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Early African American Print Culture

Edited by
Lara Langer Cohen
and
Jordan Alexander Stein

PENN

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In summary, the life spans of early black books might nudge us to reconceive of books not as objects of exchange and consumption but as vectors of social movement. The magnitude of any individual book as vector is determined by social facts beyond the control of the author as well as the alignment of the book with social movements. To think of books in this way is to find ourselves gravitating slightly away from the richly informative but more economically mechanistic models of the book trade suggested, for example, by William St. Clair’s characterization of books as “highly differentiated capital assets from which reading services were taken by purchasers and others” and toward something resembling Manuel Castells concept of books as material forms supporting “time sharing social practices that work through flows,” or Lisa Gitelman’s definition of media as “socially realized structures of communication … includ[ing] both technological forms and their associated protocols.” We might, then, conceive of the work of the book as creating a form of experiential continuity across landscapes of profound discontinuity and disruption, and we might better appreciate how it is that authors like John Marrant and texts such as his Journal end up—in Herman Melville’s words, dead letters, dead men—stranded in time.

Chapter 3

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the Circuits of Abolitionist Poetry

MEREDITH L. MCGILL

Can attention to the format of printed works change how we think about the history of literary genres, in particular, the history of poetic genres? Judging by the paucity of book history scholarship devoted to American poetry (despite its cultural prestige), and the lack of attention given to print culture by scholars of American poetry (outside of that which is lavished on our great printer-poet, Walt Whitman), one is tempted to conclude that the materiality of the printed poem is largely immaterial to how we understand its significance. Over the past thirty years or so, book history has done much to re-shape the large-scale narratives of American literary history, providing nuanced accounts of literary authorship, publishing, and reading. Such accounts are, however, generally treated as external to histories of poetic form, which continue to be told as a set of relations between and among texts, and not books, institutions, practices, markets, systems of exchange, or media. Is there something about poetry in general and lyric poetry in particular that produces transhistorical, dematerialized ways of reading? Will the uptake of book history into the discipline of media history—prompted in part by the remediation of large swaths of the printed record into easily searchable, digitally transmitted PDF images—pull the study of material texts even further away from the concerns of those of us who attend to histories of poetic form?

In her groundbreaking work Dickinson’s Miser, Virginia Jackson surveys recent digital editions of Emily Dickinson, wondering if, for all of their promise of new approaches to Dickinson’s work, these digital editions don’t
in the end offer us simply more of the same. Praising the new forms of access granted by the Dickinson Electronic Archive, Jackson nonetheless asks: "But will it change our reading of Dickinson's genre—or will readers still go to the Web as they have to the print editions in order to read more Dickinson poems? Won't readers still view—because they already expect to view—these poems as lyrics? Will the medium of the Internet have any effect on the imaginary lyric model that has guided the editing and interpretation of Dickinson for so long?" To Jackson's disappointment, genre seems to trump medium, returning us again and again to lyric reading. But must genre always trump medium? Does medium matter for the study of poetry, and if so, how?

Some of the difficulty in bringing these disciplines into closer relation stems from literary studies' and book and media history's often incommensurate periodizations and striking differences of scale in their address to their objects. From the perspective of media history, the concerns of literary criticism—modes of address, experiments in form, meter, or genre, differences between early and late style, the ebb and flow of literary movements—can seem small, even trivial. From the perspective of literary criticism, the concerns of media history—the life cycle of a medium, from novelty to viability and widespread adoption; the tension between innovation and standardization, dissemination and centralized control—can seem too broad and too remote from what matters about works of art that matter. The micromeasures of literary time—the impact of first printings, the efflorescence of styles or "isms," even the spans of authors' lives—can feel out of sync and out of scale with the slow time and transnational consequences of media shift.

Poetry compounds the difficulty of bringing media history and literary history into satisfying relation. Poetry has a long history of claiming multimedia status—threatening to overwhelm sense with sound, offering a different way of seeing, and toying with our consciousness of page (or screen). Poetry has promised to serve as tape recorder, jukebox, Auto-Tune, or synthesizer, while also competing for primacy with painting, illustration, photography, and other visual arts. Poetry's claim to be an aural and a visual as well as a verbal art makes it difficult to wrestle poetic history into the sequential narratives of media history, narratives that tend to proceed as if there were only one medium per epoch: handwriting, print, photography, film, radio, television, Internet. Can we imagine a book history or media history finely grained and supple enough to recognize the interventions in these histories made by poems and poetic genres? How can we plot the shifting relations of poetic forms to multiple media as media themselves are transformed by technological innovation, changing social and cultural values, and culturally galvanizing and rearranging works of art?

As a gesture in this direction, I propose stepping back from the larger units of book history and media history to consider the usefulness of the concept of "format," a word that has come into general use as a synonym for "medium" (video format), "structure" (formatting a computer disk), or "order" (the layout of a magazine), but that has a precise meaning within the discipline of bibliography, a precision I would like to draw on and extend. Analytic and descriptive bibliographers use the term "format" to describe the relationship between the size of the paper placed on the press and the way in which type pages were laid out and paper was folded in order to produce the signatures or gatherings that make up the text block of the book. Technically speaking, "format" describes a relation between paper size and number of pages, which, at least for books produced in the handpress period, provides a reliable, shorthand description of the size and structure of the published book: "Crown quarto" or "Royal octavo."

Unlike the larger, vaguer "medium," this technical definition of "format" directs our attention to the set of choices printers and publishers make in producing a work, with the potential field of a book's reception very much in mind. Format is where economic and technological limitations meet cultural expectations. There is a decorum to format, borne in part of the risk and uncertainty of publishing as a commercial venture. Particular formats get associated with particular kinds of texts, although these associations change over time. Across the history of its reprinting, a text might be published in number of different formats.

In using the concept of "format" to think about the relationship of poetic form to medium, I would like to loosen the term a bit from its strict bibliographic usage while retaining bibliographers' attention to the cultural hierarchies that become visible at the point of production. Thinking in terms of format can help disaggregate print into smaller units: rather than considering how poets position their work in relation to manuscript, print, recorded sound, or digital media, we can ask how different kinds of print mobilize poetic genres.

Format and Audience in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's Poetry

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper offers a particularly good example of the difference an attention to format can make to our understanding of poetry,
illuminating not only the field of circulation of particular works but also the poems themselves. Harper is best known to literary critics as the author of the 1892 novel *Iola Leroy*, but she first came into public prominence as an abolitionist lecturer and poet, traveling and publishing widely in the 1850s under her maiden name Frances Ellen Watkins. Watkins withdrew from the lecture circuit in 1860 when she married Fenton Harper, returning to the platform as “Mrs. Harper” after her husband’s death in 1864. Her midcareer name change from “Watkins” to “Harper,” therefore, signaled a significant transformation of her civil and social status. The end of the Civil War also brought her greater geographical mobility and a revitalized career lecturing to mixed audiences in churches and public buildings throughout the South. Harper became well known as a Reconstruction activist and as a leading black voice in the movements for temperance, women’s education, and women’s suffrage. Despite the demands of travel, lecturing, and contributing to numerous voluntary associations, she continued to publish poetry, including the ambitious blank-verse epic *Moses: A Story of the Nile* (1869), her second collection, *Poems* (1871), and a series of poems based on her Southern lecture tours, *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872); she also wrote serial novels for the African Methodist Episcopal Church weekly, the *Christian Recorder*.4

Critical attention to Harper’s fiction and her postwar activism has largely eclipsed her antebellum career as a poet and abolitionist. Her mouthful of a name, which incorporates the recognizably abolitionist “Watkins” (her uncle William Watkins was a prominent Philadelphia abolitionist and educator, and her cousin William J. Watkins was also a traveling antislavery lecturer) into the lyrically appropriate “Harper,” turns out to be part of the problem. Insofar as “Frances Ellen Watkins Harper” names a consolidated body of writing, it assimilates her early work to the norms of late nineteenth-century authorship and insists on a single identity across the radical personal and political changes of midcentury. Although the timing of her name change does not map cleanly onto the political and social transformations that would shape her postwar career—she gave a number of antislavery lectures as “Mrs. Harper” before embarking in 1867 on a series of extended lecture tours in the Reconstruction South—acknowledging a difference between Watkins and Harper is a critical first step toward breaking down the assumption that her writing is all of a piece, shaped by a continuity of poetic aims and means.5

The misleading coherence suggested by the inclusive authorial name works in tandem with a disregard for format, the assumption that all printed books are essentially the same. Literary critics’ impulse to collect, sort, and make sense of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s poetry under the sign of individual authorship has worked to minimize material differences between and among her published texts. For instance, critics frequently cite the number of books the poet published and sold across her career as an index of her popularity, but this general calculation glosses over the fact that the volumes of poetry published by Frances Ellen Watkins look nothing like the collections Frances Ellen Watkins Harper published toward the end of her career. Indeed, these early volumes aren’t books at all, but rather small pamphlets or chapbooks, their print format suggesting conditions of circulation and assumptions about the cultural role of poetry quite different from those I had imagined for them. In hindsight, I could have teased out some of these differences from a careful reading of extant bibliographical information, but I failed, somehow, to take the measure of these details; I couldn’t conjure the difference format made from brief descriptions of these volumes or from the two-dimensional PDFs on my computer screen.6

Compare, for instance, Watkin’s *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (printed and reprinted numerous times from 1854 to 1874) (Figure 3.1) to Harper’s *Poems* (published in 1895 and 1900) (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, like nearly all of the poet’s printed work through the 1880s,7 is more of a pamphlet than a book. It is composed of three signatures (forty-eight pages) sewn in a stab binding with a pasted-on paper cover; some editions published after 1857 include seven new poems that take up an additional eight pages. Published in small print runs in successive batches to be given away or sold at her antislavery lectures, with no copyright notice overleaf, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* bears in its format the traces of a strong relationship to oral performance—to the punctual meetings of reformers bent on miscellaneous reforms that were brought under the umbrella of antislavery, and to the songs that were sung and the songsters that provided a text held in common at these meetings.8 The 1895 and 1900 editions of the *Poems*, however, with their floral-image, illustrated cloth covers, three-quarter-length author photo, facsimile signature, and copyright registration, mobilize a significantly different set of expectations as to what will be found in the book’s pages, suggesting parlor display rather than activist uses, individual authorship and silent reading rather than the work of collectives that gathered to forge and sustain common aspirations.

Critical editions of Harper’s work treat these books as items in a series composed of essentially the same thing—they are books of poetry. The
Figure 3.1. Paper covers, Frances Ellen Watkins, Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects (Boston: J. B. Terrington and Son, 1854), and Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects (Philadelphia: Merrifield and Thompson, 1857), Courtesy of Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

differences literary critics take care to account for and to remark on are predominantly verbal ones; the field of differences between and among printed texts gets rendered as linguistic, formal, and sequential variation.9 While a book history approach to Harper's writing would surely take note of these radical differences in format, these differences would likely be normalized by being placed along the developmental arc of the poet's career rather than allowing differences in format to open up questions about the relationship
of these collections of poems to other kinds of texts published in similar formats. Examining Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects through the lens of format instead of genre reveals its affinity with numerous texts that are similarly indexed to oral performance or that seek to contribute to the advancement of knowledge just outside of sanctioned institutions. Among the texts published by Frances Ellen Watkins's Boston and Philadelphia publishers in chapbook or pamphlet format are sermons, political and commemorative addresses,
convention speeches, academic lectures, congressional speeches, government testimony, essays on reform, personal narratives, and amateur scientific essays.\textsuperscript{10}

The vital first wave of recovery of Harper’s life and writing, painstakingly pieced together and interpreted by Maryemma Graham, Frances Smith Foster, Melba Joyce Boyd, Joan R. Sherman, Carla Peterson, and others, bequeathed to us an extraordinary African American poet, novelist, essayist, and orator who had been well known in her day but who had been largely written out of the record that was made visible and sustained by twentieth-century literary criticism.\textsuperscript{11} While in her later years, Harper worked to consolidate and preserve her literary legacy, the mid-nineteenth-century chapbook publication of her poems points at every turn away from the poet herself, away from a consistent poetic persona, and away from a stable poetic corpus toward frequently repeated oral performances and newspaper reports that helped strengthen opposition to slavery and knit together scattered communities of activists.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s identity as a black woman poet was crucial to the role she played in the antislavery movement, but her poems’ publication in cheap pamphlets, their frequent appearance in abolitionist newspapers, and the structure of the poems themselves all suggest that they were not intended to be read as lyrics, but rather as instruments of exhortation, nodes for the condensation and transfer of oral authority, and vehicles for collective assent. Virginia Jackson has argued that our recognition of poems as lyrics depends on a carefully maintained distance from eloquence (“Elocution is heard, poetry is overheard,” in John Stuart Mill’s influential 1833 coinage).\textsuperscript{12} What then are we to make of poems that in their forms of address frequently abjure the lyric “I” for a collective “we” and, rather than staging their unconsciousness of a listener, go out of their way to conjure or to return the reader to scenes of collective listening? For instance, Harper’s most widely anthologized poem “The Slave Mother” begins with the rhetorical question “Heard you that shriek?”\textsuperscript{13} suggesting not the lyric’s palpable disregard of an audience but rather a hyperconscious attempt to recast readers as listeners. In its forms of address and in its strategic generality, “The Slave Mother” seeks to produce not radical solitude but an architecture for easily iterable, collective witness.\textsuperscript{14} Following format’s lead, however, will take us beyond the anthology’s approved, representative verses to the far messier world of serial antislavery lectures and the weekly newspapers that advertised and reported on them, keeping pace with small advances and setbacks in the abolitionist struggle.

Antislavery Poetry, Oratory, and Print

Frances Ellen Watkins circulated her poems in cheap pamphlets as she traveled from town to town on her antislavery lecture tours. She may have recited some of her poems as part of her oral performances,\textsuperscript{15} but she certainly sold or gave away her chapbooks to those who came to hear her lecture, commissioning new issues and editions of Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects as her stock ran out.\textsuperscript{16} Some of the formal features of this first collection of poems can be accounted for by recalling her need to address multiple audiences of would-be reformers in serial fashion. As many have noted, the very miscellaneity of the volume seems designed for an audience drawn to the “sisterhood of reforms.” Her poems depend heavily on stock figures (“The Slave Mother,” “The Drunkard’s Child,” “The Dying Christian,” “The Dying Fugitive”); they recirculate familiar stories from the Bible and from popular novels (Uncle Tom’s Cabin [1852] and Oliver Twist [1838]); they strike generic postures and attitudes in predictable meter and simple rhymes (slave-save, slave-save, strife-life, wrong-strong), and are jam-packed with rhetorical questions that seek to evoke a pragmatic, collective response from her readers.

These questions frequently urge assent to a counterfactual order of things. The pressure on the reader to add his or her voice to a gathering outcry is palpable in “The Slave Mother,” in which a bystander to the separation of mother and child asks “Oh, Father, must they part?” (59), and in “The Contrast,” which asks of a fallen woman “Would no one heed her anguish?” (73). Many poems presume or evoke the structure of call and response: “Ethiopia” begins “Yes!” (63), while the topically political “The Dismissal of Tyng” personifies an outraged Episcopal church’s response to Stephen Tyng’s antislavery sermon by echoing the last three words of the editorial statement quoted in the epigraph, “Served him right!” (83) (Whose voice is this? It is not Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s). Many of her poems are hortatory, oriented toward a future their readers are charged with bringing to pass: typically, the poem “Be Active”—an adaptation of her hymn “Freedom’s Battle”—exhorts its readers to “See oppression,” “Hurl the bloated tyrant,” “See that sad, despairing mother,” “Lay your hand upon her fetters,” and “Crush these gory, reeking altars,” all in the
first six stanzas (76–77). These poems don’t express states of feeling but rather ask readers to witness wrongs and to participate in their remedy.

The mutually reinforcing relationship between print and oratory within the antislavery movement, and the part played by poetry as a switch point between them, is readily apparent from the publishing history of Frances Ellen Watkins’s 1860 poem “To Charles Sumner.” These lines addressed to the Massachusetts senator were first published as a stand-alone poem in the black-owned Weekly Anglo-African and as part of correspondence with the editor of the National Anti-Slavery Standard; the poem was then reprinted in William Lloyd Garrison’s Liberator. “To Charles Sumner” commemorates “The Barbarism of Slavery,” the first speech Sumner delivered on the floor of the Senate after his return to Congress more than three years after being brutally caned by the South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks. Bearing evidence in its headnote of the chain of like-minded papers that often reprinted each other’s articles, Watkins’s poem takes its place in the July 20, 1860, issue of the Liberator alongside a number of reprinted newspaper pieces that review or otherwise respond to Sumner’s speech, expanding and materializing the field of circulation of a controversial and consequential oratorical performance. This issue of the Liberator also includes a front-page reprinted review of Sumner’s speech in the London Times, which describes it as “offensively acrimonious” and a “foolish and vindictive harangue”; a letter to the editor of the Dublin News responding to this review; a report on the enthusiastic reception of Sumner when he delivered the speech for a second time in New York (along with the publication of a pseudonymous personal letter threatening murder if Sumner lingered in Washington, D.C., after the close of the Senate term); a letter from Sumner declining an invitation from the Boston mayor to speak at the city’s Fourth of July festivities; and an announcement of Sumner’s headlining a lecture series scheduled for the fall.

Why reprint a poem addressed to Sumner along with this outpouring of Sumner-related news and commentary? In general, the other Sumner material printed in this issue of the Liberator measures and seeks to control the effects of oratory. That the abolitionist newspaper served as a tool for extending the reach of prominent antislavery voices is reinforced by the fact that nearly half the paper is given over to an extensive “phonographic report,” or transcript, of the speeches given at a recent antislavery celebration in Framingham, Massachusetts, a report that seeks to reproduce oral performance in print, complete with parenthetical acknowledgment of audience response, such as “(applause),” “(Loud laughter and applause),” and “(Renewed applause).” By contrast, Watkins’s poem is nearly context- and contentless. “To Charles Sumner” doesn’t reproduce or report on speech, but rather arrogates the right to reply to Sumner directly, expressing relief at the very fact of his oration and describing how it sounded to his audience:

Thank God! for thou hast spoken
Words earnest, true, and brave:
The lightning of thy lips has smote
The letters of the slave.

I thought the shadows darkened,
Round the pathway of the slave—
That, one by one, his faithful friends
Were dropping in the grave.

When other hands grew feeble,
And loosed their hold on life,
Thy words rang like a clarion
In Freedom’s noble strife.

Thy words were not soft echoes,
Thy tones no syren song;
They fell as battle-axes
Upon our giant wrong.

God grant thy words of power
May fall as precious seeds,
That yet shall leaf and blossom
In high and holy deeds!

Despite the conceit that the poem refers to public speech—“Thank God! for thou hast spoken”—Watkins’s audience is clearly one for whom Sumner’s oration has been mediated by print. However, unlike the printed letter to the editor of the Dublin News or the transcript of speeches that had been delivered at Framingham, the poem’s reply comes from nowhere in particular and thus could be claimed by any and all. Rather than responding to Sumner’s assertions about the barbaric nature of slavery, the poem claims on behalf of those assertions a powerful if indeterminate set of effects (the speech has “smote /
The fetters of the slave" and has fallen "as battle-axes / Upon our giant wrong"). Although the second stanza introduces an "I" who fears that the antislavery cause has been derailed by the recent deaths of unnamed supporters, the poem works to dissolve individual doubt into collective confidence, exhorting readers to "high and holy deeds" that would translate into action the metaphorical effects claimed by the poet for Sumner's historic speech. The conceit that this poem is itself speech—a direct address to the heroic senator—creates a sense of intimacy without the individuation we are accustomed to find in lyric poems. Instead of a generalizable lyric inwardness we are left with a figurative rescattering—not of the speaker's feelings or of Sumner's words, exactly, but of the potential effects of these words.

As with "To Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe," which obliquely insists on the black poet's (and the black reader's) capacity to award "place" to the white antislavery activist, 20 "To Charles Sumner" claims a peculiar agency, conveying the stamp of black approval more in its provenance than in the poem itself, which maintains a strategic generality (who are those "faithful friends" whose "hands grew feeble"? Does it matter who they were?). Reprinted by Garrison from a black abolitionist newspaper, but also published as part of the National Anti-Slavery Standard's regular feature—the intermittently published report from the field of a traveling antislavery lecturer—the circulation of the poem in print bears witness to the diverse audiences that were loosely knit together by repeated courses of lectures and by the networks of communication drawn by reprinted items in the abolitionist press.

Like many of her antebellum poems, "To Charles Sumner" illustrates Frances Ellen Watkins's studious avoidance of the lyric "I," the carefully managed distance she maintains between the putative speaker and the figures she offers up for readerly identification, such as the "Slave Mother" (" Saw you those hands, so sadly clasped... Saw you the sad, imploring eye" [59]) or "Eliza Harris" ("Like a fawn from the arrow, startled and wild / A woman swept by us, bearing a child" [60]). In both of these poems the speaker shares the reader's position as a bystander to the action. The poem becomes a vehicle for making available—circulating and recirculating—common reactions and stock postures for readers to inhabit.

Like the chapbook Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, Frances Ellen Watkins's newspaper poetry is designed to circulate. Constituting a public in part by addressing it, her poems act as relays for abolitionist sentiment that neither originates with nor is captured or contained by the poems themselves. If much of the abolitionist press was keyed to oratory, announcing, transcribing, and reporting on speeches that were a vital part of local organizing, poems such as "To Charles Sumner," "The Dismissal of Tyng," "The Slave Mother," and "Eliza Harris" bear witness to how much this geographically dispersed movement depended on the abstraction of print and its many forms of repetition for coherence and visibility. Watkins's poems can seem trivial, ornamental, mere supplements to the more important, persuasive work of antislavery narrative and oratory. But they also offer something these modes cannot, or cannot do as easily or as well: a simulation of intimate address that is as general and iterable as print itself.

Temporality, Performance, and Poetic Address

Frances Ellen Watkins's poems circulated in close proximity to her circulating body, whether as keepsakes or extensions of her antislavery lectures, or as newspaper items that appeared along with occasional reports of her travels, advertisements of upcoming lecture tours, and letters from audiences who reported on her orations. It is impossible to say, finally, whether Frances Ellen Watkins's performances on the abolitionist lecture circuit served as a means for the circulation of her poetry, or whether her poetry and her status as genteel black poetess sustained her career as a lecturer. Early on in her career, the black abolitionist William Still characterized Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects as a supplement to her lectures, one that might help audiences ratify the evidence of their senses. Announcing in a promotional letter to the black-owned and edited Canadian weekly the Provincial Freeman that a new edition—"making ten thousand copies"—has just been published, Still boasts that it "sells rapidly, and serves admirably no doubt to keep alive in the minds of many, the interest awakened by her lectures, proving her to be decidedly original." 21

In this account, Watkins's book of poems is not only a memento but also a means of verification. This supplementary logic is familiar from the paratexts that customarily buffer white reception of black-authored texts, but in this case, the corroborating evidence circulates under the auspices and control of the orator-author (and her patron and promoter).

It is clear from her published work that white abolitionists expected Frances Ellen Watkins to represent the possibility of uplift, to serve as a figure for an achievable future for the currently enslaved. William Lloyd Garrison's patronizing 1854 "Preface" to Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects argues that Watkins's poems offer white readers evidence of what freed slaves
might be "capable of being and doing," which, without such exemplary figures, would be a mere matter "of supposition." Garrison's "Preface" shows how important the poet's "border-state heritage" is to her appeal; she is proximate to slavery but has never herself been enslaved; she is "identified in complexion and destiny" with "a depressed and outcast race" to which she also doesn't properly belong.22 Often paired with, or scheduled so that her antislavery lectures directly followed those of a fugitive slave speaker such as William Wells Brown,23 Watkins—a freeborn black Marylander—is able to give voice to the antislavery message, providing authenticity and a sense of urgency, without the stigma of ever having been enslaved.24

Frances Ellen Watkins's peculiar legal status was instrumental to her ability to carve a space for herself within antislavery discourse, enabling her to operate as an especially powerful vector for white women's identification. Initially, she had trouble breaking into the antislavery lecture circuit, landing her first speaking engagements only after the passage of an 1853 state law that decreed that free blacks reentering Maryland were vulnerable to imprisonment and enslavement. This law estranged her from the city of her birth and upbringing, transforming her into a kind of fugitive by proxy.25 Throughout the ante-bellum period, Watkins's legal status enabled her to represent identification with the enslaved as a choice that was nonetheless compelled by law and by racial identity.26 To strike a posture of genteel vulnerability that resonated thrillingly with many white abolitionists.

Take, for example, the elaborate description of her oratorical style published by the author and activist Grace Greenwood in response to one of the poet's performances in the aftermath of the Civil War. Reporting on a course of popular lectures held in Philadelphia in the spring of 1866, Greenwood borrowed a few lines from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese to describe the effects of "Mrs. Harper's" speech:

She stands quietly beside her desk, and speaks without notes, with gestures few and fitting. Her manner is marked by dignity and composure. She is never assuming, never theatrical. In the first part of her lecture she was most impressive in her pleading for the race with whom her lot is cast. There was something touching in her attitude as their representative. The woe of two hundred years sighed through her tones. Every glance of her sad eyes was a mournful remonstrance against injustice and wrong. Feeling on her soul, as she must have felt it, the chilling weight of caste, she seemed to say:

"I lift my heavy heart up solemnly.
As once Electra her sepulchral urn."

*** As I listened to her, there swept over me, in a chill wave of horror, the realization that this noble woman had she not been rescued from her mother's condition, might have been sold on the auction-block, to the highest bidder—her intellect, fancy, eloquence, the flashing wit, that might make the delight of a Parisian salon, and her pure Christian character all thrown in—the recollection that women like her could be dragged out of public conveyance in our own city, or frowned out of fashionable churches by Anglo-Saxon saints.27

For Greenwood, Harper's nonslave status paradoxically makes her a more effective "representative" of the condition of the slave. She is able to channel a long history of "woe" through the mere sound of her voice, her characteristic poetess's lament—that bottomless font of hypothetical feeling—connects the plight of the slave to an ancient history of effective if misdirected mourning (Electra mourns her brother's loss even as he stands beside her).28 Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's genteel composure is rich with borrowed significance for her white auditors. For Garrison, her cultivation provides a glimpse into the slave's prospects; she is an apparition sent from the future to reassure wary abolitionists. For Greenwood, "Mrs. Harper" extends the repertoire of the poetess to the most pressing political issue of the day, becoming both a figure for and justification of vicarious identification. Harper provides a spectacle of thrilling vulnerability without actual compromise, one in which her agency and integrity is jeopardized, but somehow retained.

Of course, white abolitionists' complex investments in Watkins Harper's refinement must be imagined to differ from her own: as Tavia Nyong'o reminds us in The Amalgamation Waltz, African Americans' performance of respectability in the absence of civil rights is itself a kind of political action: "The respectability pursued by black male and female activists was virtual, a respectability to come. It was not based in a defense of extant social relations but enacted through a mimetic performative intervention into those relations, upon terms they well knew white supremacy might fund unacceptable. . . . In politicizing respectability, they moved the domestic into the political sphere."29 What I want to suggest is a homology between the resonant future tense of Watkins Harper's performances—her enactment of a "respectability
to come"—and her characteristic modes of address in her antebellum poems. Watkins Harper is not only or not simply an instrument of vicarious feeling, but rather a figure who is willing to embrace, even to cultivate, spatial and temporal dislocation in the interests of conjuring a radically different order of things.

Watkins Harper's willingness to take on the work of displacement—both her risky, exhausting travel along the abolitionist and Reconstruction lecture circuits and the oratorical performances themselves, in which she offered herself as an instrument for collective identification—can help clarify what the resources of poetry offered to abolitionists, why they would be so eager to reprint verses in their magazines and newspapers or to feature “Poetical Offerings from the Bards of Freedom” on important occasions, such as William Nell’s 1858 Commemorative Festival of the Boston Massacre. This event was designed to protest the Dred Scott decision by celebrating black heroism during the American Revolution and the right to citizenship it ought to have conveyed. Yoking a painstakingly compiled, if patchwork historical counter-narrative to a collective claim on rights withheld, the festival program juxtaposes evidence of African Americans’ military service—in particular, Crispus Attucks's status as “the first martyr in the American Revolution”—with Chief Justice Taney’s ruling, set out in large-type boldface, that colored men have “No rights that white men are bound to respect” (see Figure 3.4). The festival’s primary aim was to gather a community of dissent around the preservation of historical memory, assembling “Emblems—Relics—Engravings—Documents” that proved African American presence “at the dawn of the American Revolution.” It is poetry, however, that serves to articulate the hinge between a past that is in danger of erasure and a future in which unrealized rights of citizenship might yet be conveyed.

“Freedom’s Battle,” the hymn that Frances Ellen Watkins composed “for the occasion” (see Figure 3.3), testifies to the limits of historical evidence—its inability to speak for itself—even as it seeks to capture the idiom of revolution to infuse a potentially stalled political struggle with a renewed sense of purpose:

Onward, O ye Sons of Freedom,
In the great and glorious strife;
You've a high and holy mission,  
On the battle-fields of life.

Figure 3.4. From William Nell, Boston Massacre, March 5th, 1770: The Day Which History Selects as the Dawn of the American Revolution: Commemorative Festival, at Faneuil Hall, Friday, March 5, 1858; Protest Against the Dred Scott Decision (Boston: E. L. Balch, 1858). 2. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.
Among the Exhibits—Arms—Engravings—
Drawings—Together with a few Living Testi-
ments of Revolutionary and other Historic
Association will be present the following—

THE SCENE IN STATE ST., March 5th, 1770.

WASHINGTON'S CRIMSON DELAWARE, in
which Prince Whipple is seen, holding the
spear near the same soldier that in
other sketches is seen on horseback, quite
prominent near the Commissary-in-chief.

CERTIFICATE (as Gen. Washington's own handwriting) of honorable discharge of Henry Baker, a colored soldier in the Connecticut Regiment, Jan. 5th, 1785.

Capt. William Trow's return of his Arti-
illery Company, including Negro Priests,
October 31st, 1778.

LETTER OF CAPT. TROSTLE TO COL. EGGLESTON,
written in Lexington, April 17, 1776. (Handwritten)

JOHN GRIFFIN'S RECEIPT for the Black Men,
Boston, April 24, 1776.

BELL OF LIBERTY for Negro Girl Fines, con-
signed to John Powell, Boston, Jan. 10, 1776.

SALE OF A NEGRO BOY AND A BOY, Boston,
Jan. 9, 1769.

INSTRUCTIONS TO SAMPSON, Settler, March,
1760.

APPOINTMENT OF POWER OF ATTORNEY for
recovering prior-money carried by a colored 
man, Joel Gardner, on board the Private
army Schooner Manassas, of Baltimore,
and money claimed by his reputed master, J. C.
Deshong, of Baltimore, Jan. 21, 1769.

ABOLISH SENTENCES written by a Black Man
owned by Gen. Owen, of Wilmington, N.C.

See Oppression's heel of iron
Grinds a brother to the ground,
And from bleeding heart and bosom
Gapeth many a fearful wound.

On my blighted people's bosom
Mountain loads of sorrow lay;
Stop not, then, to ask the question,
Who shall roll the stone away?

O be faithful, O be valiant,
Trusting not in human might,
Know that in the darkest conflict
God is on the side of right. 31

The poet's apostrophe arrogates the right to confer subjectivity on whomever or whatever the poet addresses, rather than, as so much antislavery discourse does, either describing a state of affairs or arguing for their amelioration. Despite legal disenfranchisement, you are Sons of Freedom, by virtue of being addressed as such and asseenting to inclusion in this genealogy. The poet's fiat brings virtual worlds into being, if only for the duration of collective speaking or retrospective reading; you see Oppression's heel of iron, don't you? And what will you do about that fearful wound? The fragmentary and easily forgotten history Nell had assembled couldn't hope to countermand the bitter reality, in the wake of Dred Scott, of the legal withholding of the rights of citizenship without the strong imagination of a future in which such fragments would be gathered up and such sacrifices redeemed. "Poetic Offerings from the Bards of Freedom" provided an occasion for the collective summoning of an alternative history that exists only at the nixus of memory and desire. "Freedom's Battle" enjoins an orientation toward what might be, a world that readers and listeners might be empowered to bring to pass, not what is or has been (Onward!).

It is easy to lose hold of the importance of spatial and temporal dislocation to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's career and writing when we read her poems as if they were written or somehow destined for the readers of a book. In carefully edited collections, such as Graham's and Foster's, her poems appear as only occasionally successful lyrics; it is hard to understand either why the poems were valued or how they work. Recovering these poems' circulation

Figure 35. From William Nell, Boston Massacre, March 5th, 1770: The Day Which History Selects as the Dawn of the American Revolution; Commemorative Festival, at Faneuil Hall, Friday, March 5, 1858: Protest Against the Dred Scott Decision (Boston: E. L. Balch, 1858), 3. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.
in pamphlets and newspapers lends significance to their forms of repetition, their elusive generality, and their use of direct address. Attending to print format helps to disclose the complex relation of these poems, and of antislavery poetry more generally, to oral performance, to recover the historical importance of the counterhistorical force of poetic address. It is not simply, as many critics would have it, that these poems bear the marks of oral tradition (or delivery) and therefore serve as forerunners of twentieth-century African American performance poetry. Rather, they do all kinds of work at the intersection of print and performance: they serve as an adjunct or supplement to her lectures, a ratification of black genius, a cover for risky, boundary-crossing speech, a vehicle for collective witness, a reminder of black opinion, a personification of black response, a model of appropriate sentiment, a wormhole to other, possible worlds, reassurance of the persistence of alternative histories, an invocation of a better world to come. These poems don’t simply circulate among lecture-goers or newspaper readers, they help to constitute these readers as part of a larger public, one of indeterminate extent. They help produce the sense of temporal dislocation necessary to sustain the abolitionist movement—the need for the activist, if only at intervals, to live outside of ordinary time.

CHAPTER 4

Early African American Print Culture
and the American West

ERIC GARDNER

A handful of recovery efforts have begun to alert scholars to black textual presences outside of the urban Northeast, but the lively black print culture in the American West has often remained absent from consideration. This essay begins to treat crucial pieces of that print culture—specifically three nineteenth-century black San Francisco newspapers—to introduce scholars to the intrinsic richness of these texts (and their contexts) and to offer a case study that highlights key issues in the study of the black West as a location of early black print culture.

First, though, as absences and supposedly representative presences are deeply instructive, we should consider the factors that led to the black West’s silencing and recognize some caveats necessary for “recovering” print in the black West. Certainly some of the silencing has to do with the forms of publication that dominated the nineteenth-century black West—especially the region’s emphasis on newspapers rather than the bound books. Frances Smith Foster and a handful of other literary historians are struggling to remind the field of just how important the black press was within early black literary culture. Partially rooted in literary studies’ powerful, consistent privileging of what Joseph Rezek (Chapter 1) refers to as the “heft” of bound books, the separation of periodicals from the literary is directly responsible for part of what the editors of this volume note as a separation between two most vibrant areas for American Studies scholarship, the “inauguration of an African American literary tradition” and “the consolidation of American print culture.”

CHAPTER 3. FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER AND THE CIRCUITS OF ABOLITIONIST POETRY

I am grateful to Jay Cook, David Hall, Tricia Lootens, Andrew Parker, and Eddie Wong for their generous readings of drafts of this essay. Audiences at the University of Toronto, Miami University, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Texas Christian University, the McNeil Center, and the Historical Poetics Group’s “Crossing the Bar” conferences helped me sharpen and extend my argument.

1. Important exceptions to this general trend include Joan Shelley Rubin, Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Angela Sorby, Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865–1917 (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), both of which, however, focus on the post–Civil War United States.
4. Frances Smith Foster has collected these three serialized novels, initially published in 1859, 1876–77, and 1888–89 as Minnie’s Sacrifice, Sowing and Reaping, Trial and Triumph: Three Rediscovered Novels by Frances E. W. Harper (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).
5. In this essay, I will use “Harper” to refer to experiences and practices that were specific to her post-1864 career, to cite the body of writing published under her married name while she was still alive, and to refer to the corpus that has been assembled by late twentieth-century scholars as the work of an author. I will use “Watkins” to refer to her career and writing before 1860, and “Watkins Harper” to refer to experiences and practices that were common to her antebellum and postwar careers. I hope that the awkwardness of using multiple names for this author and orator will keep readers alive to the historical and political differences that helped shape her career, to differences internal to the corpus, and to a certain incommensurateness or excess that characterizes a body of writing that was so intimately bound up with performance.

6. The easy rescalability of digital images and the difficulty of representing a book’s thickness on the screen remain obstacles to the apprehension of the historical significance of format for scholars who work primarily with digitally mediated printed texts.
7. It is important to note that Harper continued to publish her work in chapbook format until late in her career; the shift from “Watkins” to “Harper” doesn’t index a corresponding shift in format. Indeed, printed evidence suggests that she continued to publish her postwar poems in small batches for distribution on her Southern lecture tours. Despite the shift in ambition signaled by the turn to blank verse, and the recasting of her name on the title page as “Mrs. F. E. W. Harper,” her long poem Moses: A Story of the Nile (1869) was published as a forty-eight-page pamphlet: (with a four-page prose piece, “The Mission of the Flowers,” rounding out the volume). The copy of the 1870 edition held by the New-York Historical Society indicates on the cover that it is the third edition, but, judging from the date (1869) and edition (second) printed on the title page, the publisher simply pasted a new paper cover onto an older text block, a common strategy for reissuing unbound sheets and unsold texts.
8. William Wells Brown’s abolitionist songster The Anti-Slavery Harp (Boston: B. Marsh, 1848) was also published as a forty-eight-page pamphlet. For a bracing assessment of how much of early African American writing was published in cheap and ephemeral formats, see Chapter 2 in this volume, Joanna Brooks’s “The Unfortunates: What the Life Spans of Early Black Books Tell Us About Book History.”
9. See, for example, Frances Smith Foster’s indispensable anthology A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader (New York: Feminist Press, 1990), especially section 3 of the introduction (35–39), which offers a concise description of the complexities attending the creation of a comprehensive Harper bibliography, and the appendix dedicated to the “Contents of Frances E. W. Harper’s Books” (401–8), which gives the most accurate, but still incomplete, information available on Harper’s published volumes. Foster’s main concern in this appendix is to document additions, deletions, and changes to the sequence of poems in the various editions she consulted. Like most African American authors, however, Harper still awaits thorough and exacting bibliographical study. Jean Fagan Yellin and Cynthia D. Bond’s The Pen Is Ours (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) provides an alphabetical list of Harper’s individually published newspaper poetry, letters, and anthology pieces as well as her published volumes, but also includes a number of errors, most notably repeating the attribution to Harper of an 1874 volume, Eventide: A Series of Tales and Poems (Boston: Ferrridge [sic], 1874), published under the pseudonym “Effie Afton.” This misattribution sticks like a burr to Harper bibliography and cataloging records, but goes largely unremarked in the criticism—one mark of the indefinite edge of the Harper corpus (Joan R. Sherman’s early survey of the poet’s career and writing is a notable exception; see Invisible Poets: Afro-Americans of the Nineteenth Century [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974, 1989]). Melba Joyce Boyd, Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E. W. Harper, 1825–1911 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), includes a helpful “Bibliographical Commentary.”
a critical back-projection of a familiar twentieth-century cultural phenomenon, the poetry reading. Indeed, William Still's 1872 biographical sketch suggests that Harper's postwar declamation of her long, verse epic Moses: A Story of the Nile was an exception to the rule of selling volumes of poetry after her orations. Summing up Harper's "seventeen years of public labor" pleading "the cause of her race," Still writes: "Fifty thousand copies at least of her four small books have been sold to those who have listened to her eloquent lectures. One of these productions entitled 'Moses' has been used to entertain audiences with delivering long poems as lyceum lectures or as part of commencement ceremonies and not evidence that she featured or incorporated poetry into her antislavery lectures. Harper di, however, write antislavery verse to be recited or sung at gatherings such as William C. Nell's March 5, 1858, commemoration of the Boston Massacre, discussed below.


19. Frances Ellen Watkins, "To Charles Summer," Liberator, July 20, 1860, 116. Harper made subtle changes to this poem when she collected it for publication in the 1872 Poems, translating markers of the occasional nature of the poem into a more simple past tense: the conditional "for thou hast spoken" becomes the historical "that thou has spoken," "the lightning of thy lips has smote" becomes "did smite," the speaker's fearful present-tense apprehension of continuing losses, "That. . .. faithful friends/ Were dropping" is rekeyed as a temporary setback, "As . . . faithful friends/ Were dropping" ("Lines to Charles Summer," in A Brighter Coming Day, 173). I thank Eddie Wong for alerting me to the significance of these revisions.

20. One of Harper's earliest printed poems, "To Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe" was first published in Frederick Douglass' Paper on February 3, 1844, and reprinted in all subsequent editions of Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. Although presented as a simple declaration of thanks, the poem nonetheless arrogates the privilege of assuring Stowe that she has been accorded an irrevocable "place in the hearts of her black readers and that she will find future fame in "the blessing of the poor" (A Brighter Coming Day, 57).

21. "Correspondence," Provincial Freeman, March 7, 1857, accessed through Accessible Archives. For evidence that some of Watkins's auditors doubted her originality, see a letter published in the Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, March 7, 1856, which avers "The clearness of logic, the elegance of diction, and exuberance of imagination displayed by her, so far surpassed our expectations that some among us were strongly disposed to set the production down to the credit of one of the Beechers, or some other writer of equal note. I confess to having shared in this opinion but am now convinced
from personal acquaintance that she is fully capable of writing the remarkable lecture she delivered."


24. The locus classicus for the sexual stigma borne by formerly enslaved women is Harriet Jacobs (who published under the pseudonym Linda Brent partly for protection), Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861). Given that all women orators faced accusations of impropriety for breaking the prohibition against their speaking in public, it is not surprising to find so few African American women on the antislavery lecture circuit. As Shirley J. Yee has detailed, noted abolitionist speakers such as Maria Miller Stewart, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and Sarah P. Redmond shared with Frances Ellen Watkins Harper a measure of economic and educational privilege that helped insulate them against attack; see Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828–1866 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 112–35. For a public attack on Frances Ellen Watkins that casts her very presence on the lecture platform as an instance of miscegenation, see the New York Herald report on the 1856 meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society: "Mrs. Maria Weston Chapman, Abby Kelley Foster, and other white women, meet upon the same common platform of abolition philanthropy and amalgamation with Box Brown, the eloquent humbugging fugitive slave, 'Miss Frances E. Watkins, a young colored woman of Baltimore,' and those hoary old infidel sinners, Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. 'Mingle—mingle—mingle'" (reprinted in the Liberator, February 8, 1856).

25. For evidence that Frances Ellen Watkins used her inability safely to return to Maryland as a centerpiece of her antislavery lectures, see the sympathetic report in the Wilmington Republican, reprinted in the Liberator, December 19, 1856: "She was a native of Baltimore, and there clustered all the remembrances and attachments of her infantile years, there reposed the ashes of her mother, and though no costly cenotaph or imposing marble marked her resting place, the spot was dear to her; yet she was debarred the privilege of visiting it, by a statute which disgraces the land and marks with shame and infamy those who enacted it." The New York Herald’s hostile account of the May 1857 antislavery convention similarly suggests that her appeal turned on the drama of a thwarted homecoming; "even the pathetic speech of Miss Ellen Frances [sic] Watkins (black woman) of Baltimore, who was afraid to go back there that she might weep over her mother’s grave, had no effect on the heartbroken spectators from whom only thirty thousand dollars were wanted to keep up steam for the coming year" (May 17, 1857).

26. Harper frequently referred to her solidarity with the enslaved as a matter of both choice and compulsion, as in her brief prose piece "The Colored People in America": "Identified with a people over whom weary ages of degradation have passed, whatever concerns them, as a race, concerns me" (A Brighter Coming Day, 99). Her most ambitious poem, the blank-verse Moses: A Story of the Nile, reads like an allegory of her own vocational crisis, beginning with the long drawn out spectacle of Moses’ "strange election" (139), his decision to "cast [his] lot among the people of [his] race" (149). For an astute reading of Moses and of Harper’s postwar poetry more generally, see Mary Loeffelholz, "A Difference in the Vernacular: The Reconstruction Poetry of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper," in From School to Salon: Reading Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Poetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 94–117.

27. Quoted in Still, The Underground Rail Road, 779–80. Still’s citation indicates with asterisks that some of Greenwood’s text has been omitted, although critics who cite Still have ignored the fact that something is missing from this text. Interestingly, the missing passage offers a more nuanced account of Harper’s style, suggesting both that her genteel composure is a carefully constructed pose and that the long history of mistaking her persona for her person begins with Still: "Yet, after all, Mrs. Harper’s greatest power lies in her wit and humor. There is something very peculiar about her here. She makes her best points, utters her keenest satire, with a childlike simplicity, a delicious naiveté I have never seen surpassed. She is arch, yet earnest: playful, yet faithful. She shoots sin with a fairy shaft: she pierces treason through the joints of his armor with the bodkin of a woman’s wit." For the complete text of Greenwood’s account, see "Lectures in Philadelphia: A Letter from Grace Greenwood," New York Independent, March 15, 1866. A selection from this letter to the Independent, which reported on the entire lecture series, was reprinted as "Mrs. Harper—Colored Lecturer" in the Philadelphia monthly Arbuthnott’s Home Magazine, June 1866, 401.


33. For an account of revolutionary messianic time in African American literature more generally, and its production of a "radically sustaining relationship to the future,"
CHAPTER 4. EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN PRINT CULTURE AND THE AMERICAN WEST

The author wishes to thank Jodie Gardner, the Saginaw Valley State University Braun Fellowship program, Mary Hedberg, and the organizers of and participants in the Early African American Print Culture Conference—especially Lara Langer Cohen, Leon Jackson, Jordan Stein, and Edie Wong.


4. In terms of the study of print culture in the American West, for example, even the best works—e.g., Barbara Cloud's efforts—devote little time or attention to African Americans. See Barbara Lee Cloud, The Business of Newspapers on the Western Frontier (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1992); and Cloud, The Coming of the Frontier Press: How the West Was Really Won (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

5. The eastern black press clearly labeled Indiana as "West"; John Mifflin Brown's salutatory in the Repository hoped the journal would "soar not above the humble cabins of thy own native West" without visiting "the frontier settler" therein; see J[ohn] M[ifflin] B[rown], "Salutary," Repository of Religion and Literature and of Science and Art 1 (April 1848): 1. Also see Eric Gardner, Unexpected Places: Revisiting Nineteenth-Century African American Literature (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 56-91. The expected dividing lines—e.g., the Mississippi River—and the expectation of the West as "rural" don't always signify across cultures and time periods.

6. Black textual presences in and from California appeared concurrently with initial print discussion of the Gold Rush: Frederick Douglass’s periodicals, for example, reported extensively on the black West through texts like Abner Francis's letters from both California and Oregon and a dozen later letters on black California from William Newby published under the playful pseudonym "Nabia." On African Americans in California, see especially Rudolph M. Lapp, Afro-Americans in California (San Francisco: Boyd and Fraser, 1987) and Blacks in Gold Rush California (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977); and Douglas Henry Daniels, Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); see also as the relevant sections of Katz, The Black West; and Quintard Taylor, In Search of a Racial Frontier: African Americans and the American West, 1528-1900 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998). Philip Montesano's work on black San Francisco, though harder to obtain, is crucial: see Montesano, Some Aspects of the Free Negro Question in San Francisco, 1849-1870 (San Francisco: R. and E. Research Associates, 1973). Delilah L. Beasley's pioneering efforts in Negro Trail Blazers of California (Los Angeles: Times Mirror, 1919), though riddled with errors, are also important.

7. Many bibliographies erroneously list the paper's start date as 1857; some even list 1855. The surviving issues are from August 22 and December 13, 1857. I should also note the exceedingly short-lived four-page monthly founded in 1861 by John J. Moore, the Lunar Visitor, of which only two issues survive; while an interesting early California effort, because the Visitor’s impact on the three papers I consider was limited, in the interest of space, it is not discussed here.


9. The 1856 convention offered "expressions of thanks" to the "ladies" of Sacramento and San Francisco for supporting the struggling paper; see ibid., Proceedings, 2:150, 157.

10. Ibid., 154.

11. Ibid., 153-54. Later accounts of the Mirror's founding—several of which appeared in Anderson's Pacific Appeal—depict him as more friendly; see, e.g., the June 7, 1862, Appeal.


13. Ibid., 154-55, 159.