices and drums" of the people worshiping the Golden Calf (Hurston, *Moses* 547). His "spirit rejected it" because it "injured his vision of destiny for Israel" (547). Moses

[234] Brown also burlesques the Exodus narrative in "Glory, Glory," as the voluptuous Annie Mae Johnson parts a crowd "like Daddy Moses through the Red Sea Waters" (234).

resorts to violence to enforce his law on the people, believing that Israel "must be purged of such evil-doers, or all Israel must perish" (552).[235] Locke used his stature as a critic to attempt to purge Hurston and McKay from his circle.[236] As Moses claims for himself the sole authority to determine the Hebrews' destiny, so Locke's "feeling for his esthetic experience led him to willingly declare what counted as a 'true' artistic quality" (Harris and Molesworth 307). Locke's mixed review of *Their Eyes* and even harsher review of *Moses* reflect his commitment to aesthetic uplift and newfound interest in social realism. While Hurston did not embrace social realism, *Moses* does not eschew the realities of racism and oppression.

Hurston portrayed the mechanisms of tyranny without reinforcing notions of black victimhood and inferiority. By characterizing Egypt as a palimpsest of the Jim Crow South and Nazi Germany, Hurston critiqued both "American racism and the Nazi program" (M. Wright 69).[237] Early in the novel, for instance, two Hebrews, Amram and Caleb, discuss the anguish of slavery in Egypt. Amram observes that, paradoxically, the "less a people have to live for, the less nerve they have to risk losing—nothing" (Hurston, *Moses* 346). Hurston explored oppression's perverse power to sap people's will to resist. Caleb laments that Pharaoh has barred Hebrews from Egypt's temples. Like many Jews in 1930s Germany, Caleb simply wants to assimilate into Egyptian society. In fact, the Hebrew elders plead with Pharaoh that they "love Egypt" and desire to be "good citizens" (359), but Pharaoh would rather the Hebrews remain slaves than become citizens. Echoing Southern justifications for lynching, Pharaoh legitimizes the

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[235] Robert Seguin compares Moses' purge of the idolatrous Israelites to "Stalin's campaign against the Kulaks" in its "forced collectivization" (238).

[236] Locke wrote a harsh review of McKay's autobiography, *A Long Way Home* (1937), in which McKay criticized Locke's elitism. Locke characterized McKay's "chronic and perverse truancy" as his failure to give "whole-hearted support" to any of the "half dozen movements" ("Spiritual Truancy" 225) which sought his loyalty. On Locke and McKay's tumultuous relationship, see Harris and Molesworth 203-204, 292-297 and Stewart 455-459, 744-746.

[237] On Hurston's portrayal of Egyptian society as a critique of Nazism, see also Thompson 395-403. Conversely, Darryl Dickson-Carr argues that Hurston "implicitly compares the Egyptians to Roosevelt's New Deal" (103).

enslavement of the Hebrews by claiming that they must pay back the wealth they gained when they "ruthlessly raped" the "helpless body of Egypt" (357). Pharaoh equates the gods with nationalistic zeal and conquest, as the "Hawk-god Horus signified the sun in Egypt and should bear its light to all the world" (372). Locke himself recognized that in modern Egypt the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb could be a "symbol of the regeneration of national spirit" ("Luxor" 179). Pharaoh justifies his anti-Hebrew policies which, as Melanie Wright observes, evoke the Nuremberg Laws, by claiming that "the gods had cried out for cleansing" (Hurston, *Moses* 358). Being banned from worshiping Egypt's gods gives Caleb a "real empty feeling" (345). The shrewder Amram, however, observes that "Gods always love the people who make 'em" (345).[238] Hurston made a similar comment in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938): "Gods always behave like the people who make them" (219).[239] This observation colloquializes Ludwig Feuerbach's insight that gods are anthropomorphic projections of humanity. The subtle shift from "behave" to "love," however, reflects the idea of divine election at the heart of Exodus. Whereas Caleb wants the freedom to worship Egyptians gods—to become an Egyptian—Amram realizes that Hebrews will always be considered the Other in Egypt. The implication is that African Americans will never enjoy chosen status in white America. Although she eschewed social realism, Hurston addressed the problem of racial oppression by portraying religion as a social construct that legitimates existing power relations.[240] While the novel opens with a glimpse into life under a fascist regime, it ends with a return to folk tradition.

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[238] Herbert Marbury suggests that Amram has the "conscience of the New Negro, but articulated through southern speech and rural wisdom" (123).

[239] In his review of *Tell My Horse*, Locke described this statement as a "priceless epigram" ("New or Newer" Part II 38).

[240] Michael Lackey argues that Hurston treats God as an "empty signifier" (581) equally capable of justifying oppression as liberation.

Despite his elitist tendencies, Moses embodies intellectual curiosity and love of oral tradition. Moses' greatest friend in Egypt is the stableman Mentu, who can speak with animals and tells Moses about the Book of Thoth. A master storyteller, Mentu inspires Moses with his "tales of creation" (Hurston, *Moses* 378). Although the responsibility of leading the Hebrews prevents Moses from exercising his intellectual curiosity, by the novel's end, Moses resolves to return to his old life of pursuing knowledge. Whereas in the biblical text Moses dies on the cusp of the Promised Land, in Hurston's novel Moses builds a tomb for himself on Mount Nebo and leaves the Hebrews under Joshua's leadership. Hurston published "The Fire and the Cloud," an early version of the ending of *Moses*, in *Challenge* in September 1934. Both "The Fire and the Cloud" and the ending of *Moses* involve a conversation between Moses and a lizard as Moses finishes building himself a tomb. While in the earlier short story the lizard is the focalized character, asking Moses a series of questions to which Moses offers enigmatic responses, in the novel's version of the scene Moses asks the questions. This reversal reflects Moses' ongoing interest in oral tradition. The lizard reveals that his people's "keeper of memories" (593) lives under a stone atop Mount Sinai. Moses resolves to speak with this "bearded lizard who knows all the things that used to be" to learn "how the world was made, and the heavens" (594). Mentu's conversation with a lizard earlier in the novel foreshadows this scene. Whereas in "The Fire and the Cloud" Moses is a mysterious and authoritative figure, in *Moses* he retains his intellectual curiosity late in life. If the lizard represents oral tradition, then Moses' desire to learn from him indicts those who would dismiss folk tradition in the name of modernity. Moses here resembles the Locke of the mid-1920s, with his appreciation for the spirituals, and rebukes the Locke of the late-1930s, who was impatient with folklore.

**Conclusion**

In *Moses*, Hurston's focus is not, as we might expect, the moment of liberation, but its aftermath. For Hurston, the true struggle for freedom occurs in the wilderness, where the people are unmoored from the simplicity of slavery, but not yet acculturated into the responsibility of citizenship. Hurston complicates the tradition of treating Moses as the embodiment of race loyalty and self-sacrifice spanning the works of David Walker, Martin Delany, and Frances Harper. Her Moses is racially and culturally foreign to the Hebrews he liberates and never fully identifies with their suffering. Yet, Moses does sacrifice his personal desires, including his family life and his thirst for knowledge about nature, to lead the Hebrews. Unlike Walker, Delany, and Harper, who seek to persuade their audiences to subordinate their individual desires to goals that benefit the whole race, Hurston dramatizes how an ethic of self-sacrifice can slip into a penchant for control. Hurston's Moses loses many of his best qualities when he assumes leadership of the Hebrews. Ironically, by solving the Hebrews' problems for them, Moses prevents them from becoming the self-reliant people that he wants them to be. For Hurston, self-sacrificing leaders prevent their followers from becoming self-reliant.

Beyond this critique of self-sacrifice, Hurston's portrayal of Moses' unilateral decision-making reflects Locke's habit of dictating the standards for authentic black art. Given the context of Hurston's reaction to Locke's negative assessment of the novel, we can read the text as resisting the idea that there is a single definition of African American art. Moses' tendency to demand absolute loyalty from the Hebrews reflects Locke's inability to allow for perspectives differing from his own and his disavowal of former proteges when they espoused ideas with which he disagreed. Hurston's retelling of Exodus, therefore, does not simply critique African

American socio-political leadership, but also argues for openness to a plurality of perspectives about the nature of black aesthetics.

## Chapter Four:

## The End of Exodus?: The Dissolution of Mosaic Leadership in Ralph Ellison and William Melvin Kelley

In April 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed black fraternity members in Memphis. King exhorted his audience not to forget the masses, who "stand today amid the wilderness crying out for some promised land, and all they want is some Moses to lead them out" ("Noted" 177). Echoing nineteenth-century writers from David Walker to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, King enjoined his elite peers to "rise up out of the state of lethargy and lead the way into the promised land" (177). As discussed in previous chapters, Walker and Harper held that free, educated blacks had a special responsibility to those who remained enslaved. King extended the same challenge to his white-collar audience of doctors, teachers, lawyers, professors, administrators, and ministers to devote their "academic power" and "economic power" (177) to fulfilling a Mosaic role toward the masses. Whereas King invoked Exodus to simultaneously inspire his audience with hope and prepare them for the ongoing rigors of the struggle for justice, Malcolm X used Exodus to aggrandize Elijah Muhammad as a "Man like Moses," who is "preaching boldly to us right in the very face of the wicked slavemaster"—or white America ("God's 'Angry Men'"). According to Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad is "here to lead us to our salvation, a land (on earth, not in the sky) flowing with the 'sweet honey' of freedom, justice, and equality." Malcolm X implies that Christianity offers only an illusory heaven "in the sky," while Islam preaches a true Promised Land here on earth. Allah's message is not one of "'integration' with the modern Pharaoh," but one of "complete separation of God's chosen people." This act of divine deliverance precedes the "destruction by GOD Himself of the slavemaster's entire wicked race." Like the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, white America

will be utterly destroyed. As the contrast between King and Malcolm X shows, Exodus was used to frame conflicting political projects during the Civil Rights movement.

Because of its clear resonances with the plight of African slaves imported to the New World, the exodus story had long been a "central metaphor of African-American religious expression" (Spillers 272). In its classic formulation, emancipation from slavery was imagined as "reenactments of Israel's exodus from Egypt" (Glaude 4): enslaved blacks were "remade in the image of the Hebrew slaves crying for freedom in Egypt" (43); the United States became Egypt and white slave owners became Pharaohs. As I have shown, such imagery was widely adopted by African American preachers during slavery, and then re-deployed in many different contexts after the Civil War. Dolan Hubbard observes that "Let my people go" is pivotal to the "peculiar eschatology of the black church" because the "promise of the black sermon is that God is at work in all history" (83). In his study of Chicago during the Great Migration, Wallace Best argues that the "dual themes of captivity and deliverance" have "comprised the very core of the black experience in the United States since the slave era" (1). Even as black preachers like King and Malcolm X capitalized on the rhetorical utility of exodus motifs, however, black novelists depicted the dangers of the Moses complex.

Ralph Ellison and William Melvin Kelley complicated the idea of using Exodus to frame African American collective resistance. In *Invisible Man* (1952), Homer A. Barbee deploys the Exodus narrative to idealize the Founder and legitimize Dr. Bledsoe, while Ras the Exhorter positions himself as a wrathful Moses come to deliver black people from oppression. Barbee's rhetoric resembles that of George Alexander McGuire, while Ras evokes Marcus Garvey. As Ellison emphasizes the conundrum of vesting a single charismatic leader with Mosaic authority, so Kelley exposes the predatory nature of many race leaders who would cloak themselves in

Moses' mantle. In *A Different Drummer* (1962), Kelley suggests that, paradoxically, those best suited to fulfill a Mosaic role are least interested in doing so. The novel juxtaposes Rev. Bennett Bradshaw, an embittered, ambitious Mosaic leader, with Tucker Caliban, an accidental Moses who embodies Henry David Thoreau's ideal of self-reliance. Instead of organizing his fellow sharecroppers and wage laborers by condemning Southern society as Egyptian tyranny and depicting the North as Canaan, Tucker privately decides to leave his home in a fictitious Southern state. Whereas Bradshaw's ego perverts his Mosaic aspirations, Tucker's radical individualism inspires a mass exodus of African Americans—not through charismatic moral/political suasion but through quiet, even eccentric, acts whose motivation is obscure. Kelley's vision of revolution as a chain reaction of individual choices, however, threatens traditional notions of racial solidarity.

This chapter traces four approaches to Exodus among black intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s: pro-Exodus desegregationism (Martin Luther King, Jr.), anti-Exodus democratic pluralism (Ralph Ellison), pro-Exodus racial separatism (Malcolm X), and anti-Exodus radical individualism (William Melvin Kelley). Paradoxically, at the very moment that civil rights leaders appealed to Exodus to conceptualize black collective action, two black novelists raised forceful objections to the model of Moses as the ideal black leader. I begin with Ellison's critique of the Moses complex in *Invisible Man*. I situate close readings of key passages from the novel in the context of Ellison's reflections on Afro-Protestantism, American democratic pluralism, and the biblical notion of covenant throughout his career. I then turn from Ellison's rejection of a Mosaic model of leadership to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's embrace of Exodus as a narrative frame for black liberation. I contrast how King minimized Exodus' ethno-partisan aspects with how Malcolm X accentuated them. Finally, this chapter considers

Kelley's portrayal of the failure of Mosaic leadership in *A Different Drummer*. I complement close readings of the novel with Kelley's reflections on self-reliance in his correspondence. This chapter demonstrates that even as black novelists mounted substantial critiques of Exodus black ministers and activists embraced Mosaic personae in the struggle for civil rights.

## Like that "great pilot of ancient times": The Dangers of the Moses Complex in *Invisible Man*

*Invisible Man* reveals the dangers of vesting too much authority in charismatic leaders. Ellison dramatizes the powerful logic of what Erica Edwards calls the "charismatic scenario" (17)—the idea that a single, divinely-appointed male figure speaks for the race and offers unique political and moral leadership. The invisible man finds agency through his voice, becoming a kind of secular preacher in his extemporaneous speech during the Harlem eviction, his speeches on behalf of the Brotherhood, and his eulogy of Tod Clifton.[241] Yet, he does not conform to the traditional view of Mosaic leadership established by nineteenth-century African American writers. As discussed in previous chapters, David Walker, Martin Delany, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper identified Moses as a paragon of race loyalty. Moses' key trait for these nineteenth-century black writers was his voluntary decision to identify with the suffering Hebrews rather than reap the benefits of his position as an adopted member of the Egyptian royal family. In contrast, Ellison's protagonist rejects what Wilson Jeremiah Moses calls "mythical racial messianism" (206). Dennis Welch and Allison Greer counter readings of *Invisible Man* as nihilistic or opposed to black culture by arguing that Ellison "secularizes profoundly religious ideas and beliefs not so much to reject them as to find a place for them amid post-war doubt and

[241] Kevin M. Bell argues that the "I" of the invisible man's oratory "marks only the verbal form of a mythic agency that is necessarily absent to itself, as evinced in the moment that it is uttered" (165).

Jim-Crow oppression" (365). I would modify Welch and Greer's perceptive claim by suggesting that Ellison does reject certain aspects of specific religious beliefs, even as he draws widely on biblical tropes and Christian symbols throughout *Invisible Man*. The novel reveals how the Exodus narrative lends itself alternately to regressive ideologies and anarchic violence through the dangers of the Moses complex.

Ellison gained his knowledge of the bible during his childhood experience of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Oklahoma, chapel attendance at Tuskegee Institute, and observations of street preachers in Harlem.[242] He described how church, school, and public jazz dances were the most influential institutions during his childhood.[243] He recalled witnessing "contests between fire-and-brimstone preachers and by presiding elders who got 'laughing-happy' when moved by the spirit of God" ("Hidden" 201). Ellison attributed his familiarity with the bible to the "density of the western literary and religious tradition" (*Conversations* 270). He argued that enslaved Africans were "'Americanizing' themselves long before the American Revolution" by adopting the "English language and the biblical legends of the ancient Hebrews" ("Little" 510). Yahweh's invisibility in Exodus—God is manifested in, but not reducible to, physical forms like fire and cloud—is an important precursor to what M. Cooper Harriss calls Ellison's "invisible theology" (25). Harriss observes that the common attraction of "English Puritans and enslaved New World Africans" (25) to Exodus exemplifies Ellison's notion of "antagonistic cooperation" (Ellison, "Little" 492) between the particular and the universal.[244] For Ellison, the "definitive tension of American culture" (Harriss 6) emerges from conflict over, for example, the meaning of Exodus. Ellison's mother, Ida, was a devoted member of the African

[242] See Saunders 37-38.
[243] "Remembering Jimmy" 275.
[244] Welch and Greer interpret "antagonistic cooperation" as a "political form of the Fortunate Fall" (366).

Methodist Episcopal Church, one of whose most famous leaders, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, was a prominent advocate of emigration to Africa.[245]

Emigrationism was especially prominent in Ellison's native Oklahoma. The Oklahoma territory offered a "special promise" (Flamming 80) to black migrants fleeing the injustice of the post-Reconstruction South. These "Exodusters" attempted to "build a black state in the territory in the 1890s" (Redkey 293). By 1907, when Oklahoma became a state, however, even all-black towns were impacted by a racist social order. Chief Alfred C. Sam arrived in Oklahoma in 1913 to mobilize blacks to emigrate to the Gold Coast.[246] Sam sailed from Galveston in a steamship with sixty emigrants and a black crew, but "[f]inancial, diplomatic, and political troubles cost Sam the ship, and many of the emigrants eventually returned to the United States" (Redkey 292). Sam's plan appealed most to the residents of all-black towns, who were disillusioned with Oklahoma as a Promised Land.

Ellison may have first become acquainted with the political and rhetorical uses of Exodus in the pages of black newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* and Oklahoma's the *Black Dispatch*.[247] More than a decade before Ellison made his own journey to Harlem,[248] an article in the *Pittsburgh Courier* from April 23, 1927, sanguinely suggested that black migrants from the rural South relied on their "happy-go-lucky spirit" to adapt to their new lives in Harlem, a "promised land where gold and honey are plentiful" ("Adaptation"). Reiterating the trope of the North as a new Canaan, this article frames the Great Migration as an exodus from the rural South

[245] See L. Jackson, *Ralph* 26-27.
[246] See Bittle and Geis, 69ff.
[247] On Ellison's exposure to the *Black Dispatch*, see Clark 3-18.
[248] On Ellison's arrival in Harlem, see L. Jackson, *Ralph* 161ff.

to the urban North. Scholarship has maintained this imagery into the twenty-first century.[249] With "simple faith," such migrants believe that a "Black Moses" will lead them "out of the paths of adversity." The author suggested that this Mosaic role is typically performed by a "well disposed pastor." Unlike the Hebrews, who bemoaned their travails in the wilderness, African Americans thrive because of their ostensibly "positive genius for adaptation."

Ellison recalled selling the *Black Dispatch* when he "could barely talk, and continued to sell it up into my teens" ("Roscoe" 451). He further described how he "grew up selling Dunjee's paper, reading it, and talking with my peers and friends about what appeared in it" (454). At least one contributor to the *Black Dispatch* hearkened back to the abolitionists' trope of comparing the press to Moses. In "Impressions of a Newspaper Reporter," white journalist Frederick G. Detwoilor related his experience at the NAACP's 1921 annual conference in Detroit. Detwoilor was especially keen on gathering information about the "Negro Press," which he described as "doing Moses' work 'way down in Egyptland,' and telling the old Pharaohs down there, 'let my people go'" (7). Detwoilor recognized that "Egyptland is not only the South, but also Washington, the seat of federal power, or anywhere else in the country where Negro rights are yet to be vindicated" (7). Other articles invoked Exodus to lament black leaders' shortcomings. In his 1918 editorial, "Oh! Ye Dry Bones," Rev. E.W. Perry contended that the "Race Needs no Self Appointed LEADERSHIP" (8). Rev. Perry followed David Walker in treating Moses as an exemplar of racial solidarity. Whereas Walker praised Moses for abandoning the luxury of the Egyptian court to suffer alongside his fellow Hebrews, Perry admired Moses for rejecting the

[249] See, for instance, Alferdteen Harrison's *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (1991), Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (1991), Michael L. Cooper's *Bound for the Promised Land: The Great Black Migration* (1995), Milton C. Sernett's *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (1997), and Leah Platt Boustan's *Competition in the Promised Land: Black Migrants in Northern Cities and Labor Markets* (2017).

"flattering proposition" (8) that God wipe out the Hebrews except for Moses' own descendants. Moses was "willing to go down with his people" and derided the "deception of a lot of self-appointed, traitorous leaders" (8) among his contemporaries. He criticized affluent blacks for not being willing to "suffer with the race" (8) like Moses was. Rather than "self-appointed" or "white folk-appointed" leaders, Perry called for "divinely appointed leaders" (8). Similarly, the author of "The Negro Awakens," deployed exodus imagery to critique Booker T. Washington's program. The author quoted the refrain of Washington's infamous Atlanta Exposition Address of 1895: "When Moses started out of Egypt with the Jews there were elders in Israel who preached the gospel of 'LET DOWN YOUR BUCKETS WHERE YOU ARE'" (4). The author likens Washington's disciples, with their gradualist and accommodationist strategies, to the Hebrews who advocated staying in Egypt. Ellison reproduced this kind of rhetoric in Barbee's sermon, which uses Exodus to aggrandize the Founder.

The invisible man's education is defined by Booker T. Washington's ideology. The college he attends resembles Tuskegee Institute, founded by Washington in 1881 and attended by Ellison from 1933 to 1936.[250] The invisible man feels ambivalence toward the college's Founder—a feeling he does not fully understand until after Dr. Bledsoe expels him. Alluding to an actual statue of Washington on Tuskegee's campus,[251] Ellison portrays the Founder in bronze with "his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave," yet the invisible man is "unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly into place" (*Invisible* 36).[252] The statue's symbolism is ambiguous, suggesting that the education provided by the college may be

[250] See Sundquist, *Contexts* 34. On Ellison's time at Tuskegee, see L. Jackson, *Ralph* 83-160.
[251] See Sundquist 30.
[252] See Hubbard 74.

either a "revelation or a more efficient blinding" (36). The Founder's statue appears to represent an act of liberating enlightenment, but the invisible man ultimately learns that even the idea of racial progress through self-improvement can be a kind of slavery.[253] During his early naiveté, the invisible man "believed in the principles of the Founder with all [his] heart and soul" (99). He is oblivious to systemic racism and unaware of his college's complicity in a racist society. He profusely thanks the white trustee, Mr. Norton, for "extending the hand of his benevolence to helping us poor, ignorant people out of the mire and darkness" (99). This sentiment reiterates the original justification for slavery—that savage blacks needed the help of civilized whites. His education has taught him to remain submissive to white people. Booker T. Washington, thus, emerges as a conservative figure whose ideology has produced conformity rather than freedom and whose influence the invisible man must eventually reject.

Deriving his understanding of language from Kenneth Burke, Ellison was especially interested in language's power to coerce and cajole. Ellison adopted Burke's idea that humans are "language-using, language-misusing animals—beings who are by nature vulnerable to both the negative *and* the positive promptings of language as symbolic action" ("Little" 502).[254] *Invisible Man* dramatizes language's power to promote political protest, inspire racial solidarity, and aggrandize leaders and institutions. Every ideological perspective represented in the novel, from the Brotherhood's Marxism to Ras the Exhorter's black nationalism, is channeled by an orator. Homer A. Barbee's preaching exemplifies humanity's "language-misusing" tendencies.

Barbee's sermon employs Exodus to elevate the Founder to mythical status. Barbee recalls the "blind men who preached on corners" ("Hidden" 201) that Ellison encountered in his own life. Barbee portrays the Founder as the new Moses who led African Americans from the

[253] Claudia May suggests that the college appears to be an "Edenesque academic enclave" (423) on the surface.
[254] See also Ellison, "Perspective" 772.

slavery of ignorance during Reconstruction to the freedom of education. This rhetorical mode reflects what Victor Anderson calls "black heroic genius" (13), in which an individual's excellence reflects positively on the entire race. Barbee describes the Founder as leading the previous generation "like that great pilot of ancient times who led his people safe and unharmed across the bottom of the blood-red sea" (Ellison, *Invisible* 120). He extends the comparison to Moses, telling the students that "your parents followed this remarkable man across the black sea of prejudice, safely out of the land of ignorance, through the storms of fear and anger" (120). Barbee uses the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea as an allegory for African Americans' struggles against prejudice, ignorance, fear, and anger. This kind of symbolism anticipates one of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s favorite oratorical techniques. In his "I Have a Dream" speech, for instance, King describes the "dark and desolate valley of segregation," the "sunlit path of racial justice," the "quicksands of racial injustice" and the "solid rock of brotherhood" (82). Barbee makes his encomium of the Founder even more persuasive by identifying him as a Christ figure, as well as a Mosaic leader, explicitly comparing the Founder to the "humble carpenter of Nazareth" (Ellison, *Invisible* 118). The Founder's commitment to "sacrificing himself, fighting and forgiving his enemies of both complexions" (124) recalls Jesus' sacrificial death and command to his followers to love their enemies. By casting the Founder as recapitulating the lives of both Moses and Christ, Barbee amplifies the power of the typology, yet imagery of escape, separation, and nationalism clashes with that of forgiveness, reconciliation, and integration.

Barbee's "mythifying narrative" (Bell 164) elides aspects of Exodus that do not readily cohere with the Founder's life. Whereas Moses confronted Pharaoh, the Founder relied on wealthy white donors for funding. According to Barbee, the Founder was "shouting LET MY

PEOPLE GO! when it was necessary, whispering it during those times when whispering was wisest" (Ellison, *Invisible* 120). In his distinction between "shouting" and "whispering," Barbee deftly justifies what some might consider the Founder's failure to confront racial injustice. W.E.B. Du Bois, for instance, famously critiqued Washington for accommodating white Southern racism in his gradualist approach to civil rights.[255] By suggesting that, at times, whispering is wiser than shouting, Barbee characterizes the Founder as a discerning strategist, rather than an accommodationist. By likening the Founder to Moses, Barbee implies that his audience of college students are akin to the Israelites born in the Promised Land, which inculcates a sense of responsibility to continue the Founder's legacy. Barbee's performance reflects what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "double-voiced discourse" (324): whereas Barbee seeks to persuade his audience of white donors and black students, Ellison puts his own ironic inflection on Barbee's words.

Beyond likening the Founder to Moses, Barbee imbues the story of the Founder's life with a ritualistic power akin to the role of Exodus among the Israelites. God commands the Israelites to observe Passover every year to commemorate the Exodus. The people are commanded to eat unleavened bread and slaughter a lamb to remind themselves of their deliverance from slavery.[256] Their children, who were born free, experience deliverance from slavery through the annual ritual. Barbee suggests that the story of the Founder's life serves the same function. The students "each lived with him through his escape" (121) from myriad dangers. Everyone hearing the story "left with the Founder in the black of the night" (122). Barbee's sermon becomes a "negative example of ritual expression" (J. Coleman 27) poisoned

[255] See "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" in *The Souls of Black Folk*.
[256] See Exodus 12.

by its propagandistic quality. Barbee, therefore, renews the students' allegiance to the Founder through a ritualistic act of imagination.

Ironically, when Barbee brings the audience into its closest identification with the Founder, the invisible man experiences alienation from the Founder and his legacy. He reports that the "evocation of the Founder saddened me" and the college itself drops away from him like the "fading of a dream" (Ellison, *Invisible* 123). Although he hardly comprehends it, the invisible man is subliminally aware of how Barbee uses the Founder's story to justify the school's conservatism. The invisible man perceives the rhetorical tricks Barbee uses to compel his audience into belief in the Founder's mission, noticing how Barbee "played upon the whole audience without the least show of exertion" (123). Barbee's "spellbinding performance" actually "directs the energies of his enraptured audience toward conformity" (Hubbard 74).

Barbee expertly deploys classic sermonic techniques to enfold his audience in his narrative. He exemplifies James Weldon Johnson's description of black preachers as employing "crescendo and diminuendo" which achieves a "rising and falling between plain speaking and wild chanting" (10). This vocal modulation corresponds to the ebb and flow of emotion throughout the sermon. The invisible man perceives the hypnotic power of Barbee's oratory over the "spellbound rows caught in the imperious truth of his message" (Ellison, *Invisible* 125). Barbee's sermon is so persuasive because he alters the tone, cadence, and volume of his voice, maximizing the effect of his words. His diction, for instance, varies between colloquial phrases like "Oh, yes, my young friends, oh, yes" (126) and more elevated lines like the "rank halitosis of hoary death" (131). The former creates a sense of intimacy with the audience, while the latter heightens his subject's grandeur. Barbee frequently adjusts the volume and timbre of his voice. Just before describing the Founder's death, for instance, Barbee's voice drops to a whisper

before it "rose again, crisply, almost matter-of-factly, accelerated" (127). Barbee not only perfectly matches the tone of his voice to each moment of his sermon but uses his whole body to preach: "Barbee stood with his head thrown back, his arms rigid at his sides, his fists clenched as though fighting desperately for control" (132). His gestures accentuate the harrowing nature of the story of the Founder's death. Barbee "walks and struts; he moans and groans; and he speaks in staccato sentences, steeped in driving rhythm and rich imagery" (Hubbard 88). He is like a conductor, expertly controlling his audience's emotions: "his hands were outspread as though he were leading an orchestra into a profound and final diminuendo" (Ellison, *Invisible* 127). The audience is so rapt that as "Barbee paused the silence was so complete that I could hear the power engines far across the campus throbbing the night like an excited pulse" (132). The invisible man imagines the entire college to be a body with the power plant as its beating heart. His metaphor is inflected with the sense of unity that Barbee's sermon seeks to inculcate. Whereas others are awed by Barbee's performance, the invisible man "felt more lost than ever" (133).

Barbee's encomium to the Founder seamlessly transitions into an account of the rise of his successor—Dr. Bledsoe. When the Founder collapses suddenly before a large crowd, Dr. Bledsoe's "voice ring[s] out whip-like with authority, a song of hope" (125). Barbee's metaphor is apt, as Bledsoe's tongue stings the invisible man, chastising him for allowing the college's white benefactor Mr. Norton to encounter Trueblood. As Moses dies on the cusp of the Promised Land, so the Founder dies before completing his mission. Dr. Bledsoe, the "old campaigner, his loyal champion, his adjunct" (129), is the Joshua to the Founder's Moses. On his deathbed, the Founder tells Bledsoe, "Now, you must take on the burden. Lead them the rest of the way" (129). Barbee makes Bledsoe's authority absolute by characterizing him as the Founder's "living agent"

and "physical presence" (132). Finally, Barbee urges the students to emulate Bledsoe. Bledsoe is a "form of greatness worthy of your imitation" and Barbee urges the students to "pattern yourselves upon him" (133). Although Barbee extols Bledsoe's leadership abilities, Bledsoe primarily epitomizes wealth, power, and conformity to standards of respectability. The invisible man admires and envies Bledsoe because he is the "possessor of not one, but *two* Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife" (101). Echoing God's command to Joshua to "Be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:9), Barbee exhorts the students to "Be not afraid to undertake the burdens of your leader, and the work of the Founder will be one of ever unfolding glory, the history of the race a saga of mounting triumphs" (Ellison, *Invisible* 133). Barbee's claim that the students can join a "saga of mounting triumphs" is belied by the statue of the "eternally kneeling slave" (134) outside the chapel.

The narrative undermines Barbee, however, by revealing that he is blind. Barbee stumbles after delivering his sermon, confirming the invisible man's unease.[257] The preacher's physical blindness symbolizes the blindness of those who uncritically accept the Founder's views, just as the later revelation that Brother Jack has a glass eye similarly reveals the myopia of the Brotherhood's ideology.[258] Ellison's use of blindness exemplifies what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call "narrative prosthesis" (47). Barbee's blindness is an "opportunistic metaphorical device" (47) intended to undermine his brilliant oratory.

Barbee's idealization of the Founder and Bledsoe conceals their pragmatism. The invisible man is shocked to discover that beneath the façade he presents to wealthy whites, like

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[257] See J. Coleman 27 and Valkeakari 59.

[258] Kimberly W. Benston argues that the ideologies of both Barbee and Brother Jack rely on origin myths, or "allegories of Foundation," in conflict with Ellison's understanding of "blackness as a mediated, socially constructed *practice*" (9). Kevin M. Bell suggests that the "false eye of I-deology can produce only a secondary false eye of I-dentity" (191).

Mr. Norton, Bledsoe is a brash, savvy manipulator. The mythical treatment of the Founder and Bledsoe's ability to dissemble before the "*big* white folk" (Ellison, *Invisible* 142) ensures that the college will thrive financially. Ellison objected to idealizing political leaders. Reflecting on the legacies of Abraham Lincoln and Lyndon Johnson, Ellison argued that a successful president is one who "initiates uneasy compromises and deals, who blends ideals and expediencies, who achieves what he can in order to give reality to his vision" ("Myth" 558). Ellison recognized that the received image of Lincoln as the "personification of democratic grandeur and political sainthood" belies the reality that every president must enter the "muck and mire" (558) of party politics.

As Homer A. Barbee employs Exodus to legitimize the Founder, so George Alexander McGuire invoked Exodus to aggrandize Marcus Garvey. McGuire served as an Episcopal priest for decades before becoming Chaplain-General of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and later bishop of the African Orthodox Church.[259] In his preface to *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, McGuire suggests that as to "Moses of old, so to Garvey, there came a clear call to duty and leadership" (xi). He claims that Garvey cultivated the "spirit of self-reliance, and self-determination" (xi) among Harlem's black community. Garvey is "more than a leader," he is an "outstanding prophet as well as the trail-blazer of the universal freedom of a noble race" (xiii). Beyond likening Garvey to Moses, McGuire compares Garvey's detractors to the ungrateful Hebrews who longed to return to Egypt rather than persevere on their journey to the Promised Land. McGuire condemns Garvey's opponents as "[d]isgruntled leaders who delight in the fleshpots of Egypt or accept gratefully, the crumbs which fall from the political master's table" (xiv).

[259] On McGuire, see Burkett 157-165.

In “What Is That in Thine Hand?” delivered August 1, 1924, McGuire interprets Moses’ rod allegorically as representing the divinely-ordained political, economic, and spiritual power of the African race. McGuire refers to the African race, the UNIA, himself, and, ultimately, Marcus Garvey as Moses figures. McGuire takes his sermon’s title from Exodus 4:2 in which God gives Moses the rod that transforms into a serpent and becomes the symbol of his status as God’s mouthpiece. McGuire briefly recalls how Moses used this “rod of authority” (166) to part the Red Sea and bring water from the rock before explaining the rod’s allegorical implications for contemporary Africans. McGuire adapts God’s question to Moses—What is that in thine hand?—to “Negro, what is that in thine hand?” and offers four answers: the “Rod of Political Destiny,” the “Rod of Industrial and Commercial Achievement,” the “Rod of Financial Acquisition,” and the “Rod of Spiritual Freedom” (168).

McGuire likens the doubters in his audience to the Israelites who blamed Moses for their difficulties. He declares that he will only address “[s]coffers” and “[c]alamity howlers” with the “contempt of silence” (168). McGuire likens Garvey to Moses and the members of the UNIA to the Israelites when he describes the passage of the organization’s Constitution. He says that it was as though they were “standing at the foot of Sinai when the Decalogue was pronounced” (170). By the “Rod of Political Destiny,” McGuire means the creation of a black nation in Africa. McGuire claims that with the “Rod of Political Destiny” the African race—represented by the UNIA—will “divide the Red Sea before us” (171). As Moses used his rod to achieve miracles, Isaiah Morton wielded the “Rod of Financial Acquisition” (173). McGuire rejects both the “opiate of religious expectation” and the idea that religion is a “menace and stumbling block to the Negro” (175). He rejects the idea that God is white and that white ministers should lead black congregants.

McGuire then likens himself to Moses by inserting himself into God's question: "George Alexander McGuire, what is that in thine hand? It is the Rod of Spiritual Freedom divinely given to me with a commission, and while I have breath I shall continue to urge Negroes never, never to be spiritual slaves" (177). McGuire ends his sermon by comparing Garvey to Moses: "Before the burning bush our leader stands today" (180). The UNIA itself becomes the rod in Garvey's hand. As Moses cast down the rod, so Garvey must release the organization he has carried. As Moses' rod became a serpent, so the UNIA will become "pregnant with life and energy and motion" (180) when Garvey releases it. McGuire uses Exodus to aggrandize Garvey and the UNIA, much as Barbee uses it to legitimize the Founder and Bledsoe.

Throughout the novel, Ellison depicts how typology can constrain understandings of black leadership. When Brother Jack recruits the invisible man to join the Brotherhood, for instance, he asserts that the "old heroes are being called back to life—Jefferson, Jackson, Pulaski, Garibaldi, Booker T. Washington, Sun Yat-sen, Danny O'Connell, Abraham Lincoln and countless others are being asked once again to step upon the stage of history" (Ellison, *Invisible* 307). He compares the invisible man to Booker T. Washington, claiming that "[y]ou shall be the new Booker T. Washington, but even greater than he" (307). Brother Jack suggests that Washington is the type to the invisible man's antitype; the invisible man will surpass Washington's greatness as a leader of his people. Unlike the other men in the list, Washington was not a revolutionary, war hero, or president. Conspicuously absent from Brother Jack's list are black leaders who took up arms for racial equality, such as Nat Turner and Toussaint Louverture. In giving the invisible man a "new identity" and "new name" (309), Brother Jack implies that he should follow Washington's willingness to compromise with white leaders. The invisible man accepts Brother Jack's offer but resists the idea of being a second Booker T.

Washington: "But to hell with this Booker T. Washington business" (311). He resolves to "be no one except myself—whoever I was" (311).

Because he lacks a firm self-identity the invisible man inevitably seeks to imitate other models of black leadership, such as that of Frederick Douglass. Reflecting on the portrait of Douglass given him by Brother Tarp, the invisible man muses about how Douglass "talked his way from slavery to a government ministry" (381). He hopes that "something of the kind is happening to me" (381), as he expects to rise to prominence within the Brotherhood. Ironically, in comparing himself to Douglass because of their shared status as orators, the invisible man does not realize how similar his position in the Brotherhood is to Douglass's status as an abolitionist spokesman. Much as Douglass eventually broke with former white benefactors like William Lloyd Garrison to start his own newspaper, the invisible man eventually realizes that Brother Jack does not want him to think for himself.[260]

One member of the Brotherhood associates the invisible man with a narrow conception of blackness rooted in the spirituals. When the invisible man is first introduced to the Brotherhood membership at the Cthonian, one drunk man insists that he sing "Go Down, Moses."[261] The uninhibited man begins to sing and urges the invisible man to join in: "'Come on, Brother, git hot! *Go Down, Moses*,' he bellowed in a ragged baritone, putting down his cigar and snapping his fingers. '*Way down in Egypt's land. Tell dat ole Pharaoh to let ma colored folks sing!* I'm for the rights of the colored brother to sing" (312). In a grotesque inversion of Exodus, the white man declares his support for the "rights" of African Americans to act as entertainers. This is one of many instances in the novel when a white character addresses the invisible man in terms of

[260] After returning from Great Britain in 1847, Douglass broke with Garrison over the validity of the Constitution, see *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) 394-398.
[261] Ellison described "Go Down, Moses" as an "absorption of certain Jewish religious traditions" (Sage 10).

stereotypes and preconceived notions, rather than treating him as an individual. The man associates all African Americans with musical talent. Moreover, the subject-position of the speaker in "Go Down, Moses" is one of victimhood. Rather than treat the invisible man as a fellow member of the Brotherhood, this man expects him to put his status as an inferior longing for equality on display. The invisible man is less offended than Brother Jack, who furiously has the drunken man removed. The invisible man is more annoyed by those staring at him than at the drunken man's request. After the disruption, the invisible man is haunted by the question, "Shouldn't there be some way for us to be asked to sing?" (314). In other words, how can white people enjoy black culture responsibly?

This white man's desire for the invisible man to sing rewrites a scene in W.E.B. Du Bois's novel *Dark Princess* (1928), in which the protagonist, Matthew Towns, spontaneously sings "Go Down, Moses." Remembering his father's "old log church," Matthew hears the "Great Song of Emancipation" (Du Bois, *Dark* 26). After singing the opening verse and chorus of the spiritual, Matthew lapses into silence. His multi-ethnic and multi-racial audience of burgeoning revolutionaries responds with a "chorus of approval" (27). The spiritual represents the potential of the "mass of the workers of the world" to "rule as well as be ruled" (27). Du Bois, therefore, uses "Go Down, Moses" to exemplify the black masses' latent potential to achieve a powerful spiritual and political destiny once they have been mobilized. By singing the spiritual, Matthew channels the voice of the black masses, which gains him the respect of his fellow revolutionaries. Ellison inverts this moment by having the white character's desire for the invisible man to sing isolate the invisible man from the rest of the Brotherhood. By associating a black man he has never met with "Go Down, Moses," the white man reifies the invisible man as a quasi-slave whose primary function is to exhibit his victimhood for the entertainment of a white audience.

While Barbee's sermon represents how Exodus can legitimize regressive ideologies, Ras the Exhorter resembles a hypertrophied version of the Mosaic leaders found in nineteenth-century African American literature. David Walker, Martin Delany, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper identify Moses as a paragon of race loyalty. Moses' key trait for these nineteenth-century black writers is his voluntary decision to identify with the suffering Hebrews rather than reap the benefits of his position as an adopted member of the Egyptian royal family. Ellison works within this tradition by making Ras the Exhorter an advocate of racial solidarity. Ras rails against the Brotherhood and pleads with the invisible man and his Brotherhood colleague Tod Clifton to join his black nationalist movement. Ras echoes David Walker's frustration with black treachery.[262] As Walker excoriates those complicit with white slaveholders, Ras insists "I am no black traitor to the black people for the white people" (376). As a separatist, Ras seeks to "build a glorious movement of black people" (371) and is not interested in interracial collaboration. Ras lambasts the invisible man and Tod Clifton for being the Brotherhood's stooges. He refrains from killing Clifton because he refuses to "sahcrifice his black brother to the white enslaver" (374). Ras suggests the absurdity of internecine conflict among blacks: "Three black men fighting in the street because of the white enslaver? Is that sanity?" (372). While Ras does not explicitly use the term "Pharaoh" to describe the "white enslaver," his discourse follows the logic of Exodus. Although the invisible man remains loyal to the Brotherhood until later in the novel, he is nearly compelled by the "crude, insane eloquence of his plea" (374). Whereas Barbee uses oratorical sophistication to cement his audience's loyalty to the Founder, Ras relies on sheer pathos.

[262] See Article II of Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829).

The text associates Ras with Marcus Garvey. The invisible man and Clifton discuss Garvey immediately before their violent altercation with Ras.[263] Although Ellison averred that "[n]o conscious reference to Garvey is intended" ("Art" 69) in his portrayal of Ras, the novel strongly implies the parallel. Ellison similarly downplayed the idea that the Brotherhood was the Communist Party, claiming, "I didn't identify the Brotherhood as the C.P." ("Art" 68). Clifton hopes that the Brotherhood's action in Harlem will be "bigger than anything since Garvey" (Ellison, *Invisible* 367). Recognizing that Garvey "*must* have had something to move all those people" (367), Clifton's aspirations frame Ras's black nationalist crusade.

Garvey equated himself with Moses and African Americans with the Israelites.[264] In a speech delivered March 16, 1924 at Madison Square Garden, Garvey declared that as the "children of Israel, by the command of God, faced the promised land, so in time we shall also stretch forth our hands and bless our country" (121). Writing to UNIA members from prison in Atlanta the following year, Garvey insisted that the "God of our Fathers will raise up friends for the cause of Africa, and we who have struggled in the wilderness for all this time shall surely see the promised land" (327). Employing themes of "election, captivity, and liberation" (Ware and Linkugel 52), Garvey sought to preserve his followers' hope during times of crisis.

Ellison also associates Ras with Ethiopianism, the idea that the African race has a divinely-ordained destiny.[265] Clifton remarks that he expected Ras to "say something about 'Ethiopia stretching forth her wings'" (376). Clifton alludes to Psalm 68:31—"Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God"—a verse invoked by black nationalists and emigrationists, including Robert Alexander Young, David Walker,

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[263] The elderly couple whose eviction the invisible man witnesses have a "yellowing newspaper portrait of a huge black man with the caption: MARCUS GARVEY DEPORTED" (Ellison 272).
[264] On Garvey's Afro-Zionism, see Sundquist, *Strangers* 124-126.
[265] On Ethiopianism, see Raboteau 41-45 and Smith, *Conjuring* 58-60.

Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner. Ras frequently invokes "Mama Africa" (370) and emphasizes Clifton's royal heritage as a "natural prince" (372) based on his dark skin and good looks.

Ras exists in dialectic with the Brotherhood. The invisible man eventually realizes that the Brotherhood subordinates racial justice to their own interests. The only equality they can imagine is a post-racial pseudo-equality that profits from the systemic injustice against African Americans. Ras, however, swings too far in the opposite direction; he cannot imagine any stance but hostility toward white people. To Ras, whites will always be Egyptians. During the chaos of the riot toward the end of the novel, the invisible man perceives that Ras and the Brotherhood exist in a symbiotic relationship; the Brotherhood engineered the riot by withdrawing from Harlem because they "needed this *destroyer* to do their work" (558). The invisible man tries to tell Ras that the Brotherhood will "turn your death and sorrow and defeat into propaganda" (558) to no avail. The invisible man reaches an epiphany: Dr. Bledsoe, Norton, Brother Jack, and Ras all fail to comprehend the "beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine" (559). Rejecting separatism, Ellison sought the possibility of what Beth Eddy calls "fundamental kinship with the enemy" (97). Throughout his career, Ellison distrusted separatism as a denial of "American diversity within unity, of blackness with whiteness" ("What America" 582). The dichotomy between Hebrews and Egyptians at the heart of Exodus makes it difficult to achieve the promise of American democratic pluralism.

The central problem of American democracy, for Ellison, was the difficulty of achieving the national motto of *e plurbus unum*—out of many one. Ellison addressed the "promise to make a unity out of the diversity of all mankind" ("Roscoe" 455) throughout his fiction and essays in different ways across his career. As the invisible man proclaims in the epilogue, "America is

woven of many strands" and "[o]ur fate is to become one, and yet many" (*Invisible* 577). The novel reveals how American unity-in-diversity involves a series of paradoxes, such as the ten drops of black paint that make Optic White "so white you can paint a chunka coal and you'd have to crack it open with a sledgehammer to prove it wasn't white clear through" (217). Though often a source of strife, the tensions at the heart of pluralistic democracy preserve the nation from "persistent illusion, retreat, and self-preoccupation" (Welch and Greer 376). Ellison approached the problem of plurality through the "comedy and tragedy which we know as the blues" ("Roscoe" 458). As he prepares to end his hibernation, for instance, the invisible man embraces both tragedy and comedy, hate and love because he comes to understand that "we" had been "*part of them* as well as apart from them" (*Invisible* 575) all along. He notices an "inexorable historical connection—a unity—between his life and the lives of his tormentors" (Porter 89). Steve Pinkerton argues that Ellison conceived his "ambitious democratic vision" (186) in terms of a "jazz-theology" (187) that fuses the sacred and profane. As jazz emerges from the "creative tension between band and soloist" (192), so America exists in the tension of the one and the many. Along with the tragi-comic perspective of the blues and the tension between individual and collective in jazz, Ellison draws on the biblical notion of covenant.

While Ellison exposed the dangers of the Moses complex in *Invisible Man*, his later writings drew on the biblical concept of a sacred covenant to conceptualize a "civil religion of democracy" (Eddy 127). He inherited the ideal of American unity-in-diversity from black newspapers. Ellison lauded Roscoe Dunjee, editor of Oklahoma's the *Black Dispatch*, as someone who understood that the "American newspaper was a force for cohesion" ("Roscoe" 455).[266] Ellison received from Dunjee the idea that the "shedding of blood, the sacrifice, the

[266] Ellison anticipated Benedict Anderson's argument that newspapers and national languages facilitate "imagined communities."

agony, and anguish of establishing this nation, all Americans became bound in a covenant" (452). He situates Dunjee as an heir to Frederick Douglass, who used the press to oppose slavery and defend the Constitution. Dunjee perceived that the Constitution contained the "mysterious binding force which was the secret to moving people" (452). Ellison felt that through the "fire and blood and sacrifice" of the American Revolution a "covenant was made" (453) and that covenant was codified in the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights.[267] Like Douglass and Dunjee, Ellison believed that racism violated the spirit of America's founding documents and sought to harness their "moral force" (454) to call the nation back to its ideals. Ellison recalled how during the controversy over the proposed anti-lynching bill Dunjee's editorials in the *Black Dispatch* argued that the "real ground for solving the racial predicament rested in the Constitution" ("Perspective" 767). Although the Constitution relies on "legal fictions" (771), Ellison regarded it as the "still-vital covenant by which Americans of diverse backgrounds, religions, races and interests are bound" (773). It is a "script" by which we "act out the drama of democracy" (773). The covenant demands that blacks and whites be treated equally, even as white supremacy has prevented that dream from being realized. In fact, white supremacists have their own covenant-making ritual—lynching. Although Ellison does not portray lynching in *Invisible Man*, the spectacle of the Battle Royal serves a similar function of initiating young black men into an order of terror, violence, and competition for the enjoyment of white men.

The invisible man experiences a tantalizing taste of covenant community during the speech he delivers as a spokesman for the Brotherhood. Throughout his speech, he engages in call-and-response with the crowd reminiscent of African American preaching.[268] Using the motif

[267] See Saunders 41.
[268] On call-and-response, see H. Mitchell 31.

of dispossession, he articulates a sense of kinship among the oppressed. As he concludes, he begins to speak wholly extemporaneously, articulating new feelings that arise in the moment. The sense of unity he feels with the crowd makes him feel that he has discovered his "true family," "true people," and "true country" (Ellison, *Invisible* 346). He declares himself a "new citizen of the country of your vision, a native of your fraternal land" (346). The invisible man declares that this "uncommon people" (342) is on the verge of liberation. Like the Hebrews in Egypt, these people long for deliverance, even as the promise of Harlem as a new Canaan proved overly optimistic.

Ellison continued to ruminate on the connection between covenant and narrative in his unfinished second novel, material from which was posthumously published under the titles *Juneteenth* (1999) and *Three Days Before the Shooting* (2010). The jazz musician-turned-preacher Rev. A.Z. Hickman invokes Exodus in his Juneteenth sermon: "The Hebrew children have their Passover so that they can keep their history alive in their memories—so let us take one more page from their book and, on this great day of deliverance, on this day of emancipation, let's us tell ourselves our story" (Ellison, *Three* 314). Both Juneteenth and Passover celebrate freedom from slavery, but Hickman focuses his comparison on the act of storytelling. The ritual re-telling of history preserves a people's identity. Hickman's sermon performs the same function as the Jewish Haggadah. Hickman's adopted son Bliss betrays his surrogate father by becoming the racist Senator Adam Sunraider. Bliss's transformation into Sunraider reverses Moses' life story. Whereas Moses is adopted by a princess but leaves the Egyptian court to lead the Hebrews to freedom, Bliss is adopted by a preacher but abandons the black community to enter the halls of power.

Ellison's critique of the Moses complex departs from the prevailing view of the Exodus narrative as a template for liberation in black churches, the black press, and the burgeoning Civil Rights movement. Despite his critique of how exodus typology can be manipulative, however, Ellison acknowledged that religious narratives could serve the public good. Ellison observed that Martin Luther King, Jr.—associated more closely with Moses than any other Civil Rights leader—represented an "instance of the church making itself visible in the political and social life and fulfilling its role in the realm of morality" ("Completion" 298).

**Exodus and the Civil Rights Movement**

Ellison's critique of the Moses complex notwithstanding, civil rights leaders appealed to Exodus as a source of hope and legitimation. During the 1950s and 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X articulated two rival versions of Exodus. On one hand, King followed the precedent of black abolitionists by applying exodus imagery to the contemporary struggle for civil rights. Segregationists were new pharaohs oppressing God's people; King became a Mosaic figure to many of his supporters. On the other hand, Malcolm X explicitly treated Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, as the true Moses and depicted King and other civil rights leaders as the stooges of white America's pharaohs.[269] Whereas King invoked Exodus to condemn injustice and offer hope to his followers, Malcolm X called for the complete separation of people of African descent from white America. He uplifted, in other words, a Moses who would truly lead his people away from Egypt, not just tolerate a reformed version of it.

As King became the Civil Rights movement's face and voice after the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, he was increasingly identified with Moses. Writing for Chicago's

[269] On the Nation of Islam, see R. Turner 147-173 and see Sundquist, *Strangers* 128-132.

*Daily Defender* in February 1956, Ethel L. Payne depicted King as a "new, vocal, fearless, and forthright Moses who is leading the people out of the wilderness into the promised land" (8). A month later, Lee Blackwell reported that King was being called a "20th Century Moses" because of the "calm way he has led his people in a time of crisis" (10). At New Pilgrim Baptist Church in Birmingham in May 1963, Ralph David Abernathy declared of King: "He is the leader! He is the Moses!" (Branch 801). In the wake of King's receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, the author of a 1964 editorial in the *Pittsburgh Courier* entitled "Is This a Modern Moses?" likened Bull Connor to Pharaoh and suggested that the "Red Sea has been crossed in a thousand peaceful, non-violent demonstrations" (12). Not everyone appreciated King's status as the spiritual leader of the Civil Rights movement, however. Members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee nicknamed King "De Lawd," alluding to the anthropomorphic portrayal of God in *The Green Pastures*.[270]

Recognizing both the benefits and dangers of construing the Civil Rights movement as a conflict between God and Pharaoh, King carefully chose when and how to appeal to Exodus. Using Exodus to frame contemporary events vindicated people's fear and suffering and inspired a sense of hope that deliverance was on the horizon even during the bleakest moments. However, Exodus also implied that African Americans should pursue physical migration, patiently await divine intervention, and treat whites as doomed to destruction—all of which were antithetical to King's goals. When King alluded to Exodus, therefore, he carefully avoided suggesting that his audience adopt a "stance of helplessness and passivity" (Selby 47) or "hostility and vengefulness" (49) toward whites. King's version of Exodus supported "direct, organized action against racial oppression" (49).

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[270] See Burns 171.

King established contemporary parallels to the Exodus narrative's four stages: slavery in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, trials in the wilderness, and reaching the Promised Land. His understanding of injustice was global, as he connected the "Egypt of segregation" to the "Egypt of colonialism" ("Death" 261). In "The Death of Evil on the Seashore," King compared the Supreme Court's decision to end segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* to the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea. He delivered this speech on multiple occasions in the mid-1950s, giving his most fully developed version on May 17, 1956 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. King's title came from Exodus 14:30: "Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore." King sought to harmonize the violence in Exodus with his own non-violent philosophy by claiming that although "no one can rejoice at the death or the defeat of a human person," the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea represented the "death of inhuman oppression and ungodly exploitation" (260). By interpreting the Egyptian soldiers' demise as a metaphor for the end of injustice, King minimized his audience's impulse to lash out at racist whites. King sought to "counter the threat of chauvinism" (Hartnell 104) embedded in Exodus. By placing his audience on the far side of the Red Sea, he showed them that they were "participating in a dramatic social transformation *already* in progress" (Selby 52). During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King characterized increased hostility from whites in terms of the Hebrews' journey through the wilderness. When the boycotters finally prevailed, King again likened this moment of triumph to the crossing of the Red Sea. In an address to the Montgomery Improvement Association, delivered November 14, 1956, King proclaimed that the "Egyptian system of segregation" was "drowned upon the seashore" (433). Despite the looming presence of the Midianites, Amorites, and Hittites, the movement will continue because "we've got to get to Canaan" (433). King spoke of the

"promised land of cultural integration" ("Birth" 29), reimagining Canaan in terms of an integrated society living in beloved community. The Supreme Court's decision and independence movements across the globe led to the "promised land of economic security and development" ("Death" 261).

King did not claim Mosaic authority until he emerged as the leader of the Civil Rights movement. King "spoke directly in the voice of Moses" (Selby 125) for the first time on January 27, 1957, addressing his congregation after dynamite was discovered under his porch. King described the now famous "kitchen table" moment when he heard God's voice, as Moses was called by God's voice from the Burning Bush. Yet, King did not present himself as God's sole messenger. Instead, he exhorted others to devote themselves to the cause of civil rights. In "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," a freedom rally speech delivered in St. Louis on April 10, 1957, King echoed Frances Harper's call for elite African Americans to fully pledge themselves to the cause of abolition in "Our Greatest Want." Published in the *Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859, "Our Greatest Want" refuted the idea that lack of economic prosperity was holding back racial progress. Harper sought to level class divisions among free blacks by arguing that "every gift, whether gold or talent, fortune or genius" must "subserve the cause of crushed humanity" (160). Similarly, King called on "ministers, and lay leaders, and civic leaders, and businessmen, and professional people all over the nation" to "use the talent and finances God has given them, and lead the people on toward the Promised Land of freedom" ("Realistic" 178).

Exodus typology enabled King to connect African Americans' struggle for freedom to black liberation movements in Africa. Even as King adopted his own version of the Mosaic persona, he likened Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah to Moses leading his people to freedom. After

witnessing Ghana's official independence from Great Britain, King returned to Montgomery to deliver "Birth of a New Nation" on April 7, 1957. Exodus was freshly on King's mind after seeing Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956). King depicted Great Britain as Egypt and Nkrumah as Ghana's Moses. He recalled a revolt of the Gulf Coast's indigenous people against the British in 1844. Like Pharaoh, "the British said that we will not let you go" (21). King described Egypt's economic power: "Many men have vested interests in Egypt, and they are slow to leave. Egypt makes it profitable to them, some people profit by Egypt," yet the "masses of people never profit by Egypt, and they are never content with it" (20). King observed that slavery and colonialism only benefit the few at the expense of the many. He described Ghana's independence as the "breaking aloose from Egypt" (27) but tempered his enthusiasm for this historic moment with the warning that freedom inevitably provokes a backlash: "whenever you break aloose from Egypt, the initial response of the Egyptian is bitterness" (33). King warned his audience of what Carol Anderson calls "white rage" in the face of black equality. Although Ghana is "now out of Egypt and had crossed the Red Sea" (28), it faces a wilderness period of industrialization. As David Walker urged his fellow blacks to emulate Moses by sacrificing their own self-interest to stand in solidarity with their suffering brothers and sisters, so King likened Ghana's first prime minister, Kwame Nkrumah, to Moses.[271] Recalling the peaceful transfer of power from the British to the Ghanaians, King described how the people praised Nkrumah because they "knew he had suffered for them, he had sacrificed for them, he'd gone to jail for them" (28). Rather than use his Western education for his own gain, Nkrumah returned to his native land to serve his people. King's "sermonic iconography" (Marbury 167) of Nkrumah reflects his renewed hope in the "power of collective human agency" (169)

[271] See Article I Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829).

exemplified in Ghana's independence and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Ironically, King took an anti-Communist stance, while Nkrumah was mentored by Trinidadian socialist George Padmore during his time in London.[272] King recognized that liberation is a multi-generational project: "Moses might not get to see Canaan, but his children will see it" (40). King would return to this sentiment when regarding his own legacy as a Mosaic leader.

On April 3, 1968, the day before his assassination, King presciently characterized himself as Moses gazing on the Promised Land in "I've Been to the Mountaintop." The speech is "hauntingly similar to the picture of Moses descending Mount Horeb with the Decalogue in hand" (Gilbert 106). By likening Memphis's striking sanitation workers to the ancient Hebrews, King "implies that Mayor Henry Loeb, who refuses to recognize the workers' union, is Pharaoh" (K. Miller 75). King described how "whenever Pharaoh wanted to prolong the period of slavery in Egypt" he used his "favorite formula" of keeping the "slaves fighting among themselves" (210). When the "slaves get together, that's the beginning of getting out of slavery" (210). This rendition of Exodus emphasizes collective action over the power of a prophetic leader. King ended the speech by comparing himself to Moses at the end of his life. Like Moses, King has "seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!" (223).

Unlike King, whose appeals to Exodus facilitated integration, the Nation of Islam used Exodus to promote separatism.[273] As King likened Nkrumah and himself to Moses, so Malcolm X identified Elijah Muhammad as a "modern Moses" ("We Have Risen"). Like the original Moses, Muhammad is not "eloquent in his speech." Malcolm X characterized the U.S.

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[272] See Rahman, 112-113.

[273] For how Malcolm X adopted Pan-Africanism after breaking with the Nation of Islam and converting to Sunni Islam, see Hartnell 147-163.

government as the "Slavemaster" and "modern Pharaoh." Allah's message was not one of "'integration' with the modern Pharaoh," but one of "complete separation of God's chosen people" ("God's Angry Men"). Malcolm X treated Exodus as a "symbolic prophetic picture of what was happening in America" (Cone 168) through Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X used Exodus most extensively in his 1963 speech "God's Judgment on White America." He utterly rejected "integration into this doomed white society" (132), deriding the "Negro civil rights leaders, the Big Six" as white America's "puppets" (126). He likened these six leaders—Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, Whitney Young, James Farmer, and Roy Wilkins—to Pharaoh's magicians, who opposed "Moses' message of separation" (132).[274] Treating these civil rights leaders as traitors to their race, Malcolm X claimed that "Pharaoh hired Hebrew magicians" (132) who betrayed their own people. In contrast, as Moses was "trying to restore unto his people their own lost culture, their lost identity, their lost racial dignity" (127) so, too, was Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X called for a new exodus of "twenty-two million ex-slaves" to "our own land, where we can then live in peace and security among our own people" (132). As God delivered the Hebrews from Egypt through the Ten Plagues, so he has "prepared a Doomsday" for this "sinful white world of colonizers, enslavers, oppressors, exploiters, lynchers" (131). Whereas King sought to avoid the implication that African Americans could passively await God's action, Malcolm X declared the imminence of divine judgment on white oppressors. He "challenged King to prove how he could reconcile the ecumenical spirit of integration with the tribal cohesion of a Negro culture that was joined at the hip to Moses" (Branch 916). In his invocations of Exodus, Malcolm consistently emphasized that the U.S. governmentwas a "modern house of bondage" and that Elijah Muhammad was a

[274] Malcolm X often derided King as an "Uncle Tom" (Cone 99).

"modern Moses," who wanted to "separate our people, who have been made slaves here in this country, and lead us to a land of our own ("America's Gravest Crisis" 69). As he grew more dissatisfied with the military-industrial complex, King drew closer to Malcom X's withering critique of white America.

By the end of his life, King used Exodus to critique the war in Vietnam. On April 27, 1968, just weeks after her husband's assassination, Coretta Scott King addressed a peace rally in Central Park. King's widow enabled her husband to speak from beyond the grave by reading his "Ten Commandments on Vietnam," as recorded in "some notes taken from my husband's pockets upon his death." Informed by his overarching belief in pacifism, King's commandments reflect his opposition to the war and skepticism toward U.S. military propaganda. His ninth commandment—"thou shalt not believe that the world supports the United States"—suggests that the U.S. was ignoring the international community's disapproval. His third commandment—"Thou shalt not believe that they, the Vietnamese, love us"—undermines the idea that U.S. intervention in Vietnam was undertaken to liberate the innocent. King's final, undelivered speech employs the framework of the Ten Commandments to channel every ounce of Mosaic authority to challenge deeply cherished views about the righteousness of American military action.

**Tucker Caliban as Accidental Moses in *A Different Drummer***

On June 4, 1968, William Melvin Kelley wrote from Paris to his older sister Sinah in New York, conveying his reaction to the news of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. Kelley's thoughts took the form of a brief poem: "A balcony, / A bang, / A bullet / A bleeding boogey . . . / So goes / The history of Africans / in the United States." Kelley followed his poem with the comment that King's assassination was "to be expected" because "niggerlife is cheap in

the Land of the Whip and the Beef on the Heap. Bullets do not discriminate." Kelley suggests that even lofty figures like King receive no special reprieve from the violence at the heart of the racist social order of the U.S. He reflected that because African Americans were brought "to the US as property" when the "ownership of that property was abolished" through emancipation the "property itself, and the money it (we) represent(s) still exists." He situated King's assassination in the context of the "fight for the ownership of that property." Despite the official end of slavery and Jim Crow, black bodies are still treated as a source of wealth for white America. Kelley felt that African Americans "seem to be government owned." In other words, emancipation from chattel slavery had not fully reversed the process that had transformed Africans into commodities. Even before King's assassination Kelley avoided putting his faith in race leaders.

Kelley "became a writer without even knowing it," as he put it in a letter to Sinah written July 14, 1959. *Accent* had just accepted a short story for publication, and Kelley playfully dubbed himself "one of the great literary talents of the second half of the century." He had recently ended a relationship with a woman who made him feel that writing was merely the "sport of dreamers and fools." His ambition for the rest of the summer was to "get some chapters of the great american [sic] novel before the fall falls." That novel would become *A Different Drummer* (1962), which would be followed by *Dancers on the Shore* (1964), *A Drop of Patience* (1965), *dem* (1967), and *Dunfords Travels Everywhere* (1970).

*A Different Drummer* is set during the same moment when King began to fully embrace a Mosaic persona, yet Kelley's overt model of leadership—like his title—draws from a different source: a philosophy of self-reliance inspired by Henry David Thoreau. Kelley depicts the sudden emigration of the African American residents from a fictitious Southern state in June 1957. Tucker Caliban is the catalyst for this mass exodus. As Thoreau claimed that if "*one*

HONEST man" stopped holding slaves it would mark the "abolition of slavery in America" ("Civil Disobedience" 235), so Tucker's departure prompts droves of African Americans to leave the State until none are left. Tucker's actions are deeply enigmatic to white observers, who cannot fathom that black people might have agency or desires of their own.[275] The novel portrays the Great Migration almost exclusively from white perspectives, like a retelling of Exodus focusing on the mystified Egyptians left behind after the Hebrews' departure. Drawing comparisons to Faulkner's novels, *A Different Drummer*'s plot unfolds from the perspective of a series of characters, most of whom are descendants of General Dewey Wilson, the founding father of the fictitious Southern state where the novel is set.[276] Tucker "symbolically recapitulates the Exodus paradigm" even as he "inadvertently fulfills the dream of radical racists that blacks be driven from the land altogether" (Sundquist, "Promised" 270). Ralph Ellison described the "fantasy of an America free of blacks" as a "boil bursting forth from impurities in the bloodstream of democracy" ("What" 577). In contrast, Kelley is concerned with the need for African Americans to emancipate themselves from unequal relations with whites. W. Lawrence Hogue contends that *A Different Drummer* is the first African American novel that "abandons racial uplift's mission of assimilation and revolts" (116). Kelley not only eschews traditional forms of uplift, but also rejects racial solidarity in favor of radical individualism inspired by Thoreau. Without offering any explanation for his actions, Tucker embarks on a quest to sever his ties with the land of his birth and the white family who enslaved his ancestors. As an accidental Moses, Tucker refuses to instruct others directly but leads them to freedom indirectly through his actions.

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[275] Andrew Sargent argues that Kelley's "ironic use of 'white' narrative perspectives" (38) signifies on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).
[276] See Campbell 115.

Tucker emancipates himself and his family through a series of symbolic actions. After purchasing seven acres of land from his former employer, David Wilson, whose ancestors owned Tucker's as slaves, Tucker sows his field with salt and kills his horse and cow. Finally, he destroys a grandfather clock given to his ancestor, First Caliban, by General Wilson on First's seventy-fifth birthday to recognize "First's years of good and faithful service, first as a slave and later as an employee; and passed down to Tucker" (Kelley, *Drummer* 37). Tucker, his wife Bethrah, and their baby leave for good. Tucker's salting of his field, slaying of his animals, and destroying of General Wilson's grandfather clock resemble the sign-acts of biblical prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel.[277] By salting his field, Tucker prevents the Wilsons or any other whites from benefitting from his labor by acquiring his land. Killing his horse and cow, likewise, emphasizes Tucker's sovereignty over his property and his desire to extricate himself from all economic relations with the whites of Sutton. Although Tucker's actions ironically reverse Thoreau's cultivation of uninhabited land, they serve a similar purpose: as Thoreau treated his sojourn to Walden Pond as a personal Declaration of Independence, so Tucker razes his farm to emancipate himself. Destroying the clock is particularly significant, as it "annihilates both the time of bondage and the false recompense of property" (Sundquist, "Promised" 282). Yet, Tucker does not commit this sign-act at God's behest, but rather out of his own need to emancipate himself and his family. While the biblical prophets' sign-acts tend to be accompanied by explicit calls for repentance, Tucker commits these symbolic acts for his own sake. By presenting an accidental Mosaic leader without an explicit message, Kelley suggests that true leadership is based on radical action rather than eloquent speech.

[277] See, for instance, Jeremiah 19 and 32.

Tucker's actions are mysterious but comprehensible within the tradition of allegory and parable.[278] Allegories both invite and resist interpretation. Tucker's behavior gains meaning through the context of the Caliban family's relation to the Wilson family provided throughout the novel. Critics have over-emphasized the role of silence in the novel. Erica Edwards, for instance, asserts that Kelley's preferred model of leadership relies on "disappearance and silence rather than visibility and spectacle" (106). Similarly, Stephanie Li observes that Tucker's silence is a "startling, if limited, form of resistance against the proliferating prejudices of language" (160). Yet, Tucker is neither completely silent nor invisible. In fact, his most significant action in the novel—destroying his farm—is perfectly visible, albeit unaccompanied by explanation. Moreover, Tucker offers commentary, cryptic though it may be, on his actions. Li herself notes that Tucker indirectly advises Camille Wilson to remain married to her husband David, Tucker's employer, by commenting on the "princess who is ignored by her Prince Charming" in the fairy tale which Camille tells Tucker and her son Dewey in a "thinly veiled allegory of her marriage" (178). Li argues that Tucker does not "directly advise Camille" (178), but in the context of the allegory Tucker's message is unmistakable.

Similarly, Tucker writes Dewey Wilson a letter, asking "if you remember when I taught you to ride a bike" (73). Dewey had begged Tucker to continue helping him learn to ride, even though it made them late for dinner. Dewey's father had Tucker whipped as punishment. Dewey "felt guilty that he had begged Tucker to stay, and wanted to say something to him, but never did" (71). Dewey seems to have forgotten this event, however, because he fails to comprehend Tucker's letter. Tucker's letter seeks to help Dewey understand the South's racial hierarchy. Despite his affection for Tucker, Dewey does not fathom his own complicity in systemic racism.

[278] For a discussion of parables, see Naveh.

By relating the story from the perspectives of sympathetic, though ignorant, white characters like Dewey, Kelley foregrounds how little white Southerners understand African Americans. Tucker leaves Sutton to escape his paternalistic relationship with the Wilsons, but his individualism threatens the ideal of racial solidarity.

Kelley suggests that racial solidarity is precarious. As discussed in earlier chapters, nineteenth-century writers enjoined their readers to be loyal to their race. David Walker, for instance, harshly condemned the "servile deceit" and "gross ignorance" (28) of a black woman who aided a white man in recovering dozens of escaped slaves. According to legend, Tucker's ancestor, known only as the African, was betrayed by another black man who had initially helped him escape the auction block. Harper, the leader of the white men who gather on the grocery store porch to discuss Tucker's odd behavior, tells the African's tale. Harper believes that the "African's blood is running in Tucker Caliban's veins" (20). He can only understand Tucker in the context of a "mythical archetype" (Li 165), rather than as an individual. He compares the African's story to the biblical "story of Samson" (Kelley, *Drummer* 6), suggesting that the African's physical prowess was likely as exaggerated as Samson's strength. Harper's comparison of the African to Samson implicitly likens Dewitt Wilson and the other white men to the Philistines. As Samson kills many Philistines, the African is continually "raiding and freeing slaves" (16). As Samson is betrayed by his lover Delilah, so the African is betrayed by the "auctioneer's Negro" (13) who had once helped the African escape. Disturbingly, when Dewitt Wilson asks the auctioneer's Negro why he betrayed the African, the latter explains that "I'm an American; I'm no savage" (17). The auctioneer's Negro does not feel a sense of kinship with the African based on their shared oppression or common race, but rather feels a cultural superiority over the African. He has internalized certain racial norms, such as the idea that Africans are more

primitive than Europeans.[279] Whereas Ellison celebrates the oppositions inherent in American ethnic pluralism, Kelley suggests that the binary oppositions between civilized/savage and American/foreigner inhibit racial solidarity.

The novel goes further by suggesting that certain kinds of racial solidarity are not only precarious but counterproductive. Tucker wages what Eric Sundquist calls a "private war against the state" (*Strangers* 249). He refuses to give his wife, Bethrah, even a single dollar to donate to the National Society for Colored Affairs, a fictionalized N.A.A.C.P. Bethrah is stunned when Tucker denies her seemingly reasonable request. Initially, Bethrah's friends believe that she "married a real cheap skate" (Kelley, *Different* 96). Tucker is not, however, being stingy. Tucker hands his wife twenty dollars but prohibits her from donating to the Society. Bethrah's friend tries to sway Tucker by explaining that the "Society was working for Tucker's rights and the rights of all colored people" (97). Yet, Tucker refuses to accept the idea that the society represents him or is fighting on his behalf. He philosophically rejects the idea of advocacy. Tucker insists, "They ain't working for my rights. Ain't nobody working for my rights; I wouldn't let them" (97). Class differences partly explain the antagonism Tucker feels toward Bethrah's educated friends. Yet, Tucker never seeks to organize lower-class blacks. In his conception of radical self-reliance, Tucker denies the very foundation of collective resistance. Whereas the Society's representative claims that "the Society is fighting your battles in the courts," Tucker holds that "Ain't none of my battles being fought in no courts. I'm fighting all my battles myself" (97). Tucker denies any connection between his own personal quest to break his family's ties to the slave past and cases like *Bailey v. Patterson* (1962), which ruled that transportation facilities must be de-segregated. By refusing to band together with elite African

[279] On the internalization of racialized discourse, see Gilman and Stepan 89.

Americans to seek redress for oppression, Tucker rejects the traditional approach to activism. He neither waits for a Mosaic leader to liberate him, nor pursues the mantle of Mosaic authority.

During his grandfather's funeral, Tucker realizes that his freedom is nominal at best. The man who gives John Caliban's eulogy describes him as the "kind of man who would always sacrifice hisself to help others" (109). Tucker loudly disrupts the funeral, objecting to the reduction of his grandfather's life to one of sacrifice. He stands up and declares, "Sacrifice? Is THAT all? Is that really all? Sacrifice be damned" (109). If he remains in Sutton, his own eulogy will echo his grandfather's. Tucker viscerally reacts to the idea that his life will be spent sacrificing for a white family, even one he likes. Employed by the same white family who enslaved his ancestors, Tucker's emancipation is incomplete. Unlike King, who extolled Kwame Nkrumah's sacrifices for the Ghanaian people and exhorted his fellow African Americans to sacrifice their talent, finances, and safety for the cause of racial justice, Kelley rejects the idea that sacrifice should be the guiding principle of black life. After his interruption, Tucker leaves the church and two months later he buys the plot of land from David Wilson—the first step toward leaving the only home he has ever known. Unlike the marches and sit-ins of the Civil Rights Movement, designed to arouse the sympathy of white liberals, Tucker's seemingly irrational destruction of his property represents a "form of black sacrifice that exceeds the limits of white comprehension" (Sargent 43). Tucker's uncompromising attitude derives from Kelley's interest in Henry David Thoreau.

Thoreau's emphasis on authenticity rather than convention profoundly affected Kelley. As a student at Harvard in the late-1950s, Kelley found that writing made his life meaningful. He failed most of his classes but excelled in his fiction courses. Studying under Archibald MacLeish, Kelley emerged as a prodigy when he won the Dana Reed Prize for the best

undergraduate writing for his short story, "The Poker Party."[280] Although Kelley valued MacLeish's mentorship, he believed that self-discipline alone would make him a great writer. As he told Sinah in a letter from September 29, 1959, when he learned that he was one of twelve students accepted into MacLeish's writing course, MacLeish "cant [sic] teach me to write, no one can. It will be the work and the grit that counts and only I can do it." Nonetheless, MacLeish provided valuable advice while Kelley was writing *A Different Drummer*. Writing to Sinah on March 15, 1961, Kelley related that he "got a very encouraging letter from MacLeish," who "says to write this book my way, to not care whether I am particularly well understood, and to write a good novel, not a successful novel." MacLeish, thus, confirmed Kelley's Thoreauvian inclinations to abide by a higher, personal standard than that of commercial success or mass appeal. In another letter composed the same day, Kelley explained how reading *Walden* shaped his sense of his vocation as a writer. Writing entailed the attempt to "do something honestly, without pretense, without mirrors or tricks." Kelley's discernment of his vocation came at the cost of traditional metrics of success. Despite dropping out of Harvard before graduating, Kelley insisted that he "gained more than I lost" and cannot "do well at those things I do not love." Like Thoreau, Kelley resisted arbitrary expectations. Echoing Thoreau's critique of his Concord neighbors, Kelley argued that "[e]veryday, all over the world, millions of people go to jobs they hate, take orders from people they do not respect, raise children they would rather not have had, and make love to women they would rather not have married." They fail to "keep their souls sacred" because they suppress their "secret aspirations and dreams" and deny their "right to be individuals." *A Different Drummer*'s title alludes to Thoreau's belief that when one "hears a

[280] See *Blacks at Harvard* 317.

different drummer" from others, one should "step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (219).

In contrast to his father's pragmatic decision to leave journalism to enter the civil service, Kelley made the Thoreauvian choice to pursue writing as a vocation. Kelley recounted witnessing his father become "progressively more embittered and disillusioned." Forcing himself to pursue financial security over a career he loved, Kelley's father became a "shell of what he once was," which Kelley calls a "tragedy." Observing his father's disintegration taught Kelley that "[h]e should have, I must, we all must do those things we love to do, those things that make our life meaningful." Kelley modeled David Wilson on his father.

David Wilson struggles to heed the Thoreauvian imperative to follow the beat of his own drummer. He descends into self-loathing after deciding to take his father's place as a landlord instead of moving his family to New York to pursue journalism and racial justice. Stephanie Li argues that Kelley "seems to foreclose any kind of interracial contact" (183), but it is more accurate to say that Kelley demonstrates the simultaneous necessity and near impossibility of interracial communion. As we have seen, Dewey Wilson fails to understand what motivates Tucker. Dewey's sister Dymphna befriends Tucker's wife Bethrah, but Dymphna only partially understands Bethrah's experience. The most important interracial friendship in the novel is that between David Wilson and Bennett Bradshaw, who meet at Harvard in 1931. David's feeling that the South "must get away from old patterns" (Kelley, *Drummer* 138) echoes Bennett's belief that black leadership has "followed in the footsteps of the negro overseers of plantation times" (140). Their friendship blossoms in the soil of their shared idealism. David draws his mother's ire when he reveals that his college roommate is African American and informs her that she is "unbelievably bigoted" (144). David admires Bennett's diligence and intellectual curiosity. After

Bennett's mother dies, he leaves school to provide for his siblings. They continue to discuss their "common aspirations for social betterment" and "common hatred of ignorance, poverty, disease, and misery" (149) through letters. Bennett takes a job at the National Society for Colored Affairs. After graduating and returning to the South, David becomes a reporter for the *Almanac-Telegraph*, sending Bennett articles about desegregation to publish under a pseudonym. When his boss discovers David's political leanings, however, David loses his job and no other paper will hire him. Although Bennett suggests that David join him in New York, David is afraid to do so because his wife is pregnant. He resorts to returning to his hometown of Sutton to collect rents for his father. David feels "shackled to the curb" when he should be "marching proudly" (157) in the parade for justice. Rather than marching to the beat of his own drummer, David marches to the beat of financial necessity and social expectations.

David and Bennett degenerate into the worst versions of themselves when their friendship ends. Their correspondence ends in 1938 after Bennett fails to convince David to come north. Bennett regretfully writes in his final letter to David, "[o]ne of the important touchstones of our friendship has disappeared" (157). Bennett had hoped that he and David would "lead our peoples to the things we felt were right for them" (157). After they stop corresponding, David descends into self-pity and Bennett becomes the embittered leader of a separatist group called the Black Jesuits. Had David acted on his convictions and moved to New York, perhaps, Bennett would not have adopted an extreme form of separatism.

Kelley critiques the top-down model of Mosaic leadership in the character of Rev. Bennett Bradshaw. Founder of the Resurrected Church of the Black Jesus Christ, Rev. Bradshaw travels South from Harlem, searching for the cause of the mass migration. When he discovers that Tucker acted without guidance or even urging the other migrants to follow him, he feels that

he has been eclipsed. He tells Dewey Wilson, the son of his former Harvard classmate, that as a "so-called religious leader" he "needs the Tuckers to justify his existence" (118). Tucker's actions demonstrate that ordinary folk are realizing that they "don't need to wait for someone to GIVE me freedom; I can take it myself. I don't need Mister Leader, Mister Boss, Mister President, Mister Priest, or Mister Minister, or Reverend Bradshaw. I don't need anyone. I can do whatever I want for myself by myself" (119). Rev. Bradshaw complains that Tucker's self-reliance has made him "obsolete" (119). Yet, Bradshaw has become accustomed not merely to his status as a race leader, but to an extreme level of devotion from his followers. Bradshaw's demagoguery evokes the political career of Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., pastor of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church and New York's first black Congressman.[281] Flamboyant and headstrong, Powell often clashed with other black leaders from Roy Wilkins to Jackie Robinson to Martin Luther King, Jr. By 1963, Powell alienated the major civil rights organizations—the NAACP, National Urban League, Congress on Racial Equality, and Southern Christian Leadership Conference—by accusing them of being "dominated by whites who contribute the most money" (Slaughter 1).

Rev. Bradshaw's Black Jesuits are a pastiche of urban religious sects, including the Nation of Islam, Father Divine's Peace Mission, and Daddy Grace's United House of Prayer for All People.[282] Like the Nation of Islam, the Black Jesuits "believe only those parts of the Bible which support black supremacy, believe Jesus to have been a Negro" (Kelley, *Different* 159). Rev. Bradshaw's followers accord him the same level of devotion as the followers of Father Divine and Bishop Grace. According to a magazine story, "[w]hat Bradshaw preaches, the Black

[281] In his introduction to the thirtieth anniversary edition of *Invisible Man*, Ellison described how he "marched behind Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., in his effort to desegregate the stores along 125th Street" (479).
[282] On Father Divine, see Primiano 91-115. On Daddy Grace, see Sigler 31-48.

Jesuits believe" (159). One of Rev. Bradshaw's followers donated a limousine to his spiritual leader, much as Daddy Grace's followers were expected to raise money for him.[283] The article describes the sect's creed as a "mixture of Mein Kampf, Das Kapital, and the Bible" (159). Bradshaw's anti-Semitism recalls that of Sufi Abdul Hamid, the black labor leader and convert to Islam who spearheaded boycotts of white-owned Harlem businesses in the 1930s.[284] As Hamid became known as "black Hitler" (Russell 236) for boycotting Jewish businesses, so Bradshaw claims that "Jews do most of the exploitation for the white man" (Kelley, *Different* 159). The National Society for Colored Affairs expels Bradshaw because of his Communist sympathies, much as Du Bois broke with the NAACP (Sundquist, "Promised" 273). The novel suggests that in the decades since his friendship with David Wilson ended, Bradshaw has become increasingly enamored of power for its own sake. Bradshaw indulges in self-pity when he discovers that Tucker has unintentionally achieved what he has spent his life attempting. Tucker's self-reliance proves to be contagious.

Despite his antipathy to racial solidarity and collective action, Tucker acts as a Mosaic leader to his wife Bethrah and his employer David Wilson. Although she is initially mystified by Tucker's behavior, Bethrah eventually comes to accept that he is acting on an impulse that she, too, must heed. Bethrah tells Dymphna Wilson that she fears that education leads people to contemplate possibilities rather than simply act. Bethrah hopes that by following Tucker's intuition "maybe some day I'll be following something inside me that I don't even know about yet" (100). Kelley provides Bethrah's motive with a simplistic dichotomy between thinking and acting, as she explains to Dymphna that educated people "THINK about doing" something but "end up not doing it at all" (100). Li observes the irony of Bethrah seeking to become self-reliant

[283] See Fauset 25.
[284] On Hamid, see Ottley 116-119.

by following Tucker. While Kelley's male characters practice "fierce self-reliance" (Li 177), female characters like Bethrah and Camille follow their husbands, evidence of what critic Erica Edwards describes as "the anxieties of manhood" (106). Kelley subordinates Bethrah's autonomy to Tucker's. Bethrah follows Tucker, as the Hebrews follow Moses into the wilderness.

Tucker not only acts as a Mosaic leader to his wife, but also sets off a chain reaction in Sutton's African American community. Since the novel is filtered through the perspectives of white characters, Kelley only briefly reveals the mindset of the people inspired by Tucker. Rev. Bradshaw and Dewey Wilson question a man named Elwood waiting with his family at the bus depot. The scene evokes a civil rights protest, as state troopers and policemen observe the crowd of African Americans who "sang hymns and spirituals" or "stood quietly, inching forward, thoughtful, triumphing, knowing they couldn't be stopped" (Kelley, *Different* 115). Rev. Bradshaw asks Elwood where he and his family are going. Elwood replies that they are heading for Boston where they have family. Eric Sundquist argues that by depicting an exodus without a Promised Land, Kelley treats African Americans as trapped in a "condition of perpetual wandering" ("Promised" 275). Yet, Kelley eschews the idea of a singular Promised Land in favor of depicting something closer to what happened during the Great Migration: African Americans left the South for Northern cities promising employment, dignity, and freedom. Whereas both King and Malcolm X projected specific visions of the Promised Land, Kelley is more interested in what enables or prevents people from breaking with the past than in imagining heavenly utopia.

Elwood's relationship to his wife mirrors Tucker's relationship to Bethrah. Elwood's wife "still thinks this is crazy" and wonders "[w]hat'll we do when we get there?" (116). Like

Tucker, Elwood believes that "it's right to go" (116) even without a clear plan. Elwood does not know Tucker, but rather hears about the exodus from his friend Hilton. Hilton explains that a "colored man up in Sutton" convinced everyone that "[i]t ain't worth fighting because things ain't getting better for us here" (117). According to Hilton, this man told his fellows that the "only way for things to be better was for all the colored folks to move out, to turn their backs on everything we knowed and start new" (117). Rev. Bradshaw cynically observes "[t]hus begins a legend" (117). The Exodus narrative is so ingrained that, despite his lack of charisma and penchant for silence, Tucker is nevertheless cast as a Mosaic leader. Tucker, the accidental Moses, succeeds where Bradshaw, the aspiring Moses, fails.

Tucker plays a more direct role in delivering David Wilson from his hell of self-recrimination. David resembles what Ralph Ellison calls the "flawed white Southerner" who has "confronted the injustices of the past and been redeemed" ("Myth" 561). After two decades of self-loathing David is redeemed by Tucker's decision to leave his home. David writes in his diary that Tucker has "freed himself," and "somehow, he has freed me too" (Kelley, *Different* 136). Tucker's action teaches David that "[a]nyone, anyone can break loose from his chains" (137). Tucker tells his employer, "[w]e worked for you long enough, Mister Wilson. You tried to free us once, but we didn't go and now we got to free ourselves" (162). Li argues that Tucker is David Wilson's son, but that David has "repressed his own responsibility to Tucker" (181). The key scene is when Tucker approaches David about buying seven acres of land. As David questions Tucker, attempting to fathom his motivation, David "decided to be a bit more paternalistic" (Kelley, *Different* 161). David attributes Tucker's annoyance at his questions to the fact that he "did not want to be fathered" (161). By "destroying a part of the former plantation," Tucker "both rebukes his white father, David, and his black grandfather, who yielded to the cycle

of oppression that defines southern life" (Li 182). I would argue, however, that Kelley employs the language of paternity not to suggest that David is Tucker's biological father, but to convey how white Southerners infantilize African Americans. Despite David's liberal sensibilities, it is extremely difficult for him to think of Tucker as an adult with the same level of interiority as a white man. Tucker's short stature and dark chauffeur's suit make him look like a "child pretending to be an undertaker" (Kelley, *Different* 161). This habit of seeing Tucker as a child explains why David is so amazed when Tucker redeems him from shame and cowardice.

*A Different Drummer* radically reimagines Exodus as a framework for black collective action, as Kelley suggests that the most effective Mosaic leader is an accidental one. Whereas Tucker's self-reliance inspires the masses, Rev. Bradshaw's attempt to inhabit a Mosaic role is designed only for his own self-aggrandizement. Paradoxically, Bradshaw fails to lead the people precisely because he aspires to do so, while Tucker sparks an exodus because he does not seek to do so. The novel unsettles confidence that traditional modes of racial solidarity, including religious sects and uplift organizations, facilitate individuals' ability to act for themselves.

**Conclusion**

Black writers' interpretations of Exodus serve as a microcosm of the debates at the heart of the Civil Rights movement. Should African Americans ally themselves with sympathetic whites or take an oppositional stance? Who is qualified to lead the people toward freedom and justice? As I have shown, reading Ellison and Kelley alongside King and Malcolm X reveals that in the 1950s and 1960s black intellectuals responded to Exodus in four major ways: pro-Exodus desegregationism (King), anti-Exodus democratic pluralism (Ellison), pro-Exodus racial separatism (Malcolm X), and anti-Exodus radical individualism (Kelley). Paradoxically, at the

very moment that civil rights leaders relied on Exodus as a narrative framework to mobilize black collective action, black novelists eschewed Exodus typology. While Ellison and Kelley sought to undermine the Moses complex, King and Malcolm X drew on Exodus to legitimize charismatic male leadership. King appealed to Exodus to fill his audience with hope and prepare them to face the ongoing trials of the wilderness. He likened various contemporary events and figures to key moments from Exodus, claiming the mantle of Mosaic authority for both Nkrumah and himself. Speaking for the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X invoked Exodus to legitimize Elijah Muhammad's authority and advocate separatism. Whereas Malcom X drew on the stark contrast between oppressive Egyptians and oppressed Hebrews, King minimized those elements of Exodus that could promote violence. Ellison was skeptical of conferring Mosaic authority on race leaders but returned to the concept of covenant as he conceptualized American pluralistic democracy throughout his career. Kelley's critique of race leadership is so severe that it threatens the possibility of racial solidarity itself, as he replaced the idea of Mosaic leadership with radical self-reliance.

Despite the success of *Invisible Man* and *A Different Drummer*, Ellison and Kelley's skepticism toward the Moses complex went largely unheeded. Black politicians, from Al Sharpton to Barack Obama, and black artists, from Isaac Hayes to Lauryn Hill, continued to appeal to Exodus into the twenty-first century.

## Conclusion

By excavating a wide spectrum of signifying possibilities around the Exodus narrative, this study joins insights from literary studies, religious studies, and critical race theory. Exodus is a critical nexus for black and white writers to examine the possibilities and risks of racial solidarity. The writers in this study use the figure of Moses to articulate what values, ideals, and loyalties are incumbent on black people. We have seen three major versions of Moses from the 1830s to the 1960s: Moses as a model of heroism to be imitated, exemplified by David Walker and Frances Harper; Moses as the antitype of an idealized contemporary leader, exemplified by Martin Delany, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X; Moses as representing overbearing charismatic authority, exemplified by Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and William Melvin Kelley. These different versions of Moses persist into the present, as people as diverse as Isaac Hayes, Rev. Al Sharpton, Toni Morrison, and Eve Ewing continue to invoke exodus motifs to express the perils and promise of African American life.

I have argued that we should consider David Walker a pivotal nineteenth-century interpreter of the Exodus narrative and Frances Harper as signifying on Walker's sense of Mosaic subjectivity. Walker was the first black American writer to treat Moses predominantly as a model for ordinary people to imitate. Whereas the bible portrays Moses as a singular figure, a prophet and law-giver with unique access to God, Walker focuses on Moses' decision to identify with the suffering Hebrews, rather than the powerful Egyptians. Beginning with Walker helps us see how black writers turned to Exodus, not merely as a story of liberation, but also to explore notions of racial solidarity. Engaging the tradition of sentimental fiction, Harper synthesized Walker's portrayal of Moses as the paragon of race loyalty with an emphasis on the sacredness of maternal bonds. Harper's characters identify with their mother's people even when they can

pass as white and enjoying higher status. Tracking subtle changes in Harper's use of the Exodus trope through her poetry, fiction, and non-fiction reveals how she adapted Walker's interpretation of Moses to address the challenges faced by African Americans during and after Reconstruction. Pairing Walker and Harper reveals that while Walker advocated violent resistance to slavery and Harper pursued reform primarily through non-violent means, they shared an underlying commitment to race loyalty as an important first principle for activism.

Exodus was virtually ubiquitous in the debates over slavery in the 1850s. Delany, Melville, and Stowe employed typological plasticity to explore the legitimacy of violence and the possibilities of black agency. These novelists transformed Exodus from a clear political allegory into ambiguous literary figurations. Tracking Exodus motifs across *Dred*, *Blake*, and *Moby-Dick* reveals major divisions within the antislavery movement leading up to the Civil War. While journalists like James Redpath mapped the conflict over slavery onto the simple opposition between Moses and Pharaoh, these novelists stretched Exodus to the point of questioning its utility as a template for ending slavery. Whereas Redpath valorized John Brown, the paragon of antislavery violence, as a new Moses, Stowe accepted violence to defend the innocent but refrained from sentencing slaveholders to the Egyptians' fate. While Stowe circumscribed black male agency within domestic ideology, Delany interpreted Exodus through a theology of black self-reliance. Melville deployed biblical typology to expose human voraciousness rather than to resolve social conflict. Delany, Melville, and Stowe's revisions to biblical narratives illuminate more than their stylistic innovations or their insight into class tensions and gender politics. As we have seen, typology's power lies in its flexibility. Typology provided a shared discourse for U.S. writers to imagine their nation as Egypt or Canaan, Babylon

or the New Jerusalem. The better we understand biblical typology in nineteenth-century literature, therefore, the better we will understand competing notions of the American project.

By examining the works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, this study illuminates growing skepticism toward the Exodus paradigm among black intellectuals. For Hurston, the true struggle for freedom occurs in the wilderness, where the people are unmoored from the simplicity of slavery, but not yet acculturated into the responsibility of citizenship. Hurston complicated the tradition of treating Moses as the embodiment of race loyalty and self-sacrifice spanning the works of Walker, Delany, and Harper. Hurston's Moses is racially and culturally foreign to the Hebrews he liberates and never fully identifies with their suffering. Yet, Moses does sacrifice his personal desires, including his family life and his thirst for knowledge about nature, to lead the Hebrews. Unlike Walker, Delany, and Harper, who sought to persuade their audiences to subordinate their individual desires to goals that benefit the whole race, Hurston dramatized how an ethic of self-sacrifice can slip into a penchant for control. Hurston's Moses loses many of his best qualities when he assumes leadership of the Hebrews. Ironically, by solving the Hebrews' problems for them, Moses prevents them from becoming the self-reliant people that he wants them to be. For Hurston, self-sacrificing leaders prevent their followers from becoming self-reliant.

Beyond this critique of self-sacrifice, Hurston's portrayal of Moses' unilateral decision-making reflects Alain Locke's habit of dictating the standards for authentic black art. I have used the term aesthetic uplift to convey Locke's belief that folk culture serves as the raw material for high art, an attitude which Hurston did not share. Given Hurston's reaction to Locke's negative assessment of *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, we can read the novel as resisting the idea that there is a single standard for African American art. Moses' tendency to demand absolute loyalty from

the Hebrews reflects Locke's inability to allow for perspectives differing from his own and his disavowal of former protegés when they espoused ideas with which he disagreed. Hurston's retelling of Exodus, therefore, does not simply critique African American socio-political leadership, but also argues for openness to a plurality of perspectives about the nature of black aesthetics. By retelling a biblical story in the idiom of black folk culture, the novel embodies Hurston's commitment to an ongoing folk tradition over Locke's vision of aesthetic uplift.

Black writers' interpretations of Exodus serve as a microcosm of the debates at the heart of the Civil Rights movement. Should African Americans ally themselves with sympathetic whites or take an oppositional stance? Who is qualified to lead the people toward freedom and justice? As I have shown, reading Ellison and Kelley alongside King and Malcolm X reveals that in the 1950s and 1960s black intellectuals responded to Exodus in four major ways: pro-Exodus desegregationism (King), anti-Exodus democratic pluralism (Ellison), pro-Exodus racial separatism (Malcolm X), and anti-Exodus radical individualism (Kelley). Paradoxically, at the very moment that civil rights leaders relied on Exodus as a narrative framework to mobilize black collective action, black novelists eschewed Exodus typology. While Ellison and Kelley sought to undermine the Moses complex, King and Malcolm X drew on Exodus to legitimize charismatic male leadership. King appealed to Exodus to fill his audience with hope and prepare them to face the ongoing trials of the wilderness. He likened various contemporary events and figures to key moments from Exodus, claiming the mantle of Mosaic authority for both Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and himself. Speaking for the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X invoked Exodus to legitimize Elijah Muhammad's authority and advocate separatism. Whereas Malcom X drew on the stark contrast between oppressive Egyptians and oppressed Hebrews, King minimized those elements of Exodus that could promote violence. Ellison was skeptical of conferring Mosaic

authority on race leaders but returned to the concept of covenant as he conceptualized American pluralistic democracy throughout his career. Kelley's critique of race leadership was so severe that it threatens the possibility of racial solidarity itself, as he replaced the idea of Mosaic leadership with radical self-reliance. *Echoes of Exodus* ends with Kelley because his views mirror Walker's. Both Walker and Kelley promote individual action as the basis for change, but while Walker exhorted his readers to imitate Moses, Kelley sought to free his readers from the need to look for a Moses beyond themselves.

The appeal of adopting a Mosaic persona extended beyond civil rights leaders to musicians like Isaac Hayes, who titled his 1971 album *Black Moses*. Hayes transformed Moses into an avatar of black masculine coolness, while lending his creative expression an aura of the sacred. Chester Higgins, senior editor at *Jet* magazine, blended biblical typology with colloquial language to characterize Hayes as the "Black Moses of the famous 'Memphis Sound'" (3). Higgins aggrandized Hayes much like Malcolm X affirmed Elijah Muhammad, yet Hayes's divine calling seems to be to fulfill capitalism's profit motive. As a "soulful prophet of the Chosen People, a willing servant of the Lord, and one helluva entertaining genius, to boot" (3), Hayes combines the sacred and the secular. Higgins fit events from Hayes's life into the framework of Moses' story. The "broad reaches of the cotton fields" functioned as the "bulrushes, paradoxically, 'hiding' Moses and his oppressed people from the immediate genocidal clutches of the racist and xenophobic Pharaohs" (2). Hayes's "high school teachers, behold, became the collective Pharaoh's daughter who saved the dropout Hayes" (2). As the "Lord manifested Himself in a burning bush" to Moses, so the "Master's face became that of Stax Records" (2) to Hayes. While one might interpret this equation of a record label with the divine presence as blasphemous, it reflects how Stax co-owner Al Bell wanted the company to

uplift the black community.[285] Higgins declares that the "manifest destiny of Black Moses would not be denied" (2) and that destiny seems mainly to be selling albums. While Hayes marketed himself as a musical prophet, Rev. Al Sharpton embraced a Mosaic identity to secure his place as the scion of civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr.

In his autobiography, *Go and Tell Pharaoh* (1996), Rev. Al Sharpton follows David Walker's version of Moses as a model to be imitated. Sharpton implicitly likens himself to Moses: "I don't want to be in Pharaoh's army or in Pharaoh's court" (270). As Moses forsook Egyptian luxury, so Sharpton declares, "[w]e can't be more decadent than those we wish to challenge" (264). Sharpton suggests that worldly strategies are not sufficient for defeating the forces of racism: "[y]ou can't beat Pharaoh by matching his tricks; he will destroy you and laugh" (264). Instead, one must "beat Pharaoh by matching tricks with miracles, and miracles are the fruit of righteousness" (264). Sharpton implies that as God gave Moses power over Pharaoh, so he will deliver African Americans from oppression. Moses confronted Pharaoh many times before the Hebrews were finally freed. Not every confrontation with evil will lead to triumph: "[a]nd sometimes, even if you can't defeat Pharaoh, there's a victory in telling him the truth. Even when I knew I couldn't win, I told the truth, and that was a victory in itself. If you can't win, keep lifting your voice until you can win. It will come around" (264). Sharpton identifies Pharaoh not with a specific figure, but as the "blind and arrogant indifference to their lives and hopes by individuals and institutions in this country of their births that has maimed, for no reason, so many for so long" (270). Sharpton's autobiography reveals that Exodus typology remains a natural way for black male leaders to frame their life stories.

[285] On Stax Records, see Gordon.

Black women writers, however, have developed Hurston's critique of Exodus as licensing black male tyranny. Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* (1999), for instance, shows how male liberators subordinate and eliminate women who threaten their authority. Morrison's novel is set in the Oklahoma town of Ruby, founded by twin brothers Deacon and Steward Morgan. To the Morgan twins, purity is the highest good, so they lead an exodus of fifteen families from Haven, the town founded by their grandfather, deeper into Oklahoma. Ruby is built on principles of elitism and exclusion. The novel culminates in an attack on the Convent, a refuge for women whose non-traditional community threatens Ruby's patriarchal status quo. Like Hurston, Morrison reveals how readily ideas about covenant derived from Exodus lead male leaders to impose their will through violence.

I want to conclude with a brief reflection on Eve L. Ewing's "What I Talk About When I Talk About Black Jesus," published in *Electric Arches* (2017), because it is one of the most innovative recent treatments of Exodus. Ewing simultaneously reclaims and relativizes Exodus in the context of black feminism. Ewing treats the parting-of-the-Red-Sea not as a single, definitive event, but as the status quo for African Americans. She writes, "Ever since black people came to this country we have needed a Moses. There has always been so much water that needs parting." Ewing uses the image of the Red Sea to suggest that African Americans face ongoing oppression. Although Ewing acknowledges the perennial need for Mosaic leadership, she suggests that all African Americans have the potential to play this role. Black children "come into the world as alchemists of the water, bending it, willing it to bear us safe passage and cleanse us along the way, to teach us to move with joy and purpose and to never, ever stop flowing forward into something grand waiting at the other end of the delta." As "alchemists of the water," African Americans have a Mosaic gift for survival and a Mosaic destiny for

greatness. As a “people forever in exodus,” African Americans live a constant struggle to overcome injustice. Ewing’s poem shows how black writers continue to find fresh ways to use Exodus to express the joy and struggle of African American life. Ewing relativizes Exodus by situating it among other biblical stories, reminding her readers that “Before Moses there was Abraham” and “before Abraham there was Eve.” Ewing hearkens back to Eve, rather than Adam, to convey the importance of women in black culture. For Ewing, Exodus remains a valuable way of framing black life, but not the only, or even the most important, way of doing so.

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