

# “He Made Us Laugh Some”: Frederick Douglass’s Humor

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Among Frederick Douglass’s formidable skills as a critic of slavery and racial prejudice, he was widely remembered during the nineteenth century for being able to make his audiences laugh. Toward the end of Douglass’s final autobiography, *The Life and Times*, he remarks that “I have been greatly helped to bear up under unfriendly conditions, too, by a constitutional tendency to see the funny side of things” (470). In support of his claim, he tells a story of riding a crowded night train through New York State. As one of the few passengers who had a whole bench seat to himself, he covered his head and went to sleep. When a well-dressed white man asked him to slide over, Douglass sat up and said, “ ‘Don’t sit down here, my friend, I am a nigger.’ ” “ ‘I don’t care who the devil you are,’ ” the man responded. “ ‘I mean to sit with you,’ ” to which Douglass replied, “ ‘Well, if it must be so, I can stand it if you can’ ” (470). Douglass concludes the anecdote by noting that the two men then struck up an agreeable conversation for the rest of the trip.

As is typical of Douglass’s rhetoric, the story turns on several ironies, not the least of which is his preference to be treated like an equal citizen despite the fact it might bring temporary discomfort. The story is important, too, because of the egalitarian turn of Douglass’s final remark. His grumbling consent to the white man’s request reverses the roles of a painfully familiar racial tableau in which the person of color requests a seat. Most importantly, however, the scene is characteristic of the dialectic between violence and humor that animates much of Douglass’s rhetoric: The affectionate and benevolent term *my friend* hardly belongs in the same sentence with the word *nigger*. This contrast between pain and pleasure characterizes many Douglass anecdotes. At his best, Douglass could win his enemies’ admiration by making them smile with him. But as Spike Lee has recently illustrated in his thoughtful film *Bamboozled*, making white folks laugh in this way has always had its dangers. As a newspaper editor, Douglass was well-known for his dislike of minstrel humor, and when he joked in public, he knew that he might be measured against those standards. By exploiting his audiences’ likely prejudices, however, Douglass used humor to transform himself from a social pariah into an equal. In other words, while Douglass attempted to separate himself from the clichés of plantation comedy, he often deliberately invoked those genres of bigoted humor in the service of the abolitionist cause.

Because modern literary critics have generally represented Douglass with earnest passages taken from his *Narrative*, there has been a tendency to cast him in the singular role of righteous anti-slavery crusader. Naturally, Douglass and William Lloyd

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Garrison were strongly invested in people's appreciation of the *Narrative* on these terms. At the same time, however, many recent criticisms of Douglass, ranging from allegations of racial sedition to sexism, have their origin in close readings of the *Narrative*, a document that represents only a small fragment of Douglass's literary career. Douglass's use of humor turns many recent criticisms upside down and reveals a much more complicated figure than current descriptions of him as a representative man of Jacksonian individualism.

Douglass's humor is evident throughout his 1845 *Narrative*, although this text is seldom noted for its comic moments. Until the very end of the *Narrative*, Douglass usually employs a plaintive voice, consistent with the character who gives the desperate soliloquy to the ships on the Chesapeake Bay. As is commonly known, the *Narrative* is a well-crafted series of dramatic narratives that Douglass developed on stage during his four years' work as a paid agent for William Lloyd Garrison's Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. And while many of the powerful scenes he used in his *Narrative* came directly from his stage repertoire, on the page, he elected to modulate his charismatic stage persona and appeal to readers as a supplicant rather than as an equal. Although Douglass had worked with melancholy, pathos, and controlled indignation on tour, he was far better remembered as a speaker for his sarcasm and wit. In his *Narrative*, he generally avoids a tone of bitter satire until the final chapter. The Appendix's attack on slaveholding religion and Douglass's satiric revision of the Methodist hymn "Heavenly Union" are more accurate reflections of the type of derisive performance that formed the basis for his nineteenth-century reputation.

Rather than an awkward leftover of his journeyman days as an orator, the Appendix is a specimen of a complex oratorical rhetoric that Douglass

employs throughout the body of his *Narrative*.<sup>1</sup> Combining mimicry, satire, righteous denunciation, and ridicule, Douglass makes explicit a variety of rhetorical tools that he deftly understates in other passages in the *Narrative*. Drawing upon the radically egalitarian republican educational training he learned from *The Columbian Orator*, Douglass uses humor to reshape his audience's ideas of community.

### The Sermon Satire

One of the primary means of Douglass's early success as an abolitionist lecturer was his skill as a mimic—in particular, his burlesques of slaveholding consciousness. Early in his career, in 1842, Douglass spoke on two consecutive days at Lanesborough Seminary in Massachusetts. While we do not have extensive records of these early speeches, one young seminary student wrote in his diary that Douglass "made us laugh some" by illustrating the hypocrisy of the Christian slaveholders (Alford 87).

The student was referring to Douglass's imitation of a pro-slavery minister on the theme of "Servants, Obey Your Masters." This satire was a central part of Douglass's speaking repertoire from his very first months as a Garrisonian lecturer (*Papers* 1:12). To begin his satire, Douglass buttoned his coat up to his neck and assumed a stern countenance (1:360). Imitating the canting voice of a hypocritical preacher, Douglass then gave a several-paragraph sermon based on the principle that obedience to the slavemaster is obedience to God. Pretending to speak to a slave congregation, Douglass would begin: "I know your prayer is daily, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me do?'" After a dramatic pause, Douglass would respond gravely, "The answer to that is given in the text, 'Obey your masters.'" His audiences

exploded with laughter at Douglass's bathetic drop in tone, a strategy which set the general rhythm for the speech that followed. In each of his remaining remarks, he painted a grossly idealized picture of slave life whose consistent moral was the solemn advice to "Obey your masters."

In his role as a white minister, Douglass's next move was a brief demonstration that slave unhappiness was a result of disobedience. During his tour of England in 1846, Douglass illustrated this point with a story about Sam, whose master beat him for falling asleep after being told to weed the garden. When his master got there,

Lo and behold! there lay Sam's hoe, and Sam was lying fast asleep in the corner of the place. (Laughter). Think of the feelings of the pious master! His commands disobeyed, his work not done, his authority thrown off. The good man went to look at the law and testimony, to know his duty on the premises, and there he was instructed that "he that knoweth his master's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." Sam was therefore taken up and lashed, so as not to be able to work for a week. Oh then, if you would not be whipped, be very obedient to your master. (*Papers* 1:471)

In this tableau of discovery, Douglass's portrait of Sam generates a tension which, I argue, is representative of a comic strategy he performs throughout his literary career. On one level, Douglass exploits the stereotype of a lazy slave in this anecdote, a technique that could backfire because it materializes the very prejudices he seeks to disarm. Indeed, in many other versions of this speech, Douglass emphasizes the language of prejudice by identifying the lazy slave by the name of "Sambo." At the same time, however, Douglass uses such character-typing to make a different kind of discovery: Sam's lapse of duty, which is understandable in the context of forced labor, is a far less serious crime than the slaveholders' misuse of Scripture. Invoking an Augustinian distinction between obedience to God's will and obedience to man, Douglass's burlesque implicitly

argues that the slaveholder's Christian duties toward mankind exceed the lesser claims of personal ownership.

Douglass gets his audiences to laugh at the Southern minister's hubris and hypocrisy, but the scene's comic intensity comes from the interplay of both bigoted and non-bigoted laughter. As he does in the night train story from his *Life and Times*, here Douglass's paradoxical expression of prejudice to fight prejudice generates tension. As Douglass slides the emphasis of the joke from the exhausted slave toward the slaveholder, however, he begins to reorient the audience's sense of community affiliation. They reflexively laugh at the lazy slave, but they also learn to laugh at the master, an imaginative act that pushes Douglass's audience to change its sense of group identification.

Douglass's use of stereotyping relies crucially on his ability to modulate his performance in combination with his audience's reactions. The act of laughing with others can be a moment of sharing and bonding, which, in contrast to private acts of affiliation and sympathy while reading, gains infectious strength through its publicity. Exploiting the good mood of his laughing audience, Douglass takes audience members from their prejudiced habits of laughing at plantation stereotypes and moves them toward communal laughter at the slaveholders' hypocrisy. Speech theorist Ernest Bormann, drawing on Robert F. Bales's studies of small-group interaction, has described this phenomenon of public consent as the creation of common culture. Toward the end of this essay, I connect Douglass's techniques of humor to eighteenth-century republican traditions of satire, but for now I want to emphasize that Douglass borrows from the language of one group (a prejudiced one that laughs at stereotypes of lazy slaves) for the tools to push his auditors and readers toward a new sense of themselves as human beings and a nation.

Douglass's skill at rearranging and reorienting the boundaries of self-and-society is the engine that drives some of his most humorous and violent rhetoric.

From the well-worn jest about slaves who will not work, Douglass turns to another likely audience prejudice—the primitive state of Africa:

Let us take a view of Africa. Africa, degraded, lost, and ruined Africa. There are no sanctuaries there; no Gospel privileges there. Men are groping their way in the blindness of heathenism, without God, and without hope; and the Lord seeing you in this wretched state, put it into the hearts of good men—of pious men, to leave their homes and their families, that they might snatch you as brands from the burning, and bring you into this Christian country. (1:471)

Douglass's achievement in this passage is to transform the exaggerated deficiencies of African life into an illustration of the moral deficiencies of the slaves' purported rescuers, the "pious" slavetraders. Although Douglass does little to diminish his audience's prejudices against Africa, he places most of the moral blame on those men who claim to know better. In the same way that the slavecatchers steal Africans, Douglass, in turn, poaches from their rhetoric—"degraded Africa"—for the instruments to highlight their crimes. The genius of Douglass's comic strategy is that he redirects the slaveholders' logic, inverting their sense of social status and entitlement.

At the conclusion of the sermon, Douglass's final move is an explicit attempt to transform his white audience's sense of itself. Making a distinction between mental and physical labor, Douglass addresses audience members as if they were slaves with an undeveloped intellect:

You have hard hands, strong frames, robust constitutions, and black skins. Your masters and mistresses have soft hands, long slender fingers, delicate constitutions, and white skins. Now,

servants, let me put to you a question. Whence these differences? "It is the Lord's doing and marvelous in our eyes." (Applause and laughter.) Thus, then, you see that you are most able to do the work, to labor and toil. You have superior strength to your masters. But, oh! servants, as a minister of the Gospel, let me exhort you not to boast of your strength—boast not of your strength, for that was given to you in lieu of something else. And recollect your relation to your masters does not place you in light of benefactors, for while you are dispensing blessings on them, they

are returning blessing on you. You have not so much intellect as your masters. You could not think whether such things are a benefit to you or not. You could not take care of yourselves. Your masters have the best reason and intellect. They can provide and take care of you. Oh! blessed is God, in providing one class of men to do the work, and the other to think (1:471-72)

### Like his sermon satires, Douglass's jokes are supposed to sting.

Douglass's burlesque manifests the hypocrisy of slavery in the character of the minister he is impersonating. He deliberately lists the clichés of black racial inferiority, speaking to white audience members as if they were a black congregation. Douglass asks them to measure the virtue of the slaveholder's sermon for themselves, looking at their own hands, bodies, and sense of agency. From their new perspective as a slave congregation, Douglass's audience is obliged to recognize the minister himself as a source of oppression. Even further, Douglass here attempts to dismantle the distinction between mental and manual labor, exploiting assumptions about the difference between the ignorant and the educated by implicitly suggesting that the thought of the working classes is meaningful knowledge.

Part of the success of Douglass's sermon was based on a claim of verisimilitude. Douglass often framed his parody by telling his audiences that he modeled his text on an actual edition of sermons for slaveholders written by Thomas Bacon in the eighteenth century (and edited in 1836 by Bishop

William Meade) (*Papers* 1:97).

Although the sermons in Bacon's text are accompanied by anti-slavery songs, and Bacon's sermons themselves do not wholly condone slavery in the way Douglass alleges, Douglass would flaunt the text before the crowd as if it were the devil's own book.

Apparently, it was a hilarious performance. Even fifty years later, in her obituary on Douglass's death, Elizabeth Cady Stanton would memorialize Douglass's sermon satire as one of the unforgettable moments of her generation's anti-slavery experience (Andrews and McFeely 130).

Douglass's satire is important in several ways. First, it illustrates his relationship to a black comic tradition vexed by contrary impulses of assimilation and resistance. As Dickson Preston discovered, Douglass was distinguished for his intelligence and humor while a young slave at St. Michael's. His masters' belief that he could easily adapt to the complexities of city life was one of the reasons he was chosen to go to Baltimore to serve the Aulds. He learned to successfully mimic white speech patterns from close contact with Daniel Lloyd and others (Preston 54-56). These imitations formed the beginning of his literary training. Frederic Holland reports that, when Douglass was very young, he practiced his clerical satires by addressing the pigs as "Dear Brethren" in imitation of local ministers (26). In the paradoxical economy of slave virtue, Douglass's skill at mocking the master caste earned him a marginally greater degree of freedom than his peers.

In terms of its subversive potential, Douglass's comic talent has equivocal significance. On one hand, it suggests Douglass's inheritance of African traditions of tricksterism and double-voiced narrative. Henry Louis Gates's work on the trope of signifying has attuned a generation of scholars to the importance of reading for irony and ambiguity in apparently straightforward African American texts. Douglass's mimicry clearly mocks the words and

conduct of his oppressors, an ironic appropriation of the master's discourse and power. In other respects however, mimicry, produced either for the entertainment of parents or for a master class, is a mode of conduct with often subordinate valences. Even when fairly sympathetic social critics, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, acknowledged that blacks had a natural talent for imitation and mimicry, it was a poisoned tribute, denying them the capacity for original thought and creative genius. Later in his career, Douglass became a vocal opponent of minstrel humor, performed either by blacks or whites. As editor of the *North Star* in the late 1840s, Douglass consciously sought to distance himself from the plantation burlesques he had practiced in his youth.

The success of Douglass's satire also needs to be understood in terms of commercial competition for audiences. The sermon parody was a very popular genre of American humor. Satires of the ignorance and greed of American revivalist preachers were a popular jest among American humorists and European travel writers in Jacksonian America. Following Charles Mathews, Sr.'s *Trip to America* in 1824, and Mathews' later speaking tours in the early 1830s, a road show with sermon burlesques could make very good money in the United States (Mahar 60-63; Rourke, *Humor* 101-14). In an urban area, Garrisonian lecturers competed with such public events as melodramas, lectures, musical performances, and burlesques. Although Garrison was hesitant to acknowledge the realities of commercial competition in his moral campaign against slavery, Douglass's sermon satires drew numbers and made a stir. The participation of Douglass, as a recently escaped slave, in this type of parodic performance made his jest even more marketable—he was a lively commodity.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time that Douglass's performance drew on sideshow appeal, it was nonetheless a powerful criticism

of slaveholding consciousness. His sermon satire worked on behalf of the abolitionist cause by orienting Douglass's audiences to laugh at the Southern minister's Christian hypocrisy, not just at Douglass's high-jinx as a "darky" humorist. Such cross-fertilization, however, was unavoidable, despite the fact that Douglass used his strong personal charisma as a lively refutation of racist theories of the inferiority of blacks. On the stage he spoke as an authority, not a supplicant. In the February 16, 1844, edition of the anti-slavery paper *The Herald of Freedom*, Nathaniel P. Rogers described Douglass as a "storm of insurrection," pacing the stage like a "Numidian lion" (*Papers* 1:26). Douglass rejected John Collins's advice that he speak with a slight plantation dialect because it interfered with his poise (*Bondage* 362). When he put on the mask of a buffoon, as in his preacher routines, it was so unlike the intelligence of his character that it made the performance even funnier. At the conclusion of his mock sermon, Douglass would clearly step away from his gospel burlesque, quipping his regret that such "miserable twaddle should be palmed off on the poor slave" (*Papers* 1:361).

Douglass's verbal expertise thus allowed him to move in and out of the roles cast for black speakers. In addition to the slave sermon, one of Douglass's favorite set-piece speeches in the late 1840s was an excerpt from John Philpot Curran's defense of James Somerset, a Jamaican slave who declared his freedom in the early 1770s when he arrived in England with his master. The speech was so well known in the early nineteenth century that, when James McCune Smith wrote the preface to Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he referred to it by only quoting a few words and "etc." (xxx). (Stowe also included a fragment from it as the epigraph to Chapter 37 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). During his stage performances in the 1840s, Douglass would often move into a dramatic quo-

tation from Curran's ode to British emancipation:

I speak in the spirit of the British law which makes liberty commensurate with, and inseparable from, British soil; which proclaims even to the stranger and the sojourner, the moment he sets his foot on British earth, that the ground upon which he treads is holy, and consecrated by the spirit of *universal emancipation*. No matter in what language his doom may have been pronounced;—no matter in what complexion incompatible with freedom an Indian or an African sun may have burnt upon him;—no matter in what disastrous battle his liberty may have been cloven down—no matter with what solemnities he may have been devoted upon the altar of slavery; the first moment he touches the sacred soil of Britain, the altar and the God sink together in the dust; his soul walks abroad in her own majesty—his body swells beyond the measure of his chains that burst from around him, and he stands redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled by the irresistible genius of *universal emancipation*. (*Papers* 1:85)

Douglass performs here what he claims to describe. He is not arguing, nor is he merely rehearsing, the benefits of British law. His apostrophe to emancipation is a spectacle of that liberty, a use of language to demonstrate what his countrymen refuse to legislate.

Douglass's performance of emancipation has two consequences. First, contrasted against the burlesque of the sermon satire, it appears in stark relief against the counsel of slaveholding ministers and magnifies Douglass's illustration of their deceit. Second, Douglass's adoption of a dramatic mode, in this case heroic apostrophe, is a melodramatic convention whose popular association with sacred authority Douglass shrewdly invokes. As Lawrence Levine has observed in *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, such heroic postures were well recognized topoi of creative artistry and expression during the antebellum period—the springboards of highbrow literary acrobatics (36-53). If Douglass's sermon burlesque comically inverted the power relations between white slavemasters and black

slaves, Douglass's epic postures established his authority to make such bold criticisms of the slave power.

Douglass's formidable performance skills also licensed bitter satires of the nation's leaders. During the 1842 debates over the return of the slave ship *Creole*, whose rebellious slave cargo the British intended to free, one of Douglass's successful stage techniques was imitating the personal idiosyncrasies of U.S. Congressmen as they argued that the British should surrender the vessel and its mutineers. According to one reporter, Douglass perfectly captured the ponderous logic of Webster, the dark concentration of Calhoun, and the active compass of Clay. For Douglass, the patriotic debates over the return of Madison Washington and the *Creole* sidestepped a more important discussion over the barbaric nature of the ship's mission. To illustrate this problem, Douglass drew himself up into an impersonation of the stuffed eagle of American liberty, and he lamented that its refrain was not that "all men are free and equal . . . , not the dreadful battle cry—Free Trade and Sailor's Rights— . . . but—but—I want my niggers" (*Papers* 1:xxxii). On behalf of his Garrisonian employers, Douglass emphasized that the U.S. had come to stand for slavery.

Using this method of juxtaposing his intellectual gifts against the objects of his satire, Douglass would even parody fellow African Americans, an attempt to harness the popularity of minstrel stereotypes for an abolitionist cause. Although Douglass had published an editorial in the October 27, 1848, edition of the *North Star* that was highly critical of black-face minstrel actors ("the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow-citizens" [qtd. in Mahar 7]), he also indulged in satires of black character types. A strong opponent of the plan to re-colonize black Americans to Liberia during the late 1840s, Douglass ironi-

cally employed minstrel techniques to pillory black pro-Colonization ministers for their lack of education. Taking up a backwoods dialect, Douglass once imitated a standard set-piece of a minstrel show, the black sermon: "I take my text from de Rebelation ob St. John. John you know was cast away on de island of Patmos" (*Papers* 2:167). After he finished with his parody of a black pro-Colonization preacher, Douglass shifted back to his own voice with the comment that, if these were the kinds of ministers being sent to Africa, they had better be "instructed and improved" before they were sent. Although Douglass clearly perpetuated the convention of an ignorant black preacher, he dared to use this genre of entertainment to disarm the racist expectations that endorsed the popularity of the character-type in the first place.

Even toward the end of his career, the subject of black emigration often brought out some of Douglass's strongest emotions and strained humor. One of the vocal opponents of the Exoduster plan in the late 1870s, a movement among Southern ex-slaves to resettle in Kansas, Douglass spoke critically of previous plans to move African Americans to remote locations. Speaking to a mixed crowd of blacks and whites at the American Methodist Episcopal church in Baltimore, Douglass even punned that Nicaragua "would have been a Nigger-agua" had the emigration movement succeeded (*Papers* 4:501). Although one may be tempted to indict Douglass for bad taste, his forceful inversion of popular conventions composes the rhetorical core of his literary and political sensibility. In contrast to many of his Reconstruction Era peers, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who infamously denigrated other ethnic groups to advance white women's suffrage, Douglass's use of ethnic slurs was performed in the service of a universally egalitarian political philosophy.<sup>3</sup> When he joked about drunken Irishmen, henpecking wives, and uneducated blacks,

he also enthusiastically advocated their right to the franchise. But perhaps rationalization of Douglass's nigger jokes is beside the point: Like his sermon satires, Douglass's jokes are supposed to sting.

### Violence and Laughter

In his study of American humor *Punchlines*, William Keough remarks that American humor, stretching from the Western tall-tale to the vulgarity of Lenny Bruce, often thrives upon rough-edged violence. Keough notes that several British nineteenth-century reviewers commented on the "touch of brutality" in U.S. humor (2-5). As the success of Nathaniel West's and Mark Twain's work suggests, there is little Americans find more funny than jokes featuring pain, death, and disfigurement. When Huckleberry Finn's aunt asks him if anyone was hurt in a steamboat explosion, he declares, "'No'm. Killed a nigger'" (249). The pathos of Huck's comment comes from the juxtaposition of Huck's private friendship with Jim and his public disavowal of that bond. The remark generates nervous humor from two directions: First, it is based on the reality that to pull off a charade in antebellum Arkansas, Huck's got to fit into a slaveholding culture, and his comment has perfect pitch. The second element of humor, Twain's compound trademark, comes from the emotional tension between morality and the pragmatism that Huck's comment manifests. Although this is not the knee-slapping comedy of James Russell Lowell's *Biglow Papers*, where Birdofredum Sawin's campaign for President is founded on a ludicrous celebration of his own dismemberment while killing Mexicans during the war of 1846, Huck's comment on the violence of American race relations is both funny and serious for similarly macabre reasons.<sup>4</sup>

As these examples from Twain and Lowell suggest, American ethnic humor is often bound up in a violent sociological struggle for minority recognition and survival. In a context of racial strife, jokes can be used as methods of attack and exploitation, and also of defense. In their review of ethnic humor in the United States, Joseph Dorinson and Joseph Boskin have argued that, in response to oppression, African Americans have often used humor in ways that mirror the stages of postcolonial identity formation: first, as a means of subcultural bonding, communication, and social insulation; second, as a means of becoming accepted into the dominant culture, sometimes through parody and self-caricature, and sometimes through assimilation; and, finally, as a means of aggression and defiant self-assertion (180).<sup>5</sup> In the same way that, in a given historical moment, all three of these strategies exist simultaneously, ethnic jokes can perform all three of these functions at once.

Likewise, Douglass's stage humor of the 1840s and '50s both threatened his audiences and made them laugh at the same time. Proclaiming his own mulatto heritage, Douglass taunted his listeners with the assurance that he, and other children of slavery, wouldn't easily disappear. He told an audience in 1845 that "I'm your blood kin. You don't get rid of me so easily. I mean to hold on to you" (*Papers* 1:33).

The dialectic of humor and violence in Douglass's work is evident during one of the high points of Douglass's anti-slavery career: May 7, 1850, at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City. Celebrating the sixteenth anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Garrison had organized a meeting to put pressure on Congress during the debates about the Fugitive Slave Law. Infuriated by Douglass's vocal support of the Garrisonian threat to secede from the Union (whose slogan was "No Union with Slaveholders"), local Democratic editors had encouraged pro-slavery



mobs to disrupt the meeting. The leader of the mob was "Captain" Isaiah Rynders, a Tammany ward boss who had helped lead the Astor Place Riots the previous year. Rynders and his men managed to rush the platform at the very beginning of the meeting and get one of their own speakers on stage, a "Dr. Grant," who argued for nearly an hour that blacks were descended from monkeys. Drawing comparisons to armadillos, anacondas, and shellfish, Grant concluded that racial amalgamation was abhorrent in the eyes of God (*Papers* 2:236-39). When he was finished, and Douglass was about to reply, Rynders confronted Douglass on stage by warning him loudly, "Don't speak disrespectfully, or I'll knock you down." Somewhat threatened by Rynders, Douglass replied, "No, I won't" (speak disrespectfully), which some people in the crowd heard as "No, you won't" (knock me down).

In this moment of tension, Douglass assured the crowd there would be no riot. Using himself as a foil, he responded to Grant's speech by saying, "There is no danger of our being thrown into confusion by a monkey" (2:237). Continuing to measure himself against Grant's hypothesis, Douglass asked: "Look at me—look the negro in the face, examine his woolly head, his entire physical conformation; I invite you to the examination, and ask this audience to judge between me and that gentleman (Mr. Grant). Am I not a man?" Captain Rynders then shouted: "You are not a black man; you are only half a nigger." Douglass immediately responded, "He is correct; I am, indeed, only half a negro, a half brother to Mr. Rynders" (2:238-39). The hall roared with laughter. Realizing he had scored an important victory, Douglass returned to his comment later in the speech when he said: "I am a fugitive, and I glory in the name. Kossuth was a fugitive, you know—another half brother of mine . . . There is prejudice, however, . . . against fugitives, even against Daniel Webster—another half-brother of mine." Rynders

tried to interrupt again, saying, "He's three-quarter brother of yours; he's as black as you are," but he was unable to rile the crowd for the rest of the meeting. In an interview later that year, Rynders admitted that Douglass "did give me a shot, and it was as good a shot as I ever had in my life, when he said to me, 'Oh, then, I am only your half-brother'" (2:239).

Douglass's fortunate substitution of words for fists in the Rynders episode makes explicit the significance of rhetoric for the abolitionist cause. Forged in the pitched battles of anti-slavery, humor was a literary weapon that Douglass developed while working within the restrictions of Garrison's program of fighting slavery through moral suasion rather than through political action. It protected him from bodily harm, enabled him to keep the attention and respect of his listeners, and allowed him to land figurative blows upon physically violent opponents (see Cook). Douglass's comic skills become even more valuable when compared with the zealotry of some of the other agents in Garrison's employ, such as the polemical Stephen S. Foster, author of the anti-clerical work *Brotherhood of Thieves*. Speaking to a congregation in Rhode Island in December of 1841, Foster attempted to draw attention to the church's complicity in slavery by challenging his audience with the question: "Is there a single member of the Methodist Episcopal church within the sound of my voice who dares deny that he is a villain?" (qtd. in Holland 62). It is little wonder that rioting crowds broke Douglass's hand in Pendleton, Indiana, after meeting with agents like Foster (McFeely 108).<sup>6</sup>

### The Action of Humor

**I**n the context of Douglass's 1845 *Narrative*, it is important to note that he does not generally use the bold

forms of invective there which he employed while responding to hecklers or imitating ministers. Douglass appreciated the tumult that could develop at an anti-slavery meeting, saying, "I like the wild disorder of our free discussion meetings. I like to hear the earnest voice of anti-slavery, so far forgetting the character of its speech, and the manner of its delivery, that almost any person may take exceptions to the remarks made" (*Papers* 2:180). What worked between people at a meeting, however, was not necessarily effective as written propaganda, and when writing his *Narrative*, Douglass kept the rowdy voice of abolition fairly quiet until the very end of the book. Interestingly, Douglass boldly jokes at the end of the *Narrative* about murdering people who try to inform on runaway slaves, a story whose subversive content he disowns by placing it in the context of a public meeting (*Narrative* 73).

Despite the low profile of Douglass's humor in the *Narrative*, many early readers commented about its presence, which, possibly because they had heard him speak, significantly shaped the text's reception. Ephraim Peabody, who reviewed Douglass's *Narrative* in 1849, lamented Douglass's sarcasm in his autobiography and expressed his wish that Douglass had toned it down even more (see Andrews, *Critical* 26-27). George Ruffin, who wrote the 1881 preface to Douglass's *Life and Times*, commented, "Douglass is brim full of humor at times, of the driest kind. It is of a quiet kind. You can see it coming a long way off in a peculiar twitch of his mouth; it increases and broadens gradually until it becomes irresistible and all-pervading with his audience" (vii-viii). Although Ruffin was attesting to the characteristics of Douglass's oratory, the type of quiet humor to which he refers is also evident throughout the *Narrative*, such as when Douglass, anticipating the ingenuity of Tom Sawyer, challenges the neighborhood white boys to a writing contest that

helps teach him how to read (*Narrative* 34).

The wry wit of the Sawyer anecdote is also evident in Douglass's first confrontation with Mr. Auld. When Douglass is first being taught the basics of how to read by Mrs. Sophia Auld in Baltimore, Mr. Auld finds out and forbids her to continue. Because this is a climactic moment in the story of Douglass's acquisition of literacy, few scholars have commented on its curious humor. Explaining why Douglass should be kept illiterate, Auld reasons:

"If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach a nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him." (*Narrative* 29)

Douglass assaults Auld on several fronts here, most obviously by conveying Auld's awareness that slaves need to be kept ignorant of the injustice of slavery. The second attack is a satiric criticism of Auld's manners and education. Auld's repeated use of the word *nigger* in his own household inverts social stereotypes about Southern gentility; he uses offensive language with his own wife. After Auld repeats the word for the fourth time in as many sentences, Douglass underscores Auld's vulgarity by reminding readers that, when Auld used the term, he was "speaking of myself." Finally, by substituting the word *learning* for *education* in Auld's polemic, Douglass also smirks at the poverty of his master's education, a technique Douglass has earlier employed when describing Mr. Plummer's abuse of his aunt. Crazed with sexual jealousy and anger, Plummer begins whipping Hester by shouting, "'I'll learn you how to disobey my orders!'" (15).

There is another element in this scene, however, that casts light on the rhetorical and physiological mechanics of Douglass's humor. As Thad Ziolkowski has noted, the confronta-

tion with Auld juxtaposes a common family of Enlightenment motifs: sight, literacy, knowledge, and violence. Douglass's gradual awareness of the potential rewards of literacy entangles him in the instrumental uses, or dark side, of liberatory rhetoric. Literacy (or, as Michael Warner has argued, a specific consciousness about the commercial *exploitation* of literacy) is a double-edged sword as easily used for conquest as it is for peace. For Ziolkowski, Douglass seizes the prospects of belles-lettres at his own peril.

The threat of violence, however, unexpectedly finds comic expression in Douglass's account. If one thing is clear in the "give him an ell" speech, Douglass's consciousness formation is produced by exposure to Auld's *fury* rather than his *logic*. Douglass doesn't yet clearly know the specific advantages that literacy will bring him. Rather, his decision to pursue his education is a visceral, physical reaction to Auld's anger. He feels it in his stomach more than in his head. As Douglass recalls the violent *activity* of his emotions as he confronts Auld ("What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated"), he begins to use humor as a means of expressing the conflicts he is experiencing between his emotions and his cognition, between his fear and his developing sense of intellectual superiority over Auld (29-30). In this sense, the Auld scene is a demonstration of humor functioning as a means of communicating Douglass's psychological and physiological turmoil. Humor acts as an expressive bridge between his somatic identity (his emotional and visceral feelings) and his understanding (his thoughts, both logical and symbolic).

In his 1982 work *Taking Laughter Seriously*, philosopher John Morreall proposes that laughter emanates from a pleasant psychological shift in people. Morreall argues that, while all laughter is not necessarily pleasant, if the *shift* of psychic energy is somehow pleasing, laughter results. Morreall's

hypothesis is useful because it attempts to synthesize three earlier theories of humor: first, classical theories that people laugh when they feel superior to something or someone (Aristotle; Hobbes); second, the belief that laughter issues from the perception of incongruous or unexpected events (Kant and Schopenhauer); and third, Freudian theories that laughter relieves excess psychic energy that would otherwise have to be repressed by the ego. All three of these theories offer powerful means for understanding the comic elements of Douglass's work. On one level, Douglass clearly uses humor as a means of mastery, incorporating the discourse of his opponents and laughing derisively at them. Similarly, Douglass's taste for rhetorical antithesis and opposition composes the very fabric of his style; his rhetoric thrives on the juxtaposition of opposites and incongruities. And finally, on a Freudian level, it is hard not to read Douglass's use of humor as a nervous attempt to release the stress caused by the memory of traumatic experience.

The virtue of Morreall's physiological hypothesis is that it incorporates these different kinds of psychological and somatic explanations in a model that emphasizes the dramatic *action* of consciousness, rather than the specific character of the psychological states themselves. (A comprehensive theory of laughter has to explain the kinds of laughter produced after tickling, winning a game, slipping on a banana peel, seeing twins, hearing jokes, etc). Douglass's humor evolves from *movement*: the journey from enslavement to freedom, the transformation from slave to man, the shift from one state of consciousness to another. The humor of Douglass's confrontation with Auld derives from Douglass's ability to take pleasure in his changing emotional state. With Morreall's dramaturgical explanation in mind, the climax of Douglass's *Narrative*, the fight with Covey, is particularly important for its synthesis of humor and conflict.

One of Douglass's notable autobiographical techniques in his description of the fight with Covey is his occasional disclosure of the fully mature Douglass who lived to tell the tale. Like the cosmopolitan voice that briefly reveals itself during Hugh Auld's "he'll take an ell" speech, the narrator of Douglass's description is not so naïve as his former self locked in struggle with Covey. Douglass thus creates a multi-dimensional persona who seems to span the years between the event and its telling, creating a two-headed, transhistorical Douglass, composed in part of the desperate field hand subject to Covey's brutality and the other whose developing awareness of human dignity frames the story. The disjunction between these two personae generates both sympathy for the inexperienced younger Douglass, as well as a narrative estrangement from him.<sup>7</sup>

Like the contrasts between Douglass and the slaveholders he faces, the distance between the elder and younger Douglass creates an oddly pleasing comic effect for the narrator, who seems to enjoy pointing out his own naïveté almost as much as he enjoys laughing at slaveholders. The majority of Douglass's description is told from the point of view of his youth: He establishes Covey's strength, brutality, and guile for several pages, at the same time characterizing himself as a bumbling farm worker, barely able to withstand the heat of the day, much less the pace of Covey's work. Douglass's mature contemplation of himself-as-slave almost merges with the racist viewpoint of his former masters. Covey's Monday morning attack comes as no surprise. Like Sam in Douglass's slave sermon, who is sent out to hoe the garden but who falls asleep, Douglass sets up his readers to expect that the slave is going to pay dearly for his mistake (albeit unfairly).

As the story develops, however, Douglass revises the polarities of his tale. Although he has unflatteringly portrayed himself as slavery's whip-

ping-boy during most of his stay at Covey's, in this scene he comes into an unexpected position of power, a pleasing inversion which brings a hopeful smile from sympathetic readers.

Douglass describes Covey as if he were a mischievous child: "As soon as I found out what he was up to, I gave a sudden spring" (*Narrative* 49).

Although Douglass finds himself on the ground, he undermines Covey's advantage by noting that "Covey seemed now to think he had me" (49; emphasis mine). When Douglass grabs Covey by the throat, the joke is suddenly on Covey and slavery itself. When Covey calls out for help to Bill, the hired slave of a neighboring planter, Bill walks away, leaving Covey helpless at the hands of his angry slave. Douglass's awareness of the comic elements in the fight are even more explicit in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, where he outright declares that the scene "had something comic about it" (244). Douglass's 1855 description verges on slapstick when he pitches Covey headlong into a barnyard full of dung, a detail he omits in the *Narrative*.

Given Douglass's investment in the symbolism of the Covey scene—a demonstration to the world that slaves were willing, in Byron's words, to "strike the first blow" for their freedom—it initially seems odd that he would find it funny, or deign to use humor as a means of expressing it. The slave's metamorphosis from chattel to human is serious abolitionist propaganda. Like Douglass's use of ethnic jokes and stereotypes, however, the comic element in the Covey episode is compound. The unexpected shift in the relationship between master and slave is a poetic incongruity, a pleasurable reversal that generates humor and identification with Douglass's victory. Douglass's humor is a kind of linguistic violence, a metaphorical blow against slavery to match his physical struggle. There is another shift of psychic energy in this scene, however, which is based in ironic alienation

rather than identification. The cognitive difficulties inherent in acknowledging the disjunctions between free and enslaved, between the mature Douglass and the naïve Douglass, between volition and abjection are precisely where the comic becomes a natural, if not necessary, mode of describing the movement of his thought. Rather than simply forcing narrative closure (triumph and relief at Douglass's victory), the comic is also the exposure of these stresses, an active shift in perception which is simultaneously a means of identification and alienation. Douglass's humor invokes both a sense of potential *communitas* with him, as well as an estrangement from, and denaturalization of, the brutal racial tensions of 1845 (and, regrettably, 2001).

### **Humor and the Reconstitution of Community**

**T**he socializing elements of Douglass's humor—what I have earlier termed Douglass's republican ethos—is both a transgressive effect of his artistic style, as well as a residue of an eighteenth-century political tradition of public-spirited social reform. In his review of theories of ethnic humor, John Lowe suggests that humor is closely tied to community formation: It shifts boundaries of community and re-creates them. As Konrad Lorenz has written, "Laughter produces simultaneously a strong fellow-feeling among participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders . . . . Laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line" (qtd. in Lowe 440). In this sense, laughter can function as a transgressive force, temporarily forming bonds among people who otherwise have little in common. It is a socializing phenomenon. Werner Sollors has argued that the sense of "we-ness" that humor creates is itself an ethnicizing phenomenon, in that it creates the same elusive

sense of collectivity associated with ethnic identity (441).

As Zora Neale Hurston discovered, however, humor employed by black Americans could also be misunderstood by her peers. Critics such as Richard Wright complained that Hurston was undermining a politics of racial equality by simply making the "white folks laugh" (22). Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* seems to concur: Distressed by popular films, sitcoms, and videos that feature a narrow range of black identities, such as *Homeboys in Space*, Lee implies that many black artists have succumbed to performing in what the film identifies as a "New Millennium Minstrel Show." Through camera shots that linger on the enthusiastic laughter of black audience members as well as white, Lee emphasizes that many black Americans support New Millennium minstrel theater. The genius of Lee's film is that it too exploits the American minstrel heritage—the Sambo performances are devilishly powerful—but with a careful emphasis. It's *satire*.<sup>8</sup> Lee's *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the word during the initial credit sequence underscores the film's explicit connection to a tradition of republican social reform. Like Douglass's burlesques, Lee uses humor as a tactical means of renovating national society.

One source of Douglass's early exposure to the socializing effects of humor in a political context came through his childhood study of *The Columbian Orator*, a best-selling early national schoolbook whose social philosophy was composed of a volatile blend of radical republicanism and New Light divinity. The *Orator's* conservative aspects have been explored by many scholars but few have drawn attention to its humor (its use of witty dialogues was innovative for its time) or its Frenchified political radicalism.<sup>9</sup> Endorsing the moral beliefs of Asians and Native and African Americans, the *Orator* promoted the spoken word as a means of fusing genuinely egalitarian

politics to the strict demands of Calvinist moral principle.

Douglass's prominent endorsement of *The Columbian Orator* in his autobiographies is a complicated gesture. In response to rumors that he was an educated freeman masquerading as a runaway slave, Douglass initially referred to the book in his *Narrative* to explain the source of his literacy (*Papers* 1:87-89). In addition, his expansion of the passage in succeeding editions of his autobiographies served as an homage to literary conventions of self-culture, or *Bildung* (Andrews, *Critical* 4-11). But Douglass's reference to *The Columbian Orator* also had a very simple objective: to make contact with his readers. Most of Douglass's audience, including literary figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Horace Greeley, had studied from the *Orator* as children, too.<sup>10</sup> Even in the South during the early 1830s, where one would expect *The Columbian Orator's* strongly anti-slavery message to have restricted its availability, Douglass was able to purchase a copy of it because the South did not have a sufficient printing industry to make its own schoolbooks (Elson 7-8). In his *Narrative*, Douglass refers to the text as a means of identifying with his audience, as if to say, "I had a childhood education like yours." In consideration of the text's radical politics, Douglass is also asking his readers to recall some of the more unruly voices of their youth.

Part of this republican education included exposure to the rhetorical techniques of British Parliamentary debate. In all of his autobiographies, Douglass recalls that it was in *The Columbian Orator* that he found one of Sheridan's speeches on behalf of Catholic emancipation, a text from which he learned the techniques for a "bold denunciation of slavery" (*Narrative* 33). Most modern scholars politely note that Douglass was mistaken, and that the speech he remembered was actually by Arthur O'Connor. Interestingly, however, the speech by

Richard Sheridan appearing in *The Columbian Orator* is a comic satire, featuring Sheridan's several-paragraph ridicule of a barrister who courts partisan favor for financial gain. The inspiration of Sheridan's reply comes from exploiting the language of his opponent, who had modestly claimed to be a "chicken-lawyer." Pursuing the lawyer's barnyard metaphor with a pitchfork, Sheridan concludes that perhaps it would have been as well "that the chicken had not left the barn-door of the treasury; but continued side by side with the old cock, to pick those crumbs of comfort which would doubtless be dealt out in time, with a liberality proportioned to the fidelity of the feathered tribe" (Bingham 131). By satirically working from the worldview of his parliamentary antagonists, Sheridan obliges his listeners to reevaluate their principles of social justice. Douglass's sermon satire and his fight with Covey work in similar fashion: Douglass refigures and re-deploys racist stereotypes as a means of ridicule.

Sheridan's critique of financial self-interest is another important reason that Douglass's reference to Sheridan is an invocation of an explicit tradition of *disinterested* republican social reform. Many of the *Orator's* humorous dialogues, penned by Dartmouth alumnus David Everett, poke fun at individuals who are guilty of financial impropriety at the expense of their communities. The "Dissipated Oxford Student" spends all his parents' money on gaming and drink. The dialogue on "Modern Education" satirizes the desire of a well-paid schoolmaster who teaches young women to dance and play music but who neglects the principles of a *useful* education. The "Oppressive Landlord" is rewarded for the robbery of his immigrant tenants with the burning of his property. (In a modern touch of humor, the only person left to console the landlord for his loss is his greedy lawyer.) Even in the "Dialogue Between Master and Slave," the slave suggests that his master has

cheated his neighbors in unfair business deals.

Although these dialogues ostensibly contain pat moral lessons, their humor and their dialogic philosophy are co-supportive. They deliberately exploit opposing points of view as a means of renovating community beliefs. Humor is both a result of the reversals that the dialogues generate as well as a means of creating a new community of people who can laugh together. One of the most important lessons that Douglass learned from the *Orator* is that humor and republican politics can work together.

## Conclusion

Since Peter Walker's 1978 study *Moral Choices*, it has become fashionable to question Douglass's racial allegiances. Scholars point out that Douglass's celebration of literacy, his taste for white women and masculinist

posturing, and his apparent advocacy of *homo-economics*, or the "Self-Made Man," pose discomfiting political questions about his life and work.<sup>11</sup> Given his use of ethnic jokes and satires, and his frequent tendency to censure the conduct of his African American peers after the Civil War, many critics have concluded that Douglass suffered from a case of racial self-hatred. Rather than simplify the paradoxes of Douglass's behavior, however, Douglass's multi-faceted use of republican humor tends to complicate the project of taking his personality index. His wit was both activated by his perception of inequality and opposition, and harnessed by an extraordinarily supple moral purpose that could exploit several systems of value at once, and even laugh at itself. Although there is little laughter in Douglass's famous statement in his *Narrative* that "you have seen how a man was made a slave, you will now see how a slave was made a man," there is a smile.

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1. Our current understanding of Frederick Douglass's literary accomplishment has been greatly shaped by a preference for his writing. Despite the work of many historians on Douglass's oratory, literary scholars have tended to emphasize the genius of Douglass's writing. Robert Stepto, writing on "The Heroic Slave," finds much to admire about the text once he dismisses the "florid soliloquies which unfortunately besmirch this and too many other anti-slavery writings" (111). In his introduction to a collection of critical essays on Douglass, Eric Sundquist acknowledges that the rhetorical influence of Douglass's oratory is everywhere evident in the written texts, but he concludes that Douglass's autobiographies are of greater literary interest than his oratory (*Frederick* 6-11). Finally, in his survey of modern Douglass scholarship, William Andrews applauds the move away from the idea that Douglass was an orator (*Critical* 2-7). Notable exceptions to this habit among literary scholars include Robert O'Meally, Robert Fanuzzi, and Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations*.

2. For the commercial popularity of a related staple of the minstrel circuit, the political speech, see also Christina Zwarg's excellent article on Sam's kitchen oratory in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

3. During the 1869 suffrage debates about whether blacks or women should get the vote first, Stanton demonized blacks and immigrants to make the women's vote seem more appealing. She spoke disparagingly of "Patrick," "Hans," "Yung Tung," and "Sambo," and protested that she would not want "ignorant negroes and ignorant and debased Chinamen" making laws for her to obey (*Papers* 4: 216-19). For her complete remarks in these speeches, which are more forceful than what I have quoted, see Stanton's *History of Women's Suffrage*. In contrast, Douglass welcomed a "composite nationality," saying "let the Chinaman come" (*Papers* 4:243-58).

4. One of the comic highpoints of Lowell's *Biglow Papers* is Birdofredum's advice to his fellow supporters about how to handle tough questions regarding his election platform for president. He suggests that they simply point to one of his missing appendages:

Ef, wile you're 'lectioneerin' round, some curus chaps should beg  
To know my views o' state affairs, jest answer WOODEN LEG!

## Notes

Ef they aint settisfied with thet, an'kin'o'pry an' doubt  
 An' ax fer sutthin' deffynit, jest say ONE EYE PUT OUT!  
 Thet kin'o' talk I guess you'll find'll answer to a charm,  
 An' wen you're druv tu nigh the wall, hol' up my missin arm. (124)

5. For more on ethnic humor in general, see Dorinson and Boskin's bibliography in Lawrence Mintz's *Humor in America: A Research Guide to Genres and Topics*. See also Lowe.

6. Foster's incendiary techniques were well known to both pro- and anti-slavery forces. In a published letter to the New Hampshire *Herald of Freedom* in 1842, Foster bragged that he had been imprisoned four times on behalf of the anti-slavery cause and physically removed from churches twenty-four times while trying to address parishioners. He added, "Twice they have thrown me with great violence from the second story of their buildings, careless of consequences" (qtd. in Bernard 356). Foster proffered these credentials like a badge.

7. For a wide-ranging discussion of this palimpsestic narrative identity that focuses on the reconstitution of a lost self, see James Olney's chapter "Not I," in his *Memory and Narrative*.

8. For a discussion of the burden that minstrel theater still poses for black comics (and a strangely cynical evaluation of Lee's *Bamboozled*), see Driver.

9. Although it has become commonplace to invoke residues of republicanism whenever civic duty is discussed in the nineteenth century, it is useful to keep several modes of republicanism separate. As Carla Mulford has noted, the term can take three very different forms in the early national period: (1) nostalgia for disinterested neo-classical republicanism, which New Englanders like John Adams often invoked but did not always represent; (2) commercial republicanism of the type advocated by Adam Smith and practiced by the enterprising and socially conservative disciples of Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster (see Michael Warner); and (3) radical republicanism, the neo-Jacobin social philosophy promoted by the Democratic-Republican societies of the 1790s (Mulford xiv-xv). Both the compiler of *The Columbian Orator*, Caleb Bingham, and especially the author of its original dialogues, David Everett, were trained in the principles of radical republicanism while students at Dartmouth. For more on the *Orator* and Frederick Douglass, see Blassingame 1:xxii-xxiii; Stone 17-18; Baker, *Journey* 38-39; Ziolkowski 162-63; Fishkin and Peterson; Andrews, "Preacher" 592; Royer; Fanuzzi; and especially Blight's introduction to the modern reprint. Scholars such as Baker, Ziolkowski, and Fanuzzi examine *The Columbian Orator's* educational mission as a technology of conservative white male republicanism. For the radical aspects of *The Columbian Orator's* synthesis of activist republicanism and New Light evangelism, see Ganter.

10. Emerson's familiarity with *The Columbian Orator* is evident in a letter he wrote to a friend in which he quotes one of the original poems appearing in the book (17). Stowe reports that it was one of the popular schoolbooks of her childhood in Litchfield (*Pogunuc People* 151). Constance Rourke writes at length about the influence of the text on Horace Greeley (*Trumpets* 244-45). While it is popularly noted that Abraham Lincoln studied from *The Columbian Orator* (Blight, *Columbian* xviii; Oates), it seems more likely that Lincoln read a Southern imitation of Bingham's text known as *The Kentucky Preceptor*.

11. For studies that show Douglass's alienation from his race, see Walker 247; Baker, *Journey* 38-39; Leverenz 361; Martin 208-10. For his exploitation of women, see Franchot 154; McDowell 202. For his relationship to the discourse of his former masters, see Ziolkowsky 151-52; Cheyfitz 33, 127-35. For his identification with liberal white culture, see Bercovitch 648; Baker, *Blues* 48; Martin 253-78; Leverenz 341-70; Moses 69; Yarborough 174-83; Zafar 99-117.

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