(UN)MAKING MANHOOD: ANTEBELLUM NARRATIVES OF BLACK MASCULINE CONSTRUCTION AS TRACES OF PROGRESSIVE GENDER FORMATIONS

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By

Jorden Elizabeth Sanders, B.A.

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Jorden Elizabeth Sanders, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Dana Luciano, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Since the Feminist and Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s, scholars and activists have worked to deconstruct essentialist notions of race and gender, but only recently has scholarship delved into the frameworks that construct masculinity. For black feminist thinkers, it was essential to acknowledge the intersectionality of oppression, to consider femininity, masculinity, and race in concert with each other. Hooks calls this “interbeing,” and Spillers acknowledges “pansexual potential,” and for Alice Walker it’s “womanism.” No matter the term, each of these approaches seeks to overturn patriarchal notions of manhood in order to create a future manhood that promotes gender equality by highlighting slavery’s influence on the possibilities in black manhood. “(Un)Making Manhood” builds on that scholarship by continuing to consider black masculinity in terms of its ability to wed feminine and masculine characteristics in a single notion of manhood, but it also deviates in its call to search for a usable past in the nineteenth century. It asks the reader to carefully search the speeches and narratives of nineteenth century figures for nascent vestiges of gender progressivism while acknowledging the problematic realities of such a turn.

iii
This thesis is dedicated to Judith and Jessica Sanders for their unconditional support and love. God could not have blessed me with stronger models of womanhood.

And

To every man striving to discover the fullness of that calling.

Many thanks,
Jorden Elizabeth Sanders
# Table of Contents

Introduction.................................................................................................................................................. 1

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* & the Making of Maternal Manhood.......................................................... 12

Frederick Douglass & the Making of a Black, Civic Manhood ............................................. 40

Prince Hall Freemasonry & the Making of a Socially Gynandrous Manhood ............. 78

The Manhood We Make .................................................................................................................... 109

Works Cited .................................................................................................................................................. 111
INTRODUCTION

Over the past three years, instances of black males killed in police interactions have spurred national discussion concerning America’s view of black men, a view bell hooks summarized as a depiction of “‘failures’ who are psychologically ‘fucked up,’ dangerous, violent, sex maniacs whose insanity is informed by their inability to fulfill their phallocentric masculine destiny in a racist context,” (“Reconstructing Black Masculinity” 89). Her 1992 book, Black Looks: Race and Representation, forced the longstanding narrative of black male inferiority to the forefront of feminist scholarship.

Masculinity began to formally occupy space in feminist scholarship in the 1970s. The previous decades of civil unrest had created a platform for public responses to systems of disenfranchisement. The feminist movement of the 1960s articulated a theory of women’s subjugation that attributed their oppression to the patriarchal system. Works such as Barbara Welter’s “Cult of True Womanhood” (1966) and Linda K. Kerber’s “Separate Spheres, Female Words, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” (1988) sketched the historical form and method of women’s oppression. Both authors examined the recurring expectation women to be pure, pious, domestic, and submissive. Qualities Welter described as the “solemn responsibility” of women that “promised happiness and power” (152). Feminist activist argued these expectations were gendered and limiting in the service of patriarchal dominance, because civic and social power remained a masculine inheritance as long as expectations of women remained constricted.

Though accurate, early feminist arguments against patriarchy’s oppression of women proved problematic. Too often framing the relationship of women to patriarchy depended upon the
construction of “men” as a single, all-encompassing category. As Robyn Wiegman outlines in “Unmaking: Men and Masculinity in Feminist Theory,” this “collapsing” of men and patriarchy “seemed to many scholars and activists an unproblematical linkage between maleness, masculinity, and the social order of masculine supremacy,” ideas that in reality are quite separate (34). Such an “unproblematical linkage” created two critical misconceptions: 1) the generalization facilitated the perception of feminist inquiry as inherently and essentially “man-bashing;” 2) it suggested that all men—regardless of race, sexuality, and class—shared equally in the gender privilege patriarchy offered. Combined, feminist scholarship obscured the long history of minority men’s oppression at the hands of white men and “white women’s complicity” with that oppression (Wiegman 35).

Over the following decades, feminists recognized a need to broaden their inquiry. In Calvin Thomas’s words, they began to acknowledge that “to leave masculinity unstudied, to proceed as if it were somehow not a form of gender, is to leave it naturalized, and thus to render it less permeable to change” (61). Without the intentional study and analysis of masculinity as a social construction it is impossible to effect the type of change feminists seek. To conduct the type of research Thomas suggests requires a full deconstruction of masculinity’s “seeming naturalness” that redefines it as a “set of prescriptive norms that contain potential contradictions within and between men” that “repress[es] the male subject’s constitution along multiple lines of the social: race, class, and sexuality in addition to gender” (Wiegman 43).

This inclusion of masculinity studies was not without controversy. In her 1991 work, *Feminism Without Women*, Tania Modleski communicates the central fear that the inclusion of masculinity in feminist frameworks would displace the concerns of women. Though she had
clear reservations, Modleski did not foreclose the possibility of an inquiry into masculinity. For her, a feminist foray into masculinity would only be acceptable if it were “the kind that analyzes male power, male hegemony, with a concern of the effect of this power on the female subject and with an awareness of how frequently male subjectivity works to appropriate ‘femininity’ while oppressing women” (6-7). The study of masculinity remains a peripheral concern to Modleski. The parameters outlined do not encourage a study of masculinity for the sake of men, and the language still insists on a connection between “male” and oppression. Her language emphasizes the problematic connection discussed earlier. There is not attempt to separate maleness from masculinity though “male subjectivity” offers some path to clarity. There is even less distinction concerning issues of race, class, or sexuality. Oppression remains housed in the male body regardless of other identifying factors. Rather than eschewing the need for concentrated masculinity studies, claims like Modleski’s highlight the need for such investigation.

Though it took decades for mainstream feminist to include masculinity within their activist lenses, African American female activists constructed an interdependent lens much earlier. Black women’s awareness of the interplay between race and gender can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century as women like Maria Stewart spoke out about the exclusion of black women from racial progress, but it is not until the 1970s that such voices find a collectively public and academic space. As Hazel Carby notes concerning twentieth century racial language, “beneath the surface of this apparent sacrifice of individual desire to become an intellectual and a race leader is a conceptual framework that is gender-specific; not only does it apply exclusively to men, but it encompasses only those men who enact narrowly and rigidly determined codes of
masculinity” (10). This, she claims, is a “political failure of imagination” (10). Black women responded to the Civil Rights Movement’s “I AM MAN” posters that excluded them from civic recognition, the Black Arts Movement’s masculinist narratives that forced their concerns further into the margins, and the national discourse that blamed them for the black man’s “failure” to thrive. In 1970, Toni Cade’s (Bombara) anthology Black Woman featured black women’s creative and academic responses to intersectional oppression. The Combahee River Collective’s 1978 “A Black Feminist Statement” stated the dynamics succinctly: “We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we struggle with Black men about sexism” (213). Alice Walker’s introduces womanism in the opening pages of In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens (1983) and defines it as a position “committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. Not separatist, except periodically, for health” (xi). Clenora Hudson-Weems adopts and adjusts Walker’s approach by introducing “Africana womanism” as a distinct category that is “family-centered” (139). According to Hudson-Weems, “[o]ur priorities are race, class, and gender, while the feminist concentrates on gender issues” (139). These statements were revolutionary, and they sparked conversations about the methodology and scope of feminist inquiry.

Perhaps one of the most pivotal works in this progression is Hortense Spillers’ 1987 “Mama’s Baby Papa’s Maybe.” In this essay, Spillers considered the condition of black males in light of their psychoanalytic connection to the “maternal hand.” She traces black men’s “pansexual potential” to slavery’s disenfranchisement as inherited through the maternal condition. Black males were not a part of the system of inherited privilege of patriarchy. Spillers’ concept that the black mother’s psychosocial imprint makes black men the “only” way out of the gender binary
sets a precedent for inquiry. The “power of ‘yes’ to the ‘female’ within” is not negatively feminizing. The connection to the feminine and the maternal is written as the womanist ideal, the epitome of gender progress. It is anti-patriarchal in its construction, because its dependence on feminine constructions is not understood as a failure to “achieve” patriarchal masculinity. The slave condition becomes a generative situation that positons the black male as the potential for gender progressivity. While some critics mined the nineteenth century for other sites of gender non-normativity\(^a\), bell hooks, Dexter B. Gordon, Maurice O. Wallace, and others drew from Spillers’ notion of the maternal hand on the black male body as a central site of progress.

Like Spillers, bell hooks conceives of the unity mentioned by Spillers as a future state of “interbeing” (*The Will to Change* 117). Without using Spillers’ psychoanalytic model, hooks phrases interbeing as a reality of “visionary feminism” aimed at a “restor[ing] maleness and masculinity as an ethical biologic category divorced from the dominator model” and replaced “with a partnership model that sees interbeing and interdependency as the organic relationship of all living things” (117). She specifically moves beyond race toward a global framework. The restoration to which hooks alludes has no concrete moment in history; and as a future materialization, this *future* interdependent gender must be constructed and molded based on *present* conditions. Despite such a clear call for reordering, masculinity studies still lacked a detailed look at the historical constraints under which black masculinity was constructed, and in order to model such a manhood, an in-depth study of the history had to occur.

As recently as 2002, Maurice O. Wallace argued that Western civilizations have “created out of the black male body a waking palimpsest of the fears and fascination possessing our cultural imagination” yet academic wiring on the black male “remains ironically an inexplicably modest” (2). In fact, according to Wallace, “[j]ust how masculine subjectivity constitutes itself relative to the masculine hegemony…is a feat of social and psychic wonder that has yet to be definitively named” (2). His book *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men’s Literature and Culture* attempts to establish a baseline for such inquiry.

Ranging from the subjects of architecture to autobiography, Wallace analyzes how American black men have (re)presented themselves. He claims that the construction of manhood operated “not merely by a desperate repudiation of the feminine, in other words, that the New World American man was invented but equally (if not chronically understand) by the homosocial counterconstruction of black male slavery” (2). Wallace identifies Spillers’ maternal hand as most prevalent in the antebellum black Masonic lodge. He reads the intimate relationship between the lodge and the man as masculine extensions of Spillers’ black maternal. The architecture of the lodge represents the interdependent biological relationship to the black male’s identity. What Wallace’s analysis fails to do is place the hermaphroditic model of the lodge within the Freemason’s rhetorical context. When considered within the language of Prince Hall Freemasonry the lodge and the language construct a black masculinity that embraces the feminine.

Dexter B. Gordon’s *Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Nationalism* differs from Wallace in both the subject and the relationship of his inquiry. Gordon explores the force of the maternal on the twentieth century African American male. The relationship to the
maternal is a spiritual rather than a biological one. Invoking the religious practice of “laying on of hands,” he views the black maternal as an external force whereas Spillers and Wallace consider the relationship of black man to the black maternal as interior to the psycho-social development of black masculinity. While this acknowledges the link to slavery as the platform for a progressive gender formation, the spiritual rather than physical connection to the feminine subverts the anti-patriarchal stance. Black masculinity remains the “feminine within” remains an abstract, external influence.

This thesis follows in their footsteps by identifying the language of the feminine and the maternal in nineteenth century constructions of black masculinities. I will focus on antebellum public works—printed, circulated narratives, speeches, and articles. Though “(Un)Making Manhood” may seem to repeat scholarship on the subject, this project makes to key extensions: First, it situates the language of black masculinity in light of antislavery narratives, and secondly, it searches for a usable past in the progressive though problematic constructions of nineteenth century black masculinity. The goal is not to analyze back masculinity based on its oppositional relationship to white, patriarchal masculinity or black femininity. This is not to suggest that the nineteenth century holds all secrets or embodies an overlooked perfection. The goal is to examine how antebellum black masculinity refuses the limitations of a gender binary in its language and self-construction.

Because I am interested in the construction and identification of black masculinities, each word in the title signals careful consideration. “(Un)Making Manhood” calls attention to both the artificial and temporal specificity of this study. Gender is not natural. It is made both by the social ideology and the art of its time. In this respect, the “making” is essential in our
contemporary moment and the historical one. As Maurice O. Wallace notes, “the cultural logic of the late nineteenth century suppose that individuals were productively ‘made’ (think of the concept of the ‘self-made’ man) and Americanness itself was ‘artificial and reproducible’” (61). Just as in the nineteenth century, the awareness and emphasis on the constructedness of the Subject is important for this twenty-first century study. The term also acknowledges the simultaneous process of that making with its potential to dismantle the patriarchal standard of masculinity.

The use of the term “manhood” rather than masculinities is meant to firmly locate this investigation in the language of the antebellum era. In Corine T. Field’s work *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age and the Fight for Citizenship*, she places additional weight on the use of the word “manhood.” According to her research, the language of the period depended on a “transition from childhood to manhood,” and “significantly this was also the same period when ‘manhood’ became a euphemism form the male genitals” (6). In this historical framework, then, citizenship tangled with sex and gender in a way that made “manhood” a political necessity. Aware of the relationship between anatomy and social hierarchy, the word carries with it the legacy of activism and history that is useful to the project. To adequately stage this inquiry, the analysis will proceed in three sections.

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin & the Making of Maternal Manhood* explores the constraints instituted by antislavery language. This is an important component to any analysis of the period, because it is within these frameworks that black voices operated. In his introduction to *Antebellum Activists: Race, Gender, and Self*, R.J. Young acknowledges that “[t]o define oneself is not a solitary act. A feedback mechanism exists in interaction with society which reinforces, modifies,
or discourages individual attempts at creating identity” (14). Stated differently, to understand the progressive manhood constructed by black males during this period, the mechanisms that worked to shape black masculinities must be rightly understood. As the central “feedback mechanism” to black gender construction, antislavery arguments are rarely given its due. Traditionally, the derogatory language of proslavery stances is placed in concert with black gender, especially black manhood. Considering black masculinity as a product of proslavery dehumanization without including antislavery aspirations contributes to the notions of black manhood as a flawed masculinity. How is one to think of black manhood any other way when the only force acknowledged in its construction is one that used that same language? Adding antislavery narratives to the feedback matrix does not displace the importance proslavery contestations; it expands the context.

By including antislavery claims, this chapter examines the racial and gendered tensions among those who marked slavery’s end or limitation as the goal. The language and methods antislavery advocates used to counter proslavery opinions presented problems as well as solutions for black spokesmen. The chapter offers a brief history of these narrative practices before turning to a specific conversation about the complicated progressive nature of black manhood as represented in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. A careful reading of the novel reveals a sentimental construction of black manhood as a complex blend of masculine and maternal characteristics.

In conversation with the dynamics of maternal manhood discussed in the previous chapter, the remainder of the project focuses on black male responses to the maternal masculine construction. In acknowledgement of Jeffrey B. Leak’s essay “A Crisis in the Male Spirit,” chapters two and
three read Frederick Douglass’s and Prince Hall Freemasonry’s contributions as “conscious responses to the virulent myths of black inferiority and white supremacy, as they construct black masculinity along a vast scale of psychological complexity” (3). Chapter two, Frederick Douglass & the Making of a Black, Civic Manhood investigates the civic manhood developed in Frederick Douglass’s three antebellum autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, The Heroic Slave, and My Bondage and My Freedom. White advocates had crafted a limited notion of black civic engagement, and as a public figure, Douglass worked systematically reconstruct the nature and constraints of black civic manhood without alienating white men, the only American demographic politically endowed to change public policy. Understanding Douglass’s narratives as a conscious navigation of these issues destabilizes assumption of black men’s unquestioning complicity with patriarchal masculinity. Responding to the version of black manhood offered by Stowe, Douglass deploys a rhetorical approach that combines feminine sentimental appeal and a masculine maturation model. Analyzing Douglass’s strategy provides an example of the gender duality that black men could claim, but to understand Douglass is not enough. Though incredibly prominent, using his narratives as a platform limited the scope and depth of his construction of masculinity, because he was the only male who could be directly and formally bound to its practice beyond the pages of the books.

Prince Hall Freemasonry & the Making of a Gynandrous Manhood offers a third example that actively bound black men to an explicit standard of masculinity that blended feminine expectations with masculine expression. The decision to describe this construction as “gynandrous” reflects the nuance of the Prince Hall Freemason’s construction. It is too overtly masculine to be termed “androgynous,” a word that connotes the indistinguishability of gender
expression. Its construction has no direct ties to sexual activity or objects of desire, so to use the term “bisexual” would clutter the tensions present in the texts. “Hermaphroditism” has a similar problem; it would imply a physical dimension not present in the text. The comparison to the gynandrous plant alleviates a number of these issues. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, such plants house both pistils and stamens in one single column that holds up the bloom. Though the presence of pistils and stamens suggest a sexual relationship, the removal from the human realm removes the stigmatization concerning sexual relations. The metaphor also carries the physical parallel necessary. Both feminine and masculine characteristics exist within a single column. The column, emblematic of the phallic column, hides the duality of the gendered components of the plant and gives the illusion of single, wholeness. Like the manhood espoused by Prince Hall Freemasons, the gynandrous plant is a delicate combination of masculine and feminine gender qualities into the phallic column. In order to explicate this construction, this chapter adds to the Wallace’s reading and includes three central speeches delivered on the Masonic Calendar’s Feast of St. John the Baptist between 1780 and 1830.

It is my hope that these three chapters will illuminate notions of black manhood in the nineteenth century that did not strictly ascribe to patriarchal masculinity. By reading these constructions as problematic though progressive, we may better understand the connections to twenty-first century black masculinity and remove the stigma connected to its non-normativity. Because my task is so narrow and the scope of this project is so limited it will be impossible to investigate the various ways these masculinities affected women or to answer every question concerning black men’s creation of manhood, but maybe it will be enough to broaden our understanding of masculinity in a way that will inspire us to continue (un)make manhood.
**UNCLE TOM’S CABIN & THE MAKING OF MATERNAL MANHOOD**

The commission of an art piece by the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave trade crystallized these questions in a single image commissioned in 1787. The image features a black male kneeling with shackles around his wrists and his ankles. His arm and legs are given definite musculature, and only a white cloth covers his waist and genitals. The rest of his body remains open for inspection by the viewer while his gaze is turned heavenward. The banner that frames this image reads “Am I Not A Man and A Brother?” (Roth 117). The plea that society recognize the enslaved male’s humanity and kinship was circulated on newspapers, pins, and flyers. Immediately, discussion of its design was extensive, and because of its widely anonymous circulation, readers and viewers begged to know the name and reasoning of its creator. Without revealing his identity, the author printed a one-hundred-five-page response titled “Am I Not A Man and A Brother? With all humility addressed to the British legislature” (Peckard 1). The author claims that the “abominable traffic in the Human Speicies” [sic] is “destructive of one [Commands of God], and contradictory to the other [Common Rights of Man]” (Peckard 2). The two-pronged violation of slavery connects to Grimke’s claim that slavery is in direct conflict with God’s design. Paul Gilmore summarizes some elements of the “ubiquitous ‘am I not a man and a brother’ photo” which “implied the slave’s common manhood” while “strip[ping] the black man of marks of manhood” (55). Gilmore’s analysis highlights complications within the image, but when paired with the gender dynamics of white female speaker, the complications within society becomes more apparent.

When Sarah Grimke penned “An Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States” in 1837, she called slavery an “atrocity” of the highest magnitude because those who support slavery are
“fighting against God’s unchangeable decree by depriving this rational and immortal being of those unalienable rights which have been conferred upon him,’” (3, 2). Her statement positioned slavery supporters—particularly supporters who claimed a relationship to Christ—as in direct opposition to God. For clergymen, whose job was to ensure the establishment and continuance of spiritual order on earth, her assault on their political leanings had added significance. Contrary to the doctrine they espoused concern the enslaved person’s status, Grimke included black men and women in the narrative of creation. They too were endowed with spiritual significance, honor, and purpose beyond the “thing” society had made them. While this may seem to be straightforward argument, the fact that Sarah Grimke, a white woman, delivers this statement complicates its implications and reasserts questions that had been circulating since the late eighteenth century.

Sarah Grimke’s social position as a white woman complicates the seemingly direct design. For one disenfranchised body to speak and advocate for another disenfranchised body highlights tensions within the framework of American citizenship. The intersectionality of gender and race was amplified in these moments: If race was the disqualifying factor, the white woman should have had an established claim to citizenship. If gender was the disqualifying factor, the black man should have been included. The exclusion of both demographics does not show a multilayered exclusionary practice; instead, it hints at a social commonality between the feminine position and the racial one. Aligning the causes presented a solution. How were white women to argue for the liberation and citizenship of enslaved people when that same right to citizenship was denied them? In essays or addresses such as Angelina Grimke’s “An Appeal To The Women Of The Nominally Free States,” she unites the causes by comparing the two social statuses: “The denial of our duty to act, is a bold denial of our right to act; and if we have no right to act, then may we will be termed
‘the white slaves of the North’” (246). Narratives made these connections more circuitously. To understand the way these issues were intertwined, one must understand the context of the discussion.

The American for Independence substantially altered definitions of citizenship. Prior to the war, citizenship was tied to white male’s roles as British subjects. By fighting a war to claim a distinctly American notion of citizenship, early civic leaders set a precedent for citizenship on the basis of individual rights and violence. This was in the forefront of national consciousness as native, white, and black males fought against the British in the service of American independence. Slaves and women had ample opportunity to aid the cause and prove their investment in the new government. In Corine T. Field’s analysis, such investments “irrevocably altered the rhetorical, legal, and social significance of white male maturation by turning dependent subjects into republican citizens” (22). Field defines the social idea of white maturation as the “reli[ance] upon a narrative of male maturation in which white sons outgrew their dependence on mothers and servants or lave to become the equals of their white fathers” (9). According to this model, white boys inherited citizenship potential that could only be realized through a stringent independence from anything remotely black or feminine. Neither women nor enslaved men could ever be classified as adults under this system of ideology. In Erica Ball’s essay “To Train Them For The Work,” she explains the implications of this notion of dependence for black men: “In the early years of the republic, male dependency carried with it a significant ‘social stigma.’ The political culture of the period framed, most notably the dependence of women and children upon male heads of households, as a state that clearly demonstrated one’s incapacity to wield the full privileges of citizenship” (67). Though Ball’s analysis does not explicitly reference race, her analysis reveals where tensions could
exist. If dependence was only acceptable for women (permanent dependence) and children (temporary dependence if male), the black enslaved male proved an anomaly, because he was permanently dependent similar to the condition of white females. In this sense, black males also had a particular interest in breaking the negative relationship between dependent status and citizenship. As long as social thought placed independence as a prerequisite for citizenship, the enslaved black male would never be able to claim manhood and citizenship.

During the war, individual freedom challenged the masculine maturation model, because individual freedom did not depend on age, gender, or race. Individual freedom proceeded from the belief in a “natural” right to self-governance and contended that anyone who could prove themselves capable of self-governance “could not justly [be] subordinated against their will” (Field 15). By the end of the war, groups that had been assumed “incompetent” had “both practical and ideological claims to individual freedom” (Field 22). These demographics governed themselves and preserved the colonies; they volunteered to support troops or petitioned to fight as troops but were still denied citizenship. Aware of this state, the argument for “equal adulthood” emerged, an idea defined by Field as “the idea that all human beings, regardless of race or sex, should be able to claim the same rights, opportunities, and respect at any age” (1). If accepted, this movement would have proved a solution to complex racial and gendered challenges of citizenship, but it was not so readily accepted. This meant that white women advocating for the liberation of enslaved persons had to construct an alternative narrative that wedded feminist and antislavery causes. By the turn of the nineteenth century, black males were already being included in the masculine narrative of maturity through homoerotic and homosocial connections in texts.
Analyzing homoerotic connections in antislavery texts published between 1780 and 1820, John Saillant’s “The Black Body Erotic and the Republican Body Politic” reveals a pattern of language and description that served to unite men across racial lines:

Two entirely new elements in American writing appeared in antislavery writings published and republished between 1790 and 1820: an erotic representation of the back male body—its visage, hands, muscle, skin, height, sex—unparalleled by the representation of any other body, black or white, male or female, and a *communitas*, blending sentimentalism and homoeroticism, shared by back men and white men who were unified in opposition to slavery. (80) The antislavery narratives that Saillant describes are ones written by men for men. Attention to the body was a way of establishing physical similarity between white and black men while including black men in the maturation narrative. In this framework, a recognition of physical similarity would lead to the “ideal affection, benevolence, sentiment, and sympathy shared among men” (89). While Saillant focuses on the homoerotic, “vibrant sexuality” that proved “white men who penned these tales clearly identified with the sexual prowess they attributed to black men” as suggested by this over-accentuation of the male form in literature. I am more interested in white women’s investment in this liberation narrative as the century continues (98). The homoerotic context and content of these narratives excluded women in significant ways: the sex of the characters prevented white women form crafting the same type of narrative. They could not claim physical parity with white or black men as a path toward citizenship. Also, feminine gender expectations of purity discouraged women from writing a narrative that exposed and dwelled on the physical attributes of males, especially black males. Because writing a liberation narrative based on an erotic rhetoric endangered their standing as women, white female activists created a narrative that argued for the liberation of enslaved persons while implying their own suitability for citizenship without access
to the narrative tools that had become so prominent, and the genre characteristics of southern children’s literature provided a set of useful literary tools.

In the 1820s, white women authored children’s stories that often featured black male slaves as characters, and the treatment of those characters continued into antislavery literature by white women in the 1840s and 1850s. In her book *Gender and Race in Antebellum Popular Culture*, Sarah Roth outlines the relationship between antislavery and children’s literatures as differentiated only by the former’s intentional engagement with arguments about the enslaved person’s humanity. Both literatures contrasted with the adult fiction of the time. Regarding black males, adult fiction tended to describe him as the “brute,” a dark and dangerous creature waiting to harm upstanding whites, but children’s literatures depicted the “unwavering devotion” of an “impaired version of black masculinity” (17). Roth argues that the differing descriptions had specific purposes: “The image of black men as bloodthirsty insurrectionists corresponded with proslavery ideology, which rested on the idea that people of African descent were fit only for slavery and that any loosening of the bonds of slavery would lead to the wholesale massacre of whites” (39). For antislavery writers, the savagery and violence depicted was an “unavoidable result if slavery were allowed to continue” (39). These competing premises concerning a single behavioral characteristic was the foundation for the sentimental abolitionist novel. They were moral mothers, sisters, and daughters doing their duty. Treating the black male slave as he was in children’s literature allowed white female antislavery authors to maintain their own gendered positions while contributing to the public discussion of slavery and connecting that struggle to their own quest for citizenship. One successful construction of manhood in these texts is a combination of maternal sensitivities and hyper-masculine appearance—a construction I term “maternal manhood.”
Maternal manhood finds broader appeal due to changes to the abolition movement in the 1830s. Gabriel P. Foreman calls this shift “sentimental abolition” and characterizes it as a movement as one that “coincides and borrows from the power of the extended domestic spheres polarized in reformist communities and culture…it stresses the affectional over the authoritative, emphasizing that the heart is the only true site of change and redemption” (150). This shift from an authoritative model of masculine enlightenment toward a model of feminine redemption was an exciting development for female spokesmen. The method of moral argument situated the state as an extended domestic sphere and allowed women to occupy public spaces and address citizenship as never before. If citizenship is so closely linked to manhood and its public duties, women could not speak about men, to men, in masculine spaces without jeopardizing the propriety of their gendered position.

The move of sentimental abolition’s means of persuasion also offered a unique position for women. Because of the emphasis on the affective removed necessity of an academic or authoritative persuasion. In Jacqueline Bacon’s words, this “focus[ed] not on creating arguments but on revealing objective ‘truth’ and information, a process that ostensibly removes female members of society from persuasion. The facts ‘speak for themselves,’ these women’s organizations imply and thus women need not assume rhetorical authority” (40). Revealing truth is a moral mission rather than a political one, and as such it correlated with expectations of women’s piety within a domestic space. According to Bacon, the language of womanhood in antebellum years “posited that women would ‘redeem’ men by exerting their moral authority, an influence that men could not resist” (34). With this understanding, it was only fitting that women would participate in this revelatory, redemptive cause. Slavery was a moral blight on extended
domestic of the nation and the literal domestic that included their male kin. One text that deftly consolidates all of these issues is the 1852 publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

In the years immediately following its publication, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* garnered national attention. Written for and to an audience Stowe described as the “noblest of minds and hearts” who without any fault of his own, were involved in the trials and embarrassments of slavery,” the text offers a radical depiction of the enslaved (2). Important to the context of the essay, the novel presents and blended, maternally masculine, sense of black manhood in protagonist Uncle Tom. For many readers, Stowe’s novel was rated a “vile aspersion of southern character” with “loose, reckless and wicked misrepresentations of the institution of slavery in the southern states” (Woodward 12). In the resolution by the 1953 Colored National Convention *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was deemed “a work plainly marked by the finger of God” and a “first step in that happy human brotherhood which is to be the ultimate destiny and crowning glory of our race” (40). Horace Mann concurred, calling the Stowe a “divine-hearted woman” for authoring the text (13). Abolitionist Wendell Phillips deemed the novel “rather an event than a book” (19). For the Reverend Edward Josiah Stearns, the response was more complex. He found Uncle Tom to be an “exaggeration” while George and Eliza Harris are “true representations” (144).

Twentieth and twenty-first century criticism of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* has focused on the development of Uncle Tom as representative black man and hero in Stowe’s novel. The tension between Uncle Tom’s masculine presence and complete subjugation has been a particular issue for critics like David Reynolds. In his essay “The Feminization Controversy: Sexual Stereotype and the Paradoxes of Piety in Nineteenth-Century America,” Reynolds traces the application of
gendered language to religious doctrines and denominations. The nineteenth century fear that religion and America had grown soft and feminine shapes his reading of characters. He argues that “despite his reputation as an obsequious character” Uncle Tom represents a masculine, “religious firmness” (104). In his reading, proximity to the feminine remains a concern. For other scholars, it is Uncle Tom’s proximity to feminine religious sensitivity rather than a patriarchal masculinity that endows him with feminist (rather than “feminine”) possibility.

Christina Zwarg’s “Fathering and Blackface in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” represents one such feminist reading of Uncle Tom. Zwarg asserts that Uncle Tom’s death is not so much a positive sign of masculine religious performance as it is a sign of the “radical nature of Stowe’s feminism” (282). According to Zwarg, male characters are killed or removed from the narrative when the civic demand to embody patriarchal masculinity overwhelms feminist aims. She acknowledges Stowe’s dilemma of creating a male character that can simultaneously inherit patrilineal citizenship and destabilize that patriarchal order. Uncle Tom becomes too Christ-like to carry the feminist burden, and George Harris becomes too paternalistic to continue in the text. They are killed or exported from American soil. To read Uncle Tom and George Harris negates the feminist progress hinted in their exits form the narrative and ignores how these characters embody feminist aims while active in the text.

Rather than grounding Uncle Tom in religious questions as David Reynolds does or focusing on the impossibility of a feminist conclusion to male characters as Christina Zwarg does, Cynthia Griffin Wolff situates Uncle Tom in the Fraternal Love Movement of the 1840s. In this sense, Uncle Tom does not represent a strictly feminine or masculine approach. Instead, he represents a movement that sought to redefine what it meant to be masculine. The movement based homosocial
relations on the biblical friendship of David and Jonathan, and it rejected notions closely intertwined with patriarchal masculinity such as conquest and competition. In Wolff’s analysis, Uncle Tom is not a failed masculine figure or a feminized one. His relationships with various men in the text are an exercise in fraternal love. This historical lens offers a fresh combination of factors, but the Fraternal Love Movement is too limiting for the nature of Uncle Tom’s non-normativity. Uncle Tom’s masculine construction depends on more than a fraternal bond; he represents a maternal construction, but these characteristics are only recognized by critics when depicted by female characters.

The relationship between mothers and children is given great weight in feminist criticism. According to Elizabeth Barnes, “Stowe present[s] parents, and the self-sacrificial love that parenting engenders, as the only antidote to the competitive, acquisitive impulses destroying American liberty” (85). Parents, as a general term, is less specific than the quote suggests. “competitive” and “acquisitive” are characteristics associated with masculine prowess. In reality, motherhood takes the central role in the parenting relationship. Elizabeth Ammons “Heroines in Uncle Tom’s Cabin” reads emotionally fraught scenes like Eliza’s escape over the Ohio River as a reflection of Stowe’s subject position as a white woman and mother. In Peter Stoneley’s estimation, the context of women’s literature is an unavoidably emasculatory space intended to provide women the space to discuss and project desire, “another opportunity to affirm a Christian, maternal love” (58). The limitation of these readings, and others like them, is that they continue to examine maternal characteristics as connected to female bodies. The radicalness of Uncle Tom’s Cabin is that Uncle Tom embodies feminine characteristics as a positive force, as a maternal figure to other characters, he weds feminist and antislavery causes. Maternal manhood exchanges the
homoerotic fraternal of earlier antislavery novels for a maternal bond that facilitated feminist and racial claims to citizenship.

The reader is introduced to this narrative construction with the first interaction between Master Shelby and Uncle Tom: “‘Mas’r,’ said Tom,—and he stood very straight,—‘I was just eight years old when ole Missis put you into my arms, and you wasn’t a year old. ‘Thar,’” says she, “‘Tom that’s to be your young Mas’r, have I ever broke word to you, or gone contrary to you, ’specially since I was Christian?’” (48). The passage acknowledges two requirements of the maternally masculine construction: personal responsibility for the care of the master and piety. The quotation opens by displacing the economic hierarchy that separates Tom and Master Shelby. Though Douglass addressed Shelby as “Mas’r,” the text excludes the conduit of sail form that conversation. Mr. Haley is not referenced, and his exclusion diminishes the emphasis on Tom’s economic value. The text continues by attributed Shelby’s success to Tom’s care. The transference of maternal responsibility from “ole Missis” to Uncle Tom is also a transference of gender activities. Though Uncle Tom is eight years older than Master Shelby, the construction of their relationship from the time Mr. Shelby “wasn’t a year old” and “put into [Uncle Tom’s] arms” invokes images of a mother’s cradling care, and it is the foundation for Uncle Tom’s claim for trustworthiness. Like the maternal relationship, Uncle Tom and Master Shelby’s relationship precedes Master Shelby’s maturation and claim to adulthood, and this maternal foundation is only compounded by Uncle Tom’s religious role in the household.

The passage offers a brief explanation of Uncle Tom’s conversion to Christianity when his personal and spiritual condition is described to Mr. Haley: “Tom is a good, steady, sensible, pious fellow. He got religion at a camp meeting four years ago” (4). The reference to religion can easily
be read as the product of the civilizing mission, but doing so neglects an underlying narrative. Uncle Tom is not introduced to Christianity by the Shelby family or the family meeting. He is described as finding religion at a “camp meeting.” In addition to the focus of religion in the language of white civility, the moral guidance was a gendered responsibility. The language of republican motherhood dictated that the mother’s piety influence and center her household. As expected of women, Uncle Tom performs the role of pious nurturer and incorporates femininity into his portrayal of manhood. As religious standard in a corrupt environment, Uncle Tom operates as a maternal, religious guide on the Shelby plantation. He is described as a “sort of patriarch in religious matters,” the “sort of” distancing him from the assumption of patriarchal power. The text says that “it was in prayer that he excelled. Nothing could exceed the touching simplicity, the child-like earnestness of his prayer, enriched with the language of Scripture” (27).

The maternal relationship to Master Shelby is referenced again in the scene between Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe. The scene occurs in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” It is important to notice the location, because it situates the domestic space as possession of Uncle Tom rather than Aunt Chloe. Aunt Chloe’s domain in the kitchen, for she is a cook “in the very bone and center of her soul,” and “the arranging of dinners and suppers ‘in style,’ awoke all the energies of her soul” (19). The maternal remains the domain of Uncle Tom. His response to Aunt Chloe’s anger at his being sold is that “it goes agin me to hear one word agin Mas’r. Wan’t he put in my arms as a baby?—it’s natur I should think a heap of him” (34). This assertion of a natural affinity toward Master Shelby may seem insignificant, but the relationship between nature and an infant is a narrative pattern associated with maternal relationships in the text. After hearing of Harry’s possible sale, Eliza’s flight is justified: “‘tan’t in natur for her to stay” (34). The “natur” operates in the interest of the male child.
The similarities between the text’s reasoning encourages the reader to place Uncle Tom and Eliza in the same category rather than associating him with other, more aggressive, paternal characters. Rather than a brother to Mr. Shelby—and male readers by extension—Uncle Tom engages the sympathies of maternal relationships. By eliciting those particular sympathies, Stowe removes the threat of violence and terror from Uncle Tom and invites the audience to feel his abuse and death as a keen and personal injustice.

The maternal bond to an owner’s family continues when Uncle Tom joins the St. Clare home. His first relation is to the child, Eva, and he continues as a special attachment to Augustine St. Clare. After Eva’s death, Uncle Tom “had a feeling at his own heart, that drew him to his master” (254). The feeling leads to religious conversations with Augustine St. Clare. He instructs Augustine to pray for understanding of scripture, and “Tom’s heart was full; he poured it out in prayer, like waters that have been long suppressed…St. Clare felt himself borne, on the tide of [Uncle Tom’s] faith and feeling, almost to the gates of that heaven [Uncle Tom] seemed so vividly to conceive” (257). Not only does Uncle Tom establish himself as the moral guide to Master St. Clare, the text ties that religious behavior to the absent maternal. According to St. Clare in his exchange with his wife concerning slavery, “The Bible was my mother’s book” (156). His relation to scripture is linked through the maternal and the feminine, and Uncle Tom extends that linkage.

Despite the need for a maternal lens, it is imperative that maternity was housed in an undeniably masculine character, because citizenship was still dependent upon that sex and gender ascription. It was not enough to have the hero behave maternally; that maternity needed to be able to claim citizenship in order for this construction to work to women’s advantage. To assure that position and the consistency with anti-slavery language, Stowe insures that Uncle Tom’s body is described
as unquestionably masculine without being improper. Stowe carefully introduces Tom as the character that “is to be the hero of our story,” and his body is framed within this narrative as a “daguerreotype for our readers” (19). Attention to the description as a “daguerreotype” isolates his body from the text and forces the reader to focus on Tom as an object to be viewed:

He was a large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindliness and benevolence. There was something about his whole air self-respecting and dignified yet united with a confiding and humble simplicity. (20)

Stowe offers a vision of Uncle Tom as primarily physical and secondarily social. The decidedly masculine features are set forth first: “large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man.” In line with the homoerotic antislavery texts of the late eighteenth century, Stowe draws the physical comparison between her African male character and the common male slave, but because expectations of white womanhood emphasize purity, her language must not veer into any descriptions that could undermine her gendered position. The discussion of anatomy remains above the waist whereas male authors would describe an appreciation of the male body in its entirety. For example, Joseph LaVallée’s *The Negro Equalled By Few Europeans* describes the entire body, including passages concerning genitalia.

Stowe’s hero is not undressed in that manner. She switches descriptors after assessing the build and shape of Uncle Tom’s upper body. She moves to impress upon the readers the evidence of his African-ness. He is a “glossy black” with “truly African features” (20). While these descriptors are much less precise than the allusions to his physical masculinity, they offer the reader a glimpse at the importance of Uncle Tom being presented as “truly” equal parts adult, recognized man and African. Neither qualifier can be absent if the claim to liberty is to still outweigh the maternal elements of Uncle Tom’s construction. His “self-disrespect,” “air,” and “dignity” follow the
assertion of Uncle Tom’s masculinity. It connects the air to a manhood beyond the physical. His traits hint at an internal condition worthy of citizenship and social acceptance. As previously mentioned, this particular combination of characteristics is in an effort to evince a masculinity that could be publicly handled by a white, female author and convince an unsympathetic white male to support emancipation.

The success of this maneuver can be read in Uncle Tom’s final scene. In order for Uncle Tom’s death to impact the slave-holding and the anti-slavery supporters alike, the death of Uncle Tom would have to shock all sensibilities. The method of Uncle Tom’s death is not a singular occurrence in the novel, but it is the only beating that is dramatized in the novel. Numerous women are whipped over the course of the novel, but the reader is only informed of those actions. Prue is whipped to death in a cellar, but it happens away from the reader’s eye. It is summarized by other characters: “Prue, she got drunk agin—and they had her down cellar,—and thar they left her all day” (186). Not only does Prue’s whipping to death happen off scene, the knowledge that she was whipped to death is implied by earlier references to Prue’s physical condition when she is dismissed as an alcoholic deserving of punishment (184). In addition, the death framed as a punishment for wrongdoing. It is heard that Prue is dead in a cellar and that she has begun to decay. Uncle Tom’s beating occurs for the reader to witness rather than to overhear.

A similar situation occurs when Rosa is whipped. The text only indicates that “one of the male servants came to say that her mistress had ordered him to take Rosa with him to the whipping-house, whither she was hurried, in spite of her tears and entreaties” (273). The reasons for those “tears and entreaties” reveals the gendered aspect of Stowe’s decision to partially narrate Uncle Tom’s death. Gendered notions of women’s piety and purity forces the issue of a gendered viewing
practice. Through the figures of Rosa and Miss Ophelia, the text explains: “I don’t mind the whipping so much if Miss Marie or you was to do it; but, to be sent to a man! and such a horrid man, --the shame of it, Miss Feely!” (272). The appeal to Miss Ophelia to dissuade Mrs. Austin from exposing and impugning Rosa’s claims to feminine decency lays the foundation of Stowe’s decision to exclude the whipping of a female characters from the action of the narrative. To strip a character to the male gaze in that way would be similar to the fears of her femininity expressed in the text. It would also reduce the male readership to the vile status of the men who publicly whip female slaves or to “lower men” who could witness and participate in such scenes without compunction. In Saidiya Hartman’s terms the “precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between witness and spectator” is at stake (4). As a white woman, the indecency of exposing another woman, whose humanity the text seeks to establish, and encouraging white men to witness that atrocity would violate expectations of piety, purity, and domesticity. So if Stowe is to reveal the horror of the whipping, it has to be enacted on a male body that can elicit sympathy from a male audience without jeopardizing her own moral standing. Having already established this quality of Uncle Tom, his masculine form is reasserted in brutal visibility of his death. In a “glorious” resemblance to Christ, Uncle Tom is called a “brother-man and brother-Christian” though the character has not been presented as such throughout the text. The beating continues as dialogue and narrative activity. Despite Uncle Tom being “most gone,” Legree orders Sambo and Quimbo to “Pay away, till he gives up!” (350).

While his masculine form allows his affliction to be dramatized as a tool of persuasion for the audience, the maternal element of this masculinity also reasserts itself in this scene. Even in Uncle Tom’s final scenes, he embodies the domestic charge toward moral development, particularly the
production of Christian souls. The text accounts all of the torment as worth it if the Lord “give me these two more souls” (350). The “victory” is that in his brutal death Sambo and Quimbo are “born again” (in the colloquial acknowledgement of the process of salvation). Peter Stoneley reads this scene as a victory for American society which “in killing the black, Southern, Gothic body, America in the large is performing a righteous expulsion of its capacity for desire,” but Uncle Tom is more than a marker of murdered desire (63). Uncle Tom expands the notion of desire and manhood. This desire is clearly within moral grounds for mothers silenced elsewhere in the text. Like a slave mother begging a master to let her keep or raise her children, the text situates Uncle Tom’s plea to God as a realigned request. The plea to God is answered when that same plea is often denied to slave mothers in the text. It is this wedding of maternal and masculine that appeals to the varied and complex audience without completely displacing or supplanting the patriarchal narrative of maturity and civic inheritance already in place. His sacrificial death becomes a form of agency. Though this maternally masculine character is Stowe’s declared “hero” of the text and the privileged masculinity in the world of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, this construction is not the only construction. Conflicting with this process is the attempt at civic manhood configured in George Harris.

By patriarchal standards, the character George Harris displays masculine potential, but his character is expelled from the American context. Stowe feminist goals are not conducive to the creation of a civically-engaged, black manhood, because to do so would require an affirmation of the system that excluded white women. The reader is introduced to George Harris in the chapter titled “The Mother” (11). His appearance in the text is tied to the Eliza’s motherhood, and he is described as the “bright and talented mulatto man, who was a slave on a neighboring estate, and
bore the name of George Harris” (11). His mental acuity is the first characteristic referenced. Stowe’s construction of the enslaved George is that of a “mechanical genius” and “inventor” with “pleasing manners” whose “superior qualifications were subject to the control of a vulgar, narrow-minded, tyrannical master” (11-12). His superiority does not prevent him from excelling at hard labor, for after being forced home because of his success in the factory, Stowe depicts him as capable of handling “the meanest drudgery of the farm” (13). The text paints this character as fully masculine. By prioritizing this quality, the text dismisses the claims of black inferiority, but unlike Uncle Tom, George Harris is not an image of African purity. His mixed heritage quickly follows the assertion of his mental abilities.

His “mulatto” status enables a claim to white, masculine privilege. Through law and history, slave status is a maternal inheritance, so “mulatto” invokes an unknown or unspoken paternity. If it were simply an indication of skin color, the shade of brown would have been sufficient. The text makes this point explicit later: “I had a father—one of your Kentucky gentleman—who didn’t think enough of me to keep me from being sold with his dogs and horses” (95). His claim to citizenship is further established by his designation as “man.” The distinction between George’s manhood and his “gentleman” father is important, because it exposes the possibility of manhood divorced from an assumed patriarchy. George Harris’s manhood is an open, civic construction compared to the closed, patrilineal form represented by his unnamed father. Regardless of his bastardization, George Harris inherits the qualities of citizenship and access to the maturation and process through his paternity. Stowe’s construction of his masculinity comes complete with wife, industry, and independence.
His manhood remains unstable in this passage, for his status as a “slave on a neighboring estate” prohibits the execution of his inherited potential. The character’s forced subservience removes him from the civic realm, and though his name invokes America’s founding father, George Washington, the name to which he responds, is not his own. It is a burden to be carried. His “flashing eyes, the gloomy and troubled brow, were part of a natural language the could not be repressed,—indubitable signs, which showed too plainly that the man could not become thing” (13). This explication of George Harris’s response to oppression assumes a type of indomitable masculinity imbued at birth. The enslaved man would have to be made a thing if slavery was to continue. It is impossible for a man to be anything less than a man, and his body betrays that reality. The challenge is held in his eyes, and his brows are shadowed with the unnatural condition of his subservience. His claims to masculinity are natural, and it his negative to that oppression is natural. By rooting this condition in this way lays the foundation for a formal appeal to the natural rights arguments of the century.

Stowe places George at the center of his own narrative in the chapter titled “husband and father.” To title the chapter as such invokes patriarchal authority while the narrative usurps the supposed power of those positions. In this chapter, Stowe voices the calamity of a man who ascribes to the civic, patriarchal responsibilities despite slavery’s refusal to fully recognize him. In the stage dialogue between George and Eliza, George cries,

My master! and who made him my master? That’s what I think of—what right has he to me? I’m a man as much as he is. I’m a better man than he is. I know more about business than he does; I am a better man-ager than he is; I can read better than he can; I can write a better hand, —and I’ve learned it all myself, and no thanks to him, —I’ve learned it in spite of him. (17) The list of accomplishments in this passage clearly represent notions of white manhood. More particularly they exemplify what R.J. Young’s ideas of “self-made” and “artisan” manhoods.
According to Young, the former “saw manhood in terms of the energetic action devoted to success in business” while the latter “emphasized pride in craftsmanship and hard work” (62). George claims both in the way he measures himself against his master. Stowe endows crafts George as a successful businessman with both the acumen and work ethic required. He is what he self-made and superior to his master—though it does not necessarily make him superior to other men.

This emphasis on individual merit complicates the George’s narrative of liberation. George is described as being a superior businessman, reader, writer, and manager despite the drudgery and inhumanity of slavery, but the question of his subservience does not free him entirely. The text asks “who made him my master?” which suggests that George could reasonably be subservient to a better man, a man that was truly superior to George. The failure to frame George’s liberty as an unquestionable right complicates the arc toward freedom Stowe writes. Amid the text’s qualified claim to liberty George’s inherited character makes him “one whipping won’t tame” (16). The violence inflicted upon his body demands a violent response, and the laws of slavery combined with George’s patriarchal inheritance prevent the tempering of that violence.

Slavery’s laws render George’s anger and violence unbridled, because the sentimental heart and moral influence remains out of George’s grasp. His separation from the feminine influence of Eliza due to ownership and distance allows his actions to proceed without guidance. According to nineteenth century gender expectations, the responsibility of the wife is to provide a domestic environment that restrains masculine tendencies toward amorality. The relationship between Senator and Mrs. Bird provides an excellent example in the text. Slavery does not allow that connection between George and Eliza. George explains, “Don’t you know a slave can’t be married? There is no law in this country for that” (17). In Stowe’s construction, Eliza is unable to
fulfill gendered expectations of womanhood because the domestic is shattered, and George’s behavior can be connected to her longstanding absence. Freedom first occurs without her, and maintaining it becomes a dangerous prospect.

One might ask how his separation from Eliza is different from Uncle Tom’s and why it is that George resorts to violence when Uncle Tom does not. The difference is in their construction. Uncle Tom’s maternally masculine construction places the feminine attributes within his own masculinity; he is domestic, pure, pious, and domestic, whereas George operates along a trajectory of masculine achievement. George’s claim to citizenship is founded on the question of his manhood, and no caring relationship—fraternal or maternal—is constructed between his masters and himself. Those relationships are housed in Eliza’s character.

In addition to George’s separation from Eliza, his narrative places him within the white, patriarchal mode of maturation. His has a white father, and he had achieved independence by the time he shoots the slave tracker. It is essential that Stowe have George recognized as a black male in order for the civic causes to be fully imbricated, so though George has successful passed as a white man, he returns to claim his wife, child, and liberty as a black male. He explains to Mr. Willis, “I’ll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe. You say your fathers did it; if it was right for them, it is right for me!” (96). Packed into these two sentences is the construction of a patriarchal, patrilineal civility. The “fight” is framed in terms of republican ideals. Manhood is based on the civic ability to engage in war and establish a patriotic genealogy. The semicolon separating what “your fathers” did and the black man’s “right” to exact that same violence allows the racial break without separating the thoughts and consequences of the claim. The language that follows extends the argument.
George expresses the sentiment in detail: “I am George Harris. A Mr. Harris, of Kentucky, did call me his property. But now I’m a free man, standing on God’s free soil; and my wife and my child I claim as mine” (167). George Harris is completely in line with patriarchal gentility of his day. He aspires to be a gentleman and embodies it in this declaration. Patriarchal expectations dictate that he assumes the head of his household, and he does so by claiming his wife and son as “mine.” This possessive relationship continues the cycle of gender oppression. Though this relationship is not equivalent to slavery, it is akin to it. Placing the family under his patriarchal leadership does free them from the bondage of slavery. They cannot be bought or sold, but it does not offer Eliza adult rights and citizenship. Eliza is not given the opportunity to claim herself. By claiming his son in this scene, the text places the Harry in the pattern of maturity expected of white boys. He is to follow his father’s path of independence while his mother remains dependent and subservient. This conflicts with the progressive gender espoused in Uncle Tom’s construction, but the text exposes the problem of patriarchy.

Stowe’s manufactured patriotic heritage exposes the problems of this rhetoric. The government established by the patriots in George’s lineage is the very government that rejects George’s manhood. The reasons for George’s refusal to return to slavery underscore those concerns:

You want to send Jim and me back to be whipped and tortured, and ground under the heels of them that you call masters; and your laws will bear you out in it, —more shame for you and them! But you haven’t got us. We don’t own your laws; we don’t own your country; we stand here as free under God’s sky, as you are; and, by the great God that made us, we’ll fight for our liberty till we die. (168)

Just as George articulates his patriotic lineage, he disavows the government that is its product. Freedom is a repudiation of America. The collective “we” refuses to submit to law or claim the country. Allegiance to God as a supranational mandate is the only order to which submission is
possible. He embodies what John Saillant describes as the “socially and naturally ‘heterogeneous’” subject by republican leaders concerning why slavery should be upheld until a comprehensive plan for expatriation was in place. Because George’s character represents a notion of black manhood that threatens the safety and livelihood of the only audience able to ensure civic change, white males, the successful civic engagement is problematic as an argument for black liberation.

George’s manhood is further complicated by its displacement of Stowe’s progressive gender politics. The “us” would seem to indicate every member of fugitive traveling party, but because of the hierarchy and language of the previous passages, the “us” remains a masculine pursuit. As a man, George claims the right to resist forcible subjugation to the law’s masters and the whip’s violence. The antecedents to the “us” that the trackers “haven’t got” are Jim and George. The sentences that reference the fates of Eliza, Harry, and Jim’s mother ignore their individual rights as patriotic inheritance. Their dependent relationship to George and Jim strips them of agency and discusses their subjugation in terms of George’s and Jim’s masculine achievement. The text does this by replacing the names of Eliza and Harry with George’s possessive “my wife” and “my son,” and Jim’s mother’s abuse is because the master “couldn’t abuse her son” (168). The agency and circumstances of these female characters are subsumed in the masculine “us.” The construction of an interdependent racial and feminist claim to citizenship is destabilized by the patriarchal relation in this passage. Stowe removes George and the Harris family form the intra-national geography of the text.

Critics have interpreted his removal in a number of ways. Joe Webb reads George’s removal as Stowe’s nod to historic accuracy. Emigration was a prominent discussion and solution supported by black and white advocates, and Webb concludes that George’s exit by letter is essential to that

According to Martha Schoolman, Stowe’s “endorsement of Liberian emigration at the novel’s end” is the “most famous and misunderstood geographic argument” in antislavery literature. Schoolman claims that critics’ tendency to read George’s removal as a “nostalgic reassertion of the kind of Jeffersonian vision that first envisioned African colonization as the solution to the purported ungovernability of a racially diverse national population” is both limited and unjust (159-60). Giving a greater degree of credit to Uncle Tom’s Cabin as a work concerned with broader political concerns, Schoolman suggests that George’s removal is consonant with Stowe’s fear of the United States’ expansionist propaganda.

While these arguments include African American men and the historical moment, they ignore the gendered implication of his removal and the possibility of George’s feminist recovery. Uncle Tom’s death becomes a worthy sacrifice that changes the hearts and minds of the young Mr. Shelby and his tormentors. As a contrast to the maternally masculine Uncle Tom, the civically masculine George Harris is not lauded a hero. The Harris family’s exit is neither narrated nor valorized. His first migration is to Canada rather than the free states of the North, and the removal to Liberia is unceremoniously delivered to the reader by letter.

I feel somewhat at a loss, as to my future course. True, as you have said to me, I might mingle in the circles of the whites, in this country, my shade of color is so slight, and that of my wife
...and family scarce perceptible. Well, perhaps, on sufferance, I might. But, to the you the truth, I have no wish to. (365)

George’s removal is forfeit “at a loss,” and he declines the privileges bequeathed him by the patriotic ancestry he articulated earlier in the text. He furthers this denunciation by declaring later in the letter that he has “no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them” (365). Stowe completely removes the claims of American ancestry. Like the concept of racial passing, the notion of “pass[ing] for American” suggests that the assumption of the latter role is not a natural condition. One who passes for white is not white, and one who passes for American is not American. Even if he would stay in America, the greatest he could do would be to “pass” as American not become one. The artifice and performance of American identity is the only option for the civic manhood.

Indeed, the language of George’s exit is mired in gendered notions. His “sympathies are not for my father’s race, but for my mother” (365). Though his civic maturation is tied to his paternity, Stowe concludes George’s presence with a decision to align himself with his mother. Like Spillers’ notion of the maternal imprint, Stowe writes the mother’s presence in this final decision. Immediately following this statement, George’s trials are placed amid those of the female characters. He thinks of his “early sufferings” alongside “all [my mother] suffered…and of the distresses and struggles of my heroic wife, of my sister sold in the New Orleans slave-market” (365). This sentence places Eliza on the same plane as Uncle Tom, the only other character described as heroic in the novel, but such equality is not without complications. Eliza is later described as “eloquent preacher of the Gospel ever by my side, in the person of my beautiful wife. When I wander, her gentler spirit restores me, and keeps before my eyes the Christian calling and mission of our race” (367). Here, Eliza is again silent and occluded by the failure to mention her
by name. She is only described in terms of her benevolent function which she was unable to do while a slave in the States. His violent and impatient tendencies were not influenced by her “gentler spirit,” but as his recognized wife, she inherits that subordinate position. She is not included in the work and labor of civilization, and she is not expected to be of service in that capacity. As the narrator notes following the close of the letter, “If we are not mistaken, the world will hear from him there” (367). She may be present in Liberia. She may be the “eloquent,” “beautiful,” “gentler” person at his side, but the reader will not hear from “them” or “her.” Only George will be heard from the Liberian nation.

Gender bias becomes more explicit in the decision where to emigrate. George is not relocated to “Hayti.” Haiti won its independence from France almost fifty years prior to the publication of the novel, and though that location would seem ideal for black, civic manhood, it is dismissed because “the race that formed the character of the Haytiens was a worn-out effeminate one” (365). George’s manhood can neither exist in the racialized manhood of the United States but is too superior to exist in the “effeminate” context of a former colony of the French. The demands of the patrician manhood achieved in the declaration to his trackers prevent his inclusion in the leadership of an effeminate environment or claiming citizenship among “the subject race” who “will be centuries in rising to anything” (365). The civic manhood must though have a project and a nation, so he is marked as a founding father for Liberia. The language of patriotic revolution does not go to waste. Liberia is the republic superior to America and Haiti because it is a “republic of picked men, who, by energy and self-education force, have, in many cases, individually raised themselves above the condition of slavery” (365). Later, Liberia is described as a “field of work” where “I expect to work with both hands, —to work hard” (367). George follows in the footsteps of his
namesake, George Washington. The inheritance of civic responsibility forces a patriarchal model that seems inescapable. Though he disavowed the laws that limited his freedom earlier in the text, nation-building remains a masculine activity. The cycle continues.

Through all of the gender politics embedded in the text, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* comes to a problematic close on the subject of black manhood and women’s equality. The maternal manhood depicted by Uncle Tom does not off-set the realities of a patriarchal citizenship. His character offers the reader and glimpse at non-normative masculinity that destabilizes the gender binary. Enveloped in Uncle Tom is a progressive masculinity that privileges maternal, feminine sensibilities within claims to black citizenship. His death is poignant because maternal manhood allows him to combine both modes of persuasion without compromising Stowe’s gendered position. The necessity of his death prevents a completed claim to citizenship. The only model of manhood that successfully access citizenship and patriarchal recognition is George Harris’s civic manhood. He liberates himself and family from slavery, and becomes a founding father in Liberia. By removing him to Liberia, Stowe undercuts African American claims to masculine claims to citizenship. His removal is not victorious, and it forecloses a civic space for black manhood in America.

These options were untenable for any black male who sought to achieve active citizenship within the borders of his own country. Uncle Tom’s Cabin suggested that sacrificial subservience or removal were the only ways to exact civic force on the American patriarchal political system. To assert a construction of civic black manhood, black spokesmen contended with the extreme positions of Stowe’s widely circulated novel. Engaged in this conversation was Frederick Douglass, a prominent author and orator during the latter half of the nineteenth century. A careful
analysis of his three antebellum narratives exposes the nuances of an African American masculinity negotiating the limitations of the American framework and the gender constraints of slavery.
The anti-slavery debate, as situated in the previous chapter, created a complex climate for black male self-definition. Slavery’ proponents and opponents deployed webs of narrative, science, and religion to substantiate their claims, but by the 1840s, they needed a different type of evidence: black voices. In his article, “De Genewine Artekil,” Paul Gilmore claims there was widespread demand for black bodies was gender-specific: “What these sites [slave markets, theaters, and antislavery platforms] had in common was a focus on the black male body in slavery, on its status as a valuable economic article” (40). The desire to see male bodies as “laborers,” “performers,” and “lecturers” was not an effort to explore black humanity, because enslaved males remained an “economic article” or public objects to be screened, validated, and witnessed by white audiences.

Because the language of the issue of manhood was becoming central to the slavery debate, articulating black manhood became an urgent necessity. As R.J. Young explains, “the ‘power of the word manhood…touched African American consciousness in a way that linked natural rights’ language of the American revolution on the one hand with gender-specific appeal to men’s sense of potency which slavery and America sought to deny” (59). The word became its own form of argument by which black male anti-slavery advocates could simultaneously claim freedom, citizenship, selfhood, and humanity. Black spokesmen used this language to craft a public, black masculine identity. Because of Douglass’s notoriety, this chapter will analyze the formulation of black manhood as articulated in his three antebellum narratives: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, The Heroic Slave,* and *My Bondage and My Freedom.* The project of
this chapter, then, is to read and ascertain the nature and development of that masculinity in his
tree antebellum narrative works.

Feminist criticism often focuses on Douglass’s portrayal of women in his narratives and the
seeming appropriation of white patriarchy. In Richard Yarbrough’s words, Douglass was “unable
or unwilling to call into question the white bourgeois paradigm” (182). For many critics,
Douglass’s acceptance of that paradigm dismissed of women. As Jenny Franchot notes, Douglass
becomes “ironically entangled” with “a dubious defense of the very paternalist myth whose
fraudulence he had exposed” (153). Recently, critics have moved to “reclaim” him as a what
Gary Lemons calls a “womanist forefather” (xv). As Kimberly Drake argues in “Rewriting the
American Self: Race, Gender, and Identity in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and
Harriet Jacobs,” for black male authors, “successful” escape by the formerly enslaved required
that they make “attempts to build identities by acquiring literacy and entering patriarchal
society” and “foreground self-sufficiency and dependence” within “male-centered models of
development” (94). To describe Douglass’s process as one that “foregrounds” a masculinist
reality rather than a process that dismisses women’s struggles marks an important turn in the
scholarship. It allows the complexity of Douglass’s pro-suffrage statements to coincide with the
masculinist realities of his texts. However, interpretations of Douglass still neglect Douglass’s
treatment of his own masculinity and the masculinity of his enslaved brethren.

Douglass’s self-construction requires an expanded lens. In Jacqueline Bacon’s 2002, The
Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition, she constructs the category
of “marginalized rhetors” and offers a new way of understanding their writing. Using Bacon’s
framework, one can read Douglass as “draw[ing] on the assumptions of the dominant group” in
order to “recast racist assumptions” and “actively assume agency” as a means to address other black men (54). In this framework, Douglass is not parodying or mimicking white patriarchy; he is crafting a distinctly Black masculinity. Douglass moves outside of his position as public rhetor to assume the role of narrator, a perspective the “provides a model in which narration is particularly a potent form of argument—a model whose force depends upon white audiences but upon rhetorical traditions of African Americans” (Bacon 63).

Acknowledging a black male audience for Douglass’s work does not ignore his white audience. As Gabriel P. Foreman suggests, Douglass is “acutely aware that white men are the only reader-citizens imbued as legal witnesses; they are his only politically embodied readers; the only ones, that is, with a ‘vote’” (151). Douglass’s own words, “nothing could be done in the case, unless some white would come forward and testify…If I had been killed in the presence of a thousand colored people, their testimony combined would have been insufficient to have arrested one of the murderers” (Narrative 97). To affect change, Douglass knows he needs to appeal to the white male population, because all “colored people”—free or enslaved—were excluded from the civic process and rendered “insufficient” to the task of emancipation.

Towards this end, Douglass balances of black male self-construction and white masculine persuasion by crafting a hybrid narrative process maintains the persuasive methods of the sentimental abolition’s maternal manhood while adopting the masculine resolve of the revolutionaries. Aptly summarized by Gabriel Foreman, Douglass “pairs the patriarchal and political power of the gaze with what both contemporary critical discourse and slave narrative discourse cast the feminized vulnerability and penetrability of the ear” as a means of persuading his white reader (151). Douglass occupies the patriarchal gaze by actively narrating his decision
concerning to what and whom the reader’s attention will be drawn. This is especially noticeable in regards to female characters. The feminized vulnerability of the ear concerns the use of dialogue and rhetoric. From the patriarchal position, Douglass shapes the penetrates the heart and mind of the listener. The ear is the gateway to that sensibility. His position is one of feminine supplication rather than authoritative argumentation. The narratives are tools both of self-definition for black males and persuasion of white ones.

Before analyzing the construction of black masculinity within the body of the narratives, it is necessary to analyze the additional restrictions placed on the narratives by the documents that preface them. Termed “authentication documents” by Robert Stepto, these documents have a special significance to the narrative that followed, because, though the documents “may not always be smoothly integrated into the former slave’s tale,” “they are nevertheless parts of the narrative” (Stepto 3). These documents written by white men make apparent the limiting effects of the racial and gendered dynamic in the anti-slavery movement. According to John Sekora, the documents reveals that “[n]ot black storytelling but white authentication made for usable narratives” (497). Introductory paratexts to Narrative praise Douglass for his “strict justice” to the horrors of “slavery as it is,” and Sekora claims that it is just that emphasis on fact and “strict justice” that decenters the African American subject (Garrison 14, 8; Sekora 497). This creates what William J. Moses terms the narrative “prison house in which the narrator describes himself both as actor and as object but always in terms of the social situation to which his identity is subordinated” (70). For Douglass, the situation that imprisons him is gendered and raced. The standard of the privileged, white masculine voice of the paratexts demands recognition and response if Douglass is to assert an equal manhood.
The gendered component of Douglass’s liberation is found within discussions of Douglass’s style and circumstances. Garrison offers an extended connection to manhood and citizenship when he writes, that in Narrative “the indestructible equality of man to man is demonstrated by the ease with which men, scarce one remove from barbarism—if slavery can be honored with such a distinction—vault into the high places of the most advanced and painfully acquired civilization” (10). The tension between the “ease” with which Douglass “vaults” and the “painfully acquired civilization” to which he vaults devalues Douglass’s rise to prominence. It implies that while Garrison is willing to concede the “equality of man to man,” the assurance of an equally civilized manhood is not stated. In fact, the majority of blacks remain “scarce one remove from barbarism” (10). Douglass is framed by these extremes, and Douglass’s manhood is continually enforced in the preface.

Garrison presents the text as a project for men: “fortunate for the multitudes, in various parts of the republic, whose minds he has enlightened on the subject of slavery, and who have been melted to tears by his pathos, or roused to virtuous indignation by his stirring eloquence against the enslavers of men! —fortunate for himself, as it at once brought him into the field of public usefulness, ‘gave the world assurance of a MAN’” (4). Here, Garrison draws the eye to the gendered nature of this exchange by placing “men” near both the exclamation mark and the dash then capitalizing each letter in “man” at the end of the sentence. This gendered language is compounded by the source of the closing line. The quotation from Shakespeare’s Hamlet links Douglass’s text to a legacy of revered white, male authors and imparts a decidedly male readership and ethic to this piece. This emphasis on the assurance of the masculine endeavor almost overpowers the sentimental method of persuasion that precedes it. Men are not
“enlightened” by reasons or facts; they are “melted to tears by his pathos or roused to virtuous indignation by his stirring eloquence.” Douglass’s words operate as an emotional current that ripples through the hearts of his audience. He penetrates their consciences and “melts” them.

His writing style is also described in relation to gendered expression. In Garrison’s preface to *Narrative*, he compares Douglass’s address to Patrick Henry’s address at St. John’s Church March 1775 where he declared “I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!” (*Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*). Whether the reader intends to read the text as evidence of the black male slave’s ability to achieve this manhood, Garrison places it at the forefront of the mind. Douglass uses his narrative to combat the feminized and limiting manhood framed by Garrison. He destabilizes the assumed subordinate relationship to white men and establishes a black manhood that is both civically effective and equal. The vulnerability of this position is that severing the subordinate relationship risks the alienation of the only voting population. The task then was to upset the racial hierarchy without foreclosing white male support.

Douglass begins this process from the earliest moments of the autobiography. The relationship between white and black men is represented as unstable because the humanity of white men is suppressed beneath racist demands. Concerning slaveholders, Douglass states, “Bad as all slaveholders are, we seldom see one destitute of every element of character demanding respect,” and endeavors to establish that in his descriptions of them (*Narrative* 62). The description of slaveholders and their mulatto offspring offers the first insight into the brutal humanity:
the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father…The master is frequently compelled to sell of this class of slaves, out of deference to the feelings of his white wife; and cruel as the deed may strike any one to be, for a man to sell his own children to human flesh-mongers, it is often the dictate of humanity for him to do so; for unless he does this, he must not only whip them himself, but must stand by and see one white son tie up his brother, of but few shades darker complexion than himself, and ply the gory lash to his naked back, and if he lisp one word of disapproval, it is set down to his parental partiality, and only makes the matters worse, both for himself and the slave whom he would protect and defend. (19-20)

Here, the description of the slave owner and father of mulatto slaves is explained in “all its glaring odiousness,” and though the relationship remains so, Douglass depicts the slaveholder’s position as one of conflicted humanity that may work to the relative benefit of the slave. The slave owner in this description is not devoid of feeling. He is a victim of competing sympathies: the “white wife,” his own “parental partiality,” his “white son,” and his enslaved son “only a few shades darker complexion” than his white brother. It is under such distress that he is “compelled” to sell his slave/son, so “cruel as the deed may be.” He acknowledges the error and violence of the decision to sale the child, but weighs it against the vindictive violence sure to occur if the master/father intervenes. Douglass frames it as “the dictate of humanity” despite the clearly racialized situation. There is racial privilege in the ability claim these familial relationships.

There remains in this explication the possibility of humanity and defense, and it is that possibility that Douglass continues to examine in his failed appeals to Master Thomas Auld and Master Hughes.

Twice Douglass appeals to his masters because of ill-treatment, and twice succor is denied. In these cases, the loss of wealth hinders the white man’s ability to aid. Douglass reflects on his interaction with Thomas Auld after the Covey beats him: “I appeared before my master, humbly entreating him to interpose his authority for my protection. I told him all the circumstances as
well as I could, and it seemed, as I spoke, at times to affect him” (75). The combination of Douglass’s wounds and manner “seemed” to move Auld. The text offers hope of intervention then removes. The text signals Auld’s distance from the Douglass’s cause by setting Auld in motion. As he “walk[s] the floor” away from Douglass, he justifies Covey’s actions because of the financial benefit: “Master Thomas ridiculed the idea that there was any danger of Covey’s killing me…that he could not think of taking me from him, that should he do so, he would lose the whole year’s wages” (75). The climactic argument for Douglass’s return to Covey’s farm is that of lost wages. The monetary compensation is the primary concern. There is an incentive to dismiss Douglass’s abuse and enforce Covey’s dominance.

Circumstances are similar in Douglass’s later appeal to Master Hugh. Douglass describes the conversation between he and Master Hugh after white shipyard apprentices attacked him. The account proceeds as follows:

I went directly home, and told the story of my wrongs to Master Hugh; and I am happy to say of him, irreligious as he was, his conduct was heavenly, compared to that of his brother Thomas under similar circumstances. He listened attentively to my narration of the circumstances leading to the savage outrage, and gave many proofs of his strong indignation at it…Master Hughes is very much enraged. He gave expression to his feelings by pouring out curses upon the heads of those who did the deed. (96)

In this scene, Master Hugh is distinguished from Master Auld by the “expression” of the humanity that only “seemed” to be present in the earlier appeal for protection. Unlike Master Auld, he “listened attentively” to Douglass, leaving little doubt of his awareness or validation of the injustice of Douglass’s condition. His “heavenly” response is filled with actively aggressive language: “savage outrage,” “indignation, and “pouring out curses.” The anger does not move Master Hugh away from Douglass as it does Master Auld. It precipitates a movement with Douglass toward justice. He speaks with a lawyer on Douglass’s behalf but is told by Mr.
Watson that “nothing could be done in the case, unless some white man would come forward and testify” (97). Douglass acknowledges Master Hugh’s willingness to intervene, without communal participation, the attempt is futile.

Additionally, accepting the injustice protects Master Hugh from “frightful liabilities” continues the flow of financial rewards: “He took me into the ship-yard of which he was foreman…In the course of one year from the time I left Mr. Gardiner’s, I was able to command the highest wages given to the most experienced calkers. I was now of some importance to my master. I was bringing him from six to seven dollars a week” (97). Like in the previous appeal, expression of humanity by white males competes with economic gain, and once again, economic gain supersedes the desire to aid Douglass.

Balancing the negative outcomes of interracial fraternity, Narrative offers examples of white males who come to black males’ aid. The text offers the Baltimore “urchins,” and Mr. Cookman as examples of white men whose humanity disregards the monetary incentives of slavery. The reader is briefly introduced to Cookman during Douglass’s exposition on religion in slavery. The text describes Cookman as a man “slaves loved” because “[w]e believed him to be a good man…instrumental in getting Mr. Samuel Harrison, a very rich slaveholder to emancipate his slaves; and by some means got the impression that he was laboring to effect the emancipation of all slaves” (64). Mr. Cookman represents the white male who could be an ally to the black male slave. Regardless of slave owners’ patronage, Mr. Cookman is believed to have facilitated the emancipation of Mr. Harrison’s slaves (64). He, like the slaves, is dependent upon his ability to persuade the white male superiors, though his inferiority is a matter of class not race. His alliance is an emotional boon but does little for the prolonged condition of the slaves.
The poor “urchins” of Baltimore are the second example of interracial solidarity (50). Like Mr. Cookman, these young boys are disenfranchised by American classism. The poverty of the boys makes them susceptible to Douglass’s entreaty to teach him to read. “[B]etter off” than these boys, Douglass offered them bread in exchange for “that more valuable bread of knowledge” (50). Douglass incentivizes their participation before enlisting their sympathy: “I used to talk the matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men…they would express the liveliest sympathy, and console me the hope that something would occur by which I might be free” (50).

Douglass attempts to craft a type of affinity between he and the boys by paralleling their servile conditions. Their freedom is in their “would be” adulthood. The prospect of future freedom granted these impoverished boys is withheld from Douglass, and though he can claim a type of fraternity with them—and does identify them as his “strongest attachment” in Baltimore—they too are unable to act in his favor. His education in writing follows as similar pattern though shifting from trading bread, the site of exchange is now on of masculine competition: “After that, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he” (53). The consciously patriarchal gaze is combined with the supplicatory rhetoric that allows this to supplant the purely patriarchal hierarchy from which his race excludes him. Douglass carefully lays out the possibility and hope of an interracial congeniality that will lead to the emancipation of his people, but at each turn, that hope is eclipsed.

The promising replacement is an African American brotherhood based on a belief in reasonable violence. Because the humanity of white males is so easily eclipsed in the struggle for capital and wealth, black manhood has a duty to resist—violently if necessary. The notion of
reasonable violence rests on the initial use of verbal means of persuasion with knowledge that violence and death may be necessary if words are ignored. Demby’s murder initiates the reader into that logic. Douglass reports that Demby was called by Mr. Gore three times, and after Demby “made no response,” “Mr. Gore then, without consultation or deliberation with anyone, not even giving Demby an additional call, raised his musket to his face taking deadly aim at his standing victim, and in an instant poor Demby was no more. His mangled body sank out of sight, and blood and brains marked the water where he had stood” (36). Demby does not respond violently or verbally. Demby’s refusal to resubmit his body to such domination is a mark of Douglass’s black manhood, because it attempts nonviolence with the awareness that death is a possibility. Resistance is not without cost.

Douglass emphasizes the importance of the intra-racial, homosocial bond at Mr. Freeland’s farm. Mr. Freeland’s farm stages a scene of comradery among a group of male slaves. Characters Henry Harris, John Harris, Sandy Jenkins, and Handy Caldwell were “noble souls” to whom he was “somewhat indebted”:

they not only possessed loving hearts, but brave ones. We were linked and interlinked with each other. I loved them with a love stronger than any thing I have experienced since…I can say, I never loved any or confided in any people more than my fellow-slaves, and especially those with whom I lived at Mr. Freeland’s. I believe we would have died for each other. We never undertook to do any thing, of any importance, without a mutual consultation. We never moved separately. We were one; an as much so by our tempers and dispositions, as by the mutual hardships to which we were necessarily subjected by our condition as slaves. (85-86)
The extreme conditions of their lives as slaves bred in them a fierce comradery. Like soldiers at war, they move as one unit with a single goal toward freedom. The adjectives “brave” with a willingness to “have died for each other” invoke the composition of a troops within a combat zone. They are “linked and interlinked,” “one,” in a type of symbiotic survival pact. The bond is
so strong that when their plot to escape was discovered, Douglass writes “we cared but little where we went, so long as we went together. Our greatest concern was about separation,” and their subsequent separation “caused me more pain than anything else in the whole transaction. I was ready for anything rather than separation” (92, 93). Considering the limited time spent in Narrative to the explication of his relationship to Anna, his wife, and the early dismissal of a maternal relation, these relationships take up considerable space. No other relationships are given this extended explanation and description. The primacy of these homosocial bonds forms the foundation for his first planned escape from slavery and is the subject of his later lament that they may remain in slavery long after his has attained freedom. It is important to note that it is this environment that Douglass first plans an escape to freedom. It is in this context that he and the men enter the civic discourse: “In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death” (88). As a fraternity of revolutionaries, they surpass the standard of American spirit established in the preface. They “did more” than the founding fathers. With this reference to the revolution, Douglass claims and validates the language that Stowe dismissed. He does not, like Stowe’s George Harris, disavow the laws; he exceeds them and gives himself a firmer claim to the abundance of American democracy. This is the environment necessary for the young man to consider and plan a physical escape to the North.

Henry Harris, a slave with Douglass on Mr. Freeland’s farm, resists being tied and taken to prison after their plan to escape is discovered. His refusal is both physical and verbal.

Then they turned to Henry, who had by this time retuned, and commanded him to cross his hands. “I won’t!” said Henry, in a firm tone, indicating his readiness to meet the consequences of his refusal. “Won’t you?” said Tom Graham, the constable. “No, I won’t!”
said Henry, in a still stronger tone. With this, two of the constables pulled out their shining pistols, and swore by their Creator, that they would make him cross his hands or kill him. Each cocked his pistol, and, with fingers on the trigger, walked up to Henry, saying, at the same time, if he did not cross his hands they would blow his damned heart out. “Shoot me, shoot me!” said Henry; “you can’t kill me but once. Shoot, shoot, --and be damned! I won’t be tied!” This he said in a tone of loud defiance; and at the same time, with a motion as quick as lightning, he with one single stroke dashed the pistols from the hand of each constable. As he did this, all hands fell upon him, and after beating him some time, they finally overpowered him. (91)

Henry first refuses verbally, and it carries with it the willingness to be violent. His demeanor is “firm,” “indicating his readiness to meet the consequences of his refusal.” Henry’s resolve is evident despite the pressing threat of death. Constable’s pistols cocked, loaded, and aimed at Henry. He orders the constables “shoot” four times with the understanding that “you can’t kill me but once.” It is this death-defying resolve that spurs the black male toward violent, physical resistance. The command is made in a “tone of loud defiance” while simultaneously “with one single stroke dash[ing] the pistols from the hand of each constable.” Though the resistance does not end as momentously as Douglass’s encounter with Covey, it nevertheless exemplifies the necessary resistance of a politically recognized black manhood.

Unlike Stowe’s construction of violence as the inevitable result of slavery’s depravity, Douglass violence is the based on literacy. What makes his violence reasonable is an introduction to knowledge and education. Literacy is his “pathway from slavery to freedom” and the attainment of knowledge precedes targeted violence (45). Part of each stage of maturation and growth into manhood is mitigated by his increasing comprehension of the written word. Prior to this exploration of reading and writing he existence bears little image of gender: he is part of a group of “Children from seven to ten years old, of both sexes, almost naked, might be seen at all season of the year” all whose “clothing consisted of two course linen shirts per year”
(24-25). Any item of clothing that would signal gender difference is not present. Douglass receives trousers when preparing to reach Baltimore, the place where he first learns to read (40). Mistress Auld introduces Douglass to reading until Master Auld’s dictum that the tutelage end (45).

This connection between manhood, active resistance, and literacy continues when he defers escape until he learns to write (53). With the skill of literacy comes an increasing awareness in the nature of patriarchal manhood and an ability to wield it to his advantage. Even his first attempt to escape is mediated by his ability to write and the link between the male slaves on Mr. Freeland’s farm and their ability to read. The Sabbath school “had at one time over forty scholars” including the comrades of Mr. Freeland’s farm. Alongside this conversation of knowledge procurement is Douglass’s own assessment that “I was fast approaching manhood” and “I talked to them of our want of manhood” (86).

Douglass’s violent exchange with the slave-breaker Mr. Covey marks Douglass’s transition to reasonable violence. It is in the scene when he “resolved to fight” that Douglass declares to the reader “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man” (73). According to Elizabeth Barnes, violence “allow[ed] slaves the opportunity of identifying with forms of power that make and unmake men” (100). Violence, along these terms is not simply an assertion of masculine bravado; it is part of the hybrid rhetoric. The violence is a battle for the “power to ‘master’ the terms of empathy” and to “enable feelings of compassion” (89). This return to manhood exemplified by his willingness to resist Covey is validated by Bill’s refusal to assist Covey in restraining Douglass. His verbal resistance substantiates Douglass’s physical one. Reportedly, Bill refuses to help on the grounds that “his master hired him out to
work, and not to help to whip [Douglass]” (78). Bill reverses the charge of capitalism to support is refusal to participate in subduing Douglass. His master’s monetary value is in Bill’s work not into assisting Covey to restrain Douglass. Douglass’s resistance spurs Bill towards a resistance of his own. The fact that these resistances occupy the same pivotal scene as Douglass’s own rebellion dissuades a reading that privilege a physical resistance over a verbal one. Both forms are repeatedly valorized within the text.

Douglass continues to violently resist with the white apprentices in the shipyard. The interaction is described by Douglass as follows: “I, of course, kept the vow I made after the fight with Mr. Covey, and struck back again, regardless of consequences; and while I kept them from combining, I succeeded very well; for I could whip the whole of them, taking them separately” (95). The immediate move to violence, signaled by the “of course” at the opening, reflects a learned behavior for Douglass. Deciding that verbal reasoning and avoidance are not sufficient to the reclamation of manhood in slavery, Douglass decides to act “regardless of the consequences” and recognizes the real threat to his actions. Like, Henry Harris, there is an assumed stance that suggests the consequences after fighting does not detract from the manhood gained during the initial scuffle. According to the text, the beating he receives when “they all ran upon me, and fell to beating me with their fists” leaving him with a “puffed-out eye and blood-covered face” did not dissuade him from contemplating that course of action again later in the text (96). The final intimation of violence catapults Douglass into his successful escape from slavery.

Master Hugh’s angry response to Douglass’s delayed wages sparked the final discussion of violence. After learning to write by tricking other laborers into teaching him, he comes to this final exchange with his master. Master Hugh “could scarce contain his wrath” and they “were
upon the point of coming to blows. He raved, and swore his determination to get hold of me. I
did not allow myself a single word, but was resolved, if he laid the weight of his hand upon me,
it should be blow for blow” (103). In this iteration of resistance, it manifests as silent refusal with
Douglass “not allow[ing] myself a single word,” but the text grants us access to the state of
mind: stalwart resolve toward violence if verbal arguments are not heeded and acknowledged.

After Narrative’s success, Douglass had garnered a broader stage from which to theorize a
black, civic manhood. Published the year after Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, The Heroic Slave
purports as a biography of Madison Washington, a man known for his role in the slave ship
revolt aboard the Creole in 1841. Because Madison Washington is not a public figure, the story
of his life is a unique opportunity. He is not bound to the same strictures of “fact” because so
little is known beyond Washington’s birthplace and the revolt. In addition to this distance from
fact and the absence of the physical person, the necessity of fiction had already taken root. The
narrative is only relayed by the retelling printed in the newspapers⁶. Also, other abolitionist
authors had also crafted narratives⁷. In this way Douglass has license to craft a manhood without
sacrificing the cultural currency of a living figure. To craft such an argument from pure fiction
would have left Douglass open to claims of sentimental extremism and falsehood.

While the main character’s name has obvious resonances with the first and fourth presidents
of the United States, George Washington and James Madison, the claim to a patrilineal civic
heritage goes much further. The narrative takes great pains to situate Washington among this

⁶ A few prominent titles included “Another Amistad Case—What Will Grow Out Of It?,” “The Creole Mutiny,” and
“Protest of the Officers and Crew of the American Creole.”
Dash for Liberty” are prominent examples that tell varying narratives.
legacy. The feminized state of Virginia is named the “birth-place” of “the multitudinous array of her statesmen and heroes” (3). The speaker laments that one of “the truest, manliest, and bravest of [Virginia’s] children” has not been recognized alongside Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and the namesake “who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence” (4). As if to prevent confusion over having two courageous, freedom-loving Washingtons in the narrative, the narrator references George Washington by his deeds not by his name. Madison Washington is not merely to be among the patriotic fathers, but his courage is so great that it carries the ability to eclipse the first president of the United States. The connection to the founding fathers is not established through a mulatto designation or bloodline, but through connection to the land.

Virginia is addressed as a “her” throughout the page. The land serves as a common mother that supports a more stable relationship between white and black men. Civic recognition is a birthright connected to birth place. The maternal rather than paternal inheritance of this passage asserts a type of primacy to the slave condition that is also inherited through the maternal condition. This immediately gives legitimacy to the millions of slaves who could not claim white parentage or traceable heritage. On a national scale, this removes the patriarchal necessity of paternity. Absent fathers and brokered children could not usurp this civic claim. As Richard Yarborough argues, The Heroic Slave “ambitiously set out to do more than demonstrate the slave’s determination to be free; he sought to transform his black male protagonist into a heroic exemplar who would both win white converts to the antislavery struggle and firmly establish the reality of black manhood” (179).
Land-based nationalism allows Douglass to construct a more stable interracial fraternity without the racial hierarchy. Listwell becomes the primary target of all rhetoric and the effective tool of liberation. In fact, the first human staging is Listwell’s experience of Washington’s soliloquy:

How mean a thing am I. That accursed and crawling snake, that miserable reptile, that has just glided into its slimy home is freer and better off than I. He escaped my blow, and it is safe. But her am I, a man, --yes, a man! —with thoughts and wishes, with powers and faculties as far as angel’s flight above that hated reptile, —yet he is my superior, and scorns to own me as his master, or to stop to take my blows. (5-6)
The passage above places the black male slave within a hierarchy of privilege and dominance. The male snake is in a superior position, because unlike Washington, it “scorns to own me [Madison Washington] as its master.” Despite this, Listwell declares “Here is indeed a man” and “From this hour I am an abolitionist. I have seen enough and heard enough, and I shall go to my nom in Ohio resolved to atone for my past indifference to this ill-starred race, by make in such exertions as I shall be able to do, for the speedy emancipation of every slave in the land” (7).

Persuading the white male subject that holds the possibility for the “speedy emancipation” of the slave. The isolated nature of this staged persuasion positions Listwell as the only listener. He alone is capable of bringing Washington’s liberty into fruition.

Washington’s liberty is dependent upon this relationship. After witnessing Washington’s soliloquy, Listwell facilitates Washington’s escape twice, and each escape begins with the submission of Listwell’s listening ears to Washington’s compelling narratives. The initial escape follows a fire-side conversation where Washington is “instantly” told to “be seated, —be seated, —banish all fear,” and it is here that Washington’s narrative unfolds (11). The setting, next to the fire, evokes the nineteenth century preoccupation with the bachelor’s fireside reverie fraught
with the bemoaning of his bachelorhood and a yearning for a satisfying domestic, sexual relationship. Instead of centering conversion on the moral sensitivities of a mother or daughter, the fraternal bond between Mr. Listwell and Washington fosters the liberation narrative and produces in a “domestic rhetoric” and “erotically fraternal” framework (Foreman 150).

Douglass’s portrayal of Madison Washington not only excludes Mrs. Listwell, it replaces her with Washington. Washington serves as the moral guide to Mr. Listwell as he illuminates the horrors of slavery. The second escape follows a similar pattern: an immediate recognition, a Listwell-Washington conversation, and Listwell’s aid. Importantly, the emphasis on the erotically fraternal does not merely displace the female voice, it privileges the fraternal to the exclusion of women—both white and black.

As in *Narrative*, Douglass balances the unpredictability of interracial bonds, but in *The Heroic Slave*, his approach is more targeted. In contrast to Listwell’s usefulness, the text attributes popular views of black men to degenerate pro-slavery white men. By doing so, Douglass suggests that pro-slavery individuals are in fact guilty of the behaviors they heap upon black males and depicted slavery supporters as ignorant, uncivil, and aimless. The men, “loafers, some of them completely rum-ripe, and others ripening,” stand in front of a house, “a gloomy mantle of ruin” reminiscent “of a human skull, after the flesh has mingled with the earth” (27-28). In this description, slavery supporters are described as slaves often were, and they are placed next to the dilapidated house. The proximity implies that the inactivity of the characters is the cause of the “ruin” of the house just as the inactivity of white slavery supporters contribute to the ruin of the nation. Even in their “ripening” state, “Loafer” exposes the inconsistencies of slavery: “I allos like to hear a gentleman talk for his horse; and just because the horse can’t talk for
itself. A man that don’t care about his beast, and don’t look after it when he’s travelling, aint much in my eye anyhow” (29). The same speaker that emphasizes the responsibility of owners to their horses, informs Listwell of “the greatest sale of niggers” (29, 30). The loafers argue for humane treatment of animals yet celebrate the inhumane treatment of human beings. The complexities and inconsistencies of a stance that would protect livestock over the “brave and true man” are laid bare before the reader (41).

Violence is still integral to the assertion of manhood in *The Heroic Slave* as it is in *Narrative*. Douglass is careful to frame Washington’s revolt and as reasoned and limited. The story of the slave revolt is mediated through a white shipmate on the Creole. Even after experiencing the violence of the revolt, his assessment of Washington is as “powerful, good-disposed negro” (47). Douglass ensures that Washington’s body and representation remain unscathed in this narrative. In Douglass’s rendition, Washington clearly articulates violence as last option. “I could’ve killed you a dozen times over during the last half hour,” Washington reasons (48). The dialogue continues: “I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not *malice*, is the motive for this night’s work” (48). Douglass repeats the logic in the way he writes Washington’s later address to this same sailor, “Now I have saved your life twice within these last twenty minutes,—for, when you lay helpless on deck, my men were about to kill you. I held them in check. And if you now (seeing I am your friend not your enemy) persist in your resistance to my authority, I give you fair warning YOU SHALL DIE” (49). There is none of the savage, unrestrained violence that so many feared. Douglass makes it clear that violence is a reasonable and controllable necessity in the search for freedom. Washington only threatens to kill those who impede the course of liberty. The others remain unharmed.
Since the novella allowed Douglass to construct his own narrative of black masculine construction, the second autobiographical narrative required the same type of expansion though the restriction of the paratexts would remain largely the same. The expanded nature of black manhood that Douglass depicts in the narrative of Washington is works into the expansion of his own narrative in My Bondage and My Freedom. While the nature and “facts” of slavery remain largely the same as the details in Narrative, the constraints and relations of black bodies, particularly black male bodies, in the texts becomes markedly different. My Bondage intensifies his own masculinity and the masculinity of his enslaved brethren.

Many of the constraints present in Garrison’s preface to Narrative resurface in Smith’s introduction to My Bondage and My Freedom. He substantiates Douglass’s credibility by describing him as “a Representative American man—a type of his countrymen” (10). Douglass is situated as the consummate man—last and highest—manhood” (10). This manhood is so rooted in the revolutionary genealogy that “revolution seemed to follow in his wake” for his words were “work-able, do-able words, that brought forth fruit in the revolution in Illinois” (10). Similar to Garrison, Smith tempers the praise with restrictive language. The reader is assured that “his attention is not invited to a work of ART, but to a work of FACTS” (6). While these sentiments offer Douglass’s narrative a measure of validation, they express the prejudice of the movement which Douglass dutifully illuminates within the body of the narrative. According to Douglass, John A. Collins and William Lloyd Garrison instructed him to “give [the audience] the facts” and let them, white male anti-slavery figures, “take care of the philosophy” (296). The distinction of the narrative as fact rather than art is an insult. It is a reminder of Douglass’s relative position to the white spokesman, and the white spokesmen’s control over Douglass’s life and narrative. It is
this white spokesman who decides Douglass’s place within the matrix of anti-slavery theory and arguments—not art, not philosophy—only facts. Here, there is an exchange; if Douglass is to receive their support, he must not exercise his creativity as art or philosophy.

Douglass chafes under these limitations. While he constructs a narrow masculine construction in *Narrative, My Bondage* constructs a broader masculinity parallel to Madison Washington. By his own admission, he “could not always obey” the directive to speak only the facts, “for [he] was reading and thinking” (*My Bondage* 296). Restricting his thoughts to the facts proved “impossible,” because the behavior was “altogether too mechanical for [his] nature” (296). Douglass pushes against the limited manhood by proffering a philosophy of black masculine self-definition in the system of slavery. It is not simply the plot of a life or an interaction between individual men. The system of masculine development is exposed.

While the nature of interracial, fraternal bonds and the call toward active resistance remains the same in *My Bondage and My Freedom* as it does in *Narrative,* Douglass couches the claims differently in this narrative. In the second autobiography, he displaces the emphasis from the individual white characters and their humanity and articulates slavery as a system that must be resisted by white and black men alike. *Narrative* requires the profusion of examples to evidence a philosophy, but *My Bondage* utilizes generalizing statements and emphases on the systemic nature of slavery as the foundation of his theory. By centering the argument on the system rather than the individuals, Douglass actively takes the role of philosopher rather than narrator.

Douglass introduces slavery as a system of abuse after witnessing his master’s refusal to protect his cousin from further abuse. Douglass writes:
Old master seemed furious at the thought of being troubled by such complaints. I did not, at the time, understand the philosophy of his treatment of my cousin. It was stern, unnatural, violent. Had the man no bowels of compassion? Was he dead to all sense of humanity? No. I think I now understand it. This treatment is part of the system, rather than a part of the man. Were slaveholders to listen to complaints of this sort against overseers, the luxury of owning large numbers of slaves, would be impossible. (italics added, 34)

In this passage, Douglass removes the blame from the master onto the system that requires brutality for its maintenance. Whereas Narrative took great pains to illustrate the slaveholder’s internal conflict, My Bondage and my Freedom assigns the slaveholder a full humanity that is corrupted by the system of slavery. Empathy and sympathy are impossible in this context, because the system is nationwide; it extends beyond the plantation.

The violence against him in the ship yard is also the result of slavery’s system that pits the working, white poor against the African American. The “cowardly attack” by white workers in the shipyard is described as being “really against having their labor brought into competition with that of colored people at all” (128-129). Douglass takes great pains to illuminate moments of conflict between humanity and the slave system. By placing the actions within a national system, every citizen has the ability to influence the system.

Overseers also fit into the class tensions that exacerbate the brutally long reach of the slave system. Douglass offers insight to their function and performance in his introduction to Mr. Austin Gore.

I speak of overseers as a class. They are such. They are distinct from the slaveholding gentry of the south... They constitute a separate fraternity at the south... They have been arranged and classified by that great law of attraction, which determines the spheres and affinities of men; which ordains, that men, whose malignant brutal propensities predominate over their moral and intellectual endowments, shall, naturally, fall into those employments which promise the largest gratification to those predominating instincts or propensities. The office of overseer takes this raw material of vulgarity and brutality, and stamps it as a distinct class of southern society. (49)
This “class” of men form tier above the slave and beneath plantation owners. Because of this class includes men of like “affinities,” “propensities,” and “instincts,” the system of slavery successfully groups them into a specific “fraternity” that is impenetrable to those whose nature does not find “the largest gratification in the “vulgarity and brutality.” Such an understanding urges any member of this class to reject the system that frames them as “naturally” cruel. There is no overseer who is free of this “stamp”—Not even Mr. Freeland is exempt, though his name suggests the freedom Douglass craves, because he too has these qualities. He too is bound by the rigid system of labor, class, and racial distinctions. As no white man should be comfortable as an overseer, no black man should be comfortable submitting to one. Black manhood demands resistance to any representative of the slave system.

The scenes of brutality and resistance can now be described as systemic behavior. According to Douglass, “He is whipped oftenest, who is whipped easiest; and that slave who has the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer, although he may have many hard stirpes at the first, becomes, in the end, a freeman, even though he sustains the formal relation of a slave” (39). Violence against the slave and the slave’s resistance to violence are implied as a regular activity. The individual examples are no longer a simple rendering of his life experience; they are a representative sample of a systemic responses. Denby’s death becomes the first example. In Narrative, Douglass introduces Demby’s death is narrated as fact. He uses short declarative sentences: “Mr. Gore undertook to whip one of Colonel Lloyd’s slaves, by the name of Demby” (36). The anecdote continues in this manner. When described in My Bondage, Douglass is sure to assert the hear-say nature of it: “It is said that Gore gave Denby three calls, telling him that if he did not obey the last call, he would shoot him” (50). “It is said” implies Douglass’s absence from
the scene and possibly a deviation from fact in the service of outlining a system of brutality that
includes Denby “number[s] with the dead” (50). This is a system that does not require Douglass
to witness the scene. He knows enough of the system to claim this narrative valid and
representative of the reality of slavery. His acts of resistance, those of Henry Harris, and others
in the text are frequent and necessary.

This necessary and systemic resistance to the slave system is also more clearly linked to
manhood in *My Bondage* than in *Narrative*. After the scene with Covey, Douglass explains the
ramifications of his violent resistance. It had “rekindled in [his] breast the smouldering embers of
liberty” and “revived [his] sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I
was nothing before; I WAS A MAN NOW” (101). His own manhood is so restored by the bout
that Douglass presents his manhood in all capital letters before providing supporting analysis for
his violence and the violence of others: “A man without force, is without the essential dignity of
humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot *honor* a helpless man, although it can
*pity* him; and even this it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise” (10). This scene adds
the final impetus toward physical resistance. Manhood, possessed since birth, is at risk of being
lost. If one cannot respond with force, he is only to be pitied not honored or respected. This
explanation is not present in *Narrative*. Here, Douglass lays out a philosophy of manhood under
slavery.

As in *Narrative*, reasonable violence necessitates the willingness to accept the consequences
of rebellion. Speaking of himself before positing a theory of internal liberation, Douglass writes,
“I was not afraid to die. This spirit made me a freeman in fact, while I remained a slave in form.
When a slave cannot be flogged he is more than half free. He is a domain as broad as his own
manly heart can defend, and he is really ‘a power on earth’” (101). Douglass moves from the
general to the specific in this statement. He places himself alongside Demby and Henry Harris,
black males willing to die for the ability to “be more than half free” and secure a “domain as
broad as his many heart can defend” (10). It becomes a theory of gendered liberation. The heart
set to defend a domain, parallels the war-like language used to describe the homosocial
comradery on Freeland’s farm.

The description of black comradery as a characteristic of manhood is displayed in
considerably more ways in My Bondage and My Freedom. The primacy of these relationships
begins with Douglass’s description of the slave-boy. Despite the claims against his manhood, he
continues in this gendered construction by establishing the “slave-boy’s” life as one that is more
disposed to an authentic masculinity than the slave-owner’s sons:

The slave-boy escapes many troubles which befall and vex his white brother. He is never
chided for handling his little knife or fork improperly or awkwardly, for he uses none. He is
never reprimanded for soiling the tablecloth, for he takes his meals on the clay floor. He never
has the misfortune, in his games or sports, of soiling or tearing his clothes, for he has almost
none to soil or tear. He is never expected to act like a nice little gentleman, for he is only a
rude little slave. Thus, freed from all restraint, the slave-boy can be, in his life and conduct, a
genuine boy, doing whatever his boyish nature suggests…without in any manner
compromising his dignity, or incurring reproach of any sort. (18)

Douglass claims for the slave-boy a “genuine” boyhood superior to the contrived boundaries of
socially constructed boyhood. In this sense, then, young Douglass and the other “black urchins”
reserve for themselves a more authentic masculine inheritance (33). Their experience grants
them that advantage. The uninhibited nature of Douglass’s articulation of boyhood sets up the
idea that quite possibly slave masculinity has within it the potential to embody a genuine
manhood it if were not hampered by the conditions of slavery. It would seem that the rugged,
“rude” manhood of hard labor is sufficient a foundation were it not for slavery. Importantly, the
experience of this boyhood is experienced in a community of boys. The “black urchins” play together suggesting an early space for the foundation of a sense of fraternity independent upon notions of class position or social propriety.

The emphasis on black comradery then extends to methods and paths of resistance. Douglass’s initial Sunday attempt at school and escape already detailed in the Narrative, but Douglass extends the adult reality of that band of brotherhood in My Bondage by including the brotherhood in Baltimore during his second removal there. Douglass is indebted to a second society of men. Theses “colored persons who could instruct me…could read, write and cipher” impressed upon Douglass their “high notions about mental improvement” (131). Douglass writes that he “owe[s] much to the society of these young men because of their exposure to knowledge and the opportunity to see himself as equal to free men of color” (132). It is this society that provides the backdrop to Douglass’s conflict with Master Hugh concerning wages, and it is that conflict that spurs Douglass’s decision to claim his liberty. These circles of men are exceedingly valuable to Douglass, and from them Douglass pursues liberty. As important as intra-racial fraternity is to Douglass’s manhood, the civic nature of the anti-slavery argument can only be attained by crafting a genealogy for the Black man the entitles him to the rights and privileges of citizenship. To do so, Douglass ties his birth to location of his birth and comparing his actions to well-known revolutionaries, a model seen in The Heroic Slave.

Expanding upon his birth in Tuckahoe, My Bondage replaces the patrilineal inheritance with maternal land as the foundation of the black male’s civic genealogy. Crafting inheritance this way replaces the need for father. This is necessary because “[g]enealogical trees do not flourish among slaves. A person of some consequence here in the north, sometimes designated father, is
literally abolished in slave law and slave practice” (15). He writes, “Slavery does away with fathers, as it is does away with families. Slavery has no use for either fathers or families, and its laws do not recognize their existence in the social arrangements of the plantation. When they do exist, they are not the outgrowths of slavery, but are antagonistic to that system” (22). It is the system that refuses to allow him claim to paternity or a line of inheritance. By Douglass’s own admission he should hold no claim to prominence and must set an alternate standard for manhood based on his individual and personal actions. By establishing a lack of paternity, Douglass opens the space for an alternate construction of inheritance. He implores the reader to “pardon so much about the place of my birth, on the score that it is always a fact of some importance to know where a man is born, if, indeed, it be important to know anything about him” (15). The apology for the extended description of his birthplace seems largely irrelevant considering its obscurity. The argument is that the location of a man’s birth indicates possible success. Writing from a position of notoriety, the negligible place of birth increases the awe at his rise to prominence.

In conjunction with the motherland, Douglass claims the patriots as the patrilineal line of civic inheritance. The language regarding Douglass’s escape attempts makes this evident: “In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed. For my part, I should prefer death to hopeless bondage” (88). Douglass re-presents himself as superior to Patrick Henry. Like Henry, Douglass’s statement distinguishes between himself and his comrades with respect to the choice of death or continued “bondage.” He and the others plotting to run to the North “did more than Patrick Henry” because of the high possibility and
consequence of failure. Douglass moves beyond a praise of his oratory skills and uses it as a foundation for action and analogous persuasion. He does not return to this comparison in this text but devotes much of the language in *My Bondage* to this end.

Douglass’s actions are further connected to the revolution through descriptions of his plots to escape. Rebelling against the system of slavery is a necessary art of masculine survival: “If [the slave] steals, he takes his own; if he kills the master, he imitates only the heroes of the revolution” (79). Douglass argues that, when executed against slavery, traditionally amoral behaviors align the slave with the “heroes of the revolution.” When commenting on the planning party to run away from Mr. Freeland, Douglass asserts, “[t]hese meetings must have resembled, on a small scale, the meetings of revolutionary conspirators, in their primary condition” (116). Though it is “on a small scale,” the resemblance between Douglass and the “revolutionary conspirators” is active not stylistic. The emphasis on the “primary condition” implies an original state, that Douglass and his comrades mirror the revolutionaries at the most foundational goals. This distinction suggests a type of purity to the resemblance, purity which Douglass spells out in the continuing passage: “We were plotting against our (so called) lawful ruler; with this difference that we sought our own good, and not the harm of our enemies. We did not seek to overthrow them, but to escape from them…Liberty was our aim; and we hand not come to think that we had a right to liberty, against every obstacle even against the lives of our enslavers” (116). Douglass and his brethren share the cause of liberty with America’s founding fathers, but the purpose and nature of the liberty is worth clarifying to Douglass. In this way, Douglass avoids the disavowal articulated in Stowe’s construction of George Harris. Douglass is able to claim American heritage without claiming the ordinances that oppress him.
Informing the reader that the aim is to “escape” rather than “overthrow” or “harm” the ruling power lays a foundation for a hopeful partnership. There is to be no replacement of “enslavers.” This scene is masculine, and Douglass assures his masculine audience that he is no threat to them unless they plan to impede their escape, for in Douglass’s framework killing an enslaver is permissible if men make of themselves “obstacles” to the cause. By broadening and redefining the language of American revolution, Douglass at once claims a stake in the civic, masculinity of era while writing for himself a different, nuanced manhood.

Expanding the references to revolution does not exclude the genealogical tie to Patrick Henry, but rather than claim a personal heritage in Henry, Douglass articulates it as the foundation for all his comrades. In *My Bondage*, the reference is more direct and more inclusive. There is the direct quote from Henry in text followed by a comprehensive explanation: “incomparably more sublime, is the same sentiment, when practically asserted by men accustomed to the lash and chain—men whose sensibilities must have become more or less deadened by their bondage…I believe there was not one among us, who would not rather have been shot down, than pass away life in hopeless bondage” (118). Different from the brief passage in *Narrative*, the expanded analysis in *My Bondage* illuminates the condition of the slave who is “deadened” by the brutality of his daily life. This is a philosophy of black lives under slavery rather than a report of facts. He references any slave who has experienced the “lash and chain,” but no “as for me” separates Douglass from his enslaved brethren in the statement of willingness to die. All of the men involved “would not rather have been shot down, than pass away life in hopeless bondage.” The danger in death is comparably swift in Douglass’s portrayal when compared to the lash and chain or he “lingering death in the rice swamps and sugar fields” of a “hopeless bondage” (118).
Within this framework, all enslaved black males have a claim to manhood because of their birth, but to claim that manhood requires the willingness to die and kill.

It is impossible to discuss Douglass’s construction of civic manhood without mentioning the role of enslaved women in his narratives. According to Hortense Spillers in her essay “Interstices,” “the enslaved black woman” is “the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between the self and ‘other’” (155). Lemons describes it as being “edited out of black male feminist presentation” (24). According to Jenny Franchot, “the silenced figure of the slave mother … continued rhetorical exposure of the black woman’s suffering body is crucial to his lifelong mission disclosing the sins of the white fathers” (141). The purpose in Franchot’s mind, is to bring himself close to the trauma, “provid[ing] him with his credentials as a victim” (144).

But it is so much more. Sentimental abolition requires a site of pain and trauma as a means of persuasion. The scenes are to combat “the elusiveness of black suffering” caused by “a racist optics in which black flesh is itself identified as the source of opacity, the denial of black humanity… removing the slave from view as pain is brought close” (Hartman 20). For Stowe, Uncle Tom functioned as the site of that trauma because she intended to appeal to men without jeopardizing her gendered position; Douglass utilizes women in the same way.

To elicit the necessary sentimental response without jeopardizing his masculinity, women function as sites of trauma. To write himself as exposed and broken would undermine his equal standing, so the text relies on the unsuitably of abuse against women to sway the masculine reader rather than a presentation of his own abuse. The reader is not privy to Douglass’s own scenes of abuse. The reader does not witness his own cries of pain and agony. The closest the readers come to a narration of violence against Douglass is a brief statement of refusal in My
Bondage and My Freedom: “This done [Covey] ordered me to take off my clothes. To this unreasonable order I made no reply, but sternly refused to take of my clothing. ‘If you beat me,’ thought I, ‘you shall do so over my clothes’ … This flogging was the first of a series of floggings” (88). He is only unable to stand when he works too long in the heat. The blood that flows from his head wound is “fortunate” and “efficacious” (93). He is only truly injured when he is attacked by multiple men (129-130). According to him “[t]he whole sentiment of Baltimore was murderous” (130). The bodies of black women are conduits, “gates” to slavery’s horrors for freedom-loving minds. The language of abolition already made room for such a move.

In her address of abolitionist crowds, Angelina Grimke describes the abuse of black women. She recalls the “heavy strokes upon the unresisting victim,” “the stroke of the whip or blow of the paddle more certain to produce cuts and wounds which cause the blood to flow at every stroke” (248, 249). She describes the women as “indecently divested of their clothing and exposed to the gaze of the executioner” and “her body writhes under the lash” (249). For Douglass and those of abolitionist circles, the relevance of the female body weighs heavily on the conscious. Part of the manhood Douglass ascribes to, requires male narrator “pityed her” and that “outrage” was “kindled” in him. By his own contrivance, Douglass describes such outright abuse of women as “cowardly and inexcusable in an overseer” (39). The abuse against women allows Douglass to present an entrenched notion of patrician manhood extended in other aspects of the narratives.

The women, most notably Aunt Hester (Esther), became scenes of violence. Douglass describes their scenes of abuse. Take for instance the two descriptions of Aunt Hester’s beating. In Narrative, she is simply the “blood-stained gate” through which Douglass (and the reader)
come to understand the arbitrary brutality of slavery (21). In *Narrative*, Douglass summarizes Hester’s pleas as a series of negative actions: “no words, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose (21). Captain Anthony’s orders are in the text though. This disparity has often read as part of Douglass’s tendency to marginalize women in his autobiographies. While their silence and the clear neglect of Anna, his wife, in the text are significant, it is essential to acknowledge the role and purpose of such silences. Like the “blood-stained gate” to which she is compared, Hester is silent serving as a pathway to Douglass’s own enlightenment. “But Douglass does not arrive at Esther, but rather reads through the father into the ‘system’ behind him” (Franchot 142). It was not simply a move to validate his narrative. The work of women is it do exactly what Douglass cannot while maintaining his manhood.

The scene and its horrors are extended and amplified in the description in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. In this scene and in other scenes of women’s abuse, descriptions are detailed. Nelly’s fight against being whipped in the presence of her children is emblematic of Douglass expansion in his second autobiography. Douglass introduces Nelly by the offence that occasioned the beating and the relationship to the men in her life: “The offense alleged against Nelly was one of the commonest and most indefinite in the whole catalogue of offenses usually laid to the charge of slaves, viz: ‘impudence’” (38). The charge itself carries gendered significance. Harryette Mullen explains

The impudent woman is an outspoken ‘shameless hussy’ whose sexual materiality (pudenda) is exposed. The impudent woman refuses to be modestly silent. Rather, she speaks the violation and exposure, the sexual, reproductive, and economic exploitation of her body, revealing the implicit contradictions of the sex-gender system which render her paradoxically both vulnerable and threatening. (246)
Nelly’s charge represents her as the disruption to the hierarchy, but Douglass’s claim that all slaves are subject to this charge suggests the feminized position of all slaves. All slaves, regardless of sex, were evidence of the “implicit contradictions of the sex-gender system.” Nelly was a likely candidate for such a charge because of her color, “bright mulatto,” status, “recognized wife of a favorite ‘hand,’” and economic value, “mother of five sprightly children” (38). Douglass explains, “There is no doubt that Nelly felt herself superior, in some respects, to the slaves around her. She was a wife and a mother; her husband was a valued and favorite slave” (39). By many standards, Nelly operated in close proximity to white expectations of womanhood. The only difference is the subordinate position her color endowed her. As a black woman, she is dragged and flogged without public outrage. The only responses are from three of her children who “gave the overseer an excellent pelting with stones” (38). Despite this careful staging, Nelly’s beating is narrated without her voice.

Douglass describes Nelly’s resistance as an issue of gender that should insult any white gentleman. She was “determined to make her whipping cost Mr. Sevier as much as possible. The blood on his (and her) face, attested her skill” (38). Mr. Sevier’s reaction is closely monitored in the passage: “He would, doubtless, have knocked her down with his hickory stick, but that such act might have cost him his place. It is often advisable to knock a man slave down, in order to tie him, but it is considered cowardly and inexcusable, in an overseer, thus to deal so with a woman” (39). Without the gender distinctions Douglass makes in his analysis, one could read Nelly’s resistance as part of Douglass’s notion of reasonable violence, but Douglass narrates her actions as a threat to masculinity. The overseer is restrained by the threat to his economic and social security. During the whipping, “[t]he cries of the woman, while undergoing the terrible infliction
were mingled with those of the children, sounds which I hope the reader may never be called upon to hear” (39). Douglass distances himself from Nelly by calling her “the woman” instead of “Nelly” as he does before and after that line. She survives the whipping “covered with blood” spilling from the “red stripes [that] were all over her shoulders” (39). No such description is offered of Douglass’s encounters with the whip. She exists in the text as a near relation to white womanhood, and she is exploited and exposed.

The Heroic Slave silences female characters without displaying their traumas. The clearest examples of female exclusion for the definition of black masculinity are Mrs. Listwell and Susan Washington. Mrs. Listwell is excluded from this enterprise, her presence sufficing only to elicit a faint echo to Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s Senator and Mrs. Bird. Unlike Mrs. Bird, who serves as a catalyst to Mr. Bird’s conversion, Mrs. Bird appears as an obstacle to the already-converted Mr. Listwell. She is described in the text as “the kind lady” who “revived the fire, and was diligently preparing supper; for she, not less than her husband, felt for the sorrows of the oppressed and hunted ones of the earth, and was glad of the opportunity to do them service” (12). Despite the emotive and sentimental language of affectation (“felt for the sorrows” and “glad of the opportunity to do them service”), such emotions are not effective toward Washington’s liberty. In P. Gabrielle Foreman’s reading of The Heroic Slave, she describes Mrs. Listwell as a character who “distract[s] rather than advance[s] Madison’s story and cause,” a distinct deviation from Stowe’s model (154). According to Foreman: “While in Stowe good women understand slavery’s evil better than their male counterparts, in Douglass’s novella, as in his narratives, actual women (as opposed to woman-as-mother-as-trope) are ridiculed or erased” (154). Mrs.
Listwell is repeatedly corrected by Madison Washington during his visit in the Listwell home, and by the time Mr. Listwell and Madison Washington meet, her presence is unnecessary.

This dismissal of Mrs. Listwell is compounded by the narrative’s presentation of black womanhood as a tie dangerous to the successful liberation of the black man. According to Foreman “Black female affirmation…would be ineffective as a medium of conversation, because the Black female’s desire was continually ignored, denied, or denigrated” (158). To be recognized as an active, civic man, a significant difference had to be drawn between the definition of black masculinity and his female counterpart. The Heroic Slave accomplishes this for Washington by framing his independence as a necessary, though painful, separation from his “good angel,” Susan. Elizabeth Barnes interprets Susan’s absence and subsequent death as a “biologically raced family whose embrace is the kiss of death” (102). To Van Leer, Susan’s absence and death “reinforces Washington’s heroic isolation (176). A Though their bond is described in torturous terms—their “parting like the tearing of the flesh from my bones” and the language of spiritual interbeing in Washington’s claim “With her in slavery, my body, not my spirit, was free”—his successful independence requires distance from her, her absence is what seems to ensure his safety and successful escape (16, 38). After being losing the North Star and returning to the plantation in need of food and supplies, the text’s temporary reunion of Madison and Susan is bracketed by the statement “True to her word, my wife came laden with provisions, and we sat down on the side of the log, at that dark and lonesome hour of the night. I cannot say we talked; our feelings were too great for that; yet we had an understanding that I should make the woods my home” (16).
Douglass’s civic manhood is as nuanced as his autobiographies and fiction are intertwined. The rhetoric assumes the position of patriarchal superiority, but the tone and method of his sentimental supplication invokes the feminine influence upon the white male’s ear. Within this framework, he presents black manhood as capable of American civic participation by birth, allegiance, and reasonable violence. This claim to citizenship is complicated by its necessary use of feminine rhetoric position while displacing the violence enacted on the slave onto the silenced black female body. This manhood affects the relationship among black men, black women, white men, and white women along lines of race and class. Amid this tightly constructed, sense of manhood there exists an anomaly: Sandy Jenkins.

Over the course of the two autobiographies, Douglass reveals more about his relationship with the mystical and distant Sandy. Sandy is first introduced when Douglass is escaping Covey’s beating. Sandy instructs Douglass “with great solemnity” to procure and carry a root that “[h]e saide he had carried for years; and since he had done so, he had never received a blow, and never expected to while he carried it” (Narrative 76). Resulting to a “primitive,” mystical remedy to the oppressive violence of slavery introduces an alternative to Douglass’s reasonable violence. David VanLeer argues that Sandy’s ties to Africa “represents that authentic African experience to which Douglass himself is attracted” and signals the “real mark of the power shift” in the narrative. His reading suggests a privileging of the African American Subject, and it complicates the progression of Sandy throughout the autobiographies.

Though Sandy operates outside of Douglass’s masculine paradigm, he is not initially excluded from the homosocial bond on Mr. Freedman’s farm. Douglass describes him as a “an old adviser” who “gave up the notion” of escape (76, 88). Narrative leaves Sandy’s decision
unquestioned. He not feminized or traitorous for this decision. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Sandy’s character is questioned. He enters the narrative as “not only a religious man, but he professed to believe in a system for which I have no name,” “a genuine African” who “had inherited some of the so-called magical powers, said to be possessed by African and eastern nations” (98). By the time of the escape, he had been reduced to the “root man” (118). Upon reflection, Douglass states “[s]everal circumstances seemed to point SANDY out, as our betrayer…the taking us, and the leaving him—were calculated to turn suspicion toward him; and yet we could not suspect him. We all loved him too well to think it possible that he had betrayed us” (123). The representative of the African mysticism in their brotherhood is the seat of doubt in the latter narrative. One possible way of understanding the tension with Sandy’s position is to read Sandy as an extension of Douglass’s own reticence concerning a mystical fraternity that claimed African roots and superior masculine knowledge: Prince Hall Freemasonry.
PRINCE HALL FREEMASONRY & THE MAKING OF A GYNANDROUS MANHOOD

Fact is, the invention of women under siege
Has been to sharpen love in the service of myth.

If you can’t be free, be a mystery.
- Rita Dove, “Canary”

When Rita Dove wrote these lines, she little knew how applicable the words were to black masculine self-construction in antebellum America. While representation of manhood by white antislavery advocates and prominent black voices such as Frederick Douglass, the construction manhood by Prince Hall Freemasonry has not received its due attention in academic circles. It is often dismissed from discussions of antislavery literature for two reasons: demographic separation and organizational purpose. While these components are important to the history and development of Prince Hall Freemasonry, they are insufficient reasons for its exclusion. The fraternity first founded in 1775 is integral to the construction of black manhood on a national stage and offers a unique model of masculinity that actively constructs a manhood marked by its gynandrous qualities. Like the flora bearing this description, Prince Hall Freemasonry includes within its decidedly male model an awareness and invocation of female bodies and maternal qualities in its construction of ideal manhood, but before examining the language and narrative of this construction, it is necessary to review current analyses of the fraternal order.

The primary reason Prince Hall Freemasonry has not been included is its organizational parameters. The fraternal order privileged secrecy and a wider emphasis on racial advancement that often places it outside the parameters of antislavery study. Jacqueline Bacon explains one reason in her book The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition:
“historians have often excluded African American organizations from their accounts of abolition because many of these societies were not devoted exclusively to abolitionist activity, incorporating antislavery within an agenda that addressed issues of rights, prejudice, and self-help. For African American abolitionists, these issues were fundamentally connected to abolitions” (23). Prince Hall Freemasonry is a clear example of the type of organizations Bacon discusses, because it was focused on issues beyond slavery, and according to Prince Hall himself, the organization’s involvement in the conflict was to remain minimal.

In his “Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge on the 25th of June, 1792,” Hall reminds members

That we have no hand in any plots or conspiracies or rebellion, or side or assist in them: for when we consider the bloodshed, the devastation of towns and cities that hath been done by them, what heart can be so hard as not to pity those our distrest brethren, and keep at the greatest distance from them. However just it may be on the side of the opprest, yet it doth not in the least, or rather ought not, abate that love and fellow-feeling which ought to have for our brother fellow men. (64) His charge to refrain involvement in antislavery conflict can be misread as an argument for the brotherhood’s removal from the issue, but that is not the case. They are urged not to be part of “plots or conspiracies or rebellion, or side or assist in them”; this does not foreclose the avenues of advocacy and support. The repeated use of the conjunction “or” in the opening sentence to separate items in a list forces the slowed and deliberate listing of the instruction. This move implies the careful wording and phrasing of the proscription. This is not a running list or a comprehensive one. The preoccupation is with public appearance of disturbance or sedition. This is confirmed by the listed dangers that follow: “bloodshed” and “devastation.” The language suggests that members are to avoid participation in actions that lead to bloodshed and devastation to their fellow brethren, which includes white and black citizenship. For this reason, it is unfair
to read such statements by prominent Freemasons as a removal from the political situation. There is a recognition of the injustice of the oppression and the sympathy for the plight of those under the weight of slavery, but the public reputation of the organization requires that active participation be limited. It important, then, to recognize the possible distinction between public performance and the private actions of citizens and members.

Like members of white freemasonry lodges, individual Prince Hall Freemasons were very active in the politics of the time, and many of them were a part of the single-focused antislavery organizations. For example, Absalom Jones’ December 30, 1799 petition addresses the issue directly. As a minister and leader in the Philadelphia lodge, he wielded considerable force within the fraternity and abroad. “The Petition of Absalom Jones and Seventy-Three Others” addresses “the President, Senate, and House of Representatives” and advocates from a position of free brotherhood. After establishing an allegiance to God and the government, Absalom writes, “we beseech, that as we are men, we may be admitted to partake of the liberties and unalienable rights therein held forth” (331). Despite their status as “free men,” the petition regarding slavery is a collective “we.” The petition to “guardians of our rights” asks for gradual emancipation on the grounds that “the degraded state of many, and the want of education, would greatly disqualify” for immediate abolition (331). Though free, northern had not been granted full citizenship, alignment with their enslaved brethren as part of a disenfranchised citizenry leverages the free black’s brotherhood, citizenship, and contribution in antislavery service. Free black males were able to record their contributions under their own names thus provided a record of black civic involvement. The direct appeal to government officials and the reference to their
own rights place this antislavery action within the confines of Hall’s directive and antislavery advocacy.

The second reason for excluding Prince Hall Freemasonry from abolitionist context is its perceived class separation from general black populations. This argument has two prongs: the behavioral and the economic. On the economic front, this argument is interestingly complex, because their status as freemen does introduce the issue of wages which slaves did not receive. According to R.J. Young, “[t]here was something particularly modern about their condition. In a laissez-faire, individualistic society, they were a people who could not possibly define themselves in the ways proscribed by the increasingly dominant middle class without challenging the very foundation of society” (4). This awareness often leads historians and critics to narrowly define freemasonry in terms of its ascription to class formations. Loretta J. Williams’s Black Freemasonry operate on this assumption. It is “the beginning of the black upper class, rather than the black middle class that tended to strive for identity with the white upper class, it is this group, that is mistakenly considered to be the black middle class” (27). By placing aspiration to white class structures on the burgeoning black upper class, Williams breaks the assumed unity between leadership and elitism. As she states later in the book, “[t]he confusion perhaps stems from the view of the black leadership class as synonymous with the black elite, or vice versa, and the lack of historical knowledge and awareness of the various levels of function of black groups and the middle class” (118). The distinction she makes is useful in the fact that it redefines the attributes of the black middle class and freemasonry in that context: “free blacks of varying interests and occupations sought to demonstrate, both to themselves and to their clients and neighbors, their fitness as equal social beings. The method
many chose was fraternal organizations, with the leading one being Freemasonry” (51). But studies suggest that there is no class difference between Prince Hall Freemasons and the common African American because the definition and construction of class in the nineteenth century is more fluid than the economic model most often used.

William A. Muraskin’s earlier work, *Middle-Class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America*, offers a useful consideration of class. According to him, “[a]s a result of its socially diverse but prestigious character it functioned to bind the new classes together” (23). He characterizes the middle based on public behavior: “to the middle class, ‘respectability’ is the highest value, and respectability is obtained by carrying out in public behavior standard American bourgeois morality. Those who act correctly are middle class, while those who violate the moral code in public situation are relegated to the lower class” (13). It welcomed males committed to the public performance of middle class morality. This meant that men of any employ or background could become Masons so long as they met certain aspirational qualifications. According to Muraskin, they would have had to be “ambitious individuals who wish to move into middle-class social network. They see middle-class status-conferring organization such as Masonry as the means to enter middle-class society,” and their “lower class status results either from extreme poverty—since even in a generally poor group, with weak income differentiation, there is an income range, with those falling too far below the standard being designated a ‘poor but respectable’ lower class—or from simple lack of associational ties with the ‘right’ people” (18). This fluid definition and construction of class explains the presence of former slaves among the lodges’ ranks and situates the importance of performance in a way that is useful for this project. Unlike Muraskin, I do not believe class performance “had the effect
of alienating them from the black masses, tying them to the white middle class, and interfering with their ability to lead the race” (5). This emphasis on public behavior as the marker of class affiliation allows the distinction of class without making assumptions about the inferiority of superiority of either group. “Public” highlights the performance of social construction rather than natural inclination.

Chernoh M. Sesay supports Muraskin’s definition in his 2011 survey of early Prince Hall Freemasonry’s early membership. According to him, “[a]lthough black Freemasonry symbolized certain divisions, it also represented the emergence of a black identity that was understood by people of color to be shared by all African descendants in the Americas” (34). The distinguishing factor for Sesay is the performative ceremonies of Freemasonry: “Members of the African lodge used ceremony to distinguish themselves even though they entered the same occupations and traveled the same paths as most blacks. African American Masons included the illiterate and those worked in domestic and maritime trades” (39).

Geographic claims against the inclusion of Freemasonry in the scholarship rests on the notion that because Prince Hall Freemasonry was established in the “free” North masculinity and identity formed by the fraternity cannot be included in the framework of Southern liberty. Careful understanding of the history and foundation of Freemasonry dilutes the potency of that argument. Masonry hails from a pattern of work and labor more similar to the group dynamics of slaves on a plantation than to the ideal of individual labor most often linked to northern capitalism. Masonry began as a literal order of laborers who traveled in large groups to build stone buildings such as castles and forts during a time when the majority of buildings were made of wood. In the words of Muraskin, “[u]nlike most laborers they were not employed in small
domestic units with a master and a few journeymen, but rather in large groups” (20). This idea of labor with minimal hierarchy parallels the large labor forces of the plantations. Slave labor on plantations was a mass production. Large groups worked at the behest of others, and among them the instituted language of apprenticeship hierarchy was largely lacking.

As the product of a geographically heterogeneous history, Prince Hall Freemasonry continues that tradition. The first members were initiated in 1775 by an Irish mobile, military lodge (Brooks 199). The first chapter existed as African Lodge No. 1 in Boston until it was chartered as African Grand Lodge No. 459 by England 1784. The nine years between its foundation and its charter were fraught with tension. Lodges chartered by England were considered “modern” whereas the Irish lodges considered themselves “Ancients.” This distinction carried with it notions of superiority based on a constructed history, a notion Prince Hall Freemasons would leverage in their own narratives (Hinks and Kantrowitz 27). In 1827, the African Lodge 459 declared severed ties with the Modern Grand Lodge of England, and proceeded to form its identity independent of white affirmation. The Order established its own National Grand Lodge in 1847.

Amid questions of official charters and social acceptance, Prince Hall Freemason lodges shaped a history that entitled them to national recognition as men. In his 1792 public address, Prince Hall establishes the relationship between the Mason and God as one between “the great Architect of this visible world” and the laborer (64). According to Maurice O. Wallace, the laborer and this model of labor was pervasive in the symbolism of the fraternity: “In becoming a mason in America, in fact, a man became a figurative craftsman, whatever his actual trade or office” (64). Though they were not crafting castles or physical buildings, they were crafting free
selves, free men. Wallace explains that “Prince Hall Freemasonry undertakes to transform black men into symbolic artisans, and thus members of the masculine body politic” and in doing so “black men in America have self-reflexively constructed the black masculine into their labor as men and Masons” (65). The manhood articulated by Prince Hall Freemasonry instantiates its members as artisan achievers much like Stowe’s George Harris prior to his escape Canada. In this, the “Masonic manufacture and (re)production, articulation in the rite of the Third Degree, ‘the Making of the Master Mason,’ encourages the conception of persons and bodies as artifacts that…can be made (up) and remade,” the language of which predates modern conception of racial and gender as social “constructs” (63). Wallace contends that the Masonic ideal is reflected in an “edifice complex”:

A projection of the belief that the productive powers of dual sexes may exist in the same individual, the union of phallus and cteis, realized by the material design of the lodge room, speaks for the androgynous subjectivity intent upon displacing women from the generative process of masculine self-creation by recourse to an alternative practice at once artifactual and male—Freemasonry. (80) This statement reveals both the promise and the problem of Wallace’s narrow investigation.

Wallace argues that this construction “allow[s] black men manhood, but without disrupting the differentials of power, position, or property accorded by race on the social or political claims of (white male) others” (71). His analysis of the lodge does reveal the coexistence of a gendered production in the manhood espoused by Prince Hall Freemasonry. It aligns with John Marrant’s assertion that all masons should follow the example of the “grand master” Solomon who “carried on and finished that great work of the temple of the living God, the inside work of which, in many instances as well as the tabernacle resembles men’s bodies; but that is better explained in a well-fitted lodge” (15-16).
Because Wallace examines the structure of the lodge without framing that analysis with the language and ideology of Prince Hall Freemasonry, his conclusion is narrower than the fraternal order suggests of itself. The lodge does not represent an “androgy nous subjectivity intent upon displacing women from the generative process of masculine self-construction” (80). When read within the constitutive narrative posited by its spokesmen, the lodge—and the men—are urged to embody a gendered duality that embraces the maternal and the feminine within a recognizably masculine and phallic order. The woman shares a complementary status separate but displaced. Prince Hall Freemasonry acknowledges her presence in the Mason’s masculine self-construction, and in doing so, the fraternal order upsets numerous “differentials of power, position, or property” within and beyond the race. By extending Wallace’s reading to the genealogy promoted by Prince Hall Freemasonry’s public addresses, the gyanandrous nature of this masculine construction becomes evident. The lineage constructed has two strands: biblical and civic.

The biblical genealogy is constructed from particularly convoluted series of religious influences. In this context, the analysis of religion tends to explore proslavery references that promoted unquestioning servility among African Americans. References such as the Sermon on the Mount’s “[b]lessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” and the New Testament’s command that “[s]ervants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ” positioned slavery as a divine order (Matthew 5:4-5, Ephesians 6:5). Among these scriptures, interpretations to two biblical narratives argued that slavery was the divine curse placed upon people of African descent. Cambridge student Thomas Clarkson’s 1786
dissertation “An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species,” identified these two narratives, the narratives of Cain’s and Caanan’s curses in Genesis 4 and 9, as the principal religious tools. In Genesis 4, Adam’s son, Cain the “tiller of the ground,” kills his brother, and as punishment, God curses and marks him. In Genesis 9, Caanan is cursed with perpetual servitude because his father, Hamm, witnesses Noah’s drunken nakedness and shares that information with his brothers instead of covering Noah’s indiscretion. Using both narratives, proslavery advocates postulated enslaved Africans as the descendants of those cursed individuals.

Though the Bible was used to support an oppressive system, Christianity also offered paths to liberty. According to Rita Roberts’ *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in northern Black Thought, 1776-1863*, religion of the 1780s and 1790s “stressed key republican and common sense principles” combined with Scottish philosophy that “asserted man’s universal capacity to arrive at ‘truth’ by his own reason” (46). Corey D.B. Walker describes this amalgamation as a “‘civil theology’ free of traditional theological dogma and open to the requisite virtues that characterized membership in a modern polity, complemented the secular language that properly defined the political sphere of American democracy” (86). It was essential that African Americans apply this complex religious framework to narratives as far into the past as the religious narratives that held them captive.

In 1789, John Marrant configures a genealogy that accomplishes this goal. His address titled “A Sermon Preached on the 14th Day of June 1789 Being the Festival of St. John the Baptist” utilizes the genealogy of the Bible’s first family to shape a narrative of a gynandrous original manhood “superior” to the white patriarchal manhood. He begins with the necessary “recourse to the creation of this our world,” and describes the original man as “greatest and most stupendous
work of God” (5,6). Man, in Marrant’s description, “hath not only a body in common with all inferior animals but into his body was infused a soul of a far more noble nature and make—a rational principle to act according to the designs of [God’s] creation” and is “said to be a little world, a world within himself, and containing whatever is found in the Creator” (6). This sweeping description of Adam’s creation is both a unifying and divisive gesture. The recognized common ancestry to Adam roots the claim to the slave’s manhood, but the fact that Marrant begins with the description to Adam prior to the creation of Eve is what establishes the claim to an gynandrous being. In Adam existed an entire world, “containing whatever was found in the Creator. This includes the attributes that would later be extracted when Adam slept and Eve was created from his rib in Genesis 2. Marrant reflects this understanding in his construction. Eve’s separation from Adam is never referenced in the text thought the fall and the Adam’s posterity are introduced later in the speech.

He follows the aforementioned passage with a detailed account of what the “world” included: “In him is the spiritual and immaterial nature of God, the reasonableness of Angels, the sensative power of brutes, the vegetative life of plants, and the virtue of all the elements he holds converse with in both worlds” [sic] (6). No form of life is left out of Adam’s composite construction. The spectrum of life forms affirms Adam’s gynandrous state. Racial degradation was acknowledged by the reference to the “sensative power of brutes,” and he softens the terror of the brute by deeming its power a “sensative” one. This, in itself, upsets the racial and gender hierarchy, for it implies that white men share the qualities that have been used against black males and implicates women in God’s bequeathal of reason and virtue. Masonry, according to Marrant, is to correct and alter the effects of Adam’s fall. The gynandrous gender of Adam in his original form and the
harmony of the gender coexistence in two sexed bodies are broken after the fall and duplicated with each subsequent generation. The “grand end and design of Masonry is to build up the temple that Adam destroyed in Paradise” according to Marrant (16). As previously discussed, the language of the temple parallels the Mason’s body. This is significant, because the black woman’s legacy is implicated in its origin and its continuance. In a world where the artificial physical consolidation of both sexes in one body is impossible, Prince Hall Freemasonry embodies and gender consolidation in the male body of the mason.

Masonry, then, is inherited by Cain. His genealogy continues with the link to Cain. Marrant does not shirk this connection or castigate a white audience for ascribing the curse to his race. Marrant argues that Masonry began with Adam’s fall. The “sudden fall” is the product of envy and pride: “What was it but this that made Cain murder his brother, whence is it but from these that our modern Cains call us Africans the sons of Cain? (We admit it if you please) and we will find from him and his sons Masonry began, after the fall of his father” (9). Marrant both claims and displaces the narrative of Cain. Masonry is a patrilineal inheritance passed to Cain after Adam’s removal from the Garden of Eden. Masonry, in its original and ideal state is the masculine self-possession of Black males. As Peter Hinks explains in his history of Prince Hall Freemasonry, “they envisioned themselves as the vanguard of Masonry in America, summoned to regenerate the nation and its white Masons by returning to the noble ideals of the fraternity from which they had both fallen so far” (44). According to Muraskin, in such narratives Prince Hall Freemasons “ceased to be poor, insignificant member of an oppressed group and has become a member of the most important and idealistic institution the world has ever seen!” (198). The biblical genealogy introduces the Mason to a “past (which is glorious), their present
(which is meaningful and pregnant with promise and possibilities), and their future (which is apocalyptic and millennial)” (Muraskin 199). No order of white Masons is privy to the perfect form of Freemasonry, because pure Masonry is an inheritance passed from God to Adam, pre-fall, to Cain, who by white theology and social argument, was the cursed ancestor of Africans alone.

Like Douglass’s inversion of negative traits in *The Heroic Slave*, Marrant displaces attributes the negative characteristics of Cain to white participants in slavery. The “modern sons of Cain” bear the curse because they murder their brethren, for if Adam is indeed their father, slaveholders and slave traders are guilty of the same crime as Cain according to this narrative. Though Marrant’s genealogy would be uncomfortable for white Masons, discrediting it was difficult. As Brooks comments, “Some would contest the accuracy of this genealogy, but few could deny its force” (207). Marrant had so skilfully deployed what Jacqueline Bacon describes as “the ineffable cultural force of differences,” a move “to turn the influence of racial distinctions and white-supremacist arguments into a rhetorical advantage” by “[e]mphasizing the ‘mystery’ of racial difference (70). Marrant goes beyond the initial conversion of racist narrative into racial mystery. He “actively assumes authority” by extending the genealogy beyond the narrative of Cain and Adam (70). He crafts a patrilineal line from Cain to Noah, Ahab, Nimrod, Moses, and Solomon. Despite the patrilineal of the genealogy and the unisex membership, the audience of this address included women. As part of the audience, the legacy of racial inheritance and primacy extended to them, and the decision to include Adam before the fall and the establishment of the gender hierarchy solidified their inclusion in the elevated status offered by the narrative. Joanna Brooks notes, the speech “plays a divide between a public Blackness and a
secret African brotherhood, between race as social signifier and race as a privately felt experience, and between the particulars of a general Masonic history and the potential of a re-collected genealogy,” a genealogy that is re-constructed as the years continue (201).

Eight years after Marrant’s address, Prince Hall delivers “A Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge on the 24th of June, 1797.” This is the second he delivered since the 1789 address by John Marrant. In his 1792 address, Hall affirmed Marrant’s foundational work: “we should on these public days, and when we appear in form, give some reason as a foundation for our so doing, but as this has been already done, in a discourse delivered in substance by our late Reverend Brother John Marrant, and now in print” (63). Because the origin narrative was already constructed, Hall “endeavor[s] to raise part of the superstructure” of the lodge, and this “superstructure” is the explication of the civic expectation of Masons (63). The mission of the 1797 speech is to “attempt to shew you that it is our duty to sympathize with our fellow men under their troubles, the families of our brethren who are gone: we hope to the Grand Lodge above, here to return no more” (70). The possessive “our” and the notion of them being “under” troubles suggests the relation of those still in slavery who have the claim of common race, but its later usage includes a wider scope of men. “This is not to be confined to parties or colors; not to towns or states; not to a kingdom, but to the kingdoms of the whole earth, over whom Christ the king is head and grand master,” Hall exhorts. It is important that Christ be the extension rather than the start of this genealogy, because Christ as the redeemer rescues the damned but does not under the hierarchy already established. Hall must reach further back in biblical heritage to discuss civic responsibility, and doing so allows him to simultaneously complicate notions of racial and gender hierarchies.
He begins his anecdotal instructions with the example of Jethro and Moses. The introduction is ripe with racial and ethnic implications: “The great law-giver Moses, who instructed by his father-in-law, Jethro, an Ethiopean, how to regulate his courts of justice and what sort of men to choose for the different offices” (72). Hall connects the well-recognized “law-giver” whose lineage the Masons are lineage with Jethro, “an Ethiopean.” Using different genealogies, the Mason, his brethren, and his fellow men could be represented by either character. This example could either be read as a charge to the American populace to accept, on equal terms, the darker relative whose longer history with the craft could help in the establishment of justice, but there is something more nuanced and progressive happening in this passage. By asserting this example, Hall establishes as certain polemic ambiguity that allows Masons to claim both characters as part of their heritage. This is compounded by the reciprocal nature of the confusion. Just as the mason can claim both patrilineal lines, both characters in the speech function as Masonic models. Moses’ connection to the biblical genealogy is inheritor of the craft, but Jethro is also given claim: “for Jethro understood geometry as well as laws, that a Mason may plainly see” (72). Jethro possesses the visible signs and markers of masonry. His skills in geometry allow correspond to architecture and design, a task of the historic and symbolic mason. The sentence draws the Mason’s eye to that performance of Masonic ideals. Jethro is capable of enacting and embodying ideal Masonic masculinity. The speech complicates the linear narrative of earlier years and begins to introduce the intersectionality and duality of Masonic manhood, but this is only the precursor. The following example imbricates and evoke the gender duality of the Prince Hall Freemasons’ construction of manhood evident in Marrant’s address.
In an almost jarringly smooth transition from the racial weaving of the previous example, Hall destabilizes the gender dynamic with the introduction of Nomen’s narrative:

This is the first and grandest lecture that Moses ever received from the mouth of man; for Jethro understood geometry as well as laws, that a Mason may plainly see: so a little captive servant maid by whose advice Nomen, the great general of Syria’s army, was healed of his leprosy; and by a servant his proud spirit was brought down: 2 Kings v. 3-14. The feelings of this little captive for the great man, her captor, was so great, that she forgot her state of captivity, and felt for the distress of her enemy. Would to God (said she to her mistress) my lord were with the prophets in Samaria, he should be healed of his leprosy: So after he went to the prophet, his proud host was so haughty that he not only disdained the prophet’s direction, but derided the good old prophet; and had it not been for his servant he would have gone to his grave with a double leprosy, the outward and the inward, in the heart, which is the worst of leprosies; a black heart is worse than a white leprosy. (72)

The entire narrative as told by Hall rests on the actions of two serving bodies: An Israeli slave girl who informs her mistress of the prophet’s ability to heal Nomen and a servant who persuades Nomen to follow the prophet’s instructions. The captivity of these characters clearly parallels with the African American’s condition in antebellum America. The “fellow brethren” are embodied in these images: the free Black in the body of the servant and the enslaved Black in the captive girl. The philosophy of Prince Hall Freemasonry conceived of these demographics as a unified racial category. As Chernoh Sesay notes, “ideology of the African lodge defined all people of African descent as victims of racial prejudice and of the Atlantic slave trade while developing an exclusive and masculine definition of leadership,” and Joanna Brooks contends that Hall intentional “transform[ed] the signs, symbols, and secretive practices of the Masonic temple into a template for race consciousness” (Sesay 38, Brooks 198). In light of this understanding, the separate characters exist as halves of a single African American Subject. For a successful healing of the infected government, represented by Nomen as the general of Syrian’s

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*d The scripture refers to this character as Naaman.*
army, the collective action of the feminine figure moved by her “feelings” to implore her mistress that Nomen seek help from the prophet and the masculine figure who operates along the lines of moral persuasion saving his master from the “double leprosy, the outward and the inward, in the heart, which is the worst of leprosies.” The role of moral mediator, constructed as the wife’s role, is placed on the servant in Hall’s interpretation of scripture.

The syntax of the second sentence reflect the ideological construction. The “feelings” of the female “little captive” control the entire sentence that is fluctuated and modulated by commas. Its position and brevity draw the reader’s attention to it and highlights the gendered exchange. The power of Nomen over her body is displaced by the set of commas that surround “her captor,” and the second set of commas displace the Nomen’s control over her again; “that she forgot her state of captivity” exists between these commas. The effect of this syntax emphasizes that though she may be identified as a captive, the constraints and violent implications of that status neither impinge on her activity nor influence her knowledge or claim to identity. She and the servant are effectively on the same plane.

In addition to the single African American subjectivity that the captive and the servant represent, the two are united in the figure of the prophet whose seeming absence is crucial to the gynandrous construction of the Mason. In a single male body, the prophet houses both the feminine and the masculine. Like the servant and the slave, the prophet exists in captivity, but his superior knowledge and connection with the divine separates him from his fellow men. He exists as a masculine union of the other figures. This becomes clear if the reader understands the scripture reference as more than a citation or example of ethos but reads it as a direction to the mystery prominent in the secrecy of the craft. Like a treasure map without words that only
becomes legible when layed over another map, the speech invites the reader to examine scripture in concert with Hall’s text. When examined against the scripture, the prophet Elisha is not initially approached by the Naaman. He comes in response to an overflow of feeling. Distressed by Naaman’s letter ordering that he “recover him of his leprosy,” the king tears his responds emotionally and tears his clothes (2 Kings 5:6-7). Elisha is moved to assist by this display: “And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel” (2 Kings 5:8). Like the slave girl, Elisha’s response is associated with an overflow of feeling and is mediated through a third party. Though captive, Elisha does not implore Naaman as the servant does; he delivers a divine order from a distance. The prophet’s role aligns with the purifying mission of Prince Hall Freemason’s who saw themselves as inheritors of a true masonry charged with “summoning with Masons to the purer Masonry their black brothers embodied,” the foundation of which Marrant outlined in detail (Hinks 41). Just as African American Masons desired affirmation of their claim to brotherhood, Naaman’s cleansing affirms Elisha’s connection with God.

The implications of this ideal Masonic manhood is embedded in the construction of the first and last sentences of the passage. The semicolon and colon of the first sentence make a clear separation between the racial tensions and the gendered ones impossible. The construction of gender cannot be isolated form the racial tension. It is as if the second example is to extend or further illustrate the complexities of the first. In both, the Mason functions as a conduit of these interchanges. Moses, Jethro, Masons, and the servant girl move along parallel lines tied directly to the healing and humbling of an oppressive regime represented by Nomen. Although Nomen
has no bearing on the Exodus reference, the construction of this paragraph distills the lineage into a single trend that ends with the biblical reference in 2 Kings.

In the third sentence, Nomen’s disrespect for the prophet is narrated as a stampeding compilation of offenses enacted on a passive Elisha. Nomen’s “proud” and “haughty” demeanor is described in rapid succession, and his increasingly negative behavior is situated in phrases separated by commas: “he not only distain’d the prophet’s direction, but derided the good old prophet.” The prophet receives the derision and distain that Nomen heaps upon him. He does not respond or persuade Nomen. That is the role of the servant, and the division of labor is indicated by the semicolon that transitions the interaction. Notice, the thoughts are distinguished but not broken by the choice of punctuation. What follows is a return to the subject of race and gender as mediated by the servant. Bridged by another semicolon, the closing phrases of the paragraph bring into conversation race and gender. The servant acts as the moral compass of a metaphor that inverts the significance of white and black. The association between black and negative connotation remains, but the black heart is severed from the black body and placed in the heart of the oppressor. In addition, white is connected to a debilitating, contagious disease, both of which are only curable through black Masonic instruction.

The third example picks up from this pattern by recrafting the racial and gender hierarchies in a single paragraph. In this iteration, form of the paragraph does the unifying work of the gynandrous manhood. In the first half of the paragraph, the focus is on the racial dynamic:

Another instance of this is in Acts viii. 27 to 31, of the European Eunuch, a man of great authority, to Philip, the apostle: here is mutual love and friendship between them. This minister of Jesus Christ did not think himself too good to receive the hand, and ride in a chariot with a black man in the face of day; neither did this great monarch (for so he was)
think it beneath him to take a poor servant of the Lord by the hand, and invite him into his carriage, though but with a staff, one coat, and no money in his pocket. (73)

Like in the racial paragraph concerning Moses, the text features an interracial, homosocial friendship, but rather than molding the legacies, Hall complicates American racial frames the American racial dilemma. The references to “European Eunuch” and a “black man” brings to bear the divisions of American society. The eunuch is a complicated conflation of identities. He is “European,” castrated, a “black man,” and a “great monarch” in Hall’s retelling. He holds in himself both the racial binaries, proof of manhood and its negation, and prestige. Hall’s retelling forces the listener and reader to confront their own prejudices housed in a single character. Does his castration disqualify him discovering truth? Does his race or ethnicity isolate and disenfranchise him? Like the Mason, he is gynandrous, and he is the embodiment of the dialectic.

When compared to the scripture, this passage is better understood for the racial mystery constructed by Hall. Acts 8:27 tells introduces the eunuch on these terms: “a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship” (KJV). The darkness, castration, and authority are present in this text, but to present it simply this way would confirm the common perception of the black male’s questionable masculinity rather construct the hybrid manhood posited by Prince Hall Freemasonry. Hall’s version raises the eunuch to the rank of monarch, though scripture places him “under Candace the queen” as a steward of her resources. While Hall elides the feminine monarch in this passage, he amplifies the emasculatory element of castration. Where the scripture mentions his status as a eunuch in an appositive, Hall places it as central to the identity of this character. He is the “European Eunuch” not the monarch or man who happens
to be a eunuch. In so doing, he associates the emasculation with the European experience not
with feminine leadership. Castration and feminization are not rendered pejorative constructs in
Hall’s narrative. It is essential that the potential for feminization exist unchallenged within the
body of the “black man.”

The “mutual love and friendship” Hall claims to be present rests in Phillip’s actions. The
whose identity appears simple, is praised because he “did not think himself too good to receive
the hand, and ride in a chariot with a black man.” He is “the apostle,” a “minister of Jesus
Christ,” and carrying only “a staff, one coat, and no money in his pocket,” but his presence is not
at all straightforward. He also figures in the Masonic ideology in ways that allow Masons to
claim both lineages. As in the other cases, analysis of the scripture reference aids in the
illumination of Hall’s mystery. Acts 8:29-31 narrates the Phillips arrival as a scene of divine
intervention in order to convert the eunuch:

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran
thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou
readest? And he said, How can I except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip
that he would come up and sit with him.
With this reference point, the inclusion of Philip is strategic as Hall constructs and repeats the
ideology of Masonic manhood. The position of the black Freemason, according to Hall and
Marrant, was the inheritor of a pure and true Masonry that white Masons should aspire to
achieve. Hall stages this here in the figure of Philip who possesses knowledge of the scripture
and prophecy that must be taught and interpreted to the “European Eunuch.” Once again, Hall
has constructed a relationship between the black Mason and the homosocial bond that allows the
Mason to claim the best of both lineages while displacing the negatives onto an ignorant
representative of civic power.
The companion example to racial combination exacted by Hall’s reference to Acts is the gender blend of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. In the sentence immediately following the list of Philip’s items, Hall continues, “So our Grand Master, Solomon, was not ashamed to take the Queen of Sheba by the hand, and lead her into his court, at the hour of high twelve, and there converse with her on point of masonry (for if there ever was a female mason in the world she was one) and other curious matters; and gratified her, by shewing her all his riches and curious pieces of architecture in the temple, and in his house” (73). This construction is notable for two of reasons: 1) it directly opens the possibility of Masonic ideals being housed in a female body; 2) it includes her within the Masonic domain as an equal. Solomon’s behavior toward the Queen of Sheba is likened to the behavior of Philip to the eunuch. If the parallel is to continue, the Queen occupies a relation to the Mason, but unlike the obstructed connection between the female slave, the Queen has a direct claim to the craft. The “Grand Master” brings the feminine body of the Queen into the knowledge of the craft and its mystery. She is not only a passive receptacle of knowledge. Hall makes it clear that she could indeed be a Mason. With this act, the speech acknowledged the presence of women in the Masonic lineage.

She does not only exist within the legacy theoretically. Solomon brings her into the temple to explain to her the artistry of its architectural design. This would be insignificant except for the relationship Marrant drew between Solomon’s temple, the lodge, and Masonic manhood. In his 1789 address, he rendered them inseparable, and as Maurice O. Wallace articulates in his work, the lodge is the construction that the ideal Mason is to imitate and embody. Hall represents that here; the Queen of Sheba exists and moves freely within the lodge, and the mystery of it is not kept from her. Within a text designed to set the model for its readers and practitioners the task of
Freemasonry as it relates to its fellow citizens, the inclusion of the Queen of Sheba marks a transition from the recognition of the gynandrous manhood of Masonry towards a reflection of that duality in the ranks and affiliation of its membership. The Queen of Sheba’s liminal status signaled by the parenthetical “if” serves as the foundation for physical presence of women in the lodge. Only four years later, in 1833, Maria Stewart would address the Boston lodge, and the Eastern Star would be established in 1874.

These texts form the foundation for the progression and construction of African American Freemasonry as these addresses are delivered and distributed by direction of the first African Lodge in the United States, but they do exist prior to the turn of the century. As previously mentioned, the nineteenth century slavery debate poses its own unique challenges that forces adaptation, and Prince Hall Freemasonry complied in many ways. In their introduction to All Men Free and Brethren: Essays on the History of African American Freemasonry, Peter Hinks and Stephen Kantrowitz mark these as two separate eras of the fraternal organization: “The 1820s were not the 1790s. A new generation of black masonic leaders had arisen to challenge more frankly and publicly the accumulating dross of a vigorously expansive southern slavery, gross civic and economic discrimination against free blacks, and pervasive racial violence and invective” (8). Not only do the times change in this transition, but so does the leadership.

John Telemachus Hilton’s prominence steadily increased following the deaths of Hall and Marrant. In his 1828, Hilton delivers an address that changes the methodology of Order’s gynandrous manhood. Delivered on the same occasion as the speeches by Marrant and Hall analyzed earlier, Hilton’s speech on the Festival of St. John the Baptist reflects a more radical stance concerning slavery and an awareness of the ability to frame the Mason’s manhood in
social rather than religious terms. By this point, the antislavery movement had begun to wield some force, and the prevalence of other social reform movements (Temperance and Women’s movements for example) provided the space for the Mason to construct his manhood on those same terms. Hilton’s address depicts a gynandrous manhood equally invested in biblical and social language.

The shift is evident from the earliest moments of the text. The occasion of the address is described as an opportunity to “publicly commemorate the virtues of him, who was ornamental to our ART, and an adorning pillar of piety” (3). The language of art rather than architecture is a key change in the language of Masonic representation, and Hilton emphasizes this by his decision to capitalize each letter in the word. The language of architecture is an inheritance from the original masons who operated as architectures and laborers. According to Hinks and Kantrowitz, the distance from the long tradition of masonry was intentional. There was a need for Hilton’s “single bold gesture” that “asserted the inherent legitimacy of Masonry as organized under African Americans and disavowed any further understood requirement to certify the regularity of black lodges and Masonry” (9). By distancing themselves from the English heritage of stone masons, Hilton has taken a step in the direction Hinks and Kantrowitz describe.

This historical shift has implications for the language of masculine self-construction. Without the language of architecture and skilled labor, the language of masculine achievement becomes less pronounced. It also distances the language of Masonic manhood from the heavily politicized notion of the self-made man that was so pivotal to earlier masons and instead reflects a self-styled manhood. The distinction may seem an insignificant one, but the nature of the product is important. When compared to architecture, manhood can be discussed in terms of what is a
sound or correct construction of manhood. Art does not carry the same referents. Hilton does address the perception of decadence and superfluity by saying,

It may be asserted that our Art is composed of mere superficial ceremonies. But this is not the case, having their use, they are preserved; and from the recollection of the lessons calculated, the well formed Mason derives instruction; drawing them to near inspection; adverts to the circumstances which gave them rise, and dwells on the doctrines they impart; and finding them replete with general information, adopts them as keys to the principles of his art, and prizes them as sacred. Convinced of their propriety, he estimates their value by their utility. (10)

Here, the language of formation remains, as the mason should be a “well formed” one. But the language of the artist still provides a different discussion of labor. The mason now is a student and intellectual who “derives instruction,” “drawing them to near inspection,” “dwells on the doctrines.” The Art then is valued based on the use of the propriety it imparts to the student. The result of such a move is that different expressions of manhood can operate on equal yet different systems of production. Hilton’s own reference to John the Baptist is a primary example. Whereas every Mason and mention of past figures served the function of a pattern or example to be used in the building of individual man and the lodge of brethren in the architecture model, John the Baptist can now be discussed in terms of relative use. He is “ornamental” and an “adorning pillar of piety” rather than a functional stone. Because of the openness of the “art,” the genealogy weaves a masculinist tapestry of references and “Founders of the Art” (10).

The premise of Masonic manhood as an art shapes the approach to the selection of exemplary men. Civic models are drawn from American, Roman, and Biblical texts. Aligned with the assessment of Masonry as an art, Hilton is able to reject systems while claiming individuals within the systems. A necessity of the times and a hail to Hall’s 1792 address, the references are treated as ornaments to be judged and discarded or kept. The line begins with a reference to an
unnamed “American patriot” whose words are useful to lodge’s own claims to independence (5). Hilton attributes to this unnamed figure the quotation “Independence now, Independence forever” (5). What could be read as an intentional elision of the white Founding Fathers from whom Hilton is consistently distancing himself, is in fact an attempt to present as real an artistic fabrication. The lines appear as the final lines of Daniel Webster’s “Imaginary Speech of John Adams” published two years prior (Webster 6). Daniel Webster is given his own credit later as the “exemplary patriot and Statesman” and “friend of universal liberty; who succors the cause of the Greeks, as well as that of the Ethiopians” (12). He also praises British General Henry Clinton, a “friend of mankind,” along with American General Joseph Warren “who fell on Bunker’s summit, revenging his country’s wrongs” (12). This adoption of American revolutionary language is then just as much a construction as the artistic narrative he is constructing for the organization in light of this new separation. This patriotic fiction does not, however, lead to an embrasure of the republican lineage.

Hilton’s civic narrative is very different from Douglass’s or Stowe’s. Violence and a distinctly masculine genealogy is less vital than the homosocial comradery that exists within the lodge. Hilton rejects the civic narrative and frames it in opposition to Masonic ideal. He ridicules societies designed to represent the republic:

Let us look into Parliamentary or Senate Chambers, there we shall discover those passions which knows of no restraint, created by ambition, and which generally is productive of much evil, frequently terminating in duels, when one or both perhaps of the parties fall victims to their ungovernable passions. (8) Hilton renders the government a forum for disruptive and reckless manhood. Ambition and violence for honor, two qualities associated with patriarchal masculinity are described as “ungovernable” in the exact place where governance is to be at its optimal. Douglass constructed
his manhood according to these tenets, but Hilton deems this manhood unbridled and dangerous, “generally productive of much evil.” Words such “generally” and “frequently” suggest that the very form of manhood portrayed is unsuitable. It leaves little room for arguments that it is an issue of particular men or the present situation. The langue of the black man as violent beyond control of any force but slavery is displaced and finds its home in the federal government, and this exists as a rapidly progressing trouble signaled by the series of problems separated at commas that are only stopped in order to mark the distinction between that environment and the “Masonic Hall,” for “here you will find all is peace and unity” (8). The structures and the men within them stand stark contrast of the other, and the Mason is privileged as superior.

Hilton extends this analysis to nongovernmental agencies in the next paragraph. The “Societies, even Christian denominations” are sullied by the profusion of characteristics associated with patrician manhood: “pride, contention. &c. and frequently we may behold them like the contending hosts at Thermopylia striving one against another, for power and dominion” (8). Each of the items in Hilton’s list of disapproving qualities attack scenes of valorized manhood. The “contending hosts at Thermopylia” invokes the Greek struggle for freedom against the overwhelming Persian army. The narrative is often discussed in terms of the Greek value on liberty and the Spartan stand with only 300 men, but Hilton does not discuss this masculine moment in those terms though doing so would seem to be in the advantage of an antislavery cause. He diminishes the potency of masculine violence by describing it as a “striving” in search of “power and dominion.” It is discord and violence for selfish gain. The accumulation of “power and dominion” is consistent with patrician manhood and finds its foundation in narrative of Genesis.
Genesis, as used by black Freemasonry, opened the definition and application of ideal manhood, but the reference Hilton makes is to the assumption of masculine dominance. The directive to Adam includes the command to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of sea” (Genesis 1:26). This language of subjugation and conquest is problematic not empowering in Hilton’s description. The Mason is not to claim those privileges. Connected to the disdain of dominance by a semicolon is Hilton’s instruction “from such unpleasant sights let us look into the Masonic Hall, here all is love!” (8). Love and compatibility are privileged above the quest for control, power, and prestige.

In fact, the bible serves as a language to distinguish between these expressions of manhood and entitlement. Hilton describes those who would discredit or disregard Masonry as practiced by the African lodges as “the unfortunate Esau” the brother who traded his birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup in Genesis 25:30-34 (5). The biblical analogy continues as Hilton describes the relationship between brothers present from different lodges as “a picture similar to the that of the meeting of the Patriarch Jacob and his Son Joseph, while their affectionate feeling was running from breast to breast, and almost kindled into a flame by the ardour of their passion” (6). Different from the long legacy of inherited Masonry charted by Marrant, the relationship of black Masons to the white order of Masonic manhood is that Jacob, who values the birthright more than those who would legally inherit it and through whom the promise of redemption comes. This genealogy places a greater emphasis on the trials of Israel than the claim to origin and enables Hilton to speak of black Masonry as an inheritance that “has come down to us, thus purified in the fire of persecution, a gem, which is a rich inheritance to its possessor; dissolving by its warm and animating beams all those corroding passions which infect the moral system”
They did not inherit a pure form of Masonry, as Marrant and Hall argue, their Masonry is made pure by the legacy of oppression and trial. First, this makes plain the consciousness of black “condition” linked by the oppressive masculinities present in the government. Secondly, it changes the tone of Masonic manhood. The superiority is not inherited, it is earned “[p]lacing the high, the low, the rich, and the poor, on a level, without any distinction, that that made by merit” exemplified under pressure (9). This shift in language necessitates a new articulation of manhood that amplifies rather than obstructs the construction of a gynandrous manhood; because of the biblical shift, this manhood must be written and spoken in social characteristics rather than religious imagery.

Hilton’s speech defines Masonic manhood along the same lines as feminine virtue of the nineteenth century. Barbara Welter outlines and investigates these virtues in her essay “Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860”: “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (152). These four virtues held formed the “solemn responsibility” of women that “promised happiness and power,” and Hilton turns each of them into the standard of Masonry.

Domesticity applies to the lodge and the Masonic family that grows from its proceedings. This goes beyond the user of the term “brother” to relate to fellow members. The relationship between lodges is described in term of “parent” and child, and the building itself is a moral haven (6). It is written as private space free of the moral grime of politics, because when “assembled in their Lodges they do not allows themselves to indulge in acrimonious or contentious disputes about the subjects of religion or politics, but endeavour to preserve and cherish a spirit of peace, harmony, and good fellowship” (8). The Lodge, like the home, is to be maintained as a haven where moral guidance occurs without contention. As men in charge of this
private space, they become the regulators of a type of domestic sphere. Young Masons are raised and trained by other Masons with the goal of creating “the African family” as a collective identity for African’s descendants in the United States (5). The nineteenth century nuclear family entrusted such spaces and developments to the woman of the house while the leadership rested with the man; the Mason occupies both positions within himself. He is head of the house and moral guide.

The piety and purity of the Mason figures as a central theme in the address. The lodge is the “consecrated walls of the Supreme God,” and their “great head and pattern,” John the Baptist, is described as a “pillar of piety” in the opening paragraph (3). They are “[m]oved by its [Masonry’s] pure principles and animated by its benign influence” (5). They are encouraged by Hilton to live in such a way as “transmit it in its purity, to our Children’s Children, that the world may gaze upon it with wonder, and mankind be astonished at the lasting gratitude of Africans” (6). In Hilton’s estimation, “Masonry bears that resemblance to religion, that a miniature does to a portrait; hence, it lays us under the same obligations;” and the purpose is to render the Mason pure, lacking “all the bad qualities of man” (9). Though Hilton’s Masonic manhood borrows from the language of women’s virtues, he is sure to keep it distinct from that fully feminizing proximity. He does not directly relate this purity and piety to the issue of sexual activity, but his disdain for any passion that is unbridled suggests that such conversations could easily be included.

The question of submission is a nuanced one. Hilton charges submission only to each other, and that submission is mitigated and marshalled by the claims of “reason and justice” (5). With this in mind, Hilton reminds the audience that “it is your duty to render due respect to the Offices
of your Institution; which their station and their order requires. You must be men possessing mental acquirements and unshaken love and fidelity; loving, affectionate, and true to each other,” but this is joined by the comment “let me remind you not to forget that you have declared yourselves independent” (14). The requirement to remain subject only to men of the Lodge and reminded of independence from white Masonic lodges is indicative of the masculine blend of these qualities. The goal is not to render the Mason indistinguishable from the women of the century. Hilton’s construction of manhood continues the mandate articulated by Marrant in 1789; the Mason is rebuilding what Adam destroyed in the fall, and when Hilton becomes the first national head of Prince Hall Freemasonry, it is this manhood that becomes the national standard. From Boston the Order spread north and west before exploding South at the end of the Civil War. Despite the progressive manhood, the Order never transitioned to full equality but settled for complementarity. The Eastern Star, the companion Order for black women, would be founded in 1874, a governance facilitating companionship almost fifty years before the federal government would follow suit.
THE MANHOOD WE MAKE

When searching for a masculinity that lays a foundation for true equality, we often look to the future. We gaze into the days to come and theorize about combinative qualities, rhetoric, laws, and narratives that can fix the masculinity that surrounds us. We should continue to dream of the future. But that is not enough. We must add knowledge of the past.

Each construction of black manhood featured in this project has definite flaws, and they are not designed to function as models of masculinity. Within each of them traces of progressive gender beckons. The manhood constructed from the shared traumatic past of slavery offers us three lessons:

First, a progressive masculinity cannot be afraid of the “feminine.” The feminine, here, functions in a literal proximity of feminine and feminist scholarship as well as the internal relationship to the maternal. From Stowe to Douglass to Freemasonry, these masculinities incorporated notions of the feminine without degradation. To some extent, each of these constructions of manhood positioned themselves in relationship to the feminine though a feminine position occupied a stauncher civic inferiority than it does today. The maternal and the feminine operated as necessary nuances to operate in a racist context. As long as “feminization” in non-normative masculinities is a derogatory attribution, we cannot move forward.

Second, dismantling patriarchal genders requires that we carefully re-read the creation story. As represented by Douglass and Stowe, purely civic models inherit the bias of the system. It is impossible to claim a patriarchal heritage and expect a progressive result. The ray of hope that comes from Prince Hall Freemasonry is the reminder that we must reassess our interpretations of gender at creation. To dismantle the patriarchal imperative so often read there presents a pathway
to dismantling the patriarchal institutions founded upon those assumptions. Whether or not one is Christian, the implications of Adam and Eve follow each of us. As bell hooks acknowledges, patriarchy often begins at church where we “learned that God created man to rule the world and everything in it and that it is the work of women to help men perform these tasks, to obey, and to always assume a subordinate role in relationship to power” (18). To reassess our understanding and application does not necessitate a completely secular worldview.

Thirdly, black masculinity is essential to any gender reform we consider. Spillers was right, black men have been vilified, ignored, and socially castrated because of their proximity to the feminine condition under slavery and into the present, but because of that trauma, the black man has always been at the center of gender construction. The centuries have forced him to make masculinity new, to shape and mold a manhood that is somehow in between. It would do us well to take note of that process, to study the constraints and constructs of that creation. He is only emasculated if we dismiss his creation. History has witnessed the construction of that masculine position, and through him, history may witness masculinity altered. In the black man we can see manhood (un)made.

Though it may sound like a herculean task, it is necessary if the manhood we make is to dismantle systems of oppression. What manhood will we make?
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