

**BLACK NARRICIDE AND ONTOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY: THE  
MISCHARACTERIZATION OF AMERICAN SLAVERY IN PHILOSOPHY**

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Africana philosophy reliance on a few mainstream theorists of slavery, who constitute the school of philosophical thought, diminishes the philosophical importance of the theories of slavery and freedom developed by early Black thinkers. Since the first African slaves landed in Virginia in 1619, early Black thinkers have used slave narratives to chronicle how enslaved Africans resisted slavery and its everyday genocidal logics. By providing intellectual critique of slavery as a barbaric genocidal logic of Western culture, writings by enslaved Africans and freedmen have provided the most systematic deconstruction of western moral and political philosophy rooted in slavery as a philosophical concept. While slave narratives have been studied in Africana philosophy, Africana philosophers draw from mainstream philosophical traditions that mischaracterize and justify African slavery, to advance entrenched concepts of ethics, morality, idealism, skepticism, and phenomenology as revered paradigms in the western canon. By following this trajectory, Africana philosophers fail to distinctly develop genealogies within Africana philosophy of how early Black thinkers historicized African slavery differently from Western thinkers, specifically, how enslaved Africans confronted domestication of slaves and how they fought for the abolishment of slavery. This dissertation aims to demonstrate how slave narratives offer both historical and philosophical accounts of how Black thinkers deconstructed Western theories of slavery and the evolution of theories of race that supplanted the theories of slavery in America from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through the lens of Black Narricide, I argue that since the seventeenth century Black thinkers developed a unique genre of Black philosophical discourse that deconstructed the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of slavery rooted in theology, natural law, positive law, natural history, and ethnology. The dissertation

shows how the works of most of the Black thinkers have been overlooked by Africana philosophers, and mischaracterized by mainstream scholars in their effort to justify slavery.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear mother, the late Patricia Zimba. Not a day goes without yearning for your love. I hope I have made you proud.

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This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Professor Theodore George (Head of the Department of Philosophy), Professor Tommy Curry (Committee Chair, Advisor, and Mentor), Professor Gregory Pappas (Department of Philosophy), Assistant Professor Amir Jaima (Department of Philosophy), and Professor Reuben May (Department of Sociology)

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Black Narricide as a Genre of Black Philosophical Discourse on African Slavery**

The dominant trend in Africana philosophy draws theories of slavery and oppression from the continental tradition. The trend is contemporaneous with the emergence of Africana philosophy in the 1980s as a viable discipline meant to understand race-relations in the post-civil rights era.<sup>i</sup> In relation to slavery, Africana philosophers responded to the dominant revisionist history of slavery by historians who analyzed slavery from the vantage point of slave masters and the impact of slavery on the development of Black personality post-slavery.<sup>ii</sup> Historians building on the works of sociology of race-relations contended that African slavery was a better model of race-relations than contemporary post-civil rights because it benefited both masters and slaves.<sup>iii</sup> This archetype of revisionist history focused on the domestication of slavery as a civilizing agenda; a way of transforming and transmuting white virtues to Blacks. Their assumptions were based on American sociologists and social psychologists who in their effort to evaluate race-relations, questioned White attitudes towards Blacks once they lost ownership of enslaved Africans.<sup>iv</sup> Historians sought to show that enslaved Africans had fared well under the paternalism of Whites in slavery than they had as freedmen and post-reconstruction citizens who, left to their own devices, had become a decadent and pathological driven people.

Africana philosophers turned to slave narratives to counter revisionist historical accounts of slavery by offering a philosophical critique of slavery. To address the issue of slavery, Africana philosophers drew from the respective philosophical traditions they were trained in. By following this trajectory, Africana philosophers failed to distinctly develop genealogies within

Africana philosophies of how early Black thinkers historicized African slavery differently from western thinkers, specifically, how enslaved Africans confronted domestication of slavery and were the first to abolish slavery in the western world. Instead, Africana philosophers chose to endorse slave narratives as philosophical foils that could expand entrenched concepts of ethics, morality, idealism, skepticism, phenomenology as revered paradigms in the western canon. Consequently, given their training in mainstream philosophy, and cognizant of the influence of the discipline, Africana philosophers integrated the revisionist history of domestication and use of slave narratives to expand western theories of slavery and include their experience of race, class and gender (specifically women) as critical projects of western slavery instead of showing the distinct traditions within Africana philosophy that put an end to western slavery.

For example, Howard McGary and Bill Lawson in *Between Slavery and Freedom*, used the writings of former slaves, as well as commentaries on slavery, to gain a better understanding of six moral and political concepts found in mainstream philosophy—oppression, paternalism, resistance, political obligation, citizenship, and forgiveness. In their study they argue that “our study is novel because we not only use the skills characteristic of analytical philosophy to study these notions, but we also make use of illuminations gained from other disciplines. In particular we draw on the work of historians of slavery, but more importantly we focus on the narratives of former slaves. This work is not an analysis of the slave narratives, but rather an explication of insights derived from these texts.”<sup>v</sup> McGary and Lawson sought to show how their training in analytical philosophy could be applied to slave narratives to challenge the revisionist history of Ulrich B. Phillips *American Negro Slavery* and Stanley Elkins *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. Phillips work focused on the economic choices white plantation owners made to sustain their families and to preserve wealth. Given their need to

preserve their economic wealth, Phillips argued slave plantations were not sites of horrid acts against Blacks; that the working and living conditions were better than in post-reconstruction.

In the case of Elkins, his work was notorious for marshalling works of historians, psychologists, and sociologist to illustrate that slavery produced a distinct personality in the Sambo “the typical plantation slave, [who] was docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated with childish exaggeration. His relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment: it was indeed this childlike quality that was the very key to his being.”<sup>vi</sup> In critiquing Elkin’s suppositions, McGary and Lawson argued that slave narratives depicted a different relationship of enslaved Africans to the slavery system portrayed by revisionist history of the 1980s. For McGary and Lawson, slave narratives represented a moral world that even in the face of dehumanization produced profound ethical and moral philosophies. Lawson and McGrady argued thus; “given the brutality of slavery and the assault on the humanity of those held as slaves, it is remarkable that so many slaves were able to emerge from this brutal institution as moral agents. By moral agents, we mean persons who have a sense of right/wrong, good/bad, and who are able to evaluate from a moral point of view their own actions as well as the actions of others.”<sup>vii</sup> McGary and Lawson stated that the slave narrative was their contribution to the moral and socio-political philosophy, and their contribution to the understanding of the analytical concepts of oppression, forgiveness, citizenship, paternalism, resistance, and moral discourse, fundamental to the understanding of modern race-relations.<sup>viii</sup>

With all their goodwill effort, McGary and Lawson fall short of philosophizing in the context of Africana philosophy. The production of an articulate Africana thought is missing. Situating enslaved Africans as moral agents limits the ability to acknowledge enslaved Africans

as people whose moral traditions were different from those of Whites.<sup>ix</sup> The discourse of moralism limits the ability to understand that for enslaved Africans what evoked questions of ethics and morality was political sovereignty, while for Whites, the moral and ethical questions were based on justifying slave-ownership as a necessity of western republics.<sup>x</sup> The haphazard nature of merely referencing slave narratives as moral counter-narratives has diminished the ability to understand that political sovereignty has always been the driving force behind the early slave narratives.

The narrative of moralism portrays enslaved Africans as domesticated subjects bereft of the political traditions they sought to preserve, and the sovereignty needed in the new world. In *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in Early Modern Atlantic*, Herman L. Bennett discusses how political sovereignty in Africa was unraveled before the triangular slave trade. He notes that the first century of sustained African-European interaction, the encounters were not mere economic transactions. Rather, according to Bennett, they involved clashing understandings of diplomacy, sovereignty, and politics. African kings required Iberian (Spaniard) traders to participate in elaborate diplomatic rituals, establish treaties, and negotiate trade practices with autonomous territories. And he shows how Iberians based their interpretations of African sovereignty on medieval European political precepts grounded in Roman civil and canon law. In the eyes of Iberians, the extent to which Africa's polities conformed to these norms played a significant role in determining who was, and who was not, a sovereign people—a judgment that later shaped who could legitimately be enslaved. At the start of the triangular slave trade, Iberians, wishing to monopolize the trade, developed laws that circumvented the sovereignty of African nations by deeming them as pagans.<sup>xi</sup> Bennet is critical

of both the law maneuvers and modern understanding of slavery that has displaced sovereignty in contemporary discourse on slavery. He further notes:

Slavery rarely figures as a subject in modern political thought, but when it does, the slave generally appears embedded inside the household, which in the modern period remains so thoroughly removed from the public and political realm, thereby according it little role in narratives of territorial conquest. State differently, as a form of domesticity and therefore a base matter, modern theorists assign slavery to the domain of the social, which by definition excluded the slave from consideration in the formulation of sovereignty situated in the polis or its destruction.<sup>xii</sup>

Bennet's observations help to expose one of the most undertheorized attributes of Africana philosophy. Africana philosophers have failed to situate the intellectual genealogies that birthed slave narratives that attest to Africans as a people who understood political sovereignty. Political sovereignty led to the development of free communities, marron societies, lyceums, academic societies that centered on African cosmologies, theories of education, and religious practices that rejected slavery as the natural condition of Africans.<sup>xiii</sup> The trend of responding to revisionist history has presented enslaved Africans as devoid of political knowledge and engaged in questions of ethics as domesticated subjects. Yet early Black narratives augment Bennet's point when we consider that Ottobah Cugoana's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, Olaudah Equiano *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*, Pompee Valentin Vastey *The Colonial System Unveiled*, Prince Saunders *Haytian Papers*, Antenor Firmin *The Equality of the Human Races* and Martin Delany in *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color, with an Archaeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization* offer different philosophical notions of sovereignty in relation to the African on the main continent and in the diaspora during the age of slavery.

Questions of ethics as they relate to slavery have been an indeterminate fixture of western philosophy.<sup>xiv</sup> Bluntly put, no philosopher in the western canon wrote vigorously about the

injustice of slavery and ending slavery using ethics. Instead as ethics moved from a religious inspired field of inquiry to a more secular and rationalist tradition during the age of the Enlightenment, enlightenment thinkers created ethical theories that justified enslavement of Africans.<sup>xv</sup> Yet despite this understanding, Africana philosophers have still turned to the enlightenment as a place to engage philosophical questions of slavery and race. Tommy Lott's edited volume *Subjugation and Bondage* claimed that the question of slavery that was of interest to contemporary philosophers was equally a cardinal question for Enlightenment thinkers. As such, modern philosophical reflection on slavery and slave autobiographies stood to benefit from being read against the concerns of enlightenment thinkers. Lott further asserted; "explicit comparisons are drawn between the arguments given by ex-slaves and certain political theories that may have been influential. By considering the slave's critical appropriation of Enlightenment views, the ambiguous implications of various notions of consent, liberty, and natural rights are examined from the slave's perspective."<sup>xvi</sup> Lott's work is a gallant attempt to challenge the Enlightenment as a progenitor of secular values that have shaped the modern world. His, as most early works by contemporary Africana philosophies, situates the voices of enslaved Africans alongside the western canon in an attempt to show why Africana philosophy is an important field of inquiry in the discipline. But again, this limits the ability to understand how enslaved Africans, writing during the age of the Enlightenment developed their own philosophical insights about the causes of enslaving Africans, and how they were the first to develop philosophical language about reparations and slavery as crimes against Africans. Instead of resurrecting enslaved Africans' argument that Enlightenment was a barbaric enterprise that resulted in sciences rooted in the barbaric trade of Africans and validated the underdevelopment of Africa, Lott argued slavery could well be understood through the Enlightenment thinkers'



perspective.<sup>xvii</sup> This dissertation contends that importing theories of slavery from the continental traditions distorts the philosophical importance of the theories of slavery and freedom advanced by Black thinkers in slave narratives, journals, and national proceedings.<sup>xviii</sup>

In Africana philosophy the utilization of continental philosophy has meant trying to understand how the theories of slavery propagated by Aristotle, Locke, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche could be used to understand how slave narratives offer alternative knowledge of slavery based on the experience of race, class, and gender. For example, in 1969, Angela Davis's students published "Recurring Philosophical Themes in Black Literature," a compilation of class lectures that appeared in a pamphlet titled *Lectures of Liberation*.<sup>xix</sup> The lectures presented over the course of two days explored the phenomenology of oppression and liberation as obtained in Black literature. Davis applied her training in German idealism and critical theory to examine the themes of oppression and freedom in Black literature, and argued:

The idea of freedom has justifiably been a dominating theme in the history of western ideas. Man has been repeatedly defined in terms of his inalienable freedom. One of the most acute paradoxes present in the history of western society is that while on philosophical plane freedom has been delineated in the most lofty sublime fashion, concrete reality has always been permeated with the most brutal forms of unfreedom, of enslavement...the pivotal theme of this course will this be the idea of freedom as it is unfolded in the literary undertaking of Black people. Starting with *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* we will explore the slave's experience of freedom. Most important here will be the crucial transformation of the concept of freedom as a static, given principle into the concept of liberation, the dynamic active struggle for freedom. We will move on to W.E.B Dubois, to Jean Toomer, Richard Wright and John A. Williams.<sup>xx</sup>

Davis used three philosophical attributes; freedom, identity, and self-knowledge as heuristics to illustrate her points about the significance of Black literature in resolving abstract philosophical problems in the Western Canon.<sup>xxi</sup> With a masterful balance of Hegel and Marx, the first lecture drew on Douglass's third autobiography *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* to illuminate the philosophical problem of freedom posed by Hegel and Marx as either being a subjective

experience or something that can be experienced even when one is in material bondage.<sup>xxii</sup>

Enlightening and profound as Davis's reading of Douglass vis a vis Hegel and Marx is, it distorts a couple things about the way Douglass himself approached writing his auto-biography and the questions he sought to address in the process of re-writing his autobiography.

Evidentially, there are more themes in Douglass's third autobiography than the problem of freedom Davis attempts to underscore. For instance, in his short work *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass narrated the story of Madison Washington the slave who led a rebellion on the Creole Ship. In doing so, he mixed Washington's account with his own autobiographical accounts—his journey to freedom and infused his ethnological views of Black manhood, and highlighted the importance of the mechanic arts towards slave rebellion, education, and moral philosophy of racial uplift that he used as the basis of his philosophy about Black liberation in America. The afore-stated themes were undertheorized in Davis' lectures on Hegelian-Marxist accounts of freedom.

The penchant of reading Douglass as merely mimicking Euro-centric or Anglo-saxon ideas of freedom has also impacted contemporary reflections on Douglass' *The Heroic Slave*. Scholars suggest the Douglass's *Autobiographies*, and *The Heroic Slave* were written with white audiences in mind, as works of moral persuasion about the injustices of slavery. Scholars postulate Douglass modeled his autobiography and short story after the dominant Anglo-saxon norms of manhood and patriotism to move Black people from the realm of slavery to the realm of humanity. Consequently, scholars contend that because they adopt tropes of White manhood, Douglass's autobiographies, and particularly *The Heroic Slave*, fall short of challenging sexist, elitist and patriarchal values. For example, in "Storytelling in Early Afro-American Fiction: Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave,'" Robert Stepto points out that Douglass situates

Virginia as the location of where Madison Washington will lead his rebellion and proclaim Washington loves liberty as much as three famous Virginia statemen—Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. By comparing Madison Washington to George Washington, Stepto argues, Douglass was comparing a heroic statesman and a heroic chattel, an impression that statesmen and slaves may share the same name and be heroes and Virginians alike.”<sup>xxiii</sup> This equivocation of heroic statesmen and heroic chattel has led scholars to argue that Douglass short story mirrors the patriarchal values of white male slave masters. The impression is a predominant critique perpetuated by Black feminist and African American literary theorists in the 1980s. They argued Black Nationalism was a male chauvinism ideology which aspired to attain same values and nationalistic goals as white nationalism.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In the same vein, Black feminists of the 1980s, responding to the Daniel Moynihan Report that claimed because the Black family in slavery was matriarchal and emasculated Black men from their socio-sexual roles, the family structure resulted in Black pathologies since Black men were not heads of the household. Black feminists of the time equated men of the 1980s to enslaved men on plantations who equivocated racial equality with being patriarchs.<sup>xxv</sup> Such standoffs led to various theoretical works that claimed Black masculinity and nationalism was a paragon of white nationalism; that it entrapped Black masculinity into reproducing patriarchal ideals that could be traced to Black male writings during slavery. In “Race, Violence, and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass’s *The Heroic Slave*,” Richard Yarborough argues Douglass in the short story was “unable or unwilling to call into question the white paradigm of manhood itself. Consequently, his celebration of Black heroism was subverted from the outset by the racists, sexist, and elitist assumptions upon which the Anglo-American male ideal was constructed and that so thoroughly permeated the patriarchal structure of

slavery.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Subverting the ideologies of white masculinity that were congenial towards preserving slavery meant that Douglass and his character Madison Washington fought to liberate themselves so as to participate in patriarchal ideals of slavery. To this end, Krista Walters in “Trappings of Nationalism in Frederick Douglass’s *The Heroic Slave*,” notes Douglass “adopts a host of nationalistic suppositions underpinning the ideology of American slavery: the primacy of Eurocentric historical and cultural perspectives, the belief in America’s glorious origins, the projection of a kind of manifest destiny based on such origins, and the necessary adherence to patriarchal values.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

The preceding arguments challenge historical facts that show Black men as subordinates in slavery could not attain patriarchal ideals; that they were used as sexual laborers, raped and economically exploited as part of the socialization regimes for white masculinity and femininity. The trend consolidated patriarchal as a civilizing ideal shared between white men and women aimed at domesticating Black males as slaves. This circumstance has been undertheorized in philosophical discussions regarding the experiences of Black males under slavery.<sup>xxviii</sup> In view of this, Tommy Curry’s groundbreaking work *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Blackmanhood* has been a necessary intervention and a historiography of how Black males given their vulnerability to violent structures aimed at their gender, have from slavery through contemporary times conceptualized their manhood differently from white men. Curry states thus; “black males are socialized to understand manhood in the context of their vulnerability, the dangers their assertiveness and competitiveness are perceived to have in the larger society. Black men define manhood based not on their ability to dominate others, but rather, on their vulnerability to America’s racist misandrist regimes.”<sup>xxix</sup> The inability for scholars to understand how Black males’ philosophical dispositions emerge out of rejecting misandrist pathologies,

hinders the ability to comprehend Black males since slavery were the first to develop egalitarian gender views that centered on the experiences of Black women and Black men in their philosophical arguments about racial and gender equality.<sup>xxx</sup>

Curry's discernments are helpful in providing a contextual fact that scholars have gone to length to chronicle the impact Black women and white men and women have had on Douglass's life.<sup>xxxii</sup> The fact is that Douglass, who in his *Autobiographies* goes to great length to situate different Black men who were instrumental to shaping his intellectual vocation, has received insignificant theorization in scholarship. Stated differently, the scholastic fascination with Douglass attempting to determine if his slave-master was his father, and the reflections on his mother, sisters and Grandmother, has taken primacy over the Black men Douglass perceived as influential to his ideas of manhood and racial uplift. Ultimately, scholarship on Douglass renders intellectual idols as White men, women and Black women, who help him straddle his complexity as a myopic race leader, wrestling with white patriarchal ideals. What scholars have failed to do is to ask if White men, white women and Black women are the intellectual influences who lead Douglass down the path of patriarchal, who then helped him develop ideals outside of white patriarchal that propelled him into the historical Black man he has come to represent in American history?

As noted in later passages of this project, Douglass wrote *The Heroic Slave* after the historical figure Madison Washington who led a slave rebellion on the ship Creole that freed 18 enslaved Africans. The story appeared as part of a gift book titled *Autographs for Freedom*, created to boost the popularity of Douglass's newspaper.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Douglass intermingled his own life story with that of Madison to explore Black philosophical themes of freedom. This is important to this dissertation because Black thinkers were writing their accounts of Black freedom,

different from how 18<sup>th</sup> century European thinkers were writing about their race and freedom. Douglass's story appeared among other accounts of Black freedom written by figures like William Cooper Nell who not only was the editor of Douglass' paper *North Star*, but also author of the work *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, With Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons*. Other publications included *To Which Added a Brief Survey of the Condition and Prospects of Colored*, a historical record of Black participation in the American Revolutionary war and slave revolts which included the story of Madison Washington; William Wells Brown's books; *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*; *George Washington William Volume Two*; *History of the Negro Race in America From 1619 to 1800*; and *Negroes as Slaves, As Soldiers, and As Citizens*. For Black thinkers, themes of freedom were linked to the racial ideology of uplifting the race. Left with no political rights as a people, Black thinkers fought the American ideology of political rights tied to manhood and masculinity by showcasing the development of the Black race based on valor, artistic gifts, political participation, and educational attainment.<sup>xxxiii</sup> After the American Revolution through the Civil War, the Black male body, and particularly the Black male soldier, added different ideals of political "communitas" through valor and liberty.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

As I have argued above, fruitful as post-structural theories have been in championing the salience of slave narratives to the wider academic community, the reliance on the use of post-structural and western theories of slavery has resulted in the inability of Africana philosophers to develop philosophical methodologies rooted in Black intellectual history and has resulted in what Tommy Curry refers to as a methodological crisis in Africana philosophy.<sup>xxxv</sup> This methodological crisis has undermined the canonical way to understand the development of Africana philosophy and how Black thinkers conceptualized their existence outside the bounds

of western slavery. In lieu of mining the way Black thinkers have developed their own methodological approaches to the problem of slavery, contemporary Africana philosophers perpetuate and disseminate post-structural theories and ignore Africana-centered theories and methodologies.

This tendency of reading post-structural theories in Africana philosophy views in the works of Black thinkers as a way for Africana philosophy to garner legitimacy in the academy is what Tommy Curry calls epistemological convergence:

African American philosophy has failed to inquire seriously into the culturally particular epistemologies of African-descended people, preferring instead to read into Black thought decidedly European philosophical continuities. This established practice of reading into African philosophical continuities. This established practice of reading into African American philosophy an epistemological convergence with white philosophical tradition creates not only a methodological dilemma, as to how one should go about studying the historical philosophical insights of African descended people, but also a normative problematic.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Curry's work has been instructive in exploring how Black thinkers are integrated into the philosophical canon to ameliorate the racism of western canonical figures. In this vein the discipline does not have to overhaul the canon, since Black thinking is treated as a panacea to the racism of canonical figures instead of understanding that Black thinkers have rejected western categories of thought and developed philosophical and empirical studies that have advocated for Black humanity as its own measure of civilization ideals that has added to the world and American society. Said differently, Black thinkers have developed their own thinking on the question of slavery, race and racism. They have been marginalized for more multi-cultural views that re-center white figures as progenitors of a progressive society devoid of racial tension. Consequently, Black thinkers are given philosophical credence only when they are seen to propagate established perspectives of White thinkers, thereby limiting the ability to understand

Black thinkers on their own terms. This problem is what Curry has identified as epistemological convergence “or the phenomenon by which Black cultural perspectives are only given the status of knowledge to the extent that they extend or reify currently maintained traditions of thought in European philosophy.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Epistemological convergence legitimates western philosophy as the only philosophical tradition by which other racial groups are termed philosophers only when they build on or extend philosophies from the Western canon. As such, philosophies of the western canon become the pedestal on which philosophical questions and theories are drawn and addressed. This normative influence as Curry notes, is deeply problematic when it comes to studying Black people in philosophy as it creates a problem he calls “racial normativity” in which “African-descended people are studied not as they are but as they should be in relation to the ideological goals of the investigation...inquiring into Blackness, or asking how should [one study] question, perform a negating function that seeks the amelioration of the Black condition and to normalize Blacks, despite their historical circumstance, as a concern of humanity.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> Instead of addressing the historical realities and the material conditions that cause Black thinkers to philosophize about or how their philosophies develop different racial dispositions, racial normativity contradicts such conditions by addressing Black philosophy as raising ideological concerns perceived as an obstacle in the assimilation of Black people into American society.<sup>xxxix</sup> Otherwise stated, racial normativity assumes even if white philosophers are racist, their philosophies can help assimilate Black people into the American society when their philosophies are decolonized or creolized through the critique of a Black thinker.

The detriments of using western philosophy is a critique about the very foundation of humanities disciplines within the American academy and the manner in which western



philosophies of slavery we teach were used as justifications to further western republics. That American universities were rooted in educating it's citizenry using the bible, Greek and Roman literature to understand how to govern a republic rooted in slavery was important part of the role philosophy played both in universities and congressional debates about slavery. For example, Alexander Crummell in his "The Attitude of the American Mind toward the Negro Intellect" address, provides an anecdote whereby in 1834 he worked as an errand boy in the New York anti-slavery office in which two eminent Boston lawyers Samuel E. Sewell and David Lee Child had dinner with John Calhoun who was senator of South Carolina. Crummell noted "it was a period of great ferment upon the question of Slavery, States' Rights, and Nullification; and consequently, the Negro was the topic of conversation at the table. One of the utterances of Calhoun was to this effect "that if he could find a Negro who knew the Greek syntax, he would then believe that the Negro was a human being and should be treated as a man." <sup>xl</sup>

By situating Calhoun's remarks as spoken during debates about slavery's relation to state's rights and nullification or abolishment, Crummell allows us to understand that Calhoun's remarks reflected a trend that was prominent in the south amongst university professors, lawyers and religious leaders who sought to protect slavery as an important institution that added to the growth of both western civilization and theories of government using Greek and Roman history. As historians have pointed out the emergence of nullification and state rights in South Carolina (the state Calhoun represented) began with the response to Haitian revolution, David Walker's insurrection text *Appeal to Coloured Citizens*, Nat Turner's rebellion and Denmark Vesey's conspiracy.<sup>xli</sup> Which is to say the Haitian revolution and slave revolts in Virginia and South Carolina brought about the question of what to do with slavery, abolish it or find an economic utility to it, thus challenging the ontological status of slavery.

The most influential proposal came from The College of William and Mary president and professor of Law, Political Economy and History Thomas Dew whose *Review of the Debate in the Virginia of 1831 and 1832* argued against abolishing slavery. As Harvey Wish in “Aristotle, Plato, and the Mason-Dixon Line,” notes “professor Thomas R. Dew of The College of William and Mary- Jefferson’s Alma mater- who defended slavery in Aristotelian terms as a perpetual institution and the basis of an ideal Greek democracy; his arguments did much to still the older abolitionist sentiment yet active in the Virginia legislature of 1831-1832.”<sup>xliii</sup> Dew as president and professor of law, political economy and history with his *Review* created the condition on which southern lawyers, academics, professors defended the South against northern abolitionists using Aristotle’s idea of natural slavery and property rights. Harvey Wish noted:

In the bitter slavery controversy, defenders of the peculiar institution found next to the bible itself a deep source of inspiration in Aristotle, whose heavily qualified and contradictory statements on the justice of slavery was taken as a flat endorsement. Dismissed by most historians as mere rationalization, the broader significance in American thought of this employment of Aristotle has been overlooked. For just as Aristotle proved a major prop to antebellum southern romanticism for the leisure class ideal of Greek democracy, so his master Plato inspired the numerous utopias and transcendentalist theories of northern romanticism.<sup>xliiii</sup>

The sectorial debate as Wish documents is that southern politicians, academics, jurists and statesmen’s rejected notions of natural equality and government from classical natural rights on which Aristotle provided grounds to justify slavery as a natural condition of government. Calhoun’s remark about “that if he could find a Negro who knew the Greek syntax, he would then believe that the Negro was a human being and should be treated as a man,” reflected his classical education on which the bible, Greek and Roman literature served as a guide for Americans to understand their relation to past republics, the pitfalls and challenges that statesmen had to endure, the need to protect against tyranny, enslavement and slave revolts, and

the virtues of agrarian culture over industrialism.<sup>xliv</sup> Calhoun known for his political speeches relied on Aristotle's theory of slavery to justify the need to preserve slave-master economic interest and property rights that propelled the debates on nullification.<sup>xlv</sup> George Fitzhugh in "The Politics and Economics of Aristotle and Mr. Calhoun," argued:

Mr. Calhoun in his Disquisition on Government, which forms the first division of his works, edited by Richard K. Cralle, maintains much of the doctrines of Aristotle. It is entirely obvious, that Mr. Calhoun's views are the results of his own reflection and observation, and are not borrowed from the Stagyrate. We doubt whether he ever read his politics and economics, for we think the book has but recently been published in America. This coincidence of opinion between two great, observant, learned, and experienced men, living more than two thousand years apart, goes far to strengthen the authority of Aristotle to prove his adaptation for modern use, to show the sameness of human nature and of human institutions, in all ages and countries, and to establish the theory for which both contend that society, law, government, religion, nay, all human institutions, are of natural origin, growth, and development, ... these doctrines of Calhoun and Aristotle are of vital importance to the South; for if a social contract precedes society, then it is but fair to assume, that all men have surrendered to government equal amounts of rights and liberty, and retained equal amounts, hence all men remain equal, or of right ought to be, and domestic slavery becomes a gross violation of natural right. But the consequences of the doctrine would not end here; all men being equal, all would have equal right to the soil, and equal right to govern. Carry out the principle of the social contract into practice, and it leads to an equal division of land, and the government by turns of every member of society, all which is impracticable and absurd.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Aristotle's theory of natural born slave served as a sociological argument about inequality, a natural condition of human society and basis of the Greek government that southerners saw themselves emulating as heir of the Greek legacy. In "The Old South and the Classical World," Edwin Miles observed, "southerners who argued that the experience of Greece was worthy of their consideration were following the precedent of the American revolutionary generation, which considered the example of the ancient republics, especially Rome, as a source of inspiration for its young nation."<sup>xlvii</sup> The revolutionary generation saw Rome as a model republic to fight the tyranny of the British so as to protect the enslavement of Africans. The southern generation of

politicians and academics saw Greece as a model in the defense of southern slavery and perceived the northern arguments about natural law, equality and social contract theory as tyrannical to southern way of life. Calhoun's remarks as Crummell relates them were based on the idea that Blacks were inferior beings who should be brought under the paternalism of whites, since Greek was one of the dominant models of education for the white citizenry. The inability for Blacks not to speak the Greek syntax was proof they were not fit for citizenship. Aristotle gave southerners the ability to argue that whites had a natural right to own slaves since some were naturally born slaves. This meant Thomas Hobbes and John Locke's ideas of natural right, consent, and natural law as the basis of social contract, were rejected in favor of Aristotle's natural laws of inequality and the benefit that slaves derived from having masters who could govern them.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Susan Monosson notes that southern educators, jurists, congressman marshalled Aristotle's theory of slavery and governance into the political theory of the political economy of Southern slavery to demonstrate that slavery was a natural and necessary institution. She argued that two of Aristotle's claims that were used to justify enslavement of Africans postulated, 1) that in being based on black slavery, planter society was indeed founded on a correct identification of a specific population suited to slave status and, 2) that black slavery as practiced was for both slave and master a positive good.<sup>xliv</sup> However, Aristotle was not the only philosopher favored by southern politicians in the justification of the enslavement of Africans. On February 21, 1860, Lucius Q.C Lamar II, a Mississippi politician and jurist in the House of Representatives, argued against the abolishment of slavery by pointing to the constitution and Act of 1798 that called on the expansion of slavery in new territories. Lamar in his speech rejected the Northern appeal to natural rights, enlightened conscience and the bible, to justify abolishing slavery by arguing that

slavery was justified in the bible.<sup>1</sup> Slavery as justified in the bible, Lamar argued, meant that whites had supremacy over Blacks who were in abject conditions in Africa and were better off under the paternalism of whites. To justify this assertion Lamar turned to Hegel to show that Africans disposed to cannibalism, lawlessness and slavery when placed under American slavery were able to be trained under a rationale state which cultivated their sensual nature by making them develop into moral, intellect and rationale beings. Lamar further stated:

I propose just here to read from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, an imperishable monument of human genius, in which the author holds 'freedom to be' the essence of humanity, and slavery the condition of injustice." And what does he say? 'The negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality, all that we call feeling, if we would rightly comprehend: him. There is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. The undervaluing of humanity among them reaches an incredible degree of intensity. Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper... The devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race. To the sensual negro, human flesh is but an object of sense, mere flesh.' After describing many other characteristics, the author concludes 'slavery to have been the occasion of the increase of human feeling among the negroes. The doctrine which we deduce from this condition of slavery among the negroes, and which constitutes the only side of the question that has an interest for our inquiry, is that which we deduce from the idea—viz., that the 'natural condition'."<sup>li</sup>

Hegel's racist remarks about the nature of Africans gave credence to racist policies and authority to expand slavery in the U.S. Hegel's view of Africans as slaves was deemed authoritative and congenial to racist views about not abolishing slavery in the U.S senate. As noted earlier, slavery for the western world was a congenial condition that reflected the moral progression of westerners and they had no impetus to abolish it. Africana philosophy must reject applying theories from the western canon to understand the enslavement of Africans in the new world. Teshale Tibebu in *Hegel and the Third World: The Making of Eurocentrism in World History* demonstrated how Hegel was the foremost philosopher who championed the enslavement of Africans by deeming them incapable of using reason. Tibebu argues, Hegel outlined a

philosophy of achieving manhood that ensured that philosophers understood that Africans stuck in nature and their senses were incapable of achieving humanity based on the enlightenment criteria of reason as essential towards manhood and humanity. Tibebe argues “for Hegel, human life in Africa is animal existence. The African is a slave to nature as well to his own raw natural impulses. The African lacks self- control and self-consciousness. The African lives a merely natural, unreflective, unexamined life.”<sup>lii</sup> Since Africans were driven by their senses, they were deemed incapable of developing laws and ethics as both required reason. As such by subjugating them to slavery laws in America, they would learn ethics, rationality, and adherence to the law. It’s this point that Lamar found views of Africans useful to his arguments in the U.S senate about expanding and not abolishing slavery within the U.S. Hegel’s philosophies had global impact, by deeming Africa was habituated by savages incapable of reason, colonialism under enlightenment ideas was reason for justifying slavery as a civilizing process.

Peter Park’s *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy* has shown how the German idealist using Kant’s ideas of reason and pragmatic history between 1780-1830 wrote philosophy of world history that showed that Asia and Africa were primitive civilizations that were stuck in religion and had no philosophies as ascribed through the criteria of reason. In effect, German idealism excluded Asia and Africa from world history since they stuck in primitive states of religion.<sup>liii</sup> Reason was important towards discovering principles and laws that governed humans. As such, the senses were seen as deceiving man and hindering their ability to discover their essence. This topography ascribed to races meant those with religion were driven by the senses and primitivity since they had no rationality. Politicians were not the only people using western philosophers to justify slavery in congressional debates.

Presidents of universities and professors were instrumental in Americanizing figures like Aristotle and Hegel and imposing their theories on future statesmen, jurists and presidents. For example, professor of law at University of Virginia Albert Bledsoe's text, *Essay on Liberty and Slavery* was widely read and used in southern universities. Others included George Fitzhugh's *Sociology for the South*, professor of Law at William and Mary Beverly Tucker's *An Essay on the Moral and Political Effect of the Relation Between the Caucasian Master and the African Slave*. Famed classicalists and professor of history and literature George Frederick Holmes wrote an influential article in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, "Observation of a Passage in the Politics of Aristotle relative to Slavery." According to the legal historian Alfred Brophy, Dew's text was influential in southern universities and resonated with professors teaching, political economy, history and moral philosophy or what we currently call the humanities. Hampden-Sydney College, South Carolina College, Washington College, University of Georgia, University of North Carolina, College of Charleston, Emory, Randolph Macon, Southern University, University of Alabama, Mississippi and the Virginia Military Institute followed his model of using the bible, history of Greek and Aristotle's theories of slavery and government to justify why the South instead of abolishing slavery protected the economic rights of slave owners.<sup>liv</sup>

By looking at the writing of faculty in southern schools from the 1830s to the civil war, it becomes apparent that they were writing and teaching about the importance of slavery; less often they challenged it. The faculty defended slavery in a variety of ways. Often the defense was based on empirical grounds of history and economics.<sup>lv</sup> In effect universities created an intellectual culture in which professors wrote treaties of moral philosophy, political economy and law that defended slavery. Newspaper editors solicited essay prizes for the best theories of slave management and farming techniques, while students defended slavery in classrooms and

literature societies and commencement speaker reminded students their duty to preserve slavery as a virtue of southern culture and governance. Brophy writes:

Law professors, especially, developed those arguments about the natural inferiority of the slaves and the good that slavery brought to all of southern society. They rested on the ‘practical in moral’ what we call considerations of utility. They argued that slavery was economically necessary. As academics developed these ideas in conjunction with lawyers, politicians, religious leaders, physicians, newspaper editors, and planters, the intellectual power of the southern society was brought to bear to justify the present system. Their books and articles told of the research they had done on history and on contemporary society. They sought to prove with scientific precision that slavery was nearly ubiquitous in history and that there could be no end in the near future.<sup>lvi</sup>

What does it mean for Africana philosophers to rely on continental theories to study the enslavement of Africans when those theories were used to educate southern and northern citizens in the importance of slavery as an institution that was a foundation of western government and civilization? Importantly, as William Spanos argues in *The End of Education*, the recent reformulation of the humanities as a field of inquiry dedicated to social justice is a phenomenon that began in 1979 following Harvard University’s *Core Curriculum Report* that influenced universities across the country to move beyond the classics as the core curriculum. Spanos argues Harvard was forced to evaluate the role of the classics as central to its education endeavors after the student protests, black power movement and the Vietnam War. Yet as Spanos notes, the evaluation of the classics as congenial to slavery, racism and colonialism did not mean a wholesome change in the curriculum of the humanities, rather it meant a re-centering of the humanities by making the claims of marginalized groups as part of the universal ideals of western humanism. Spanos notes, “the benign pluralism of contemporary liberal humanism constitutes a strategy of incorporation that, whatever its explicit intentions, operates to reduce the subversive threat of the emergent differential constituencies (whether bodies of marginalized texts or marginalized social groups) by accommodating them to the humanist core or center; that



is, the anthropologists...in short, the renewed appeal to disinterested inquiry by liberal humanists in the university is ultimately intended to recuperate the lost authority of humanism.”<sup>lvii</sup>

Spano’s insight helps us understand that the humanities began with a provisional notion of humanism. In American universities this liminal notion of humanism meant using theories of western slavery in American universities to justify the enslavement of Africans. As such, discourse about revamping the canon which still centers western philosophies do not displace the authority of western philosophy to dictate the claims of who is included in the liminal ideology of humanism. Said differently, the reliance of post-structural theory by African philosophers to study slavery reifies the very theories that were used to teach American citizens, statements and jurists to enslave Africans without having to rectify the injustices and genocide that meted on Africans across the diaspora.

A significant shift is needed in understanding that liberal arts and humanities in American universities have always been at the helm of engendering anti-black sentiments and genocide. It was the amount of lynching on college campuses that prompted DuBois to develop sociology as an empirical study of Black life to counter the philosophies and moral arguments that justified slavery in universities. And the philosophies prevalent in American colleges that justified Black people had contributed nothing to civilization and were best suited for slavery led Carter G. Woodson of *The Miseducation of the Negro* to exclaim “lynchers are made in the classroom.”<sup>lviii</sup>

### **Sylvia Wynter as Entry Point for Interrogating the Influence of Greek, Roman and Enlightenment Age**

If philosophy and the other fields of the humanities are revered for their ability to train students to understand notions of virtue, vices, search for truth, Sylvia Wynter shows that disciplines in the humanities were fundamentally geared towards structuring the provincial

notions of European knowledge onto the rest of the world. Her genealogical work traces the roots of the concept of black inferiority from the Renaissance period towards the 1990s IQ wars.<sup>lix</sup> Simultaneously Wynter's work is attuned to how 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century Caribbean anti-colonial theorists' writers Frantz Fanon, George Lamming, CRL James, Edouard Glissant, theorized about anti-colonial movements in their works that challenged the mythologies that governed Africans enslavement on the islands.<sup>lx</sup> This discourse of coloniality and enslaved rooted in mythologies of Africans is what Wynter calls ethno-poesis—the act of creation, or production in which a race or ethnic group brings something that did not exist before, like colonialism; also the ethno-centric discourse based in mythological assumptions about other Black people which has been validated as knowledge of Black people. Which is say, since mythology has functioned as legitimate source of western knowledge, ethno-poesis as a mythological knowledge about Black people, serves as legitimate knowledge that structures racist discourse. The counter-doctrine discourse that emerged from 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Caribbean thinkers that challenged ethno-poesis is what Wynter calls socio-poesis. Wynter argues “ethno-poetics can only have validity if it is explored in a context of socio-poetics where the socio firmly places the ethnos in its concrete historical particularity...that the ideological meaning of ethno-poetics and the real meaning that we try to give it can only be defined in the overall context of the relation between first/third world in its socio-poetic context.”<sup>lxi</sup>

Wynter's arguments about socio-poesis attunes us to how these Caribbean anti-colonial theorists constructed a socio-poesis discourse that deconstructed the different Western ethno-poesis mythologies and categories of being that structured the relationship of African on plantations and colonial masters in metropole. Which is to say Wynter's fundamental argument is that socio-poesis discourse that begun with the Haitian revolution challenged the categories of

western ethno-poiesis that were used to construct a plantation economy predicated on subordinating African bodies to the category of laborer using particular mythologies about Africans. This socio-poiesis discourse effectively showed that Western humanism was birthed in conquest and subordinating groups into genres of biological and inferior beings who had fallen out of the grace of God that western man had to redeem.

The counter-doctrine poesis that Wynter's argues 20<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean anti-colonial theorists developed sought to interrogate this logic of genres of biological and inferior beings that undergirds Western humanism. Wynter locates this violence of politics of truth in the mythologies of origins and the conquest that began in 1492. She shows how using the bible as the source of origins of races, Europeans constructed themselves as those given God's edict to redeem the rest of the world through spreading the knowledge of Christianity. To do this Europeans first had to reformulate the curse God placed on Adam as fallen man who sinned against God and bound to produce progenies who born in sin outside of Europe by claiming redemption through reason and discover of God's laws henceforth shifting sin and the concept of fallen man to Africans through the curse of Ham. Wynter in "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," traces the beginning of this logic in Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*:

In this treatise, Pico rewrote the Judeo-Christian origin narrative of Genesis. Adam, rather than having been expelled with Eve from the garden by God, is shown by Pico to have fallen at all. Instead, he had come into existence when God, having completed his creation and wanting someone to admire his works, had created Man on a model unique to him, then placed him at the center/midpoint of the hierarchy of this creation, commanding him to 'make of himself' what he willed to be- to decide for himself whether to fall to the level of the beasts by giving into his passions, or, through the use of his reason, to rise to the level of the angels. It was therefore to be on the basis of this new conception, and of its related civic-humanist reformulation, that Man was to be invented in its first form as the rational political subject of the state, as one who displayed his reason by primarily adhering to the laws of the state, rather than, as before, in seeking to

redeem himself from enslavement to Original Sin by primarily adhering to the prohibitions of the church.<sup>lxii</sup>

The reformulation of Adam as a fallen subject prone to produce progenies in sin was reformulated by Italian humanists as created as a subject God made to marvel at the creation of the world and given the choice to perfect his form through reason or become like one of the animals God made subjected to senses and passion. As Wynter shows, this reconceptualization meant the Church as the intermediary between God and Man enforced laws and constructed those incapable of adhering to God/ the State as sinners and irrationality. Wynter states:

With this redescription, the medieval world's idea of order as based upon degrees of spiritual perfection/imperfection, an idea of order centered on the Church, was now to be replaced by a new one based upon degrees of rational perfection/ imperfection. And this was to be the new 'idea of order' on whose basis the coloniality of being, enacted by the dynamics of the relation between Man-overrepresented as the generic, ostensibly supracultural human- and its subjugated Others i.e. Indians and Negroes..was to be brought into existence as the foundational basic of modernity. With this revealing that, from the very origin, the issue of race as the issue of Colonial question, the nonwhite/ native question, the negro, yet as one that has hitherto had no name, was and is fundamentally the issue of the genre of the human, Man.<sup>lxiii</sup>

As Wynter notes the construction of Western Man began with reclaiming western man not as a fallen subject but one who learned obedience to God as a secular being who adhered to the laws of the Church. The ability to be obedient to Gods laws birthed the enlightenment idea that man as a creature capable of reason could discover laws that governed human life through reason.

Perfection of reason engendered the discourse of colonialization by searching for those incapable of reason whom must be brought under the civilization of Christianity. This brought about the "colonial question, the nonwhite/ native question, and the negro question." The negro question was addressed through the curse of ham by reconstructing Western Man as one of reason, the concepts of fallen man/ sin/ vice was that used to discuss Adams fall from grace was

supplanted onto Africans as those who have fallen outside the realm of humanity through the sin/vice that was traced to the biblical curse of Ham Wynters argues:

It is the population group classified as 'negro' by the West who would be made to pay the most of both psycho-existential price for the West's epochal degod-ding of both its matrix Judeo- Christian identity and the latter's projection of Otherness. Since, if that process called for the carrying over or transuming of the monotheistic macro-stereotype of all Black peoples as descendants of Noah's son Ham whom he had cursed, condemning his descendants to be the servants of those of his two other sons, Japhet and Shem, and its reattachment to the new concept of the subrational negro, condemned this time by the malediction of nature rather than by Noah.<sup>lxiv</sup>

On Wynter's view we must understand two discourses of slavery developed in Western philosophy 1) Western man progression as a moral/ rational began with reclaiming Adam as the fallen man who had sinned and was cursed by God to produce progenies who sinned 2) Upon reclaiming Adam from God's curse, Africans became the new fall man through the curse of Ham whom God ordained that his children would be slaves. These two notions of slavery, the construction of sin/curse had shifted from Adam as fallen man and ascribed to Africans as those outside the realm of the human through the sin/curse of Ham were important to the development of sciences in the Enlightenment age and what defined Western man search for laws that would free western man from religion. A similar point is made by Andrew Curran in *The Anatomy of Blackness*. He argues that in the Enlightenment age, European scientific academies and universities sought to refute the religious argument that the curse of Ham was the cause of blackness in Africans by conducting vivisections on Africans. These vivisections were conducted under the auspices of scientific academies who hosted debates about which internal organ (the brain, liver, kidney) was responsible for creating the phenotypical expression of blackness in Africans.<sup>lxv</sup> Anti-blackness was instrumental towards the development of the sciences, moral and political philosophies that would emerge during the Enlightenment. As much as thinkers of

the enlightenment have been praised for freeing the western world from the dependence of religion to structure a humane life by advocating that reason could help humans discover laws that govern the world and human life. Enlightenment thinkers relied on religious ideas to formulate racism and theories of morality, ethics and geography in the modern world.

For example, John Zammito in *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* argues, Kant influenced by *popularphilosophie* saw his philosophical praxis driven by the need to transform the esoteric concerns of metaphysics, science and theology into practical questions about human life and the best way humans must live their lives.<sup>lxvi</sup> Kant began this project in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. In the text Kant sought to create a typology of how the sublime and beauty shapes character traits of individuals, relationships between men and women, and the differences between races and their national characteristics. Kant argued “the different sentiments of gratification or vexation rest not so much on the constitution of the external things that arouse them as on the feeling, intrinsic to every person, of being touched by them with pleasure or displeasure.”<sup>lxvii</sup>

For Kant observing oneself and the way in which the world stimulates moral responses was a preoccupation that gave a philosopher the advantage to propagate values about the moral character as it develops under the experience of the sublime and the beauty.<sup>lxviii</sup> The philosopher could use reason to observe oneself and isn't merely a passive agent in the experience of the sublime or beauty. As such, Kant noted that if one observed oneself there were two main defining sentiments from the sublime and beauty “gratification or vexation”. While the discourse of the sublime and beauty had been used to understand the distinctions between external things like art, poetry, mountains covered, Kant sought to understand how gratification and vexation impacted the moral development of humans. Kant states:

Among moral qualities, true virtue alone is sublime. There are nevertheless good moral qualities that are lovable and beautiful and, to the extent that they harmonize with virtue, may also be regarded as noble, even though they harmonize with virtue, may also be regarded as noble, even though they cannot genuinely be counted as part of the virtuous disposition.<sup>lxi</sup>

For Kant while feelings like sympathy and complaisance are important as they coalesce with beauty, they, however do not engender virtue because they have no guiding principle on which one can always act virtuous from.<sup>lxx</sup> This distinction of the sublime grounded in virtue and beauty with no principle called for an investigation of principles of moral development. Kant argues:

...thus virtue can only be grafted upon principles, and it will become the more sublime and noble the more general they are. These principles are not speculative rules, but the consciousness of a feeling that lives in every human breast and that extends much further than to the special grounds of sympathy and complaisance. I believe that I can bring all this together if I say that it is the feeling of the beauty and the dignity of human nature.<sup>lxxi</sup>

Kant's definition of development moral qualities looked towards the sublime as the guiding force of virtues as they are grounded in principles which can engender feelings of the "beauty and dignity of human nature." Given this understanding of the role of the sublime and beautiful in the development of moral qualities, Kant goes on to explain how the sublime and beauty influence the human temperaments; phlegmatic, sanguine, choleric, and the different frames of mind that people with these temperaments endure and how they formulate character traits based on the sublime and beauty.<sup>lxxii</sup> Kant proceeds to show how the sublime and beauty also formulate masculine and feminine traits. Kant's recommendation is since women embody beauty they should be educated and socialized into beauty, while men must be taught to be more sublime.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Kant concludes by building on Hume's essay "Of National Character" to create a typology of the expressions of the sublime and beauty in nationalities and the feelings of beauty these nationalities engender in through the creation of arts, literature, manners. Following Hume, Kant

endorses that European races and Asian races through the arts and literature have engender feelings in different national characteristics, the only race incapable of engendering feelings is the African race. Kant states:

...the negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

Kant endorsed Hume's argument that Africans had no distinct racial or national character in which other racial groups when come in contact with them would deem important to humane civilization ideas. Said differently, Black people were incapable of engendering moral sentiments which others could recognize them as humans. Or in Kant's words black people had no moral capacity to produce sciences or arts that could evoke beauty or the sublime as a creation of values in others. The idea of creating epistemes of knowledge of racial and national character based on the observation of philosophers would be a hallmark of modern ethical theories which centered the subject of the experience as more important than attempting to understand the experience of others.<sup>lxxv</sup> By excluding Black people from the realm of progenitors of humane values and morals, enlightenment thinkers give credence to colonization schemes that saw Africa and its inhabitants as a degenerate people whom had to be brought under European rule and reason to civilize them in the modern world.<sup>lxxvi</sup> This development of modern racism was built of the theory of the curse of Ham and Africans as those deemed to be enslaved. These notions of validating the curse of Ham were not unique to Europe. American politicians, doctors, plantation owners relied on these European theories of slavery as form of moral progress and the curse of Ham to create medical theories that influenced the development of gynecology, asylums, prisons,



medical schools that lied on black bodies laws that reinforced whites as superior to Black people.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Wynter's wide ranging work is precisely important because it interrogates the development of western humanism and the development of genres of biological and intellectually inferior beings that was ascribed to Africans and indigenous people is also important in that it helps us situate the way 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers engaged with Greek, Roman, and enlightenment ideas of slavery based on the mind/ body split as it was used to justify the intellectual inferiority of Black people. Wynter's work is important in that it situates African slavery as engendering a unique discourse which freed western man to go out and colonize and enslave those whom were deemed incapable of using reason not only to obey God by develop arts and sciences that would engender moral values in other racial groups. Importantly Wynter's work situates this knowledge as part of the development of western academies and universities which rely on a canonical system of anti-Blackness to justify that Black people are not human.<sup>lxxviii</sup> While Scholars have built on Wynter's work to show how the concepts of race and gender were used to construct genre of biological and intellectual being and how this discourse was essential towards disciplines in the humanities.<sup>lxxix</sup> Scholars however have not been attuned to the way Wynter's work provides us the ability to understand how Greek and Roman theories of slavery as classical literature was important to the establishment of American grammar schools and universities that socialized Americans from the 1700s through 1850 into theories of slavery that were important to modern western nation states.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Wynter's work as it traces the mythologies of Black inferiority beginning in the renaissance period is important to the contextual work of slavery and race that this introduction attempts to situate how American statesmen, lawyers and slave owners relied on theories from

the bible, Greek and Roman history to justify the enslavement of Africans and how Black thinkers developed a philosophical discourse that deconstructed these theories. Wynters notes:

If the ostensibly divinely ordained caste organizing principle of the Europe's feudal-Christian order was fundamentally secured by the absolutism of its scholastic order of knowledge, the ostensibly evolutionarily determined genetic organizing principle of our Liberal Humanists own, as expressed in the empirical hierarchies of race and class is as fundamentally secured by our present disciplines of the humanities and social sciences<sup>lxxxix</sup>

As Wynter suggests, theologians in the scholastic period were responsible for finding theological justification for African slavery in the bible which initiated a discourse in the humanities on which Africans were defined as beings to be conquered and sequestered under western knowledge and civilization. Similarly, our contemporary disciplines influenced by the ideas of post-reconstruction race-relations scholars who argued that Black people needed to be assimilated into American values because they engaged in moral decadent and pathological behavior since they were no longer under the paternalism of whites on plantations has become the dominant discourse of race in the academy.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Wynter's wide ranging work allows us to see how anti-blackness has been fundamental to shaping disciplines in the humanities and how Black thinkers outside of these institution developed knowledge that not only challenged the epistemological categories but the world on which they were built on. Consequently, Wynter's work offers a genealogical guide into thinking about how early Black thinkers engaged in the discourse of slavery.

Importantly, Wynters' work requires us to wrestle with slavery as shaping the emergence of scientific discourse under the Enlightenment age. While Africana philosophers have addressed how philosophers of the enlightenment age were at the focal point of creating racist theories, they have yet to account for the way the enlightenment age was influenced by African slavery which gave credence to the enlightenment ideas of civilization stages that sought to extend the

agrarian ideas of the ancient republics of Greece and Rome which relied on slave labor.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Under the enlightenment age, Greek and Roman slavery served as models on which emerging western nations could model their republics on. To justify slavery, modern nation states developed their own theories of slavery and those who were to be subjugated under the modern western republics much like the Greek and Roman republic created their own theories of slavery.

By drawing from post-structural theories which wrestle with the legacy of the enlightenment age, African philosophers have been limited by their inquiry to understand how Americans adopted theories of slaves and race from the bible, Greece, Rome and the Enlightenment age to create unique justifications of African enslavement in the western world.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Stated differently, Black thinkers were well versed in the theories of slavery from the bible, Greek, Roman history that influenced the development of scientific studies that sought to ground slavery and race into a racial hierarchal under modernity.<sup>lxxxv</sup> As Brit Russert has observed about Black intellectual engagement with the enlightenment in *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*, “early African American practitioners repeatedly questioned the very definition of science, radically expanding its borders while presenting themselves as vital scientific agents who had the power to manipulate and experiment with the objects of the natural world.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Africans in the new world developed a scientific intellectual culture that not only served as a counter discourse of colonialization but also as an intellectual genealogy of African scientific methods and experiments that challenged the scientific discoveries of Europeans. Our tendency to reduce Black thinkers as Sisyphean subjects engaged in constant struggle and not active agents in the creation of philosophical systems, nations and programs that affirm Black humanhood has created a methodological crisis in how we think about unique ways Black

thinkers reflected seriously on deconstructing western categories that dehumanized them and abolished oppressive systems of slavery and colonialism.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

By relying on post-modern theory, Africana philosophers have adopted the conceptual models of European thinkers' reflection of slavery as opposed to adopting the different theoretical lenses that Black thinkers developed to combat western slavery. Said differently, even-though figures like Hegel and Marx were contemporaries of prominent Black abolitionist, Africana philosophers using post-modern theory have privileged European constructs to understand African slavery instead of those of Black abolitionist who reflected on their enslavement. As William R Jones and Tommy Curry have respectively argued, Africana philosophy must be rooted in its own methodological and genealogical studies that account for the debates that have been essential towards the development of Africana philosophy.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Building on these insight, in this dissertation I argue for the need to be enmeshed in genealogical ways Black thinkers since slavery have debate slavery and race which requires that we pay attention to the fact that slave narratives offer us both historical and philosophical accounts of how Black thinkers deconstructed Western theories of slavery and race that were rooted in theology and the emergent 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> natural and physical sciences of the enlightenment age. By understanding how Black thinkers challenged biblical ethnology, natural history, scientific ethnology, natural law, we are better able to understand how Black thinkers rejected the categories used to subordinate them. Importantly, we are better able to understand how Black thinkers challenged the shifting contours of racial theory and developed different conceptualizations of race by developing programs, scientific studies and intellectual organizations that abolished slavery.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

By opting to study Black experiences through white theorists and refusing to take seriously that Black thinkers developed their own theories of race and racial development has led to what Tommy Curry has called underspecialization of race theory in Africana Philosophy. As Curry notes:

We condemn our area of study to under-specialization whereby our works of philosophical genius, past and present, will be judged solely by the degree to which they extend the universalizing character of Europe and her theories. To the extent that African-American philosophy chooses to abandon the genealogical patterns of Black thought for philosophically privileged associations with white thinkers, it remains, derelictal-continuing to neglect its only actual duty- the duty to inquiry into the reality of African-descended people as they have revealed it.<sup>xc</sup>

The task Curry presents about the importance of black genealogies is taken up in this dissertation by looking at how Black thinkers interrogated slavery and race beginning in the eighteenth century. As I will show in the proceeding pages, Black thinkers engaged in the debate on African slavery in its different reiteration, it's this genre of discourse that the term Black narrative attempts to encapsulate by showing the way Black thinkers interrogated the genocidal logic that undergirded the different theories of slavery and race that justified western colonialization of Africans.

The impetus of this project is motivated by Sylvia's assertion that the call from Black student protests movements on campuses in the 1960s and 1970s was incorporated into university systems which did not overhaul their foundational knowledge structure rooted in anti-Blackness.<sup>xcii</sup> Instead, universities integrated the protests and call for inclusion into their systems by developing "ethnic and gender and /or minority studies as enclaves."<sup>xciii</sup> As such, to legitimize their existence, ethnic, gender and minority studies were required by university to associate themselves with anti-Black paradigms as critical paradigms of anti-Blackness within

the university instead of developing the traditions of Black knowledge that challenged anti-Blackness in American society.<sup>xciii</sup>

As Wynter notes “what she calls for new studies at first overlooked, however, was precisely the regularities which emerged into view in the wake of the ‘diverse modalities of protest’ whose non-coordinated yet spontaneous eruption now brought into unconcealness, not only the lawlike rule-governed nature of the exclusion of the diverse protesting groups/categories as group-subjects from any access to the means of reproduction, but also the regularities of the exclusion of their frames of reference and historical/cultural past from the normative curriculum.”<sup>xciv</sup> As per Wynter’s insight, the incorporation of the protest movements as critical anti-Black paradigms limits the ability to understand how Black people have understood themselves; how they have studied their development and fought to preserve traditions that resist the mythologies of western culture that has entrapped Blackness as a condition of subordination. To gain credence in academia, contemporary scholars were forced to exclude the frames of references, historical and cultural knowledge that Black people developed to counter racist assumptions that ended slavery. In lieu, they were incorporated into academic disciplines voices aimed at rehabilitating western knowledge using western theories.

For Wynter there is a need to return to the knowledge that sparked the Black protests movement in order to develop “new studies, whose revelatory heresy lies in their definition of themselves away from the chaotic roles in which they had been defined-Black from Negro, Chicano from Mexican-American, and Feminists from Women.”<sup>xcv</sup> The established paradigms within the academy limit understanding how Black thinkers developed knowledge that deconstructed the category of Negro as a reconfiguration of being subhuman, or how the Chicano movement developed knowledge that reframed whites as colonial-settlers and rejected

the assimilation project of Chicano's as second-class citizens under the Mexican-American label, or how the category of women as the progenitor of feminism as an ideology of gender egalitarian politics belies the structure of imperialism that function under the gender category of woman, when feminism is centered on egalitarian politics of identity. Taking the forestated into account, new studies of how Black thinkers rejected western philosophical justification of their enslavement are needed to understand that for enslaved Africans their philosophical praxis was rooted in ending slavery, while for western philosophers Africans slavery was a question of how to further western republics built on slavery.

### **Black Narricide as an Intervention in the Discourse on African Slavery**

The word “narricide” means the fracturing or violent killing of a story.<sup>xvii</sup> The term “Black narricide” implies the killing of western narratives emerging out of African slavery. This term is deployed in an attempt to encapsulate a genre of Black philosophical discourse on African slavery that centers the philosophical insights that Black thinkers from the 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century developed to discuss and understand slavery. It is the impression of this body of work that western morality, economic, legal and government theories have failed to see African slavery as a crime committed against Africans, but rather as a problem of incorporating Africans into western civilization as a permanent subordinate class. By conceptualizing African slavery as a crime enshrined in western morality, economics, legal and government theories, the Black in Black narricide operates to violently kill off (1) the revisionist literature that perpetuates stereotypes of Blacks as inferior, uninvolved, and subhuman, (2) findings that cast down about the physical and mental endowments of Black people, (3) outrageous justifications of slavery, (4) the portrayal of Blacks as morally corrupt; ignorant, predatory, and sinful.

Black narricide centers on the philosophical justifications that led Africans to organize, resist and abolish slavery. If slavery existed as a normativity state of humans in Western civilization, Africans in the new world raptured the system by asserting their humanity outside the western concepts of slave/human and challenging the different justifications that were used to enslave Africans.<sup>xcvii</sup> In Chapter 1, “Arrow of God Cuagano’s Deconstruction of Biblical Ethnology and the Curse of Ham,” I discuss and analyze the Curse of Ham with reference to Quobna Ottobah Cugoano’s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* which is generally considered the first text by an African in the new world to decenter the philosophical, theological and legal justification of slavery.<sup>xcviii</sup> Cugoano’s critiques maintained slavery was rooted not in biblical theology but the economic incentive that slave catchers gained from kidnapping and selling Africans as property. Invariably, through Cugoano’s critique, we learn white on white crime was the basis of American property law during the slave trade. The expeditions to Africa and the control of trade routes and goods was a fight between European nations and America not to abolish slavery but to fight for continental control of African labor. This jingoist approach created the conditions for property rights embedded in the trafficking of Africans to the new world.

Cugoano’s text sets the tone for critiques of the 18<sup>th</sup> century black thinkers who sought to show that Africans were more than slaves and had their own civilization ideals that were linked back to African civilizations. This discourse developed a different biblical ethnology which gave the natural history of the Africans in both autobiographical terms and the development of Black historical texts that centered on the past achievements of African civilizations. By focusing on ancient African civilizations and their achievements, this dissertation invariably argues that slavery and republicanism in Africa gave different civilization ideals to the world than the



slavery, republicanism, and civilization ideals that developed from the Greek and Roman republics on which American republicanism was fashioned. As such, Chapter 2 “Misplacement of Slavery in Africana Philosophy” looks at how James McCune Smith’s reading tapped on Douglass’ intellectual development engrained in the African heritage of his mother and utilized it to challenge the classical republican ideals of Greek and Roman slavery. I focus on Smith’s use of biology and ethnology to affirm that Douglass’s parentage was linked to a Black woman of eminent stature like an Egyptian Pharaoh who birthed a progeny. While the link to Egypt in Black writing can be traced to the emergence of Prince Hall Masons activism and organization in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Black thinkers under the heuristic of profane and sacred history, created comparative history of how slaves fared in Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Americas.

Black thinkers using Egypt to consolidate natural history of African slavery and achievement in the modern world sought to do three things 1) Challenge the classical foundation of the Greece and Roman histories that the American republic used to justify the enslavement of Africans, 2) Challenge the emergent scientific Darwinist laws of development that sought to supplant the curse of Ham by asserting that Black people were a species of apes and outside the realm of being human,<sup>xcix</sup> 3) Reinterpret the question of African racial origins of Noah’s children and show Shem as the father of the Asiatic races, with Ham as the father of the African race and Japhet as that of Europeans. Ham’s sons Canaan and Cush settled in Egypt and Ethiopia respectively and created two civilizations different from Japhet’s progenies. This scenario provides extant evidence that whites and the ideal of European and American enlightenment were a later stage of human development. And unlike the Black arts, sciences and philosophies that emerged out of Africa, the arts, sciences and philosophies of the European and American

Enlightenment had a negative impact on the world and specifically on indigenous and Africa people.<sup>c</sup>

In this chapter I argue that Black narrative, as a genre, not only served as foil to critique the classical republicanism of Greece and Rome that undergirded the nation, but show that with the rise of Egypt, Africans created the first advanced civilization and those in the new-world from Haiti and the diaspora continued that legacy. Egypt and Haiti served as models of modern republics. Slave masters believed American slavery was entrenched in Biblical, Greek and Roman slavery. This impression provided them with prototypes on which to create a system of slavery system that would purportedly civilize and imbue western virtues to African slaves. Black thinkers in 19<sup>th</sup> century asserted that slave masters and their exemplars of classical republicanism were decadent.

Douglass in his second autobiography *My Bondage and Freedom* revisited such claims by giving description of his mother as having a phenotypical structure like an Egyptian Pharaoh. While the remark might seem ordinary, Douglass was actually furthering Black intellectuals' assertions that American slavery was the worst form of slavery in the world. It was so inhumane Africans on slave plantations constructed their own epistemological understanding of their experiences that linked their liberation to creating more humane civilization archetypes not only in Africa but also in the western world. When the Scottish Enlightenment offered new theories of slavery, Douglass, as I urge in this chapter, challenged the theories of morality, economics, great chain of being and work ethics fostered by the Scottish Enlightenment.

Referencing chapter 3, "Douglass' Critique of Natural Law and the Constitution" which builds on Douglass's critique of philosophies of the Scottish Enlightenment, I argue Douglass employed a legal philosophy of the Constitution as an economic compromise between states

fixed on economic incentive to ensure slave-owners benefited from slave labor. To further advance my argument, I trace the genesis of conceptions contained in *The Columbian Orator* and specifically in “A Dialogue between a Master and Slave” that inspired Douglass’ to venture into the common law philosophies of consent and property rights. I demonstrate how Douglass argued against the dominant legal trend that applied natural law to critique African slavery. Douglass argued that the Constitution was a document invested in preserving the property rights of slave-owners and denying slaves the ability to own themselves. In essence, I argue that Douglass understood that slavery was a function of economics and property rights that established rights to suit slave masters.

In chapter 4 “Conceptual Incarceration: The Current Position of Slavery in Contemporary Africana Philosophy,” I focus on how Douglass used ethnology as a theoretical basis of discussing Black manhood and the mechanic arts as being important to Black liberation. In the chapter I focus on how Douglass argued that the mechanical arts were important towards building the moral character of Black manhood. Given that enslaved Africans worked as mechanics, or worked found work in ship yards, Douglass argued these skills could be cultivated in teaching Black people to create self- sustaining economic systems and also be useful in developing skills necessary to gain freedom in slave-revolts. I contextualize Douglass’ ethnological views within the debates amongst Black thinkers in the *Coloured Convention Movement* about how ethnology could be applied to Black liberation. In his own time Douglass and Martin Delany using ethnology would arrive to different conclusions yet their readings of ethnology and the mechanic arts set the state for the debates between W.E.B Dubois and Booker T Washington who both built their ideas of Black cooperation’s, mechanical arts and Black liberation based on Douglass’ views

To this end, this project makes a strong case for the need to challenge the use of western theories of morality, economic, and law by situating critiques and insights that Black thinkers developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to contest the different justifications for slavery. By addressing the philosophies of Black thinkers, we comprehend the necessity to organize against and abolish systems rooted in anti-Black oppression. Stated in a nutshell, slavery as a fundamental feature of western civilization was only abolished as a result of slave revolts, economic pressures, founding of new Black nations, legal suits for enslaved Africans and freedmen that Black people brought on western slavery. If we understand that western theories of slavery weren't just abstract notions of the human condition, but defined the human condition, and were propagated as serious guides on which to manage enslaved Africans on plantations and served as the governing philosophies a republic based on slavery.

Africana philosophers must reject the idea that the philosophical canon can be rehabilitated through critiques and rather should develop its own canonical understanding on how Black thinkers challenged these philosophies as they were used on Africans. If western philosophy can conceive of a world in which African slavery is an indeterminate moral and legal problem, what does it mean for Africana philosophers to understand that our ancestors conceived and developed philosophical insights that abolished slavery and contextualized the discourse of genocide and reparations that would dominate the modern world after the World Wars. It's precise this unique genre of black philosophical discourse which takes seriously the reflection of African kidnapping, murders and enslavement that birthed modern societies that require its own account as important genre of Black philosophical. For example, Pompee Valentin Vastey, a Haitian writer who fought alongside Toussaint Louverture during the Haitian wrote about why

the enslaved Haitians had rebelled against French colonialism in *The Colonial System Unveiled*.

Vastey argued:

What manner of pen would be required to describe crimes hitherto unknown to humankind? When depicting all these many horrors, what form of expression can I employ? I know of none. The flowers of rhetoric and embellishments of style are suitable for describing scenes that do not put a man to shame, but when it comes to such a lugubrious topic, when it comes to descending into a cesspool of crimes, they are useless ... Most of the historians who have written about the colonies were whites, indeed colonists. They have entered into the greatest detail regarding crops, climate, the rural economy, but they have been careful not to rend the veil from the crimes of their accomplices. Precious few have had the courage to speak the truth, and even when speaking it they have sought to disguise it, to diminish the enormity of those crimes through their manner of expression. Thus, out of cowardice and self-interest, these writers have cast a veil over the outrageous crimes of the colonists.<sup>ci</sup>

Vastey argued that the crimes committed against enslaved Haitians were shrouded in colonial discourse of botany, discovery of animals and the ability for the French to set a colony that could aide in its imperialistic expansion. Yet the crimes against enslaved Haitians were never recorded or discussed. These crimes were the impetus of the Haitian Revolution and charted a genre of Black philosophical discourse on which enslaved Africans began to organize slave revolts on.<sup>cii</sup> It's this distinct tradition that has been bequeathed to Africana philosophers. Black thinkers were innovative and developed humane ideals that created ethical, legal, moral and economic theories that were the first systematic to end slavery as a civilization tool of Western republics. These theories were not abstract principles but axioms rooted in ending suffering, death and genocide of a racial group. The intimate nature in which modernity has been shaped by Black Death also gave birth to philosophies of Black existence, resistance, fallibility and humanity that deconstructed western philosophies of Black subordination. It from this vantage point that Africana philosophers must honor ancestral struggle of philosophy born in struggle.

The concept Black narricide seeks to capture the shifting discourse of the decadence of western moral and political philosophy that Black thinkers have developed as a distinct genre of philosophy on African slavery.

Finally, the lack of effort to explicitly grapple with slavery is a persistent trend that is symptomatic of a society that would rather tiptoe around the issue of slavery rather than directly address it. This project is the only one to employ the Black narricide concept to judiciously respond to the dominant revisionist history of slavery that emerged in the 1980s, and show how and why Africana philosophers have failed to distinctly develop their own histories of slavery and have instead depended on revisionist historical accounts of slavery to tender a philosophical critique of slavery. Pedagogically, the prospective, bourgeoning and established Africana philosopher needs to know the impact the triangular slave trade has had on Black people in the U.S. and beyond. The theories and concepts put forth in this project provide a platform from which Africana philosophers can debate the authenticity of Africana philosophy as a major discipline in academy, and also address and challenge Afro-pessimism.

This project challenges the predominant trend of Afro-pessimism in contemporary academic that seeks to theorize how slavery impacts contemporary race-relations. Afro-pessimists argue that the sociological discourse of race-relations was really a discourse of power relations and anti-Black antagonism in which the master/slave relation is the lynchpin of race-relations.<sup>ciii</sup> They further argue that ending slavery birthed a racialized subject prone to violence and domination during and after reconstruction. In other words, the idea that reconstruction gave rise to the idea that Black people as citizens under the law belied the reality of the ontology of Black people born as slaves that for years upheld notions of citizenship. They further postulate Black people can never be accepted as citizens given the ontological foundation of slavery linked

to blackness.<sup>civ</sup> In short, Afro-pessimists argue the vestiges of the ontology of blacks born as slaves is fundamentally tied to the ontology of blacks, meaning Black people can never be accepted as citizens given the ontological foundation of slavery linked to blackness.<sup>cv</sup>

Afro-pessimist miss the point when they attempt to extend the legacy of slavery into post-reconstruction and civil rights area which was meant to mark the birth of the Black citizen in accordance with constitutional amendments 13 to 15. What Afro-pessimist fail to acknowledge is the Civil War created conditions on which war became the domestic policy that Whites used to create ethno-nationalism, imperialistic policies, and violence against Blacks. Which is to say, in post-reconstruction Black subjects appeared as a threat to national security. They were labelled as criminals, militant nationalist, sexual and economic degenerates in American sociology, social psychology literature, and government agencies, and where tailed for subversive acts, and lynched.<sup>cvi</sup> War and imperialism defined the government's approach to Black migration and urban problems from the World Wars through the civil rights area, these programs extended from the war on poverty to the war on crime.<sup>cvii</sup>

Surprising enough Afro-pessimist don't engage the work of Malcolm X who read extensively nineteenth century Black ethnology that he extended into the twenty century to articulate the impact slavery had on contemporary race-relations. Neither do they engage with Black power theorists who looked to insurrection by enslaved Africans, the second amendment as derived by the fear of slave revolts and Black veterans in the world wars to understand the condition of captivity under the socialization of war as a domestic policy aimed at Black people in urban citizens that led Black power theorist to theorize about Black political repression as neo-slavery.<sup>cviii</sup> Black power theorist were in line with, early Black thinkers who understood how war and the theory of just war theory was one philosophical justification of the enslavement of

Africans. By centering the history of early black thinkers on the question of slavery, we are better able to understand the genealogy and contours of the tradition as it is bequeathed from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and extended through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



**CHAPTER II**  
**ARROW OF GOD: OUOBNA OTTOBAH CUGOANO'S**  
**DECONSTRUCTION OF EURO-CENTRIC LAW**

**Biblical Ethnology and African Slavery**

Biblical ethnology was instrumental in creating the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries natural and physical sciences and served as the history of racial relations.<sup>cix</sup> Black thinkers in contesting biblical ethnology challenged natural and physical sciences that sought to relegate Africans outside the realm of being human and achieving the models of humanity that Western sciences used to portray white civilization and humanity as superior. In doing so, Black thinkers pitted themselves against perpetrators of biblical ethnology who employed theories of race to justify African slavery. Some, in their bid to trace the physical characteristics and differences of peoples of the world, challenged the theory of “The Curse of Ham,” imposed by the biblical patriarch Noah, and addressed the controversies regarding the nature of Ham’s transgressions, and the implications of Noah’s curse of Ham’s son Canaan.

In doing so, Black thinkers created their own literature that challenged Western thinkers who drew from biblical ethnology to defend the appalling and inhumane Atlantic Slave Trade between the 1400s-1800s in which Africans were considered cargo, and upon landing on the shores of America treated as property. What is glaringly absent in Africana philosophy is the absence of these Black thinkers’ counter-perspectives. This chapter situates 18th century Black thinkers who set out to “kill” western narratives emerging out of the Transatlantic Slavery, by so doing engaged in narricide. Scholars in Africana philosophy have hardly documented the counter-narratives of such Black thinkers as instrumental towards understanding how biblical

notions of slavery shaped early 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century racial discourse.<sup>cx</sup> In contesting biblical ethnology, the Black anti-slavery literature challenged the emergence of the natural and physical sciences that sought to place Africans outside the realm of humanity.

The aim of 18<sup>th</sup> century Black anti-slavery literature was to “fracture” or “kill” Western narratives centered on the curse of Ham by asserting a different historical understanding of Africans in the modern world. James Sidbury’s *Becoming African in America* reveals how an African identity emerged in the late eighteenth -century Atlantic world, tracing the development of “African” from a degrading term connoting savage people to a word that was a source of pride and unity for the diverse victims of the Atlantic slave trade. Sidbury argues “transforming a term so laden with connotations of primitivism and savagery into a source of pride required these authors to counter conventional Enlightenment portrayals of Africans’ place- or absence of a place in the progressive universal history of humanity forged by Enlightenment thinkers. In short, the authors had to replace Africa within the Enlightenment’s grand narrative of human history.”<sup>cxii</sup> This transformation began by challenging the biblical justification of Africans as those deemed to be enslaved through the curse of Ham. Sibbury’s insights are fruitful as they provide historical context for 18<sup>th</sup> century Black thinkers as progenitors of Black philosophy of history that challenged the dominant narrative of Africa as a dark civilization.

### **Locating Africans on the World Stage: Black Philosophy of History**

In the discipline of philosophy, Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* lectures have been judiciously criticized for their racist standpoint and for their disregard of African contribution to world civilization.<sup>cxiii</sup> Hegel understood reason as the defining factor of being human, thus Hegel argued that we can understand human and racial differences based on the intellectual creations of different civilizations. From this perspective, Hegel saw no African civilization rivaled that of

Europe and thus Africans were not human. Equally important, the use of reason as a defining factor fit into the Greek concept of a natural slave as a person incapable of using their own reason.

According to Hegel, Africans were incapable of self-governance and creating civilization unless brought under white dominance to be used as a labor source. Hegel's lecture fits into the paradigm of Western thought that sought to use natural law and natural history as justification of enslavement of Africans predicated responding to the three problems 1) tracing the origins of government, 2) tracing the origins of the races, and 3) tracing the origins of slavery.<sup>cxiii</sup> While contemporary Africana philosophers seek to disavow the racism of figures like Hegel and the Western canon by deconstructing the epistemic categories of knowledge to create new knowledge through critiques.<sup>cxiv</sup> These critiques while important are deficient in that they fail to promote the works of Black thinkers of the same period who wrote their own accounts of philosophy of history from a Black perspective.

These works have yet to be studied systematically within Africana philosophy as works that give an account of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Black philosophy of history and how these account inform the intellectual history of Africana philosophy.<sup>cxv</sup> Importantly, these works help us to understand the shifting definition of race and how Africans in the new world engaged with the construction of race by deconstructing the biblical, economical, anthropological, ethnological and legal justification of the enslavement and subordination of Africans.

Black narricide peddlers who wrote texts in defense of the Black race and showed Africans as an integral part of a civilizing universe include, but not limited to James W. C Pennington *A Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored People* 1841, Robert Benjamin Lewis's *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History; Containing*

*the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Races from the Creation of the World to the Present Time* (1843), Henry Garnet *The Past and Present Condition, and the Destiny of the Colored Race*, 1848, Henry McNeal Turner *The Negro in All Ages*, 1873, Joseph T. Wilson *Emancipation* 1882 Antenor Firmin *The Equality of the Human Races* 1885 , Williams Wells Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, 1863, J.F. Dyson *A New and Simple Explanation of the Unity of the Human Race*, 1893, W.H. Croghan and H.F. Kletzing *The Progress of a Race*, 1897, Pauline E. Hopkins *A Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by its Descendants*, 1905 and Daniel Murray, Murray's *Historical and Biographical Encyclopedia of the Colored Race Through the World*, William Ferris *The African Abroad*, Carter G Woodson *The African Background Outlined: Or a Handbook for the Study of the Negro*.<sup>cxvi</sup> The Black narrative genre also showcased Black autobiographies of James Albert Ukasaw *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince*; John Marrant *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black*; Olaudah Equiano *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*; John Jea *The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher. Compiled and Written by Himself* were consciously rooted in biblical ethnology and titled with their African names to counter the Enlightenment ideas of Africans and Africa as a cursed people from a decadent continent.

All Black narrative thinkers were anti-slavery advocates who intellectually challenged their masters. For example, On March 29, 1754, an enslaved African preacher Grinning, delivered a sermon before a white congregation which included his owner Captain Obadiah Johnson. He criticized the enslavement of Africans based on the curse of Ham. In the sermon

Grinning proffered an exegesis of biblical slavery and its relation to the curse of Ham. “Some say that we are the seed of Canaan and some say that we are the tribe of Ham,” he extolled. “But let that be as it will justice must take place therefore I will show you how Abraham came by his servants in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis 18.”<sup>cxvii</sup> Grinning’s exegesis began by showing that the debate about the racial origin of Africans as either the children of Canaan or part of the tribe of Ham was in effect an inconclusive argument amongst pro-slavery theologians. Leaving the question of African origins in its inconclusive state, Grinning proceeded to show that the most pertinent discourse about African slavery and biblical curses should be addressed through God’s mandate to give Abraham servants and how he would curse those who challenged this mandate.

Consequently, by placing God’s mandate on Abraham, Grinning shifted the debate from the biblical verse Genesis 9: 25 in which Noah cursed Ham’s child Canaan and his descendants to be servants and introduced God’s covenant to Abraham contained in Genesis 15 vs 18. He argued that Africans were a people whom God had a covenant with as they emerged from the land on which Abraham had settled. Genesis 15 vs 18 reads; “upon thy seed have I given this land from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the Euphrates: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmoities, and the Hittities, and the Perizites and the Rephaim and the Amorties and the Cannanites.”<sup>cxviii</sup>

The passage was a reminder to the congregation that God called Abraham to settle in the land of Canaan and made a covenant with him to protect him and his family and the nation he would build. Canaan and the people who emerged from the land of Canaan were under the covenant God had made with Abraham. By reframing the question of racial origins of Africans from the curse of Ham to the covenant God made with Abraham, Grinning argued that God’s covenant had more authority over that of a curse Noah placed on Ham. Substantiating this claim

Grinning used Genesis 17 verses 8 “the whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”<sup>cxi</sup>

The covenant God made with Abraham allowed him and his children to own servants who would be under God’s protection if they were circumcised as a sign of keeping God’s covenant. Grinning referenced, Genesis 17 vs 12 “from generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased.”<sup>cxx</sup> This covenant Grinning argued, was meant to extend to the people who populated Egypt and the land of Canaan (Ethiopia), according to Genesis 10 vs 20. Grinning proclaimed: “these are sons of Ham.”<sup>cxxi</sup>

The covenant Grinning focused on and emphasized was to him more importance than the curse of Ham that was used to justify the enslavement of Africans. He argued there had to be a different justification for enslaving Africans since there was no biblical credence. He continued: “Now brethren suppose any nation should have a continual war amongst themselves and any of you should supply them of ammunition and when you have done this you will steal as many of them and bring them over into your country to make slaves of them their soul and body.” Grinning ended his sermon by meticulously showing that the debates of the racial origins of Africans were inconclusive as pro-slavery theologians could not agree if Africans could be traced to either the tribe of Ham or Canaan.

Grinning proceed to address the idea of curse, covenants and servants by showing the covenant God had with Abraham. Through biblical ethnology, Grinning traced Canaan and Ham to be people whom God had a covenant with as people from the land Abraham had settled on. As

such, Africans had a covenant with God to not participate in wars they did not start and where within their right to rebel against kidnappers and plantation owners, whom subjugated whom kidnapped them and subordinated them for economic purposes to serve other humans and not God. Grinning in challenging the curse of Ham, showed that curse of Ham had not biblical basis as the edict God made that justified the enslavement of Africans. Consequently, the curse of Ham under Noah was used by colonialist to kidnap and steal Africans for war and economic purposes.

The motifs of colonialization and war as the impetus to enslave Africans through the curse of Ham was a staple critique that Black thinkers developed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The sermon by Grinning was however, not an isolated case of 18<sup>th</sup> century Black critiques of war as foundational to justify the enslavement of Africans through the class of Ham. For example, Lemuel Haynes a celebrated Black minister in New England published in 1776 a pamphlet titled *Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the illegality of Slave-keeping*. Haynes in the pamphlet argued that the main proposition he intended to show was “that an African, or, in other terms, which a Negro may justly challenge, and has undeniable right to his liberty: consequently, the practices of slave-keeping, which so much bounds in this land is illicit.”<sup>cxvii</sup> Much like Grinning had begun his speech addressing the inconclusive debates about of racial origins of Africans through the curse of Ham, Haynes argued:

That in all probability the Negroes are of Canaan’s posterity, which were destined by the almighty to slavery: therefore the practice is warrantable. To which I answer, whether the Negroes are of Canaan’s posterity or not, perhaps is not known by any mortal under heaven. But allowing they were actually of Canaan’s posterity, yet we have no reason to think that this curse lasted any longer than the coming of Christ: when that sun of righteousness arose this wall of partition was broken down.<sup>cxviii</sup>

While Granning traced Africans to Abraham who settled in Egypt and enacted Gods covenant with the Canaanites, Haynes argued there was no way to conclusively point to Africans to being descendant from the Canaanites. Instead Haynes appealed to the fact that God by placing Jesus in the world, God had wiped out the sins of figures in the Old Testament who had sinned against God. By sending Jesus God had created a world where slavery as a biblical or God ordained edict was no longer true. Instead Jesus ushered in a world where adherence to God's law meant humans had liberty and free will to adhere to God's law. Consequently, slavery then had to be found in a different justification other than the bible. Haynes argued "we give ourselves the trouble to inquire into the grand motive that indulges men to concern themselves in a trade so vile and abandon, we shall find it to be this, namely, to stimulate their carnal avarice, and to maintain men in pride, luxury, and idleness."<sup>xxxiv</sup> Haynes argued that with no biblical justification of Africans as those cursed to be slaves, enslavement of Africans could only be found in the "carnal avarice" of white nations that sought to enrich themselves in luxury, pride and idleness. Haynes in essence was a proto-theorists of slavery as fixated in a political economy of homoeroticism that 20<sup>th</sup>- 21<sup>st</sup> century anti-colonial theorists would argue created a carnal complex of sexual, cannibal, negrophilia and economic gratification of degrading Black bodies through systems of subordination.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Haynes continuing his polemic argued that it was important to address the mythologies of just war theory that was used to argue that "Negros that are brought into these plantations are generally prisoners, taken in their wars, and would otherwise fall a sacrifice to the resentment of their own people.. and some say they came honestly by their slaves, because they bought them of their parents, that is brought them from Africa and rewarded them well for them."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Haynes argues, it's illogical for kidnappers to claim that they recused enslaved Africans from worse



conditions from their fellow Africans or to claim that they purchased African children from willing parents who sought to sell their children to foreigners. Haynes argued:

But without doubt this is, for the most part false; but allowing they did actually buy them of their parents, yet I query, whether parents have any right to sell their children for slaves: if parents have a right to be free, then it follows that their children have equally as good a right to their freedom, even hereditary.<sup>cxxvii</sup>

Haynes argued just war theory was used to argue that African parents gave up the liberties of their children. Since children could not make contracts and where under the governance of their parents, giving away of children by African parents were seen as giving a property deed to a new owner. Haynes challenged this notion of transference of liberties as synonymous with property rights arguing if parents were free on what grounds would they be willing to sell their children to be slaves with no liberties especially to foreigners whom would enslave them under oppressive conditions. This discourse of justification of enslaving African couched in the language of liberties and property right Haynes argued hid the crime of kidnapping and under-development of Africans nations under the imperial wars between European nations. Haynes argued:

Men were made for more noble ends than to be drove to market, like sheep and oxen. 'our being Christian, does not give us the least liberty to trample on heathen, or does it give us the least superiority over them.' And not only are the guilty of man-stealing that are the immediate actors in this trade, but those in these colonies that buy them at their hands, are far from being guiltless: for when they saw the thief they consented with him. If men would forbear to buy slaves off the hands of slave-merchants, then the trade would of necessity cease; if I buy a man, whether iam told he was stole, or not, yet I have no right to enslave him, because he is a human being: and the immutable laws of god, and indefeasible laws of nature, pronounced him free. Is it not exceeding strange that mankind should become such mere vassals to their own carnal avarice as even to imbrue their hands in innocent blood?<sup>19cxxviii</sup>

While Enlightenment thinkers were developing economic theories that argued that individuals bring to the market their skills and talents that corporations compensate them on through wages. Early eighteenth-century Black thinkers challenged the theories of the market place, property and

natural rights that shrouded the exploitation of Africa through a slave trade that benefited the British and Americans. Haynes in the above quote had argued the discourse of liberty and property rights was being used to under-develop Africa by creating a demand of African labor. By positing that Africans willing engaged in the trade by giving up their liberties, this discourse asserted that Africans willing transformed themselves into property. Consequently, since they had no liberties, they had become property of a slave master who in turn had property rights over them. This economic system as Haynes noted was structural and reinforced the idea that Blackness and slavery was synonymous with property. This, however, belied the structure of exploitation on which slave-merchants created an economic system that justified kidnapping and traded Africans as a source of labor. War began a proxy on which the victor accrued the spoils of the war. As such war, property rights and liberty became metronomes to justify the enslavement of Africans and not the curse of Ham. This discourse in effect transformed Africans not only into property but victims of war bound to their captors. Haynes argued under the economic system that emerged, slave-merchants fueled the “carnal avarice” of plantation owners by using war as way to compete for slaves. Haynes argued:

N. Brue, directory of the French factory at Senegal, who lived twenty-seven years in that country says, ‘that the Europeans are far from desiring to act as peace-makers among the Negros, which would be acting contrary to their interest, since the greater the wars, the more slaves are procured. William Boseman, factor for the Duth at Delmina, where he resided sixteen years, relates, ‘that former commanders hired an army of the Negroes of Jefferia and Cabestria, for a large sum of money to fight the Negros of Comanry, which occasioned a battle, which was more bloody than the wars of the negroes usually are: and that another commander gave at one time five hundred pounds, and at another time eight hundred pounds to two other negro nations, to induce them to take up arms against their country people.’ This is confirmed by Barbot, agent general of the French African company, who says, ‘the Hollanders, a people very zealous for their commerce at the coasts, were very studious to have the war carried on amongst the blacks, to distract as long as possible, the trade of the other Europeans..so the commerce fell in their hands.’<sup>cxxix</sup>

Early Black thinkers developed a philosophical discourse that showed a remarkable awareness on which European wars and conflict spurred the kidnapping of Africans. These wars were linked to political theology which sought to justify the enslavement of Africans through the curse of Ham and deny that Africans had liberties since they were prisoners of war or had sold their liberties to slave-merchants. Eighteenth century Black thinkers debated the merits of the curse of Ham by developing a biblical ethnology that showed God had a covenant with Africans as those under the land Abraham centered under. Similarly, these thinkers argued that kidnappers should be killed for violating God's covenant and that was God's law against kidnappers.

Early Black thinkers developed a philosophical stratagem that showed a remarkable awareness on which European wars and conflict spurred the kidnapping of Africans. These wars were linked to political theology which sought to justify the enslavement of Africans through the curse of Ham and deny Africans liberties since they were prisoners of war. Eighteenth century Black thinkers debated the merits of the curse of Ham by developing a biblical ethnology that showed God had a covenant with Africans. By developing these arguments, 18<sup>th</sup> century Black thinkers sought to show that crimes against Africans were committed and given legal and moral justification in the western world. It is within this milieu of thinkers like Grinning, Haynes, Jupiter Hammon, John Marrant, Prince Hall that Cugoana would marshal critiques into a comprehensive text *Thoughts and Sentiments of the Evil of Slavery*.

### **Cugoano Polemic as Exemplar of Eighteenth Century Black Narricide Discourse**

Perhaps the most systematic deconstruction of the philosophical underpinning of Western slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by an African in the new world is contained in the text by Quobna Ottobah Cugoano's titled *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*. Cugoana was a Ghanaian enslaved in Grenada who

eventually ended up in Britain as a freedman. In 1787, Cugoano published his text in which he masterfully deconstructed the assumptions of natural law and positive law that undergird the justification of African enslavement. The problem of natural law and natural history as justification of enslavement of Africans predicated on the bible, presented three problems 1) tracing the origins of government, 2) tracing the origins of the races, 3) tracing the origins of slavery. In his text, Cugoano engages these three problems critically by creating his own theories about Euro-centric forms of governance, criminal law, justice, wealth of nations, modern day slavery and restitution.<sup>cxxx</sup>

Writing in the period when the bible served both as the basis of understanding universal history through natural law and natural history of the origins of the races, Cugoano creates his own methodology to deconstruct the erroneous justification of enslavement of Africans through natural law and mosaic codes that undergird Euro-centric ideals of natural history and racial origins. Cugoano engaging in the problems of 1) tracing the origins of government, 2) tracing the origins of the races, 3) tracing the origins of slavery writes:

It would be needless to arrange a history of all the base treatment which the African slaves are subjected to, in order to show the exceeding wickedness and evil of that insidious traffic, as the whole may easily appear in every part, and at every view, to be wholly and totally inimical to every idea of justice, equity, reason and humanity. What I intend to advance against that evil, criminal and wicked traffic of enslaving men, are some Thoughts and Sentiments which occur to me as being obvious from the Scriptures of Divine Truth, or such arguments as are chiefly deduced from thence, with other such observations as I have been able to collect.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

Given the bible was read as the history of the origins of the world, Cugoano uses it to dispute the debates of the origins of Blacks as slaves in the bible. Two main camps dominated the debate of racial origins: *Monogenists* believed that all the races in the world had a common origin, and *Polygenists* believed that Blacks could not have had same origins as Whites. Polygenists used the

curse of Ham (Gen. 9:20-27) to advance their argument that Africans are cursed with black pigmentation and relegated to eternal servitude and slavery. This argument of servitude and slavery in the bible was seen in mosaic codes that God gave Moses. For polygenists, not only did God curse Blacks through Ham, he codified into law that they were bound to be slaves. Consequently, natural law and natural history as interpreted by Polygenists bore substantiation that Blacks were by God's decree natural slaves cursed with black skin. Cognizant of such beliefs, Cugoano saw his task as one of advancing thoughts and sentiments against the "evil, criminal and wicked exercise" of enslaving Blacks through the scriptures of divine truth. He sought to create not only a Black philosophy of history to examine and understand the curse of Ham and other scriptures, but also to show that slavery was a form of evil and trafficking, and a criminal act that had no biblical basis. In this regard, Cugoano sought to deconstruct and refute the theories of natural law and natural history that justified African enslavement.

These critiques that Cuagono created were rooted in challenging biblical ethnology. Biblical ethnology was signification to the formation of the U.S as a Christian Republic between 17<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> century which confronted the problems of slavery and the place of Black people in the republic through the question on what grounds could Negroes be considered slaves, citizens and soldiers. Intellectual debates hinged on the three questions based on the origin of races, origins of family, origins of government. In other words, what were the Christian origins of the race, what Christian duties were accorded to each member of the family, and what form of government was aligned with God's will and duty. The debates used the family genealogy between Adam and Noah to answer the question; what role were Black people supposed to assume in the republic?

The two preceding genealogies had significant implications in answering whether American slavery was God ordained with four meta questions, 1) Could Black people be traced

to any family line between the Adam and Noah family genealogy? 2) What constituted slavery in this time? 3) Could Black people be traced to any family genealogy between Noah and Abraham? 4) Was there a race condemned to permanent slavery and which family line can this race be traced? Arguments about the right interpretation of biblical genealogy played out in the 1700s in the first noted debate in Massachusetts between Judge Samuel Sewall and Judge John Saffin. Saffin who owned the slave Adam and his wife promised to free them based on good behavior. Saffin later recanted his manumission terms and a legal battle ensued. Sewall condemned Saffin and presented his arguments in the pamphlet titled *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial*. Sewall admonishment of Saffin is couched in three Old Testament stories; Adam, story of Joseph, and the story of Rachel and Jacob. These three stories serve as homilies about the nature of slavery in the bible. By first referencing the biblical Adam, Sewall created a double entendre by linking the enslaved African Adam with the biblical Adam. Doing so, Sewall placed the enslaved African Adam into the monogenism argument (the idea that all races have one origin). Secondly, the reference to the story of Joseph being sold by his brothers into slavery challenged the polygenism argument. Thirdly, the reference to Rachel and Jacob shows the only way restitution can be offered to enslaved Africans for being displaced from their families, is letting them marry daughters of slave owners.<sup>cxxxii</sup>

Sewall began his argument by linking the monogenism claim of the original source of all races as being sons of Adam who have equal rights towards liberty. Sewall argued that before the fall sentient beings under Adam were free. Therefore, slavery did not exist in the time of Adam. Sewall used the example of Joseph to argue. Joseph was neither a slave nor property of his brothers they could hold in bondage or kill. The sin that Joseph's brothers committed was in selling him. The bible forbade selling humans because liberty was more precious than gold, thus

the act of stealing and selling a human is a capital crime punishable by death. Sewall argued Saffin has not only committed a crime against God and society.

While Sewall sounded benevolent argued that it was to the benefit of the welfare of the state of Massachusetts to have white servants for a short term than to own slaves for life. Sewall justified his arguments in five ways using the story of Rachel and Jacob:

The continuous petitions and slave revolts by Africans showed that they were unfit to be servant since they fought and sought for their liberty 2) Their condition, color, and hair did not make them part of white families 3) Yet slave could be used as an extra blood line, since they were more enslaved African men than they were white men to make up military posts, black men should be encouraged to marry white women 5) It was well known that slave masters were raping Black women they were unwilling to take in as wives , they should then be required to find wives for their slaves or pay fines for raping their wives.<sup>cxxxiii</sup>

Slavery would have to account for the pillage of stealing Africans and destroying their families.

The arguments of monogenism and polygenism missed the point of the theft of Africans from their families when it questioned whether Negroes derived from God or not. In Sewall views, the American slave was a category outside not only the human structure of racial origins but also the structure of the white family. As such, Sewall believed, the constant petition of enslaved Africans meant that they did not voluntarily offer themselves as labor sources in compensation for protection. In their petition they recognized the crimes whites had committed against them. This was unlike the English serfs who voluntarily exchanged their labor for protection to feudal lords. While their blood line did not make Africans part of the white race, they had instrumental use as soldiers and sexual labor source that could be used to protect and populate the new colonies. Where white men enjoyed the privilege to rape Black women, Black men and their families should be compensated by letting Black men marry white women. In other words, for Sewall the problem of slavery could be resolved by integrating Black families into white families

through inter-marriage. While Africans were outside the human family, they could be made human by inter-marring with whites and be compensated for their enslavement and pillaging of their Africans families.

Saffin replied to Sewall in 1701 in a pamphlet titled *A Brief and Candid Answer to a late Printed Sheet, Entitled, The Selling of Joseph*. Citing Corinthians 12:13:26, Saffin rebuffed Sewall's claims, arguing while it was true that God had decreed liberty to all men, God has also created different order of men some to be low and despicable, others to be monarchs, kings, princes, masters and slaves. He Cited Leviticus 25:44; while it was unlawful for Joseph's brothers to sell him, it was not unlawful for the descendants of Abraham to have bonds with men and women who were deemed as heathen. The question of freeing enslaved Africans in Saffin's view hinged on whether money could be paid to slave owners to free slaves. Saffin critiqued Sewall for his own hypocrisy of owning slaves while proposing restitution be given by encouraging the marriage of African men and white women.

This debate underscores what would later be known as the Negro problem, the question of restitution for both slave and slave owner, the question of mixed families, citizenship and forming a militia of African soldiers. Equally important was the debate on the views of natural law vs positive law. In other words, on what grounds was the enslavement of Africans legal? What is a divine ordinance or form of civil society and social contract between slave owners and legislators? The enslavement of Africans justified through the bible did two things. First, it helped spur the debate between monogenists and polygenist for biblical interpretation to justify whether Black people were descendant from one family line or came from a different origin outside human family lines. This search for the right biblical interpretation to understand the racial origins of Black people began with the search for biblical family genealogies that gauged



whether Africans were descended from Adam or not. Secondly, the biblical justification of Africans enslavement through the search of biblical family genealogy created the conditions for the creation of American ethnology as the first racial science that studied the distinct origins of family genealogies of “primitive man” and civilized man through marriage laws, kinship structures and consanguinity.<sup>cxxxiv</sup>

Emerging in the mid-nineteenth century, scientific ethnology benefited from the debates between Monogenists and Polygenists about which family genealogies Black people could be traced. Between theology and ethnology, legal categories of slaves, servants, and apprentice in Common law served as the basis for the justification of African enslavement under white families. These legal categories resurfaced in ethnology as biological categories rooted in the science of phrenology and natural history to prove that Blacks had only achieved civilization under the governance of whites. The evolving concept of family in relation to racial subordination is one of the unique facets of American racial science that has shaped the modern worlds in understanding race-relations. The American enlightenment beginning with the emergence of ethnology created a science of racial origins that treated Black people as a racial group that was destined to be slaves.

Scientific ethnology preserved the biblical arguments of slavery by linking common doctrine of master-servant relations that was developed to govern the social relation of American society through slavery. Equally important, these arguments curtailed the quest for political rights through legal sanctions and argued Blacks were permanent subordinate class legally recognized as property, servants and slaves owned by white families. The legal categories of master wives, servants and children that dominated antebellum America during slavery would reappear in the post-antebellum scientific literature of ethnology in theories of recapitulation,

phrenology, consanguinity, and political rights under the category of race and gender and a superior race that would govern a post-reconstruction America.

Scientific ethnology was believed to disprove the monogenist thesis by showing that racial differences existed and thus races had different racial origins as polygenists posited. Melissa Stein's *Measuring Manhood: Race and the Science of Masculinity, 1830–1934*, documents how scientific ethnological arguments were linked both to race as gender taxonomy through manhood and a racial categorical that justified political rights and citizenship only to white manhood which had significant impact in debates on slavery during the civil war up till the world wars in protecting the white nuclear family. Relying on phrenology, ethnology built on the phrenological arguments from 1838-1882 in *The American Phrenological Journal and Life Illustrated: A Repository of Science, Literature and General Intelligence* published works that covered material ranging from ethnology, physiology, phrenology, physiognomy, sociology, psychology, education mechanism, agriculture, and natural history, to provide scientific methods for spiritual, intellectual and social development. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, phrenology as the science of physical, moral and intellectual development used by southern pro-slavery adherent gave reasons to disfranchise Black political participation, as Stein notes:

Ethnological proslavery arguments generally presented at least three interrelated claims: (1) that Africans had occupied positions of servitude and slavery dating back to antiquity, demonstrated by Egypt and biblical lore in particular; (2) that the very bodies of African Americans were designed for labor whereas the bodies of male Caucasians were more suited for intellectual pursuits; and (3) that the social/political order reflected the natural order in regards to race and to gender.<sup>cxxxv</sup>

Curry explained in *The Man-Not* our contemporary notions of race, class and gender divorced from their scientific ethnological origins fail to account for the fact that notions of race, and gender were not meant to be expansive categories of political inclusion for Black men and

women into the American polity. Importantly, Curry's analysis, because it is rooted in a thorough understanding of ethnology, shows why Black men as subordinated males are incapable of participating in patriarchal as a govern ideology of the American empire. Rather, they were constructed as social, political, sexual, threats to the masculine ideals of white patriarchal and in essence the American empire. This is a central point that takes the popular practice of anachronistic reading of 20<sup>th</sup> century Black civil rights era and Black feminist historiography backwards into time periods where gender did not actually apply to Africans. Following Curry's analysis in situating scientific ethnology's influence on our contemporary notions of race, class and gender, Cuagono engagement biblical ethnology showed African slavery was rooted in the jingoism of European nations who used the curse of Ham to hide crimes being committed against Africans. Cuaogno was an essential part of a group of Black thinkers who developed a black biblical ethnology that challenged the curse of Ham.

### **Cugoano Critiques of the Apologetics of Treatment of African Slaves in British Colonies**

One of the polygenists Cuagano engaged with in his text was Tobin James who wrote a rejoinder to Reverend James Ramsay's text *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies*. James's rebut is titled *Cursory Remarks upon the Reverend Mr. Ramsay's Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the Sugar Colonies*. James's text was aimed at defending the treatment of slaves in the British colonies of the West Indies. His belief was, while slavery was supposedly evil, no one in the world knew why servitude, much like poverty, pain and sickness existed.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Consequently, the aim of his rejoinder was to "trace the origins and progress of civil society, the consequent division of men into different ranks, the connection depending between such different ranks and more especially that between master and slave".<sup>cxxxvii</sup>

James began his critique of Ramsey's text by refuting the claims that the British started the slave trade. Instead, James argued the British merely inherited a system that predates them. To augment his argument, he pointed to two sources; (1) the writings of Leo Africanus published in 1550 under the titled *Description of Africa* and (2) The Dum Diversas of Pope Nicholas V published in 1452. James used these sources to support the legal historical argument that slavery always existed in the world. Specifically, slavery in Africa as accounted for by Africanus beginnings in 1443.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> In James's view, African enslavement predated the enslavement of Native Americans in 1492. The link between African slavery in 1443 and Native American enslavement was Pope Nicholas V's Dum Diversas which argued that all enemies of Christianity be they pagans or infidels were be invaded, conquered and subjugated to perpetual servitude to further Christianity.<sup>cxxxix</sup> The Pope by decreeing slavery in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was modernizing the mosaic codes into the Dum Diversas. The Church thus justified by law that European nations had a duty, as Christian nations, to further God's kingdom against Christianity's enemies at all cost. It's this point James sought to stress by arguing that Britain did not start the slave trade, rather it joined in after the trade begun as part of the decree of Christian nations.

Having proved that Britain didn't start the slave trade, James went on to defend the treatment of slaves under British law in the colonies as different from those of other laws that guided other European nations in the colonies. James took exception to Ramsey's proclamation that the French laws known as "Code Noir" treated Africans more humanely than British laws in the colonies. The Code Noir laws were passed by King Louis of France on May 6, 1687 in Saint Dominique. These Codes assigned the overseeing of slaves solely to those of the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Faith, restricted sexual relationships between slaves and freemen, gave children of enslaved parents away to the master of enslaved women, allowed children to be free

if their mothers were free, forbade slaves from carrying weapons, gathering, selling crops, firewood, herbs or animals, forbade slaves from congregating in court, created criminal laws punishable by death for insulting slave masters, striking in the face or drawing blood; also, slaves could be traded for compensations against wrongs.

Masters were forbidden from voluntarily killing slaves, so long as absolution was involved, they could be pardoned.<sup>cxl</sup> James defended British laws as being more humane than the Code Noir. According to him slaves under British laws were given an allowance of clothes, and if they broke the law were fined by courts; Jailers who jailed children were required to provide food, water, and lodging within the parameters of their crime; Female prisoners were to be free until they delivered; Slaves had the liberty to plant and sell fresh fish, chicken, vegetables and benefited from penalties that would not stop them from selling produce; Slaves were not maimed or mutilated at the will of the owners; People who killed slaves were deemed guilty and fined; and murdering slaves often resulted in death.<sup>cxli</sup>

Having showed that English laws treated enslaved Africans in the colonies more humanely than French laws, James proceeds to show that enslaved Africans profited more from their labor than poor English laborers. James's legal historical reading attempted to show that while the British inherited slavery, they were more inclined to espousing the edicts of Christian tenets in the treatment of Africans. This is reflected in their laws in the colonies. For James, not only were criminal proceedings of enslaved Africans different from those of the French, enslaved Africans in the colonies were treated better than paupers and poor laborers in London, given the privilege they enjoyed engaging in trade and benefiting from farming and growing their own produce. Thus, English laws were more benevolent than any other European laws in relation to enslaved Africans in the colonies.

Cugoano's text responded directly to Tobin James rejoinder and his apologetics through legal history. To achieve this Cugoano addressed both James's account of African intra enslavement and the mosaic codes that Pope Nicholas V appealed to create his *Dum Diversas*. Cugoano deconstruction of natural law was in three parts: 1) The Curse of Ham, 2) Variations in Color, and 3) Mosaic codes—servitude vs. Slavery. The Curse of Ham as the basis of African enslavement had political and legal consequences in relation to the treatment of Blacks in the Western hemisphere.<sup>cxlii</sup> Per the theory, Ham's father Noah cursed his grandson Canaan after Ham ridiculed his father who slept drunk and naked. The curse was for Ham to produce dark progenies who would be born in servitude. After the deluge, the displacing of Noah and his children around the world provided a natural history of the development of the races across the globe.

Each race traced its originality based on where one of Noah's children and grandchildren resided. Africans being dark-skinned were associated with the Curse of Ham and therefore regarded as the cursed children of Canaan condemned to eternal bondage. Cugoano refuted the claim of Africans being the progenies of Canaan. Turning to the scriptures and natural history, he argued that what was omitted was that Ham had three other sons Cush, Mizraim and Phut. While it was believed that Canaan gave birth to the African race, Cugoano argued Canaan actual settled in Asia.<sup>cxliii</sup> Cush the oldest of Ham's sons was said to have settled in South-West of Arabia were his descendants, known by their Hebrew name Cushites, became black under the climate of the tropics of Abyssinia and Ethiopia.<sup>cxliv</sup> Mizraim's descendants were Egyptians and Philistines, while Phut's descendants settled in Libya and Mauritania<sup>cxlv</sup>. Cuagano's argument was that Africa became the land of Ham by proxy, through his progenies Cush, Mizraim and Phut and not on the account of the cursed Canaan.

Cugoano's basic argument was that the variations of pigmentation were not caused by the Curse of Ham but by the natural outcome of God's creation—the climate. As he would argue “God alone who established the course of nature, can bring about and establish what variety he pleases; and it is not in the power of man to make one hair white or black. But among the variety which it hath pleased God to establish and caused to take place, we may meet with some analogy in nature, that as the bodies of men are tempered with a different degree to enable them to endure the respective climates of their habitations, so their colours vary.”<sup>cxlvi</sup> Logic would therefore follow that God created a world in which variation in pigmentation was justifiable due to the different climatic conditions of the world. Cugoano's perspective accentuates the debate of the origin of races from the binary of monogenism and polygenism that filters into the idea of natural law and positive law. He shows that Africans are not monolithically dark but a diverse group of people who have their own natural history and laws that govern them morally, religiously, and legally.

Based on this conclusion, Cugoano denounces the claim by Tobin James that draws on Leo Africanus to show that slavery is a homogenous experience that even Africans participated in. According to Cugoano, African slavery and European slavery are incomparable. He further argues;

So far as I can remember, some of the Africans in my country keep slaves, which they take in war, or for debt; but those which they keep are well fed, and in good care taken of them, and treated well; and, as to their clothing, they differ according to the custom of the country. But I may safely say, that all the poverty and misery that any of the inhabitants of Africa meet with among themselves, is far inferior to those inhospitable regions of misery which they meet within the West Indies, where their hard-hearted overseers have neither regards to the laws of God, nor the life of their fellow men.<sup>cxlvii</sup>

The above debate is important to this research because Cugoano shows a differentiation between the laws that governed slaves in the nations of Africa and those in European nations.

Importantly, he challenges the assumption that Africans in the West Indies under British imperialism fared better than paupers in England and better than Africans in Africa. Cugoano shows that the conditions that gave rise to poverty in Africa were not similar to the economic systems rooted in subordinating and dehumanizing Africans in the West- Indies. In essence the discourse about work, economic cooperation's that undergirded the African economic system differed from the capitalist system based on extracting wealth from African labor as a permanent subordinate class. Moreover, the enslavement of Africans in the West-Indies did not have equivalence to the way enslaved Africans in Africa were treated—humanely and often given economic restitution as members of the community. Whatever the designs of the French Code Noirs or the British laws in the colonies, the overarching question Cugoano raises is; what gives white people the right to believe they are endowed with more humane habits, laws, clothing or economic systems that they assume can civilize Africans? In drawing the difference between African slavery and European slavery, Cugoano shows that there is no economic incentive in the former. Addressing James's claim that the African slave fared better than the English laborer, he states:

The case of the poor, whatever their hardships may be, in free countries, is widely different from that of the West-India slaves. For the slaves, like animals, are bought and sold, and dealt with as their capricious owners may think fit, even in torturing and tearing them to pieces, and wearing them out with hard labour, hunger and oppression and should the death of a slave ensue by some other more violent way that which is commonly the death of thousands, and tens of thousands in the end, the haughty tyrant, in that case, has only to pay a small fine or the murder and death of the slave.<sup>cxlviii</sup>

Unlike the laborer who can compete for jobs and wages, the slave is relegated to the status of an animal whose labor is dictated by market needs. Cugoano is also critical of the misreading of the English Poor Law which James appropriates in his argument that enslaved Africans in the West Indies fared better than London paupers. The English Poor laws that existed between 1349



and 1834 were created to provide relief to the poor. Three significant periods of these English laws that impacted slavery in the colonies resulted in the establishment of the Statutes of Laborers of 1349-1350, Public Relief Acts of 1531-1536, and Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601. The Statutes of Laborers grew out of the demise of feudalism, growth of capitalism and the black plague. In Feudalism, the poor entered servitude to lords who took care of them in exchange for their labor.

The growth of industrialism begot feudalism and its paternalistic system of servitude. However, capitalism brought an overburden of workers who could not earn jobs in urban cities. Thus, the Statutes of Laborer were passed to relegate four things; (1) compulsory work, (2) reduced compensation and control of wages, (3) imprisonment as penalty for quitting work before the term ended, and (4) stiff enforcement through a special system created to resolve disputes over the statues. These laws thus created conditions for work by beggars, laborers and vagabonds. <sup>cxlix</sup> The Public Relief Acts of 1531-1536 sought to do the same by creating legislation and State responsibility for beggars and the poor. They distinguished by law the poor deemed unable to work and those who were able bodied. The laws have four aims (1) make local officials, mayors, and Sheriffs search for beggars and determine where they could beg, and gave beggars seals (2) if any aged person was found begging with no seal, they were either be denied food for three days or stripped naked and whipped publicly, (3) those who voluntarily begged instead of working, if found were arrested, whipped publicly, returned to their last place of dwelling or home-town and implored to work for three years, (4) Forbade scholars and physicians from begging. <sup>cl</sup>

The Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601 reinforced local responsibility of the poor, but also encouraged settlement and removal of those who were not permitted to beg in different states,

they also created family responsibilities for members of the family and children, where families failed to take care of their children the state intervened.<sup>cli</sup> While James argued that the British did not start the slave system, their poor laws and system of punishment imposed on the Africans created the conditions of perpetual slavery in the colonies.<sup>clii</sup> The only adequate relief was the abolishment of the slave trade. The English Poor laws were placed to ensure work and compensation were given to citizens. Public relief was a moral, political and economic incentive to the well-being of the nation. Slavery was a dehumanizing process that depleted Africa of natural and human resource. Thus, the poor and slaves were incomparable under the English Poor laws. Cugoano took a similar critical attitude to the appeal of the Mosaic codes as justification of African enslavement.

As referenced earlier, Cugoano argues that modern slavery was worse than ancient slavery. Slavery under the mosaic code allowed for the enslavement of foreigners except Hebrews who if enslaved were to only be held temporarily. Slavery was justified when someone fell on hard times and sold themselves as laborers. If someone stole and failed to make restitution or when a debtor declared bankruptcy, he could sell his children.<sup>cliii</sup> Cugoano accentuates the point that ancient slavery was based on based bond-servant. Citing Exodus 21:1-6, Leviticus 25: 39 and Deuteronomy 15: 12, Cugoano defines a bond-servant as a person obligated by contract to work without wages, usually for a specified period. Hebrew bond-servants were treated as servants, not to be resold, and at the end of the time the slave could choose either liberty or perpetual servitude.<sup>cliv</sup> Cugoano's point is that ancient slavery offended restitution and compensation of the slave on economic terms, thus the mosaic codes foreshadowed the English Poor Laws in providing relief for the poor. He observes:

The state of bondage which they and their children fell under, among the Israelites, was into that of a vassalage state, which rather might be termed a deliverance from debt and captivity, than a state of slavery. In that vassalage state which they were reduced to, they had a tax of some service to pay, which might only be reckoned equivalent to a poor man in England paying rent for his cottage...and so, likewise, those who were reduced to a state of servitude, or vassalage, in the land of Israel, were not negotiable like chattels and goods; nor could they be disposed of without their own consent; and perhaps not one man in all the land of Israel would buy another man, unless that man was willing to serve him.<sup>clv</sup>

The last two-points underscore that enslaved Africans did not voluntarily get into slavery nor was slavery as a form of debt relief, a condition of the modern slave system that enslaved Africans. Thus, the mosaic codes birthed the English poor relief system. Unlike the mosaic codes which did not enslave Hebrews, the English poor relief system relieved English citizens of perpetual slavery by enslaving Africans. Thus, African enslavement had no biblical basis as in the context of the Curse of Ham. People with a dark pigmentation could not have been ordained by God to be slaves. Cugoano deconstructs the basis of natural law, positive law, and enslavement through a rigorous reading of the bible and modern English laws. He rebuffs these claims showing that slavery was an economic investment for European nations.

Per Cugoano, laws were not passed to treat slaves humanely, rather, they were passed to regulate the work cycle for slaves. Unlike the Mosaic codes that penalized those who failed to pay off their debts by having their children work in servitude to their parents' debtors as part of restitution, slaves in the Americas had their progenies sold without their consent as labor sources for a different slave-owner. In other words, the bible created economic incentive for slavery by referring to the mosaic codes. This is evident in the edict of the *Dum Diversas* and the subsequent laws that each European nation created in the colonies. The English Poor Laws were meant to create restitution for the poor. There was no restitution for slaves. If slaves were treated humanely, the laws passed were given the economic benefit of not wantonly killing slaves.

Cugoano rejected the liminal freedom that was given to a few Africans while countless remained enslaved. He wrote;

[the] emancipation of a few, while ever that evil and predominant business of slavery is continued, cannot make that horrible traffic one bit the less criminal for according to the methods of procuring slaves in Africa, there must be great robberies and murders committed before any emancipation can take place, and before any lenitive favours can be shown to any of them, even by the generous and humane.<sup>clvi</sup>

Cugoano rejected the ideas of individual liberty that developed out the manumission laws as applicable to redressing injustice against Africans. Said differently, slavery was rooted in transforming tribes and nations of Africans into property. Redressing these crimes, meant redressing justice to groups and not individuals whom through manumissions law established the basis on which Africans had to work for their freedom. In essence, Cugoana presents the problem of reparations that is owed to Africans for slavery and the discourse about the merits of reparations which was first initiated by Africans in the modern world.<sup>clvii</sup> The problem of reparations as Cugoano saw it was how to bring robbers and murders to trail for their genocidal acts. Stated differently, the question of reparation isn't merely about monetary gains but the need to remove Africans from a system that is rooted in legal and economic structures that justified stealing, enslaving and killing Africans as economic and legally advantageous to Americans.<sup>clviii</sup> In this view, the foundations of civil societies, discourse about criminal laws, systems of debt relief, foreign aid, human rights, tort have to be interrogated from the prescriptive of what is owed to Africans, given the precedent that slavery set for an economic and legal system that protect the property interest of whites.

For Cugoano the notion of stealing humans and turning them into property was a violation of God's laws. Citing Deuteronomy 24:7: "if a man be found stealing any of his neighbors, or he steals a man and sells him, or that makes merchandize of him, or if he be found

in his hand, then that thief shall die.”<sup>clix</sup> If God forbade stealing or making property of other humans, where did whites find legal justification to supplant God’s laws. Said differently, It can be deduced from the verse that modern slavery as peddled by Europeans was started for debt relief and creation of national wealth through criminal acts that included the theft and robbery of Africans and natural resources. While the mosaic codes allowed for a thief to repay what he stole by selling his children if he did not have money, stealing a man, kidnapping neighbors was an offense punishable by death. Cugano deconstruction of the mosaic codes as justification of the economic incentive of slavery and not the purpose of God to enslave Africans as Canaan’s cursed children, implicitly asks the question why aren’t whites put to death for defining God’s laws? The question served as the basis of his theory of the foundation of civil society.

For Cugoano slavery as a form of debt relief as stipulated by the mosaic codes created the growth of a system in which wealthy European landlords bargained with foreign slaves, the poor, and vagabonds in exchange for their labor. For Cugoano the universal phenomena of slavery created a system of restitution where criminals, the poor and those deemed slaves, sold themselves to a wealthy patron who took care of them.<sup>clx</sup> His contention counters the argument that slavery was a universal phenomenon decreed by God and should be perpetuated in the new world by Christian nations. Slaves, the poor, and vagabonds have economic incentives as bond-servants through the mosaic codes. It’s the relationship of bond-servants defined in the mosaic codes that perpetuated the idea that since enslavement of Africans was justified through the social contract theory of European laws, African slaves voluntarily engaged in slavery.<sup>clxi</sup> In Cugoano’s view, the basis of the social contract theory of the foundations of European nations does not begin with the protected or property, or the prohibition of violence among citizens.

Rather, the basis of social contract begins with the expansion of territories by wealthy landlords vying with other wealthy landlords who used the bond-servant tradition of the mosaic code to protect those who committed crimes and everyday citizens who could not get restitution for being robbed in their bid to exchange their labor for protection.<sup>clxii</sup> To this regard Cugoano wrote:

Wherefore, when their lives were in danger otherwise, and they could not find any help, they were obliged to sell themselves for bond servants to such as would buy them, when they could not get a service that was better. But as soon as buyers could be found, robbers began their traffic to ensnare others, and such as fell into their hands were carried captive by them, and were obliged to submit their being sold by them into the hands of other robbers, for there are few buyers of men, who intend thereby to make them free, and such as they buy are generally subjected to hard labour and bondage. Therefore, at all times, while a man is a slave, he is still in captivity, and under the jurisdiction of robbers; and every man who keeps a slave, is a robber, whenever he compels him to service without giving him a just reward.<sup>clxiii</sup>

Cugoano contests the theory of civil society founded on the need to protect property or violence amongst citizens propagated by Adam Smith, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes respectively. He reiterates the argument of the creation of slavery and servitude through the creation of bond-servants as the basis of creation of civil society. Three classes of people benefited from bond-servants' relationship: (1) wealthy landlords who offered relief to poor people, beggars and everyday citizens by protecting them in exchange for their labor. (2) The outgrowth of a class of robbers and patrons who created an economic system to sell labor to wealthy landlords who sought to expand their territory. (3) Intellectuals, judges, and priests who gave philosophical, legal and theological justification for enslavement and conquest.<sup>clxiv</sup>

Thus, the creation of modern European nations and the U.S. came about through the creation of a bond-servant economic system based on protecting the rights of individuals and corporations to own humans as permanent slaves and classes to keep the bond-servant economic

system active. The creation of modern European nations and the U.S. are therefore rooted in the allowance of white collar crimes to sustain monopolies of labor and resources. Given that the wealthy created the conditions on which rights are given to those who exchange their labor for protection, no one oversees those in power and the crimes they commit.<sup>clxv</sup> The creation of monopolies and international commerce based on the slave trade creates the condition for taxes and debt crises in which the few who run society place the burden of generating money for the wealthy to colonize other labor sources, as Cugoano notes:

The national debt casts a sluggish deadness over the whole realm, greatly stops ingenuity and improvements, promotes idleness and wickedness, clogs all the wheel of commerce, and drains the money out of the nation. If a foreigner buys stock, in the course of years that the interest amounts to the principal, he gets it all back; and in an equitable time, the same sum ever after, and in course must take that money to foreign parts. And those who hold stock at home, are a kind of idle drones, as a burden to the rest of the community.

If the English Poor Laws were supposed to prohibit idleness and punishment for those who refused to work, the paradox of an economy is that the wealthy do not work and are not punished when they force others to work to create money for goods and produce for barter. Where a nation cannot be self-sufficient it opens stocks into companies to own labor and accrue profit. The conditions of work do not improve society, rather, they encourage a segment of society to be idle abetted by slavery and criminal laws that create the condition of free labor for the wealthy.<sup>clxvi</sup>

The slave trade thus created the condition for free labor and classes of Europeans who were given interest to oversee free labor in the colonies. Laws were created to control the productivity of slaves. Under that edict benevolence meant preserving the capacity of slave labor.

While Cesare Beccaria's 1764 text *On Crime and Punishment* is noted for influencing the U.S. founding fathers in transforming capital punishment and prisons.<sup>clxvii</sup> Beccaria work had nothing to say on the issue of considering those who participate in enslaving others as a crime

worthy of punishment. Beccaria's work highlights the creation of the prison system and criminal law as forms of deterrence and rehabilitation of those who steal property from others.<sup>clxviii</sup>

Cugoano's work challenges Beccaria's theories of crime and punishment that merely look at deterrence based on property. For Cugoano the question is why is enslavement of Africans not a crime given that the entry into the West is based on theft and robbery of Africans and their natural resource? The theory of property and deterrence of crime based on property does not seem to protect Africans and their property. If God decreed that stealing of other humans was a crime punished by death, then why aren't whites put to death for stealing Africans? does stealing property under positive law supersede the natural law of God that forbids stealing humans?

Cugoano argues:

When the divine law points out a theft, where the thief should make restitution for his trespass, the laws of civilization say, he must die for his crime: and when the law tells us, that he who steals or makes merchandize of men, that such a thief shall surely die, the laws of civilization say, in many cases, that is no crime.<sup>clxix</sup>

The theory of civil society created to protect property and property rights supersedes the very idea of natural law which assumes all humans have recourse to life and liberty as proclaimed by God. In Cugoano view if life is the basis of natural law, how is that the life of the African is not considered as a life that God prohibits destroying? The theory of crime and punishment rooted in property rights provides restitution to the offender by imprisonment as a form of rehabilitation. Cugoano is implicitly alluding to the bond-servant economic relationship that allows relief to those who enter a "protection" contract with wealthy land lords. For Cugoano, the question is if Africans have not committed crimes by killing Europeans who steal their progenies, sell them and their natural resources what crimes warrant them to being relegated to permanent slavery? And on what grounds do the theories of natural right and positive law apply



in the persecution of Africans?<sup>clxx</sup> The British response was to create the colony of Sierra Leone as a free nation for Africans. Cugoano was not satisfied by this symbolic gesture given his theory of creation of civil society, wealth of nation and criminality. He rejected the thesis of natural law and positive and proposed three ways restitution should be given to Africans:

I would propose, that there ought to be days of mourning and fasting appointed to make inquiry into that great and preeminent evil for many years past carried on against the Heathen nations, and the horrible iniquity of making merchandize of us and enslaving the poor Africans...secondly, I would propose that a total abolition of slavery should be made and proclaimed; and that an universal emancipation of slaves should begin from the date thereof..and thirdly, I would propose, that a fleet of some ships of war should be immediately sent to the coast of Africa, and particularly where the slave trade is carried on, with faithful men to direct that none should be brought from the coast of Africa without their own consent and the approbation of their friends, and to intercept all merchant ships that were bringing them away, until such a scrutiny was made, whatever nation they belonged to.<sup>clxxi</sup>

Cugoana ended his polemic by noting that Africans had never consented to slavery, as such, they were within their rights to revolt against a tyrannical system that sought to use them as a permanent subordinate labor class. The discourse of consent and slavery as Cugoano had noted had roots in the discourse of bondsman and slaves where paupers would agree to work off their debt to a wealth patron in exchange of housing and food. In this system of slavery, there was a consensual agreement to the duration of enslavement. The enslavement of Africans on the other hand argued they had consented to slavery and thus could only be freed at the death of their master. This system treated African slavery and consent as a legal tool to transfer property from one family member to another in an effort to continue to exploit the labor of Africans. From this perspective, Cugoano much like Dubois had understood, a system based on slavery would create a conflict of labor on which enslaved Africans would be treated as the scapegoat of economic down-turns.<sup>clxxii</sup> Cugoano championing the call for total abolishment of slavery and the need to create reparations for Africans. This argument was rooted in the fact that justification of the

enslavement of Africans had no biblical basis yet violated God's sacred laws by being used for imperialistic reasons as to build wealth for European nations. In elucidating this fact, Cugoano noted how European wars structured a world on which moral, legal and economic theories and structures were rooted in violence that set a precedent on which Black life is deemed fungible to the imperialistic needs of whites.

### **Summary**

The late Nigerian novelist and philosopher Chinua Achebe's text *Arrow of God* looks at the struggle between Christianity and indigenous African religions through the eyes of priest Ezeulu. Achebe's novel stretches our bound of imagination to visualized full blooded Africans wrestling with a tumultuous upheaval of civilization while retaining customs, family values and laws. Like Achebe, Cugoano in titling his text *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* challenges the British philosophy of empiricism that propagated the mind-body split, by creating an expose of the thoughts and sentiments of a fully bodied African.<sup>clxxiii</sup> Cugoano not only challenged the mind-body binary, but the natural law vs. positive law binary, the theory of property as the basis of civil society and creation of the criminal justice system, the binary of servant vs. slave, and human vs. property. Cugoano's critique is part of a tradition of Africans in the modern world who challenged theories of government and civil rights as protecting individual's rights to property. These motifs from early 18<sup>th</sup> century Black thinkers would be further developed about the barbarity of whites who developed sciences they used to justify the enslavement of Africans. It is this tradition Frederick Douglass sought to keep alive in his journal writings and auto-biography that I engage in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER III**  
**MISPLACEMENT OF SLAVERY AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT**  
**AGE IN AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY**

**James McCune Smith's Reading of Frederick Douglass's Narrative**

As the first chapter demonstrates, the rarity of the study of transatlantic slave trade from the vantage point of enslaved Africans in the history of modern philosophy has come with a cost. It has left Africana philosophy with imperceptible comprehension of the lack of humanity of one race over the other. Slavery, a system that was utterly cruel, sacrilegious, barbaric, and absolutely unjustifiable; slavery, the greatest crime that allowed one human race to treat the other as property, bought and sold like animals, denied human rights, and systematically subjugated, has been misplaced and subdued. When Africana philosophers and philosophers of race write about the Enlightenment, they fail to underscore the role slavery played in the development of Enlightenment ideals and sciences. Instead, Africana philosophers emphasize the role Enlightenment thinkers played in advancing racist concepts that portrayed African slaves as inferior beings. Such philosophers mollify the Enlightenment's role in the creation of new scientific arguments that provide a rationale for African slavery, the hierarchy of races, and the development of colonies and plantations as colonial systems on which modern western republics were developed.

The tendency of Africana philosophers and the philosophers of race is to focus on race and not slavery, as evidenced in the contemporary fixation on race, pervasive racism, and genocide, major depictions of the modern world in which racial groups in Europe and America were persecuted. By doing so, Africana philosophers and the philosophers of race, overlook the

atrocities committed on African slaves by slave traders and slave masters, and how, as a result, slavery shaped the modern world, both materially and intellectually. In the 1990s, philosophers wrestled with Enlightenment-age secular ethical theories due to the type of racism that fueled the World Wars and showed the inability of humans to apply reason and ethics to contain the persecution of racial groups in Europe. Mainstream philosophers of race liberally perceived the racism of the 1900s as befitting their agenda of overriding the study of the genocide and atrocities meted on Africans by Whites in the Transatlantic Slave Trade during the Enlightenment age. Such intentions led to one of the most perplexing phenomena in the modern world—the European philosophers’ endorsement of the anti-Semitism of the Nazi Party, and as such, the furtherance of racist and genocidal ideas.

For European philosophers, the anti-Semitism by philosophers highlighted the limits of the Enlightenment ideals of practical reason and moral philosophy in which European philosophers argued that individuals when faced with an ethical problem could use reason to act in the best interest of others by making decisions that maximized the happiness and not the suffering of others. Anti-Semitism, however, showed that reason led humans to participate in the killing of Jews through the moral philosophy of fascism. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argued in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the limits of the Enlightenment could be found in anti-Semitism and in a world in which “the blacks must be kept in their place, but the Jews are to be wiped from the face of the earth, and the call to exterminate them like vermin finds an echo among the prospective fascist is of all countries.”<sup>clxxiv</sup>

Horkheimer and Adorno’s work was an influential text that forced the discipline of philosophy to wrestle with the fact that most mainstream philosophers were complicit in the advancement of anti-Semitism by propagating totalitarian and rationalist logic as a feature of the

Enlightenment which created a world in which scientific discourse was used to create differences in irrational fears of nature and other humans. As Horkheimer and Adornos argued “the pathic element in anti-Semitism is not projective behavior as such but the exclusion of reflection from that behavior. Because the subject is unable to return to the object what it has received from it, it is not enriched but impoverished. It loses reflection in both directions, as it is no longer reflects the object; it no longer reflects on itself; and thereby loses the ability to differentiate. Instead of the voice of conscience, it hears voices; instead of inwardly examining itself in order to draw up a protocol of its own lust for power, it attributes to others the Protocol of the Elders of Zion.”<sup>clxxv</sup> Anti-Semitism in essence functioned as religion which impelled the individual to reason for oneself and make ethical decision based on reason and not myth as the Enlightenment has argued was a defining feature of modern European society.

The rise of anti-Semitism in Europe helped mainstream philosophers to avoid challenging questions regarding the continued legacies of slavery. The shift enabled culprits and beneficiaries of the transatlantic slave trade to escape responsibility and avoid reflecting on the inhumane economic and socio-political system that shaped the modern world. Works by scholars like Horkheimer and Adornos and other mainstream philosophers created a place in which the Enlightenment and race became a preoccupation of modernity and philosophy. Early African philosophers like the eminent Nigerian philosopher Emmanuel Eze “abandoned” the narrative genre of the Black thinkers that concentrated on the slave trade and joined philosophers of race in putting racism and discrimination in the forefront in the discipline of philosophy. As indicated in the first chapter, in the early 1800s, Black thinkers developed a genre of comparative slavery that extended biblical ethnology into the question of how enslaved Africans developed different civilizations even when slavery was a feature of African civilization. Black thinkers in their

autobiographies and speeches challenged the mainstream Enlightenment ideas of modern slavery as humane by creating comparative histories of slavery from the bible, Greek, Rome, and Egypt, showing enslaved Africans were the most persecuted people in the history of western slavery. In their counter-narratives, Black thinkers used Egypt and Haiti as examples in their argument that Black people developed arts, sciences and civilization that pre-dated the European Enlightenment. Black thinkers had different notions of slavery and emancipation that challenged the Enlightenment Age, but African philosophers chose to side with mainstream researchers, and by doing so helped to “misplace slavery.” Suddenly the transatlantic slave trade, world’s 400-year tragedy that saw a total of 50 million Africans enslaved in Europe, North America, Asia, and throughout the Middle East was, in scholarship, replaced with racism. By focusing on the enlightenment age as the period preoccupied with racial classification, African philosophers have failed to scholarly expound on the narrative genre and show how Black thinkers created anti-slavery societies, literary clubs and National Negro Conventions which resulted in the creation of Black anti-slavery movements in Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Canada, U.S and the U.K.<sup>clxxvi</sup> African philosophers have failed to educate the world on how Black thinkers fought for the abolishment of the slave trade in 1810, and how they defended the Haitian revolution.

Understandably, African philosophers like the Nigerian Eze were drawn to matters of race in order to offer opposition to the bias thinking of mainstream philosophers. In Eze’s influential text *Race and the Enlightenment*, he attempted to situate the writing of Enlightenment thinkers racist, arguing that “despite the rapid growth of interest in the interconnectedness of race and culture in the fields of cultural and black studies in recent years, there still exists to date no volume that brings together the most important and influential writings on race that the Enlightenment produced.”<sup>clxxvii</sup> Eze, argued that the preoccupation with race in fields like Black

studies should have forced the discipline of philosophy to take a closer look at the role Enlightenment thinkers played in developing racist theories given the fact that “enlightenment philosophy was instrumental in codifying and institutionalizing both the scientific and popular European perceptions of the human race. The numerous writings on race by Hume, Kant, and Hegel played a strong role in articulating Europe’s sense not only of its cultural but also racial superiority.”<sup>clxxviii</sup> In effect, Eze’s text was influential in the development of the field of critical philosophy of race as a project within Africana philosophy’s emergence in the academy. By focusing on race and racism, Africana philosophy become a critical project to the long-standing racist views of European philosophers from the Enlightenment to the modern world. Africana philosophy was able to engage the enlightenment as a critical praxis on which those impacted by notions of race and racism could offer different views from the disciplinary views of Black people. With critical philosophy of race, African scholars are able to examine issues raised by the concept of race, the practices and mechanisms of racialization, and the persistence of various forms of racism across the world. As Lewis Gordon states “Africana philosophy, in taking modern concerns such as race, racism, and colonialism seriously, explores problems of identity and social transformation, of the self and the social world, of consciousness and intersubjectivity, of the body and communicability, of ethics and politics, of freedom and bondage, to name several.”<sup>clxxix</sup> Alternatively stated, Africana philosophy in addressing the concerns of race and racism that emerged from the Enlightenment, offers a different understanding of the experience of race through consciousness, intersubjectivity and the like. By doing so, Africana philosophy becomes an important space to theorize about the condition of “Blackness and race”, shaped by slavery, the emergence of writing at the end of the eighteenth century on Blackness, and the way contemporary neo-liberal markets affect the condition of Black people.<sup>clxxx</sup>

In essence, Africana philosophy's preoccupation with race and racism as a countenance of modern society entrenched in the Enlightenment, makes it difficult to interrogate Enlightenment thinkers' endorsement of slavery. Also, a small number of Africana philosophers know that only a handful of Enlightenment thinkers were abolitionists or strong advocates of antislavery, and that the majority developed a scientific basis for racist ideas, to undermine the impact of slavery. For example, Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lott show how the Enlightenment movement strengthened racial prejudice. In their edited volume *The Idea of Race*, they argue; "the development of a rigorous scientific concept of race in Europe in the eighteenth century was motivated more by the obsession with classification and an obsession with the causes of black skin rather than by the need to justify slavery. To be sure, slavery as an institution played a part in determining how blacks were characterized... As the debate about abolishing the slave trade became more intense at the end of the eighteenth century, natural historians sitting in their studies in Europe were fed information that not merely reflected existing prejudices but that was designed to reinforce and deepen those prejudices against blacks. By and large, it was another generation before the science that the natural historians produced was recycled into a defense of slavery and other racist practices."<sup>clxxxix</sup> Such an argument warrants scrutiny by Africana philosophers because it is flawed in that it assumes slavery as a racist practice was only endorsed by the sciences of ethnology that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to justify why enslaved Africans should not be free. Slavery was important to the different schools of the Enlightenment who each formed different justification of slavery. For example, Wylie Sypher in *Hutcheson and the Classical Theory of Slavery*, argues that the moral philosophy of universal benevolence—the idea that benevolence and sympathy can be extended to all humans—developed in the Scottish Enlightenment, created a schism between British



intellectuals. Most of the British intellectuals chose to revise Aristotle's theories of slavery that stipulated some people were natural born slaves, incapable of reasoning, and that those captured in war had slavery imposed on them, and that this applied to enslaved Africans as well.

Sypher notes "amongst the most characteristic effects of the onset of 'romanticism' in eighteenth century was the undermining of the 'classical' ethics, based on rational self-discipline, by the 'romantic' or humanitarian ethics, based on benevolism. A useful indication of the point at which this change in ethics occurred is the moment in which the institution of Negro slavery was attacked by benevolistic theory."<sup>clxxxii</sup> The theory of universal benevolence as it applied to African slavery, meant revising Aristotle's theory of natural born slaves and captives of war. Since the British were participating in wars and established colonies in the Americas, benevolence philosophy became a philosophy of ameliorating the conditions of enslaved Africans in the colonies. Justin Roberts in *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* argues "work was the *raison d'être* of the system of slavery. In the eighteenth century, an improvement movement swept through the British Americas, changing how planters conceptualized and managed their plantations. The working world of the plantation was transformed by new management theories, which were in turn shaped by broader Atlantic discourses about moral reform and scientific and agricultural improvement. The Enlightenment conviction that moral and economic progress were compatible led planters to believe that increasing productivity could accompany benevolent management."<sup>clxxxiii</sup> Concerns of benevolent management developed alongside statistical methods that sought to record the value of land, crops and labor to generate wealth. As such, plantation record books sent to plantation owners in Europe became instrumental in the debates of the importance of enslaved labor to the development of the British Empire.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> Such plantation accounting books often were rooted in

taxonomies, recording the output of enslaved Africans, alongside animals and quantity of labor used to attend to the crops. Caitlin Rosenthal in *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and*

*Management* states:

The daily record of labor that occupied the front of each report allocated one line to each day, with columns for man different categories of enslaved men, women, and children: “In the Field,” “In the Yaw House,” “Watchmen,” “House Servants,” “Carpenters,” and “Boatmen.” Then it listed those “In & about the Buildings, and on Jobs” and finally “children,” “invalids,” and “Runaways”. Each day, every slave on the plantation was allocated to one of these categories . . .below the “Negro Account” was a nearly identical “Live Stock Account” recording the fate of horses, mules, oxen, cows, calves, sheep, pigs, and goats.<sup>clxxxv</sup>

It was through the plantation books sent to the metropole that Enlightenment thinkers developed a classification system and the categories used on the plantation to keep track of crops. The productivity of enslaved Africans, and the different divisions of labor given to enslaved Africans, fell under the category of animals. Such racial classifications and categorizations become part of the philosophical theories of race. Enlightenment thinkers used records on the plantations and agricultural tasks to argue that Africans were incapable of participating in Enlightenment sciences and the arts. For example, David Hume was explicit about the inability of enslaved Africans of the Enlightenment era to develop arts and sciences beneficial to the advancement of humans. In the footnote of Part 1, Essay XXI: *Of the National Characters*, Hume wrote:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. The never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures among them, no arts, no sciences. . . .there are NEGRO slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity, tho’ low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In

JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but tis likely he is admired for every slender accomplishment, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

In studying Hume's remarks about the negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, and those in Jamaica, Africana philosophers' have failed to ask what taxonomies allowed Hume to compare enslaved Africans with uneducated industrious white people in Europe, and an enslaved African in Jamaica with a parrot? Hume endorses the idea that enslaved Africans are outside of the realm of moral worth because they have nothing to offer to the Enlightenment concept of the arts and sciences. What is absent in Hume's analysis is, the state in which enslaved Africans were forced to labor for Whites in Europe and Jamaica in households and plantations, denied them the time for innovation to create arts and sciences. It can be assumed that Hume's impression of Black people was rooted in intimate knowledge of slavery, particularly of enslaved Africans on Jamaican plantations, to the extent he created a bifurcation of enslaved Africans/uneducated industrious white persons versus enslaved Africans on a Jamaican plantation who imitated their master and accomplished very little. Felix Waldmann in his extensive works on the private letters of David Hume unearthed a letter in which Hume who served as secretary for Francis Seymour Conway, First Earl of Hertford a politician and courtier encouraged his benefactor to purchase plantations in Grenada. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Hume wrote:

Today, Sir George Colebroke spoke to me a business, which he desired me to communicate to your Lordship. It seems Sir George, with two partners, Sir James Cockburn & M Stewart the wine merchant, had a great undertaking in Dominica, to which place they sent an Overseer, one M Nalson, a very honest man and a man of substance. M Nalson was oblig'd on some affair to go to the Granadoes, where the offer of the most advantageous bargain that had been made for a long time in America, had engaged him to make in their name & his own a purchase of some plantations to the amount of 60.000 pounds sterling. They had no intention to have gone farther than the first project but rather than the poor man should be ruined or hurt by his rashness, they were willing to take the half of the bargain. Hearing that your Lordship had once entertained thoughts of making some purchase in these new conquests, they Sir George

desired me to make an offer in his name of the other half, which may be manag'd by common Stock and at common risqué with him and his partners. As these people are men of substance and character, I thought it possible that your Lordship might give ear to this proposal; and if your Lordship think it worthy of your attention, Sir George says, that he will write you a full relation of the whole.<sup>clxxxvii</sup>

Hume's views of Black people in his essay "Of National Characters," have justifiably rendered him a racist. On the other hand, Hume's letter presents another facet of his view on Black people. Hume was a power broker who endorsed slavery. He was personally acquainted with plantation owners and had the power to broker deals to purchase plantations. Hume endorsed a colonial system of slavery and championed the inferiority of Black people using moral philosophy, preserving slavery as part of the Britain's imperial interest. His remarks in his essay that "In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but tis likely he admired for every slender accomplishment, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly," were not speculative assertions, they were remarks embedded in intimate knowledge of the conditions of slavery in Jamaica.

Waldmann's research reveals the "M Stewart" in Hume's letter to Francis Seymour Conway, was John Stewart, a personal friend of Hume who owned a plantation in Grenadian with forty-two slaves on it. In Waldmann's research, Hume's bank passbooks records show that he lent Stewart £400 on 8 February 1766. As Waldman notes "it is not inconceivable that Hume's money was invested in the plantation."<sup>clxxxviii</sup> Waldmann's assertion makes sense when one discovers that in 1892, John Stewart published a text *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica; With Remarks on the Moral and Physical Conditions of the Slaves, and on the Abolition of Slavery in the Colonies*. The text is an apologist of the colonial system of the British ownership of Jamaica. Stewart, in the text chronicles how the British claimed Jamaica from the Spanish and improved the agricultural output and conditions of enslaved Africans on

the island. Stewart begins his text by stating that the main reason he wrote it was to describe “the state of society—the different classes of the free inhabitants, the character, customs, and moral and physical condition of the slaves, and the means proposed of improving their condition, as preliminary steps to gradual abolition of slavery, the author has been more circumstantial, these being topics of more particular interest, especially at the present moment, and on which his long residence in the island has enabled him to supply many important particulars.”<sup>clxxxix</sup> Further, in documenting the protracted fight against Maroons that began in 1690 and the callous act to reclaim the island from Maroons in 1796, Stewart described British lieutenant governor’s deployment of 200 hundred blood hounds that were violently used against Moors stating “the intention was, as had been said, that they might, by the terror they inspired, induce the Maroons to come in and surrender themselves. This event their presence speedily brought about...thus, in short, was much bloodshed and barbarity, not to say the absolute destruction of the country, prevented by the introduction of those animals.”<sup>cxc</sup> Importantly, the text shows Stewart intimate knowledge about the working and management of sugar plantations and the “four great desiderata in settling a sugar plantation.”<sup>cxc</sup> Stewart notes:

An estate producing 200 hogsheads of sugar, averaging 16cwt., may this be valued 500 acres of land, at £20 per acre, on an average £10,000 (of which 150 acres, if the land be good, is sufficient for canes, the rest being in grass and provisions). 200 slaves, averaging £100 each, 20,000. 140 horned stock, and 50 mules, £5000. Buildings and utensils, 8,000. Jamaica currency £ 43,000.<sup>cxcii</sup>

Stewart’s text reads like an extension of proprietor journals and plantation account books that often were published in England to encourage investment in plantations in Jamaica.

Rosenthal observes “detailed account books offered visibility from the attorney’s office-or the

proprietor's desk back in England while delegating operating responsibility and day to day management to those on the groups. Regular reports enabled owners and attorneys not only to monitor their operations but also to think strategically about capital optimization and allocation. In this case, however, the laborers on the ground were enslaved people and much of the capital being allowed was human capital."<sup>xciii</sup> Thus, when Hume had vouched for Stewart to his benefactor Francis Seymour Conway, Hume was acquainted with someone who could provide accurate value estimates necessary to purchase plantations in Grenada. The preservation of slavery and the economic interest to Britain and plantation owners was not lost on Hume who rendered his views of Black people as incapable of producing arts and sciences in his written work as part of his philosophy of moral philosophy while encouraging his benefactor to purchase plantations that would need Black labor to increase his wealth and political standing in Britain.

In the text chapter titled "Wild Quadrupes, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles, Insects," Stewart gave an interesting description of the parrots in Jamaica, noting that there were four species; the macaw, the black-billed, the yellow-billed green parrot, and the paroquet. Stewart noted "the parrots frequent the high woods, from which, when the seeds on which they feed are scarce, they often descend to prey on the plantain-walks, the fruit of which they greedily devour."<sup>xciv</sup> As birds that wreaked havoc on the plantation, the suggestion of the parrot speaking "few words plainly" as Hume had suggested spoke to the domestication of animals as pets. Yet when juxtaposed to the enslavement of humans, the domestication of animals as pets became a litmus test to debate slavery. Ingrid Tague in *Animals Companions: Pets and Social Change in Eighteenth Century Britain* argues "naturalists explained the relationship between humans and domestic animals as that of master and slave, and slavery was not simply a metaphor. Because it was meant literally but applied to an area that seemed much less problematic than human

slavery, animal slavery became an ideal testing ground for ideas about the morality of all forms of enslavement.<sup>”xcv</sup> Hume in speaking about slavery in Jamaica was not only noting his familiarity of slavery in Jamaica but was parroting the words of the naturalist Comte Buffon who had wanted to distinguish Humans from apes and parrots when he remarked “had the voice of the parrot been bestowed on the ape; the human race would have been struck dumb with astonishment, and the philosopher could hardly have been able to demonstrate that the ape was still a brute.”<sup>xcvi</sup> In other words, mimicking behavior not indicative of human behavior, was a distinguishing feature of those incapable of being considered humans during the Enlightenment age. Hume in his quip on the enslaved African in Jamaica and the parrot, evoked the issue of enslavement, the domestication of animals into pets, and reason, as distinguishing criteria for who qualified to be considered human and who merited slavery in the modern world.

While Lott and Bernasconi are right when they argue that “the development of a rigorous scientific concept of race in Europe in the eighteenth century was motivated more by the obsession with classification,” they are wrong when they assert that impetus had to do with “an obsession with the causes of black skin rather than by the need to justify slavery.” These classification systems were rooted in slavery and were important for distinguishing the different characteristics of enslaved people. For instance, Stewart argued “between the whites and blacks, in the West Indies, a *numerous race* has sprung up, which goes by the general appellation of people of colour. These are subdivided into mulattoes, the offspring of a white and a black; samboes, the offspring of a black and a mulattoo; quadroons, the offspring of a white and a mulattoo; and mestees, the offspring of a white and a quadroon.”<sup>xcvii</sup> Classification systems were rooted in slavery and the condition on which a “numerous race” classified as “people of colors” emerged from the colonial system of slavery. This classification system was a way to understand

“the people of colour may be supposed to possess the mingled natures of the two original stocks from whence they springs, and the more or less they are removed from one or the other, they seem to be imbued in proportion with their particular qualities”<sup>cxviii</sup> The belief being that “the negroes, though rude and ignorant in their savage state, had a natural shrewdness and genius which was doubtless susceptible to culture and improvement. Those who have been reared among the whites are greatly superior in intellect to the native Africans brought at a mature age to the country.”<sup>cxix</sup> Classification systems were important to distinguish slaves and the interests they served slave-holders.

This segment of the chapter provides not only a historiography of the impact and effects of slavery, but most importantly, shows the importance of studying slavery in African philosophy. The tendency to place race over slavery in Africana philosophical discussion obscures our ability to understand how, for instance, the way the classification system allowed whites to reformulate slavery as a humane system in the Enlightenment age and beyond. Marlene Daut’s *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789-1865* in which she notes; “ the racialization of Saint-domingue owes its historical genealogy to the kinds of organizational taxonomies that were created by naturalist travel writers, who, after descending upon the French Caribbean islands beginning in the seventeenth century, attempted to categorize by “race” or “type” the different varieties of inhabitants one might find there...early narratives of the Haitian revolution were directly linked to the vocabulary of these naturalists .”<sup>cc</sup> In effect these categories uplifted from the plantations, were instrumental in creating literature that decentered the Haitian revolution as a revolt inspired by Negroes. Daunt asserts such naturalist categories were useful to Enlightenment thinkers such that up “until at least the American Civil War, the literature of the Haitian revolution demonstrated a



dogged obsession with “mulatto” or other “mixed-race” beings; specifically, with understanding the initial revolt and subsequent rebellion by children of “color” against their “white” fathers, and not as an antislavery revolution led by predominantly “negro” slaves.”<sup>cc1</sup> While Daut’s text adds to understanding the classification system, it is Hume’s 1753 infamous footnote that exposes Africana philosophy’s lackluster approach to the transatlantic slave trade. Literature review on Africana philosophy indicates that few Africana philosophers have cared to use the footnote as a springboard to question the integrity of Hume’s empirical analysis. Such oversights have created a large gap in Africana philosophy research, wider than observed in Africana discourse and praxis.

### **Ontological Sovereignty and Racial Vindication**

Because Africana philosophers have concentrated on racial matters, they have failed to access in detail, the ontological condition of African slaves under the sovereign power of the White colonial system of slavery. It was the rejection of the scientific ideals of the Enlightenment that sought to justify enslaved Africans as part of the civilization process that Black thinkers wrote vehemently about in the narricide genre. Baron de Vastey’s adornment in *The Colonial System Unveiled* recalled that “most of the historians [and planters] who have written about the colonies were whites, indeed colonists. *They have entered into the greatest detail regarding crops, climate, the rural economy* [emphasis added], but they have been careful not to rend the veil from the crimes of their accomplices...the time has finally arrived when the truth must come to light. I, who am neither a white man nor a colonist, may not possess the same erudition, but I will not be lacking when it comes to citing examples.”<sup>ccii</sup> The literature that emerged about the productivity of enslaved labor, the rural economy, crops and climate, all rooted in taxonomies, in effect covered up the crimes committed against enslaved Africans. In

other words, the narratives that emerged from enslaved Africans, deconstructed the scientific justifications of the African as instrumental to the economic needs of western republics. Black thinkers were aware that Enlightenment thinkers turned to the bible, ancient Greece, Rome and the emergent sciences of natural and physical history to justify enslavement. As such, in their assessment of their experiences, Black thinkers deconstructed these justifications by showing that Enlightenment sciences were decadent and often belied the totalitarian nature of whites. Black thinkers sought to show that under the sciences of Man, Enlightenment thinkers developed a philosophy of amelioration that justified slavery as a humane enterprise out of which Whites owned slaves the same way they owned animals. Which is to say, while Enlightenment thinkers were developing moral philosophies of a secular European and American civil society, they simultaneously developed a philosophy on which enslaved Africans in colonies and plantations were degraded as beings. Also, Enlightenment thinkers regarded enslaved Africans as humans with no moral capacity and whose instrumental value to whites was grounded in labor, to build modern republics rooted in agriculture and commerce.

For Enlightenment thinkers, slavery was perceived as a feature of Western society which needed to be re-oriented to fit the needs of the Enlightenment age. Related to this, George Kelly in *Notes on Hegel Lordship and Bondage*, argues not only for Hegel, but for his great predecessors and his age mates as a whole that “master and slave were a multi-dimensional problem and a paradoxical one...The paradox is this, antiquity, which had sanctioned the institution of slavery, had nevertheless intensely researched the dilemma of man’s enslavement of himself. The Enlightenment, by contrast, progressively attacked social bondage as abusive and immoral, while scratching only at the surface of its spiritual dimensions.”<sup>cciii</sup> If the problem of slavery and emancipation was tied to the religious order, nature and the ontology, the different

schools of the Enlightenment given their preoccupation with slavery and colonies, constructed different notions of slavery as a philosophical praxis of Western man versus the reality of enslaving Africans as laborers. Put differently, philosophers wrestled with modern slavery as an instrumental part of modern society which required re-centering those who were enslaved from Europe to Africa. For example, in 1740, an unknown writer wrote an article in the *London Magazine* titled “In Defense of the African Slave Trade,” in which he argued “the inhabitants of Guinea are indeed in a most deplorable State of Slavery under the arbitrary Powers of their Princes both as life and property. In the several subordinations to them, every great Man is absolute lord of his immediate dependents...no doubt such a State is contrary to Nature and Reason, since every human creature hath an absolute Right to Liberty.”<sup>cciv</sup>

The writer proclaimed it was the duty of the English to end repressive regimes and incorporate people into Western systems of government that upheld notions of liberty. The writer further noted that “by purchasing, or rather ransoming the Negroes from their national tyrants, and transplanting them under the benign influences of the law, and gospel, they are advanced to much greater degrees of felicity, to not to absolute liberty.”<sup>ccv</sup> The absence of absolute liberty however, was greater than the purported abject slavery in Africa, because colonies had laws on which enslaved Africans conduct could be judged. The writer added that “this is truly the case that cannot be doubted by any one acquainted with the Constitution of our Colonies, where the Negroes are governed by Laws, and suffer much less punishment in proportion to their crimes, that the people in other countries more refined in the arts of wickedness; and where capital punishment is inflicted only by the civil magistrate.”<sup>ccvi</sup> The laws were rooted in imperialistic interest tailored to manage colonies and in essence quell the dissent of enslaved Africans. Edward Rugemer in *Slave Laws and Resistance in the Early Atlantic World* argues “Each planter

class developed its own distinctive mode of governing slaves, made evident in the laws they passed. The legal innovations adopted by each colony responded in part to the threat of slave rebellions and in part to wars with internal enemies, the Maroons of Jamaica and the Indians of the southeastern woodlands, especially the Yamasee.<sup>”ccvii</sup> With such laws, the problem of managing slave societies mounted. Slave rebellions in every slave society challenged the Constitution of the Colonies regarding enslaved Africans in the Enlightenment age, and demands for emancipations increased.

The enslavement of Africans impacted the philosophical notions of slavery and emancipation that were abstract notions for Enlightenment thinkers. French philosopher Louis Sala-Molins a staunch critique of the failure of contemporary mainstream philosophers to wrestle with the impact of slavery in the Enlightenment era, wrote the following in *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment*; “clearly, the crucial test case for the Enlightenment is the slave trade and slavery. It is not the Jew, as it sometimes claimed, or woman, as it is often stated. It is the ‘slave’...to interpret the Enlightenment without them is to play the game of the Enlightenment; it is tantamount to limiting universal philanthropy to one’s little neighborhood, reason to the domain of ‘biblico-whitism,’ sovereignty to the boundaries of the parish.”<sup>ccviii</sup> Sala-Molins’s point was that slavery went in tandem with the development of colonial systems in which colonies and plantations supported by European laws, began the grounds of testing out universal human laws. By deeming Africans as inferior, slavery was perceived as a civilization tool with which enslaved Africans through labor and humane treatment, were forced to adhere to the laws of slavery. The totalitarian logic of slavery augmented the discourse about the inferiority of Africans and their inability to create the arts, sciences, and government. Regarding the Haitian revolution, Sala-Molins scoffed off the

European claim of the inferiority of the African. Sala-Molins wrote: “how then did he manage to snatch from the Enlightenment, what the Enlightenment never dreamt of? Look seriously for Bouckman and Louverture in the Enlightenment. Look for Dessalines, the man who snatched Haiti from France. The Negro, always a slave and yet still standing tall, did indeed invent his liberty.”<sup>ccix</sup>

Sala-Molins echoes Sylvia Wynter’s call for the need to understand enslaved people viewed emancipation as their Ontological sovereignty.<sup>ccx</sup> Wynter notes “we have taken from the West their conception of freedom and slavery. We tend to conceptualize freedom and slavery only in their terms. Yet when we look at African conceptions of slavery, it’s entirely different. For the Congolese, for example, the slave was the lineage-less man and woman who had fallen out of the protection of their lineage.

The opposite of not only being free, the opposite to slave is also belonging to a lineage.”<sup>ccxi</sup> In order for the enslaved Africans in Haiti to attain ontological sovereignty, they had to completely move outside their conception of what it was to be a slave, and therefore outside the body of fear of European power. The Haitian victory over European power in the Enlightenment age brought about debates about the emancipation of enslaved Africans in Europe and the Americas.<sup>ccxii</sup> Enslaved Africans conceived emancipation outside of abolition as a gradual process. In other words, for enslaved Africans the concept of emancipation meant that they moved “outside the ground of the orthodox body of knowledge [of slavery],”<sup>ccxiii</sup> and fight for emancipation by all means necessary.<sup>ccxiv</sup> One of the fundamental problems of how we think about slavery is through the conception of social death, which renders Africans as people with no kinship conception once they are captured and rendered property of a slave master, an act that leaves them with no social lineage.<sup>ccxv</sup> Consequently, blackness as a consequence of slavery

becomes a process of understanding slavery via the process of social death in which the enslaved African has no lineage. For example, Achille Mbembe in *Critique of Black Reason* observes; “for Black confronted with the reality of slavery, loss is first of a genealogical order. In the New World, the Black slave is legally stripped of all kinship. Slaves are, in consequence, ‘without parents.’ The condition of kinlessness is imposed on them through law and power. And eviction from the world of legal kinship is an inherited condition...in such conditions the invocation of race or the attempt to constitute a racial community aims first to forge ties and open up space in which to stand, to respond to a long history of subjugation and bio-political fracturing.”<sup>ccxvi</sup> Historians of the New world have argued against this reduction reading on which slavery is equated with kinlessness, and race qualifies as the social glue of the community of enslaved people. This argument as historians have postulated, discounts that enslaved people worked to restore kinship structures within their communities even under the legal parameters in which marriage was only permissible through consent of the slave-master and slavery followed the condition of the mother.

In *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, Herman Bennet demonstrates how enslaved Africans exploited marriage laws under Spanish law that required that the formation of nuclear families necessitated adherence to Christian ethos. As such, to preserve and adopt new family structures armed “with this legal consciousness, both enslaved and free persons established family and friendship networks predicated on an imagined identity. But in contracting Christian marriages, the centerpiece of family formation in New Spain, slaves and free persons, both of whom were defined as legal dependents, confronted opposition from patricians who interpreted certain martial alliances as a challenge to their authority. In ensuing struggles between paterfamilias and dependents...persons of African descent, both slave and free, appropriated strategies manifest

among other dependents, wives, minors, and servants in New Spain...this legal consciousness was also instrumental in the decline of slavery and the growth of the free black population.”<sup>ccxvii</sup>

Similarly, historians of the African experience in Portuguese America have shown enslaved Africans often created complex kinship structures to replicate their native kinship structures. According to James Sweet in *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770*, in addition to the kinlike networks that were created during the Middle Passage among Malungos, Africans developed other corporate webs of kinship that sustained them in Brazil. Perhaps the best known examples were the runaway slave communities that came to be known as Quilombos. In Central Africa, the Kilombo referred to a merit-based, male warrior society that not only cut across lineage boundaries, but actually erased lineage ties based on natal descent. These lineageless warrior societies were a practical solution to the ruptures in natal kinship that created by war, famine, and forced migration in Central Africa during the slave trade. In Brazil, isolated lineageless, mostly male runaway slaves sometimes reconstituted themselves in a similar hierarchical kinlike fashion.<sup>ccxviii</sup>

Mainstream philosophers fail to envisage the enslaved African as a human who had social ties to communities back in Africa and the colonial systems of slavery. Where lineages of kinship and political affiliation were broken, enslaved Africans developed new lineages. For instance, in New England, enslaved Africans developed a celebration known as Negro Election Day which was the “annual election of a black king or governor who would often wield considerable authority within the black community, acting variously as arbitrator, judge, adviser, and liaison with whites.”<sup>ccxix</sup> The elections served to create political affiliations and ties to political sovereignty that often led to slave revolts. William Klooster in “Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolution,” shows the election of kings was a

common occurrence both in the U.S and West Indies colonies. Such kings wielded enough power to cause revolts. Klooster notes “Enslaved blacks, drawing on African and Creole notions of kingship, employed rumors of royal emancipation to rally their numbers to revolt against local authorities who had putatively suppressed monarchical edicts of manumission.

Although the rumor was systemic to the institution of New World slavery for perhaps as much as two centuries, it was nevertheless forged locally by slaves.<sup>ccxx</sup> Klooster points to political adherence to Africans in the new world that led to revolts, noting for example, enslaved Africans in Martinique in 1768 believed the rumor that the king of Angola was about to arrive with a strong army to take them back to Africa. While in a small town near Popayán, New Granada, enslaved Africans revolted in 1810, when a Black queen supposedly arrived from Africa, bringing freedom. Also, during the Aponte rebellion in Cuba, two years later, slaves of the Kongo nation referred to the king of Kongo, who had allegedly sent letters ordering the slaves’ freedom to the island.<sup>ccxxi</sup> Similarly, Macya, the Congolese Haitian Revolutionary leader, when persuaded to return to the republic, wrote back: “I am the subject of three kings: of the King of Congo, master of all the blacks; of the King of France who represents my father; of the King of Spain who represents my mother. These three Kings are the descendants of those who led by a star, came to adore God made man.”<sup>ccxxii</sup>

Wynter’s perception of ontological sovereignty is instructive in that it requires we orient our understanding of how enslaved Africans understood their lineages as a people who belonged to a kinship structure and political communities that stood outside the imperial needs of the Western colonial system of slavery. These lineages were often the praxis of political organizing and revolts in the colonies.<sup>ccxxiii</sup> The concept of race tied to the colonial system of slavery, meant enslaved Africans and free people were connected to different lineages than those tied to the



property of a slave master. The difference became a salient feature of the discourse developed by Black thinkers between 1808 and 1865. Black thinkers in their speeches and auto-biographies reflected on the ending of the international slave trade and abolition of slavery in the West Indies. Black thinkers developed anti-slavery societies and literary clubs in Haiti, Jamaica, Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. addressing the colonial system of slavery.

Joseph Rezek in “The Orations on the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the Uses of Print in the Early Black Atlantic” states, beginning in 1808 “these orations narrate the slave trade’s history and its consequences, from its origins in the sixteenth century to its abolition.”<sup>ccxxiv</sup> What is remarkable about these texts is they created comparative history of slavery, and traced the experience of slavery beginning from the Bible to the New World. The orations underscored the barbaric nature of Western slavery and the mercantile logic that spurred on the different colonial systems of slavery. According to Mitch Kachun in *Festivas of Freedom*, “ the most recurrent interpretive narrative offered by such early African American historians revolved around recounting the glory of the African past and the inhumanity of the slave trade...black orators often mocked the ‘enterprising spirit of European genius’ comparing it unfavorably not only with the grandeur of ancient African civilization but also with the ‘simplicity, innocence and contentment’ of more contemporary ‘harmless Africans’ living in what ‘might truly be called a paradise.’ A paradise that survived up ‘until the man-stealing crew entered.”<sup>ccxxv</sup>

By centering Africa and tracing the history of slavery from the sixteenth century to its abolition, Black thinkers developed a different understanding of slavery and race. The Haitian Revolution and ending of slavery in the West Indies on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1834, created an annual commemoration of slave emancipation that lasted well up to 1865. Jeffrey Kerr-Ritche in *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* successfully argued that the

annual celebrations of August First were important because “the ideas around slavery, emancipation, and liberation formed the basis for racial politics of identity, grounded in being African in the modern world.”<sup>ccxxvi</sup> Furthermore, the ideas placed enslaved Africans in an ontological state that called for immediate abolishment of slavery. Kerr-Ritche further notes “many black abolitionists endorsed emancipation not simply for polemical purposes, but because of its racial vindication of former slaves, fugitives, free blacks, and slaves. They refuted weight historical charges: enslaved Africans did not want their freedom (i.e. revolts were rare); they were unable to manage their own freedom (i.e. poor post-emancipation societies); and they were eternally destined for servitude (i.e. wealthy American slave South). At stake was neither an experiment nor strategy, but the future freedom of people of African descent.”<sup>ccxxvii</sup> Part of this racial vindication was the focus on the “African origins of man, the greatness of Egypt and its place in Africa.”<sup>ccxxviii</sup>

If Africana philosophers are to adequately account for efforts made by enslaved Africans to free themselves from the bondage of slavery and create their own sovereign, there is a need to understand the ontological incompatibility between the European concept of sovereignty and that of the enslaved Africans. The latter do not have a state, they must fight for one. The rebellion in the French colony of St. Dominique led to the defeat of three European powers in 1791, resulting in the first Black republic. This feat should form the basis of devoting more attention to the transatlantic slave trade.

### **The Classics and Scottish Enlightenment Theories Influence on American Slavery**

The connection of the transatlantic slave trade to a larger pattern of philosophical and economic suppositions remains subtle in Africana philosophy. Historians of early colonies have noted that scientific taxonomies and scientific discoveries of plants went hand in hand with new

scientific ideas of labor that relied on slavery to create a global economy based on agriculture.<sup>ccxxix</sup> These theories of scientific improvement and techniques of farming meant to sustain these ideas of agriculture and commerce in the new world, labor and farming practices from Europe would have to shift to a labor economy that relied on slavery given the financial challenges and competition of bringing labor from Europe.<sup>ccxxx</sup> To sustain the scientific theories of farming and labor based on slavery, American plantation owners turned to the economy theories of the Scottish Enlightenment to justify slavery on plantations as instrumental towards creating a new world economy based on agricultural commerce. Historian Joyce Chaplin in *Anxious Pursuit* notes:

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Scottish historical school (precursor of political economy) formed the most influential interpretation of economic development. The school's conjectural history was the first modern theory that linked cultural progress to material production, rather than made simple contrasts between past and present that might not refer to discrete forms of economic activity. Whites in the Lower South were interested in Scottish history because they wanted to determine their own place within its comparative sociological framework. They inserted themselves, with great care, somewhere between the two value-laden extremes of nomadic savagism and commercial civility set out by this theory, the first stage epitomized, for them, by Indians who lingered in relative economic underdevelopment, the last by Europeans who embodied the most polished and commercial form of human society.<sup>ccxxxi</sup>

As noted earlier, the Scottish enlightenment was essential towards modernity by arguing that the use of science and discovery of laws of human nature could help modern European nations involved in agrarian culture and slavery to transcend ancient republics that failed to use slavery to elevate their civilizations. The Scottish historical economic school constructed a theory of evolution based on a four-stage cycle that argued commerce and agriculture were the highest stage that defined modern civilization. Linking morality and economics, Scottish thinkers argued that racial and moral differences could be seen in the four-stage theory of civilization; hunter gathers, pastoral, agriculture and commerce. Moreover, Scottish thinkers developed philosophies

that argued a society based on commerce was the most evolved society given the division of labor, acquisition to property and international trade that commerce allowed for.<sup>ccxxxii</sup> Cognizant of the hunting habits and habitants of indigenous people, colonial settlers saw themselves having to distinguish their farming, hunting, and labor habits to ensure that they embodied the ideals of civilization propagated by the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>ccxxxiii</sup> Silvia Sebastiani referencing race in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* states that the Scottish Enlightenment sought to find the sources of human differences through moral and economic causes.<sup>ccxxxiv</sup> Commerce for enlightenment thinkers not only meant producing goods but also the idea of exchange of virtues and vices that structured race, gender and class relations.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> Consequently, with the development of colonies and the enslavement of Africans, debates within the Scottish Enlightenment centered on how to understand the moral worth of Africans while using them as a labor source. Given the Scottish Enlightenment theory of economics, the quest to build an agricultural commerce-based civilization meant American slave owners recognizing slave labor as an important tool towards economic empowerment.

Infused with the Scottish Enlightenment theory of four stages of civilization, agriculture, and commerce as essential towards new models of civilization, American political theorists turned to Rome to push back on the British, a people they deemed corrupt and driven by avarice with the taxation and Stamp Acts while protecting slavery in America. The roman republic provided American political theorists with the political clout to participate in agriculture and commerce as a nation and not as a colony. Eran Shalev in *Rome Reborn on Western Shores* writes:

[American] Southerners, and occasionally, Americans from the middle colonies turned-states related to the ancients by believing that they shared a common fate with the republics of antiquity; they understood their revolution, for better or worse, as the latest

link in a succession of republics that had unfolded through time and followed similar historical patterns. As such, they were obliged to face the question of decline of political entities. While this view of time originating in the south conformed to contemporary continental republican thinking about the cyclicity of history, northerners, mostly New Englanders, displayed a novel attitude toward time by applying Protestant modes of historical interpretation to classical narratives.<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>

Combining the ancients, and in particular Rome, with Scottish enlightenment ideals, the founders studied the rise and decline of Roman Empire as an example of how greed and corruption can cause decline in society. The founders saw how, simultaneously, the courage and virtues of the roman senators, politicians and militia, could be tied to a salvific narrative in which Americans saw themselves carrying out conquests to overthrowing despots and tyranny, to preserve their way of life. Applying non de plume on Roman senators and orators, American politicians constructed revolutionary sermons and polemics that propounded their battle with the British in a similar manner as that of Roman's rebelling against enslavement and a tyrannical government in ancient society. Referencing the politics of Greece and Rome, Americans understood their opposition of slavery as a form of tyranny and those who were enslaved as incapable of succumbing to tyranny. Carl Richard in *The Founders and the Classics* observed:

The founders' immersion in ancient history had a profound effect upon their style of thought. They developed from the classics a suspicious cast of mind. They learned from the Greeks and Romans to fear conspiracies against liberty. Steeped in a literature whose perpetual theme was the steady encroachment of tyranny on liberty, the founders became virtually obsessed with spotting its approach, so that they might avoid the fate of their classical heroes...but since the founders believed that the central lesson of the classics was that every illegitimate power, however ended in slavery, they were determined to resist every such power.<sup>ccxxxvii</sup>

In strategizing their rebellion against British tyranny and enslavement, American statesmen and politicians, educated in the classics of Greece and Rome in the revolutionary era up until the antebellum period, deemed enslaved Africans on plantations as incapable of fighting off tyranny since they were intellectually inferior.<sup>ccxxxviii</sup> As Gerald Horne has demonstrated in the *Negro*

*Comrades of the Crown* and *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*, the preoccupation with fighting the British as enslavers meant that African insurrections and revolts in America were treated as conspiracies inspired by the British and met with brutal force and draconic laws that suppressed African fugitivity and insurrection. In essence, Americans through sustaining their rebellion in the themes of ancient history saw themselves as slaves fighting tyranny from the British while simultaneously fighting African insurrection and revolts seen as conspiracy plots engendered by the British.<sup>ccxxxix</sup> *Felix Okoye in Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries*, argues “the rhetoric of the American pamphleteers makes sense as soon as it is realized that their predicament, shortly after the Seven Years War, bore a striking resemblance to that of black slaves in their midst. The outrage of the colonials stemmed from their conviction that only black people in America were deserving of servile status.”<sup>ccxli</sup>

Americans relying on Greek and Roman notions of slavery, tyranny and rebellion, differentiated their enslavement by the British in that they were intellectually superior to Africans incapable of fighting against American tyranny.<sup>ccxli</sup> For example, much like John Calhoun had compared African slaves to Greek slaves, Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* alluded to the intellectual difference of Roman slaves versus Africans enslaved in the Americas. Jefferson argued that “among the Romans, their slaves were often their rarest artists. They excelled too in science, insomuch as to be usually employed as tutors to their master’s children. Epictetus, Diogenes, Phaedon, Terence and Phaedrus, were slaves. But they were of the race of whites. It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced this distinction.”<sup>ccxlii</sup> Jefferson in effect argued that even though Romans had slaves who were white (Jefferson characterized Terence as white, when in actual fact he was African) nothing about

their enslavement stopped them from engaging in intellectual endeavors that earned them fame from their slave masters.

As such, Jefferson much like Calhoun, believed Africans were biologically and intellectually inferior. Greek and Roman conceptions of slavery were used as points to show racial differences and the biological basis of African inferiority. The comparison of the experience of the Greek and Roman slaves to the African experience showed Africans were intellectually inferior and that Roman slaves even though they suffered more than African slaves, achieved artistic and scientific levels of achievement. However, Jefferson's remarks are contradictory to his treatment of slaves to build a nail shop on his plantation. Jefferson developed a nail shop by using children between the ages of 10 and 16. Jefferson in his *Farm Book* wrote "children up until 10 years old serve as nurses. From 10 to 16 the boys make nails, the girls spin. At 16 they go to work in the fields or learn trades." Jefferson's book acts as a diary, documenting the operation of the nail shop by date:

**1795 July 10.** A nailery which I have established with my own Negro boys now provides completely for the maintenance of my family, as we make from 8 to 10,000 nails a day and it is on the increase **1806.** Jim makes 15 pounds. 20 penny nails. Barnaby makes 10 pounds, 10 penny nails. Wagner Davy makes 10 pounds, 10 penny Nails. Bedford John makes 8 pounds. 8 penny Nails. Bartlet makes 6 pounds. 6 penny Nails. 4 Boys make 8 pounds. 6 penny Nails. **1807 May13.** Those who work in the nailery are Moses, Wormly, James Hubbard, Barnaby, Isabel's Davy, Bedford John, Bedford Davy, Phill Hubbard, Bartlet, Lewis. They are sufficient for 2 fires, five at a fire.<sup>ccxliii</sup>

As much as Jefferson was a student of the classics and an advocate of slavery, he was also a student of the Scottish Enlightenment and a beneficiary of the emerging British political arithmetic. British arithmetic helped plantations develop accounting methods on which to calculate wealth by understanding the value of land and labor and how much was realized from crops that grew on the land, and how labor produced goods destined for the market. For

plantation owners, Jefferson's *Farm Book* served as an economic indicator of their wealth.

Arthur Young, an English agricultural journalist who reported innovative farming practices in England and America, and published *Annals of Agriculture* from 1784 to 1809, wrote to his avid reader and pen-pal George Washington to calculate the labor costs of slaves on plantations and compare them to White laborers in England.

Young questioned Washington: "Is the labour (of negroes @ £9. sterl.) to be commanded in any amount?—If taken by the year it may be commanded in any amount: but not if wanted on particular occasions only, as for harvest, for particular dressings of the land &c?"<sup>ccxliiv</sup>

Washington sent this request to Jefferson who responded to Washington's inquiry noting "The labour of a negro Mr. Young reckons cent per cent dearer than the labour of England.—To the hirer of a negro man his hire will cost £9. and his subsistence, clothing and tools £6. making £15. sterl. 1 or at the most it may sometimes be £18.—To the owner of a negro his labour costs as follows. Suppose a negro man of 25 years of age costs £75. sterling: he has an equal chance to live 30. years according to Buffon's tables; so that you lose your principal in 30 years."<sup>ccxlv</sup>

Calculating the annual interest £75 as capital, as well as the annual depreciation of a slave given the thirty year life span, Jefferson argued in addition to the £6 cost for food and clothes, the annual cost of owning a slave at £12.50 a year. Jefferson argued "there must be some addition to this to make the labour equal to that of a white man, as I believe the negro does not perform quite as much work, nor with as much intelligence.—But Mr. Young reckons a laboring man in England £8. and his board £16. making £24."<sup>ccxlvii</sup>

Jefferson's remarks of the inferiority of Black people like his contemporary David Hume were rooted in the Scottish Enlightenment ideas of "rational improvement of agriculture through the pursuit of scientific, quantitative, and empirical husbandry."<sup>ccxlviii</sup> Under such ideas, slave



labor was improved to maximize capital gains of slave-masters through scientific methods of measuring labor output and money earned from slave labor. The value of a slave laborer was the source of debates in abolition and anti-abolition circles both within the English and American parliament.<sup>ccxlviii</sup> Jefferson had devised a calculation of the value of slaves on his plantation noting; “I allow nothing for losses by death, but on the contrary shall presently take credit 4 pr.cent pr.annum, for their increase over and above keeping up their own numbers.”<sup>ccxlix</sup> Henry Wienczek in his text titled *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves* discusses Jefferson, noting that the theorem of annual 4pr.cent increase as monetary gain with each born slaves explained, Jefferson’s stand on slavery. Jefferson in his correspondence with French and English Enlightenment thinkers championed the gradual abolition of slavery as philosophical axiom of his age, while as a slave owner, he was plagued by debt on which he needed to increase the effectiveness of slave labor to pay his debts off.

In a letter to a Manager of his Plantation in July 1787, Jefferson notes “I cannot decide to sell my lands. I have sold too much of them already, and they are the only sure provision for my children, nor would I willingly sell the slaves as long as there remains any prospect of paying my debts with their labor. In this I am governed by solely by views to their happiness which will it worth their while to use extraordinary exertions for some time to enable me to put them ultimately on an easier footing, which I will do the moment they have paid the debts due from the estate, two thirds of which have been contracted by purchasing them.”<sup>cccl</sup> Calculating the value of slave labor was a common feature of the colonial system of slavery that emerged during the Enlightenment age. While debates about emancipating enslaved Africans stressed moral plea, slave owners and statesmen appealed to the economic stability that slavery provided to modern western republics. To defend slavery in the western republics, American colonists in their public

debates and congressional hearings appealed to the Roman republic which served as model on which to understand how greed and avarice brought down an empire while at the same time served as model on which to build a slave republic.

By referencing the classic, American statesmen and slave-owners believed they could learn lessons from the failure of the Roman republic, and adopt models of improvement from the Scottish Enlightenment out of which to improve the labor of their slaves, that in turn, would give them control to measure the progress of the nation. While the Roman republic and Scottish Enlightenment gave American statesmen a philosophical justification to enslave Africans in their effort to continue the legacy of western republics, beginning in 1810 these themes became sources of critique from Black thinkers who challenged the idea of Rome as the model republic on which American notions of republicanism and slavery were rooted. Black thinkers created comparative history that showed Egypt created a model on which arts and sciences were beneficial to the world compared to the arts and sciences that emerged in the Enlightenment.

### **Dr. James McCune and 19th century Black Thinkers Use of the Classics to Critique American Slavery**

Although James McCune Smith has largely been forgotten in contemporary Africana political philosophy, Smith was a prominent doctor and abolitionist in his day. Educated at Glasgow University, Smith was the first Black doctor in New York who ran a Black orphanage center. He was the co-founder of the Radical Abolitionist Party and served as the New York correspondent of the *Frederick Douglass Paper* where he wrote articles from 1851-1859.<sup>ccli</sup> In his capacity as a columnist and race theorist, Smith used his medical knowledge to challenge racist scientific myths of his day. Smith in his essays used statistical methods, quantitative studies, and anthropometric theories to disprove the notion of African inferiority and

degeneration that were prevalent theories in European academies.<sup>ccliii</sup> Smith was also one of the most learned men of his time and versed in the classics.

In his essays, Smith was in the habit of referencing to classical literature as it relates to African slavery. Mainstream scholars have noted that 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Black thinkers engaged the Greek and Roman classics because they “provided a vision of virtue, education, history, cultural unity, and governance that was not fundamentally clouded by racist suppositions about blackness or dependent upon Blacks sacrificing basic civil rights.”<sup>ccliii</sup> Scholars however have failed to attend to the fact that Black thinkers engaged in the classics to counter the classical republicanism on which America built its own ideals of republicanism. Nineteenth century Black thinkers used the classics as a foil on the classical republicanism the founding fathers built using the philosophies of Roman statesmen to justify their fight against the British as a fight against tyranny and slavery. For example, in the introduction of Douglass’s biography, Smith recalls asking William Whipper a prominent Black Abolitionist and co-founder of the American Moral Reform Society “whether he thought Mr. Douglass’s power inherited from the Negroid, or from the Caucasian side of his makeup?”<sup>ccliv</sup>

In his response, Whipper stated it came from his Caucasian side. Smith argued the facts narrated in the first ninety pages proved otherwise.<sup>cclv</sup> Smith further contended; “we are left in the dark as to who was the paternal ancestor of our author; a fact which generally holds good of the Romulus and Remus who are to inaugurate the new birth of our republic. In the absence of testimony from the Caucasian side, we must see what evidence is given on the other side of the house.”<sup>cclvi</sup> Smith’s reference to Romulus and Remus introduces an important notion about parentage and heritage based on Roman history and its role in the founding of the American republic. Romulus and Remus were twins who founded the city of Rome. Legend has it that two

bothers Amulius and Numitor were given land and wealth to share. Amulius out of greed killed his brother Numitor. Fearful of the future wrath of descendants of Numitor, Amulius summoned his niece Rhea Silvia to the order of the vestral virgins. While a vestral virgin, Rhea Silvia was raped by one of the gods (scholars argue between Mars or Hercules) and conceived of twins Romulus and Remus. Uncle Amulius fearful of the god's wrath, banished the twins outside the kingdom placing them in a basket and in a river. Upon coming to shore, the wailing babies attracted a she-wolf that took them to her cave where she fed and nurtured them.

While Smith's assertion was about the inconclusive nature of the father of Romulus and Remus as an important narrative of the founding of Rome was about white men—founding fathers of the nation who raped Black women—the insinuation points to another interesting facet of the story of the twins.<sup>cclvii</sup> What became more iconic from this story was that the twins were breast-fed by a she-wolf. This image of the twins being breastfed was immortalized into a statute that became emblematic of Rome and its imperial legacy of preying on other nations, self-destruction and the colonial inclusion of other races under the Roman Empire.<sup>cclviii</sup> Equally important, the story alludes to the way other sentiment beings humanize feral children who become prophetic figures, who return to restore order and justice to their society and civilization that banished them. As scholars have pointed out, ancient and modern literature is littered with mythologies of feral children reared by animals that redeem humanity upon entry into human society.<sup>cclix</sup> Francesca Prescendi in “Romulus and Remus, the Wolf and the Prostitute” argues:

These myths are built on this schema: a child, exposed by or because of a hostile authority, must live in nature, where he encounters an animal that helps him survive and return to the human society to which, when he becomes an adult, he will bring an improvement (he will found a new city or a new kingdom, etc.). In this myth, the animal (which can sometimes be replaced by a person living in contact with nature as a shepherd or pigman) plays a helping role.<sup>cclx</sup>

Prescendi asserts the she-wolf by breastfeeding Romulus and Remus, plays an important role by treating them like her cubs. In the she-wolf's actions, Prescendi postulates that we can learn that:

Childhood is felt as a slow process of formation and humanization, qualities that will be achieved only when the child is no longer an *infantry*, that is to say when he has learned the faculty of expressing himself through a human voice. The attitude of *fingerere*, to use the verb used in describing the wolf, that is to say, to gradually shape the newborn, is specific to the gestures that mothers and nannies perform daily.<sup>cclxi</sup>

For Smith, it is the idea of mothering as essential to the development of a fatherless child that becomes the other facet that the myth of Romulus and Remus has to Douglass' life story. Black women were treated as beasts of burden whose responsibility was to reproduce inferior babies to be civilized through slavery.<sup>cclxii</sup> Therefore, Smith's allusion to the Romulus and Remus story indicates that despite the rape of Douglass mother and his banishment from his father's household, Black women whom we thought to be beast of burden implanted the seeds of manhood in Douglass. In phylogenetic terms, Smith argued Douglass's description of his grandmother and mother physical stature, intelligence, agricultural skills, and the love for learning were traits recapitulated in Douglass as a child.<sup>cclxiii</sup> Black women bequeathed to Douglass a prophetic legacy that he, like other progenies of enslaved African women in the western world, would use to challenge African inferiority. Smith noted:

...facts show that for his energy, perseverance, eloquence, invective, sagacity, and wide sympathy, he is indebted to his negro blood. The very marvel of his style would seem to be a development of that other marvel—how his mother learned to read. The versatility of talent which he wields, in common with Dumas, Ira Aldridge, and Miss Greenfield, would seem to be the result of the grafting of the Anglo-Saxon on good, original, negro stock.<sup>cclxiv</sup>

Smith in describing Douglass's intellectual prowess as originating from the "good, original, negro stock" of Douglass's maternal heritage, used the language of naturalists and physiologists to dispel the notion that Black women reproduced natural born slaves. Rather, Smith argued

Black women reproduced children who challenged notions of the innate inferiority and natural condition of slavery as a facticity of blackness.<sup>cclxv</sup> As Douglass in his autobiography has described his mother as being “tall, and finely proportioned; of deep black, glossy complexion; had regular features, and, among the other slaves, was remarkably sedate in her manners. There is in Prichard’s *Natural History of Man*, the head of a figure on page 157, the features of which so resemble those of my mother.”<sup>cclxvi</sup> As Smith stated, the head that Douglass was referring to was that of an Egyptian Pharaoh, adding that “the head alluded to is copied from the statue of Ramses the Great, an Egyptian King of the nineteenth century dynasty.”<sup>cclxvii</sup>

While the link to Egypt in Black writing is traced to the emergence of Prince Hall Mason’s activism and organization in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Black thinkers under the heuristic of profane history, created a comparative history of how slaves fared in Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Americas. Black thinkers using Egypt as natural history of African slavery and achievement in the modern world, sought to do three things, 1) Challenge the classical foundation of Greece and Rome that American republic used to justify the enslavement of Africans in the republics that emerged in western civilization, 2) Challenge scientific Darwinist laws of development that sought to supplant the curse of Ham by stating that Black people were a species of apes and outside the realm of being human,<sup>cclxviii</sup> 3) Reinterpret the question of African racial origins of Noah’s children, showing how Shem was the father of the Asiatic races, Ham of the African race, and Japhet of the Europeans. Ham’s sons, Canaan and Cush settled in Egypt and Ethiopia and created two civilizations different from the Japhet’s progenies. The reinterpretation served to show that whites and the ideal of European and American enlightenment were a later stage of human development, and unlike the Black arts, sciences and philosophies that emerged out of Africa, the arts, sciences and philosophies of the

European and American Enlightenment had a negative impact on the world and specifically on indigenous and African people.<sup>ccxix</sup>

For Black thinkers, Egypt developed not only as foil to critique the classical republicanism of Greece and Rome that undergirded the nation, but to also show that Africans had created the first advanced civilization, and Africans in the new-world from Haiti and the diaspora continued the legacy. Egypt and Haiti served as models of modern republics Black thinkers aspired to. While slave-masters believed American slavery rooted in Biblical, Greek and Roman slavery gave them ideas of how to execute the transatlantic slave trade, an occurrence that would civilize Africans by imbuing western virtues in them. Black thinkers in 19<sup>th</sup> century showed that slave masters and their ideals of classical republicanism were decadent. On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1809, Black thinkers consecrated the abolishment of the international slave trade through Orations that were attuned towards critiquing the domestic slave trade by recounting slavery from its' ancient times through its contemporary reiteration. Arguably, William Hamilton, co-founder of the *Freedom's Journal*, and the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, made the first critique against Jefferson's remarks about the difference between Roman slaves and African slaves that became staple and was used by Black thinkers in their arguments against Jefferson.

On January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1809, Hamilton delivered an address to the New York African Society for Mutual Relief and challenged Jefferson's remarks about the different between the experiences of Roman vs African slaves. Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* wrote:

The improvement of the blacks in body and mind in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by everyone and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life. We know that among the Romans, about the Augustan age especially, the condition of their slaves was much more deplorable than that of the blacks on the continent of America. The two sexes were confined in separate

apartments, because to raise a child cost the master more than to buy one. Cato, for a very restricted indulgence to his slaves in this particular, took from them a certain price. But in this country the slaves multiply as fast as the free inhabitants. Their situation and manners place the commerce between the two sexes almost without restraint. The same Cato, on a principle of economy, always sold his sick and superannuated slaves. He gives it as a standing precept to a master visiting his farm, to sell his old oxen, old wagons, old tools and diseased servants, and everything else becomes useless. The American slaves cannot enumerate this among the injuries and insults they receive.<sup>cclxx</sup>

When contemporary Africana philosophers read Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, they focus on Jefferson's racist remarks of Phyllis Wheatley; "misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Wheatley, but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism."<sup>cclxxi</sup> For 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Black thinkers who read Jefferson's text, they understood the necessity of defending the honor of Wheatley in the context in which Jefferson compared Roman slaves' intellectual abilities, lifestyle, and treatment by their masters to how enslaved Africans were treated by their masters. Hamilton refuted Jefferson on three accounts:

My Brethren, it does not require a complete master to solve this problem, nor is it necessary in order like good logicians to meet this argument, that we should know which is the major and the minor proposition, and the middle and extreme terms of syllogism, he must be a willful novice and blind intentionally, who cannot unfold this enigma. Among the Romans it was only necessary for the slave to be manumitted, in order to be eligible to all the offices of state, together with the emoluments belonging thereto; no sooner was he free than there was open before him a wide field of employment for his ambition and learning and abilities with merit, were as sure to meet with their reward in him, as in any other citizen. But what station above the common employment if craftsmen and labourers would we fill did we possess both learning and abilities; is there ought to enkindle in us one spark of emulation: must not he who makes any considerable advances under present circumstance be almost a prodigy.<sup>cclxxii</sup>

Hamilton argued, roman laws allowed for those enslaved to attain both political and intellectual vocations, meaning the romans had difference laws of manumission that those that were used in



America. Yet under the very conditions of slavery, Black people as craftsmen and laborers, produced prodigies in literature and crafts whose labor was beneficial to whites. Hamilton noted Roman laws allowed slaves to co-habit with their marriage partners, while American slave laws prohibited slaves from marrying without the consent of slave masters or relied on sexual coercion to force enslaved Africans to co-habit for procreative reasons, prostitution that would benefit slave masters. Jefferson de-centers the hypersexuality and socio-economic roles White women and men created in an economic system that relied on Black sexual labor. By arguing enslaved Africans and Freedmen were procreating children at higher rates than Roman slaves who co-habited together, Jefferson was calling for more effective ways to deal with African sexuality. The classics were important texts for the founding fathers and statesmen in the antebellum period who looked to ancient history to guide them in their endeavor to establish a new republic in the modern world. Jefferson's remarks were made by a historian, jurist, politician and educator, and therefore authoritative.

By contending, Jefferson was justifying the claims that Africans were better off under American slavery than the Roman slaves. The detriments of such comparisons was not lost on Black thinkers who in their auto-biographies, travel writings, essays and histories of the African race, responded ardently to Jefferson. David Walker's *Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Published in 1829, Walker's text sought to show that Africans in the new-world were the "most wretched, degraded, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began, and that white Christians of America, who hold us in slavery or more properly speaking pretenders to Christianity treat us more barbarous than any heathen nation did any people whom it had subjected, or reduced to the same condition." What has often been under-theorized about Walker's appeal is that Walker was well read, he cited the

Bible, *Freedom Journal*, *Plutarch Lives*, Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention of 1829-1830, Oliver Goldsmith, *The Grecian History*, *From the Earliest State, to the Death of Alexander the Great*, Flavius Josephus *The Jewish Wars*, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Frederick Butler, *A Complete History of the United States of America, Embracing the Whole Period from the Discovery of North America Down to the Year 1830, 3vols*, *National Intelligencer*, Jesse Torrey, *Portraiture of Domestic Slavery*, *African Repository* & *Colonial Journal*, *Rights of All*. Walker began his appeal by stating thus:

They tell us of the Israelites in Egypt, the Helots in Sparta, and of the Roman Slaves, which last were made up from almost every nation under heaven, whose sufferings under those ancient and heathen nations, were, in comparison with ours, under this enlightened and Christian nation, no more than a cypher-or, in other words, those heathen nations of antiquity, had but little more among them than the name of slavery; while wretchedness and endless miseries were reserved, apparently in a phial, to be poured out upon our fathers, ourselves and our children, by Christian Americans.<sup>cclxxiii</sup>

Walker created a bifurcation between slavery, as a name of a condition that existed in the bible and ancient history, and the wretchedness and endless miseries, as a condition of subjugation that was perfected on Africans. This is a similar observation Franz Fanon made when he called Africans on the continent and in the diaspora “The Wretched of the Earth”. With his milieu in mind, Walker developed a comparative history of what was described as slavery from the bible, and from ancient history. Walker demonstrated higher knowledge of the classics of Greece and Rome and understood them as major instruments in the American education system. By drawing on the bible and ancient history of Greece and Rome, Walker was challenging classical republicanism as the foundation of American republicanism and the statesmen it produced who believed they were ushering in a new republic that would take over the Roman republic. Walker put it differently: “the causes, my brethren, which produce our wretchedness and miseries, are so

very numerous and aggravating, that I believe the pen only of a Josephus or a Plutarch, can well enumerate them.”<sup>cclxxiv</sup>

By stating thus, Walker subverted the logic of the founding fathers to use classic, like *Plutarch Lives*, as a source of learning the virtues and vices of statesmen and how to govern a republic on the source of history on which American statesmen’s were venerated after the revolutionary war. By addressing enslaved Africans as citizens and brethren subverted the classic notions of citizens and those deemed to be slaves and meant to “awaken in the breasts of my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in this Republican Land of Liberty.” How could the most barbaric form of slavery manifest in a land based on Christianity? Why were the techniques of degradation from ancient slavery perfected on Africans? Walker stated:

I call upon the very tyrant himself, to show me a page of history, either sacred or profane, on which a verse can be found, which maintains, that the Egyptians heaped the insupportable insult upon the children of Israel, by telling them that they were not of the human family. Can the whites deny this charge? Have they not, after having reduced us to the deplorable conditions of slaves under their feet, held us up as descending originally from the tribes of monkeys or orang-outangs?<sup>cclxxv</sup>

Walker was arguing that nowhere in profane and scared (biblical) history were those labelled slaves deemed to be outside the realm of being human or linked to animals. Unlike the slavery described in a profane and scared history in which people were captives of war or bond servants, American slavery described Africans not only as a cursed people, but as subhuman, a species of monkeys. The description of Africans as monkeys, was in reference to Thomas Jefferson’s argument that Black women were repulsive to Black men such that monkeys found them attractive. As Walker noted, such statements were not to be taken lightly or termed as pseudo-scientific ideals contained in the racist remarks from historical figures such as Hegel. Walker

noted that Jefferson was one of the most learned men in the country who not only influenced American politics, but also education that replicated his classic training in the Greek and Roman works. Walker argued:

The suffering of the Helots among the Spartans, were somewhat severe, it is true, but to say that theirs, were as severe as ours among the Americans, I do strenuously deny, for instance, can any man show me an article on a page of ancient history which specifies, that, Spartans chained, and handcuffed the Helots, and dragged them from their wives and children, children from their parents, mothers from suckling babes, wives from their husbands, driving them from one end of the country to the other? Notice the Spartans were heathens, who lived long before our Divine Master made his appearance in the flesh. Can Christian Americans deny these barbarous cruelties? Have you not, Americans, having subjected us under you, added to these miseries, by insulting us in telling us to our face, because we are helpless, that we are not of the human family?<sup>cclxxvi</sup>

By engaging in the history of the treatment of Helots in Greece, Walker contended while it was true the Helots faced harsh conditions working in mines, and were made a public spectacle by forcibly made to drink wine corrosive to the soul, nowhere in history do we find an account of them being made public spectacle by chaining them, dragging them, destroying their families, violating their men, women and children.<sup>cclxxvii</sup> Similarly, Walker turned to Roman history and observed:

Everybody who has read history, knows, that as soon as a slave among the Romans obtained his freedom, he could rise to the greatest eminence in the State, and there was no law instituted to hinder a slave from buying his freedom. Have not the Americans instituted laws to hinder us from obtaining our freedom? Do any deny this charge? Read the laws of Virginia, North Carolina, &. Further: have not the Americans instituted laws to prohibit a man of colour from obtaining and holding any office whatever, under the government of the United States? Now, Mr. Jefferson tells us, that our condition is not so hard, as the slaves were under the Romans.<sup>cclxxviii</sup>

Walker wanted to show that the ancients that Americans relied on to build their republicanism were altered by the barbarity of the Americans to suit their selfish agenda:

I saw a paragraph, a few years since, in a South Carolina paper, which, speaking of the barbarity of the Turks, it said: ‘the Turks are the most barbarous people in the world- they treat the Greeks more like brutes than human beings.’ And in the same paper was an advertisement, which said: ‘Eight well-built Virginia and Maryland Negro fellows and four wenches will positively be sold this day, to the highest bidder. And what astonished me still more was, to see in this humane paper the cuts of three men, with clubs and buckets on their backs, and an advertisement offering a considerable sum of money for their apprehension and delivery.’<sup>cclxxix</sup>

Walker while showing that Americans were appalled at the way Greece nationalists were been treated by the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s, he also pointed out American newspapers had created a genre of print media on which slaves advertisement for sale or runaway became a staple feature of American print culture, consumerism and slavery. Newspapers became a way to facilitate trade and aided in the development of slavery laws by which merchants and buyers could sue for false advertisement. Also, slave runaways after reading news of their sell or abolitionists challenged the kidnapping and selling of freedmen.<sup>cclxxx</sup> Lorenzo Greene in his analysis of runaway and sale advertisement of enslaved Africans in New England noticed a peculiar trend that slave masters had with naming slaves. Greene states:

Reflecting the classical tradition of the times and probably expressive of the master's sense of humor or ridicule, nineteen slaves carried Latin and Greek names. Some of them bore the high-sounding names of illustrious Roman statesman like Cato, or the cognomen of great soldiers like Pompey and Caesar, one carried the name of the Roman emperor, Titus, and two slaves, Neptune and Sylvia, were named after gods of classical mythology. Primus, Felix and Prince further illustrate the seemingly derisive humor of the masters in naming their slaves...the influence of the Hebrew tradition in New England was apparent in such slave names as Sarah, Jonathan, Zil, Shubal, and Moses.<sup>cclxxxi</sup>

As noted earlier, the bible, Greek, and Roman slavery shaped the manner in which American slave masters conceived of their role in creating a republic based on African slavery. Naming slaves after classical roman statesman, soldier, and mythological gods evoked the ability to distinguish one's understanding of what these figures achieved in their days. The trend by federalists was to use ancient names to drum up support of their positions by appealing to ancient figures embodied what the public understood and what they read in ancient history.<sup>cclxxxii</sup> Stated differently, from congressional debates of establishing America as a modern republic, to owning slaves, Americans relied on the bible, Greek and Roman history to adopt names for themselves and the slaves they owned. It is such reality that Greene highlights, stating that early 18<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>

century thinkers like William Hamilton and David Walker addressed the way figures like Calhoun and Jefferson made comparisons between African slavery and other forms of slavery. Similarly, it is such reality that Africana philosophers face—the urgent need to reevaluate what it means to teach the “classics” and see them as congenial towards illuminating the type of slavery experienced by Africans across the diaspora. For Walker the classics illuminated one thing about Whites:

The whites have always been an unjust, jealous, unmerciful, avaricious and blood-thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority. We view them all over the confederacy of Greece, where they were first known to be anything, in consequence of education we see them there, cutting each other’s throats trying to subject each other to wretchedness and misery to effect which they used all kinds of deceitful, unfair, and unmerciful means. We view them next in Rome, where the spirit of tyranny and deceit raged still higher. We view them in Gaul, Spain, and in Britain. In fine, we view them all over Europe, together with what were scattered about in Asia and Africa, as heathens, and we see them acting more like devils than accountable men.<sup>cclxxxiii</sup>

Walker was widely read; his comparative analysis of slavery from the bible, Greek and Roman history juxtaposed to that of African slavery was an informed reading about the way Americans created a system of slavery that ensured Africans were regarded not only intellectually inferior but subhuman. Such justification for Walker amounted to the fact that Americans constructed a system of slavery that, while modeled after ancient civilizations, was more punitive and destructive to those subjugated. Walker in his own words:

I have been for years troubling the pages of historians, to find out what our fathers have done to the white Christians of America, to merit such condign punishment as they have inflicted on them, and do continue to inflict on us their children. But I must aver, that my researches have therefore been to no effect. I have therefore come to the immoveable conclusion, that the Americans have, and do continue to punish us for nothing else, but for enriching them and their country.<sup>cclxxxiv</sup>

Like the conclusion that Grinning, Haynes and Cuaogno came to after a rigorous analysis of the enslavement of Africans, Walker came to the same conclusion about the way colonialist used

different theories of the inferiority of Africans to cover up carnal avarice and crimes. Unlike the 18<sup>th</sup> century Black thinkers, early 19<sup>th</sup> century Black thinkers moved beyond biblical exegesis to address the use of ancient Greece and Roman history and slavery to challenge the thesis that Africans fared better under American slavery. Black thinkers reframed Rome as a city on the hill which shaped the tyranny of America. Walker shared the perceptions of Black thinkers:

The world knows, that slavery as it existed among the romans, which was the primary cause of their destruction was comparatively speaking, no more than a cypher, when compared with ours under the Americans. Indeed I should not have noticed the Roman slaves, had not the very learned and penetrating Mr. Jefferson said, ‘when a master was murdered, all his slaves to any tyrant, who takes not only my own, but my wife and children’s life live by the inches? Yea, I would meet death with avidity far! far! in preference to such servile submission to the murderous hands of tyrants.’<sup>cclxxxv</sup>

In Walker’s assessment, Rome functioned as the source of American despotism and encouragement of American slavery. As such Black thinkers created a comparative history centered on Egypt as a land that once practiced slavery, but that it also was the first advanced civilization that developed the arts, sciences and government ideals. Importantly, Egypt served as the origin of Black identity linked to the biblical children of Ham. Hosea Easton writing in *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the People of the United States*, published in 1837, noted that Japhet’s progenies in Europe, developed as war-mongering people who created barbaric systems of oppression based on warfare. What they brought to the rest of the world was arts and sciences of war and conquest instead of the caviling arts of the progenies of Ham. Easton further stated:

The European branch of Japhet’s family have but very little claims to the rank of civilized nations. From the fourth up to the sixteenth century, there were in the deepest state of heathenish barbarity. A continual scene of bloodshed and robbery was attendant on the increase of their numbers. Their spread over different countries caused almost an entire extinction of all civil and religious governments, and of the liberal arts and sciences. And even since that period, all Europe and America have been little else than one great universal battle field...it is true, there is a great advance in the arts and sciences

from where they once were; but whether they are anywhere near its standard, as they once existed in Africa, is a matter of strong doubt... anyone who has the least conception of true greatness, on comparing the two races by means of what history we have, must decide in favor of the descendants of Ham.<sup>cclxxxvi</sup>

Easton made an argument that was prevalent among 19<sup>th</sup> century Black intellectuals about Egyptians and the ancestral roots of Ham linked to Africans, a people regarded as the first to disseminate the arts, sciences, laws and systems of government to the world. Douglass in his second auto-biography linked his matriarchal to the likeness of an Egyptian Pharaoh. Douglass seemed to show that the laws that came out of Egypt, which were the first laws of the world, were different from the laws that came out of European slavery and conquest. According to Douglass and other Black thinkers of the time, European slavery laws were detrimental to the world. Douglass made such conclusions in his second autobiography about the likeness of his mother to an Egyptian Pharaoh. That Douglass, in his later years traveled to Egypt and reflected on his visit as a reminder of the historical reality of Africans in the new world, and linked it to that of the ancient Egyptians, has been under-theorized in Africana scholarship. Douglass wrote in his diary:

The thought of this trip to Egypt and Greece will probably keep me awake tonight... but it will be something to contemplate when it is done. It is no small thing to see the land of Joseph and his brethren and from which Moses led the Children of Abraham out of the House of Bondage..I could congratulate myself born as I was a slave marked for a life under the lash in the cornfield that was aboard and free and privileged to see these distant lands so full of historical interest and which those of the much highly favored by fortune the permitted to visiting find myself much ease on this steamer. Everything we see reminds us of the days of Moses. I do not know of what color and features the ancient Egyptians were, but the great mass of the people I have yet seen would in America be classed with mulattoes and negroes. This would not be a scientific description but an American description. I can easily see why the Mohamadite religion commends itself to these people. For it does not make color the criterion of fellowship as some of our so called Christian nations do. All colors are welcomed to the faith of the prophet.<sup>cclxxxvii</sup>



Egypt as a leader of African civilization provided Black thinkers with a liberatory model to understand their passage through American slavery, and Roman slavery as model of integrating Blacks into American society. Black thinkers rejected Rome and its American legacy as paternal, since Africans were the first by way of Egypt to bring civilization to the world. James McCune Smith read Douglass's narrative as auto-biography of a race capable of producing Black statesmen who would continue the legacy of Egypt and Haiti. Smith sought to emphasize that Douglass narrated the paradoxes of American statesmen whose plantations served as a model on which they governed the country and how they engaged with Black people. For Smith, Douglass's narrative is a rejection of the Americanization of Africans as inferior beings. Smith saw how Douglass, influenced by his mother and the African community, was inspired to acquire an acumen of political resistance that challenged the theological, economic, medical and biological arguments of the unfitness of Africans to participate in American politics. Smith includes Douglass' narrative his writings, with the caveat that the use of natural history and natural science in Douglass's narrative would be confined to American slavery. Smith notes:

Like the autobiography of Hugh Miller, it carries us so far back into early childhood, as to throw light upon the question, 'when positive and persistent memory begins in human being.' And like Hugh Miller, he must have been a shy old fashioned child, occasionally oppressed by what he could well not account for, peering and poking about among the layers of right and wrong, of tyrant and thrall, and the wonderfulness of that hopeless tide of things which brought power to one race, and unrequited toil to another, until, finally, he stumbled upon his 'first-found Ammonite,' hidden away down in the depths of his own nature, and which revealed to him the fact that liberty and right, for all men, were anterior to slavery and wrong. When his knowledge of the world was bounded by the visible horizon on Col. Lloyd's plantation, and while everything around him bore a fixed, iron stamp, as if it had always been so, this was, for one so young, a notable discovery.

ccxxxviii

The reference to Hugh Miller is important. Hugh Miller was a 19<sup>th</sup> century self- educated geologist and fossil collector in Scotland, who gained fame as a literary writer and social

commenter of social justice issues of his day.<sup>cclxxxix</sup> A former mason, Miller used his knowledge of masonry and his affinity of collecting rocks and fossils to shape the emergent scientific field of geology. Geology during the enlightenment age sought to verify the biblical narrative of the creation story. Fossils were important in determining the age of the earth and the origins of races. Miller's writings were influential in addressing the questions of evolution and origins of species and race that dominated the Enlightenment age. Michael Taylor in *Hugh Miller: Stonemason, Geologist, Writer*, notes "miller's point, perhaps, was not so much to popularize geology to the wider world, as to change the science itself by making it central to his writings on all subjects and thereby write geology into everything. That was no small mission, yet it was deeply appropriate, for science was raising fundamental questions with huge implications for humanity's view of its own place in the world."<sup>ccxc</sup> Miller published poems, natural histories of cities of Scotland, worked as journalist, editor and wrote multiple autobiographies that centered on his fascination with fossils and geology that pointed to the creation story. Miller's writings on fossils and geology gave credence to the idea of divine intervention and the creation story.<sup>ccxi</sup>

By juxtaposing Douglass's narrative and literary career with that of Hugh Miller, Smith suggests that the plantation gave Douglass the same opportunity to reflect on the natural world, divine intervention and the development of animals, plants, and humans as that of Miller's affinity for fossils, geology, and religion. Importantly, Smith links the influence of two autodidact intellectuals who used their experiences and education to engage with the sciences of their day. While Miller started with fossils, Douglass started with the idea of African slavery as God ordained. Before Douglass became a renowned public intellectual, he honed his intellectual prowess on the slave plantation as a lay preacher and was an avid participant in Black literary societies where he debated religion, abolitionist literature and state laws with freedmen and

slaves.<sup>ccxcii</sup> Douglass was aware of the hermeneutical interpretations used by antebellum theologians on the plantation to justify slavery and sought to deconstruct these taxonomies that sought to relegate Africans to the realm of natural born slaves. Douglas in his autobiography noted:

How did people know that God made black people to be slaves? Did they go up in the sky and learn it? Or, did He come down and tell them so? All was dark here. It was some relief to my hard notions of goodness of God, that, although he made white men to be slaveholders, he did not make them to be bad slaveholders, and that, in due time, he would punish the bad slaveholders; that he would, when they died, send them to the bad place, where they would be 'burnt up.' Nevertheless, I could not reconcile the relation of slavery with my crude notions of goodness. Then, too, I found that there were puzzling exceptions to this theory of slavery on both sides, and in the middle. I knew of blacks who were not slaves; I knew of whites who were not slaveholders; and I knew of persons who were nearly white, who were slaves. Color, therefore, was a very unsatisfactory basis of slavery.<sup>ccxciii</sup>

By recounting his dissatisfaction with the idea of African slavery being God ordained, Douglass was challenging the rational orthodoxy of antebellum theology that sought to reconcile the ideas of reason and revelation from the Scottish Enlightenment with Biblical scriptures. Antebellum theologians argued through reason and revelation from the scriptures, Whites understood that African slavery was God ordained. E. Brooks Holifield in *The Gentlemen Theologians* argued: "American 'rational orthodoxy' was one expression of a broader pattern of conservative European religious thought, which was manifest both in the religious traditions of the English and Scottish enlightenment and in the eighteenth and nineteenth century European debates over revelation and Biblical criticism. As a mode of religious thought, American rational orthodoxy, dominated the churches and seminaries of antebellum America."<sup>ccxciv</sup> Douglass challenged the very modes of "revelation" and "reason" of rational orthodoxy asking questions shown in the

quote above; “how did people know that God made black people to be slaves? Did they go up in the sky and learn it? Or, did He come down and tell them so?”

Equally important, Douglass could not reconcile the idea of God’s goodness in making slaveholders who were not bad but would in due course burn in hell for being bad. The idea of the curse of Ham also did not fit with the fact that not all black people were slaves. For Douglass the “revelation” of the bible as a source of God’s edict of enslaving African’s could not be reconciled with facts that showed otherwise. Of Douglass’s intellectual prowess and scientific mind, Smith observed thus; “to his uncommon memory, then, we must add a keen and accurate insight into men and things; an original breadth of common sense which enabled him to see, and weigh, and compare whatever passed before him, and which kindled a desire to search out and define their relations to other things not so patent, but which never succumbed to the marvelous nor the supernatural.”<sup>ccxcv</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE COMMON LAW TRADITION

The preceding chapter ends with James McCune Smith's tribute to the most significant African American philosopher of the nineteenth century Frederick Douglass. A born slave, Douglass survived in the dreadfulness of the system and lived to write about his experiences in his three autobiographies. Africana philosophers, concentrating on matters of race and racism cite him most extensively, and rarely reflect on what triggered his quest for equality. Often Africana philosophers overlook the fountain of his knowledge—the book he bought for fifty cents at the age of thirteen and became perhaps the most important book of his life, *The Columbian Orator*. Douglass was especially intrigued by the “Dialogue Between a Master and Slave.” While Africana philosophers have noted *The Columbian Orator* inspired Douglass' mastery of rhetoric and eloquence, most fail to understand that it affixed his attention on slavery and cultivated in him great interest in common law philosophies of consent and property rights. In this chapter I explore how the “Dialogue between the Master and Slave” found in *The Columbian Orator* provided Douglass with a philosophical template to explore two questions; 1) On what basis was it a crime to be a fugitive slave if one did not consent to slavery? 2) On what grounds did a slave-master have clemency to own someone as a slave and property when that person did not consent to the legal categories that were used to substantiate ownership of the slave? With the fore-stated questions in mind, I demonstrate how Douglass's understanding of consent and property rights grounded in economic incentives of slavery challenged natural law theorists like Lysander Spooner and Gerrit Smith who argued the Constitution was grounded in natural law principles that ensured equality to all. I equally show how Douglass's critique of the

Constitution, rooted in economic incentives that benefitted slave-masters and the states, differed from the critiques of Garrisonian Abolitionists who argued that the Constitution was a proslavery document and should not be adhered to on moral grounds. I argue that the philosophical difference Douglass had with Spooner, Gerrit, and Garrison, explains Douglass's evolving view of the Constitution, and show how Douglass developed a critique of slavery and the Constitution based on property rights that denied enslaved Africans from owning their labor as a perquisite for property rights and citizenship. Douglass, I assert, sought to show that because African American slaves created wealth and substance for plantation owners, they were the true embodiment of property owners and citizens, given labor was the basis of property and citizen rights in accordance with the law. Invariably, in this chapter, I argue against the narrow tendency in contemporary Africana philosophy that confines Douglass's work to solely that of natural rights, equality and liberty. In the process, I show the under-theorized aspect of Douglass work, and that it is rooted in the economic incentives that robbed slaves of their labor entitlement to own property and citizenship rights. This for Douglass was motivated by his understanding that slaves in the modern world did not consent to slavery.

### **Contemporary Natural Rights Flaws and Douglass**

There is a tendency in contemporary political philosophy to reduce Douglass' work to be a fountainhead of modern natural law theory. This trend in political philosophy situates Douglass as one of the most profound purveyors of contemporary American Liberalism.<sup>ccxcvi</sup> In such a scenario, Douglass's political philosophy, grounded in natural rights principles of equality and liberty, can help illuminate ways we can overcome contemporary race-relation issues much the same way natural law principles helped Douglass in his critiques of racial injustice and inequality during slavery. For example, Nicholas Buccola in *The Political Thought of Frederick*

*Douglass* argues Douglass political philosophy was rooted in the call for an inclusive notion of individual rights such that he believed his goals could only be accomplished if the classical liberal commitment to individual rights was coupled with a robust conception of mutual responsibility. Buccola argues two ideas were at the core of his political thought: “a belief in universal self-ownership and a commitment to a doctrine he called ‘true virtue’.”<sup>ccxcvii</sup> Such ideas as Buccola sees them were about the liberty to own one’s body and having the “extensive obligations to stand up for the rights of others.”<sup>ccxcviii</sup> That Douglass interrogated slavery based on classical liberalism is a misnomer. It is unclear who Buccola defines as a classic liberalist who influenced Douglass’s liberalism. Yet if Douglass’s “embrace of these foundational ideas was rooted in the experience of slavery and his quest to abolish it,” Buccola doesn’t provide evidence to show specific experiences in slavery that led Douglass down the classical liberal path.<sup>ccxcix</sup> Otherwise stated, if classical liberalism was defined by the ideas of British thinkers Adam Smith and John Locke, then classical liberalists were wrestling with classical theories of slavery under the British system of slavery, and individual liberties, property rights, and economies were shaped by owning both Africans and their labor. No classical liberalist advocated abolishing slavery.<sup>ccc</sup> For instance, Adam Smith in his classic economic treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nation* in which he evaluates slave labor with regard to the economy of British colonies exclaimed; “slaves, however, are seldom inventive; and all the most important improvements, either in machinery, or in that arrangement and distribution of work which facilitate and abridge labour have been the discoveries of Freemen.”<sup>ccci</sup> The horrid conditions of slavery that physically wore down the bodies of enslaved people were not a question of Smith’s concern, the labor as used was not enough to invent things like machines which would improve product because “should a slave propose any

improvement of this kind, his master would be apt to consider the proposal as the suggestion of laziness, and of a desire to save his own labour at the master's expense, the poor slave, instead of reward, would probably meet with much abuse, perhaps with some punishment."<sup>cccii</sup>

Smith makes clear the paradox of classical liberalism. Slave masters giving up slavery would mean giving up farm labor, a move that would force them to do the work themselves. Douglass alludes to supposition in this autobiography. Given the Scottish Enlightenment theory of economics and liberty that influenced British colonies in the Caribbean and the U.S, the quest to build an agricultural commerce civilization based on slavery meant slave owners valued slave labor as an important tool towards hindering economic degeneration.<sup>ccciii</sup> To this effect Douglass noted:

It was quite natural for Master Thomas to pressure I was feigning sickness to escape work, for he probably thought that were he in the place of a slave with no wages for his work, no praise for well doing, no motive for toil but the lash, he would try every possible scheme to escape labor. I say, I have no doubt of this; the reason is, that there are not, under the whole heavens, a set of men who cultivate such an intense dread of labor as do the slaveholders. The charge of laziness against the slaves is ever on their lips, and is the standing apology for every species of cruelty and brutality. These men literally 'bind heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulder's; but they, themselves, will not move them with one of their fingers.'<sup>ccciv</sup>

Douglass shows that the preoccupation to create White civilization depended on enslaved Africans. Work meant slave owners did not tolerate slaves not working whether they were sick or not. Douglass concludes by quoting the verse in Matthew 23:3-4: "So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, burdensome loads and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." The verse alludes to Jesus telling people to be weary of the Pharisees, the "heavy burdens" comes from the tradition of laying a burden on an animal. In other words, the Pharisees' laid a heavy burden on people while they did



nothing to assist them. Similarly, slave-owners developed a moral philosophy of labor and degradation of the Black body and did nothing about it.<sup>cccv</sup> Instead, flogging served as a way to force slaves to work to their expectation. Douglass tells how his master controlled his slaves:

Mr. Hopkins could always find some excuse for whipping a slave. A mere look, word, or motion—a mistake, or accident—are all, things for which a slave could be whipped. Does a slave look unhappy? It is said that he has the devil in him, and it must be whipped out. Does he speak loudly when spoken to by his master? Then he is getting high-minded, and should be taken down a peg. Does he forget to pull off his hat in the presence of a white person? Then he lacks respect. And should be whipped for it. Does he ever dare find excuses when told he did something wrong? Then he is guilty of impudence - one of the greatest crimes of which a slave can be guilty. Does he ever dare to suggest a different way of doing things from that pointed out by his master? Then he is indeed getting above himself: and nothing less than a flogging will do for him. Does he, while ploughing, break a plow - or, while hoeing, break a hoe? It is owing to carelessness, and for it a slave must always be whipped.<sup>cccvi</sup>

Laziness and economic degeneration required plantation owners to appear strict if they were to produce crops that competed on the national and international market. By controlling and making slaves produce goods increased the wealth and prestige of plantation owners, and helped to manage their debits, credits and leave inheritances for their progenies.<sup>cccvii</sup>

Enslaved Africans turned to stealing as a form of compensation by slave-masters who robbed them of their labor, property rights and overworked them to death.<sup>cccviii</sup> Douglass noted, he and other slaves stole and begged because slave masters deprived them of enough food portions and stopped them from earning money to adequately sustain a living. Douglass stated:

We were compelled either to beg, or to steal, and we did both. I frankly confess, that while I hated everything like stealing, as such, I nevertheless did not hesitate to take food, when I was hungry, wherever I could find it. Nor was this practice the mere result of an unreasoning instinct; it was, in my case, the result of a clear apprehension of the claims of morality. I weighed and considered the matter closely, before I ventured to satisfy my hunger by such means. Considering that my labor and person were the property of Master Thomas, and that I was by him deprived of the necessaries of life-necessaries obtained by my own labor- it was easy to deduce the right to supply myself with what was my own. It was simply appropriating what was my own to the use of my master, since the health and strength derived from such food were exerted to his service.<sup>cccix</sup>

Notice that Douglass presents a circumstance that stealing was not wrong in a colonial system of slavery that robbed enslaved Africans of their own labor and starved them as a form of inducing productivity. According to Douglass, stealing was a way of humanizing oneself. If work, food, hunger and beatings went hand in hand to ensure that slaves labor produced wealth for whites, slaves had to reclaim their bodies and compensation for their labor outside the boundaries of the morality and philosophies of labor that undergirded how plantation owners governed plantations. Stealing in this case was a “clear apprehension of the claims of morality” in that theft conserved the humanity of slaves. It was not the classical liberalism of slave masters notions of liberty and self-ownership that led Douglass to fight to abolish slavery, it was the notions of property, labor and work that preserved the liberties of slave masters that Douglass encountered on the plantation. Douglass further noted:

I hold that the slave is fully justified in helping himself to the gold and silver, and best apparel of his master, or that of any slaveholder, and that such taking is not stealing in any just sense of the word. The morality of free society can have no application to slave society. Slaveholders have made it almost impossible for the slave to commit any crime, known either to the laws of God or to the laws of man. If he steals, he takes his own; if he kills his master, he imitates only the heroes of the revolution.<sup>cccx</sup>

In this aspect, Douglass creates an important bifurcation, which is that the morality of a slave society cannot be the same morality of a free society. The challenge in political philosophy is to understand the moral, ethical, legal and political theories that enslaved Africans, and were used to liberate themselves. That enslaved Africans rejected the theories that were used to enslave them seems absurd to contemporary mainstream scholars who justify slavery by analyzing the benefits of the African being a slave in America. It is impossible for contemporary mainstream thinkers to acknowledge enslaved Africans understood the motives of their enslavers.

Enslaved Africans worked to extend their intellectual traditions from Africa and create distinct Black intellectual traditions in the New World central to their liberation.<sup>cccxi</sup> That these very ideas would reemerge in the works of anti-colonial thinkers who destroyed European and American colonialism in the Caribbean and Africa and inspired urban riots and notions of Black community control in the U.S., have been pushed aside in mainstream scholarship to preserve the achievements of Europeans as those worthy the study in philosophy.<sup>cccxii</sup> Peter Meyers in *Frederick Douglass: Race and the Birth of American Liberalism* contends “the recently intensified critical spirits among Douglass scholars reflects the spirit of the day in post-civil rights era America, in which both the successes and the perceived failings of the mainstream civil rights tradition lend safety and urgency to criticism of its leading figures.”<sup>cccxiii</sup> For Meyers, post-civil rights scholarship on Douglass is often tainted with contemporary sentiments that are read anachronistically into Douglass’ works. For example, Meyers asserts Critical Race Theorists and Black Nationalists who argue that given the permanence of racism, America cannot live up to its creeds of justice and equality found in legal documents and the Declaration of Independence tend to minimize what Douglass stood and fought for, mischaracterize his legacy.<sup>cccxiv</sup> Such pessimism, Meyers argues, distorts the optimism Douglass had in ending slavery and white supremacy grounded in natural law as a bulwark against injustice in American politics.<sup>cccxv</sup> For Meyers, Douglass’s works offer us a starting point from which understand how natural rights principles that animated Douglass’s political philosophy could be used to overcome systems of oppression. Meyers writes that defeating oppression is possible if we understand Douglass’s political philosophy was grounded in the belief that:

- 1) The natural rights doctrine, as epitomized in the Declaration of Independence, is true as a set of moral prescriptions and sanctioned as a body of moral laws
- 2) Institutional systems of slavery and racial supremacy are unjust and ultimately weak
- 3) The national mission and the destiny of the United States are to become an exemplar of harmonious, integrated equality among the racial and ethnic varieties of humankind <sup>cccxvi</sup>

As important as Meyer's assignment of Douglass work is, there are a few discrepancies worth noting. First, Meyer's first two points reduce natural law and slavery to a moral problem. The reduction negates 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> moral philosophy instrumental towards the justifications of enslaving Africans. Since slaves were deemed property they were incapable of being human and therefore had no moral worth. Eighteen and Nineteen century moral philosophy was based on the experience of slave-master and the public's complicity in slavery, and not on the experience of slaves. Historian Margaret Abruzzo in *Polemical Pain: Slavery, Cruelty and the Rise of Humanitarianism* notes "slavery's critics expected slave's bodies to evoke physical responses in the bodies of white observers and these responses or lack thereof revealed the moral and spiritual character of whites. Exposure to the pain of others ought to trigger a sympathetic reaction in the body, a moral spectators nerves vibrated in sympathetic harmony with the victims."<sup>cccxvii</sup> Per Abruzzo's observation, the expansion of moral principles was not about expanding the categories to include Black people, but was based on the sentiments of different classes of whites invested in the well-being and economic stability of the country.<sup>cccxviii</sup> As such, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophy was not an enforcer of principles of equality.<sup>cccxix</sup> Rather, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophy was rooted in categories of inequality and the debates about the appropriate response not to victims but perpetrators of inequality.<sup>cccxx</sup>

Secondly, Meyer's assessment of Douglass's political philosophy starts from the vantage point of idealism, and not from the materialism that confronted Douglass. If slavery was justified through natural law as a moral philosophy to own slaves as property, enslaved Africans challenged slavery, beginning with the reality that they were property.<sup>ccccxi</sup> Douglass in *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, states that reading *The Columbian Orator* awoke in him the understanding that his enslavement was based on him being property. Douglass explains "the more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery."<sup>ccccxii</sup> Douglass started by investigating slavery from the economic assumptions of Africans as a labor race, seen as an economic source to provide for a class system that codified property rights. The last point Meyers makes about Douglass's view of a harmonious land does not consider Douglass's 1895 essay "Why is the Negro Lynched?" Douglass in the essay was concerned with the prevalence of racial violence, property rights of freedmen and the failure of the government to protect the new civil rights of freedmen. Douglass was perturbed by the new ideas espoused by southern lawmakers and politicians who argued that Blacks as freedmen were rapist and thieves. Douglass saw the labelling Black male as a hyper sexual people, raping white women was a deliberate move to criminalize and justify violence against Black people. Douglass explained:

Now, my friends, I ask what is the manifest meaning of this charge at this time? What is the meaning of the singular omission of this charge during the two periods preceding the present? Why was not this charge made at that time as now? The Negro was the same man then as today. Why, I ask again, was not this dreadful charge brought forwards against the Negro in war times and in reconstruction times? Had it existed either in war times or during reconstruction, does any man doubt that it would have been added to the charges and proclaimed upon the housetops and at the street corners as this charge is at present? I will answer the question: or you yourselves have already given the true answer. For the plain and only rational explanation is that there was at the times specified no

foundation for such a charge, or that the charge itself was either not thought of, or if thought of it was not deemed necessary to excuse the lawless violence with which the Negro was then pursued and killed. The old charges already enumerated were deemed all sufficient.<sup>cccxxiii</sup>

Southern lawmakers and politicians argued that Emancipation had brought more detriment to American society now that Black people were not under the paternalism of whites. Douglass saw such accusations of the morally decrepit nature of freedmen, as driven by the need for

Southerners to suppress freedmen efforts to economically uplift themselves. Douglass stated:

The landowners of the South want the labor of the Negro on the hardest terms possible. They once had it for nothing. They now want it for next to nothing. To accomplish this, they have contrived three ways. The first is, to rent their land to the Negro at an exorbitant price per annum and compel him to mortgage his crop in advance to pay his rent. The laws under which this is done are entirely in the interest of the landlord. He has a first claim upon everything produced on the land. The Negro can have nothing, can keep nothing, and can sell nothing, without consent of the landlord.<sup>cccxxiv</sup>

As Douglass explains, the problem of lynching was marked by the economic incentive to suppress Black people from owning their labor and property. During slavery, enslaved Africans could only achieve manumission through a will (consent) or by laboring for their freedom and having their master vouch for their moral character.<sup>cccxxv</sup> Similarly in slavery a freedmen could only own property and a business if a morally upstanding white person in that community vouched for the character of the freedman.<sup>cccxxvi</sup> Under the 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> amendment, the concepts of property right, labor and consent were supposed to supersede the idea freedmen no longer needed a master or morally understanding white member of the community to vouch for their moral character for them to participate in civil society.<sup>cccxxvii</sup> The themes of economic interest in Black bodies that Douglass extolled as they relate to Post-Reconstruction were not new ideas. In 1847 in his “Farewell Speech to the British People,” Douglass noted that slave-masters were required by the State to prove that once a slave was free they wouldn’t be a burden on the state as

paupers. Douglass in the speech explained that the idea of Black paupers as a liability on the state was a ploy to justify claims against freeing slaves. Douglass stated:

But the idea of a black pauper in the United States is most absurd. But, after all, what does the objection amount to? What if really they have to give a bond to the State that the slaves whom the emancipate should not become chargeable to the state? Why, sir, one would think this would be a very little matter of consideration to a just and Christian man; considering that all the wealth that this conscientious slave-holder possesses, he has wrung from the unrequited toil of the slave. It is not much, when it is recollected that he kept the poor negro in ignorance and worked him twenty-eight or thirty years of his life, and that he has had the fruit of his labour during the best part of his days.<sup>ccccxxviii</sup>

Douglass, from slavery to post-reconstruction knew that the fundamental issue of slavery was about economics and owning Black people as property. The rise of lynching under the guise of purging immoral acts perpetuated by Black men against white women belied the economic interest of keeping Black people enslaved. Slavery seen from the vantage point of the enslaved was not a moral problem of expanding principles of liberty and equality, but was about who owned black labor that created property rights. This understanding of ownership of Black labor and consent that Douglass expressed in his 54-year career as an abolitionist, I argue, was shaped by his reading discourse about petitions to abolish slavery and his reading of *The Columbian Orator*.

### **Petitions, Freedom Suits and Black Legal Activism in the Antebellum Period**

One of the undertheorized aspects of slavery in Africana philosophy is the manner in which slaves took vested interest of the laws of the states and the nation as they evolved from the revolutionary era to reconstruction. Enslaved Africans' use of freedom suits and petitions in the

revolutionary era to gain freedom while simultaneously using civil suits during the pre-civil war and post-reconstruction era, and their formation of Negro Conventions and National Equality Leagues to petition the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, has received little attention in Africana philosophy, creating a large gap in philosophy research. Also, the way enslaved Africans learned legalese even when it was against the law to learn to read and write, and passed that knowledge down to others, an act that led to campaigns to petition abolishing slavery, ending segregation of public education, housing, and development of the suffrage movement, has created a stasis in which natural law is deemed as the natural appeal to ending slavery that dominated discourse in political theory. Legal historians have cautioned against this tendency, stating; “because of the persistent moral shadow cast over the study of slavery, all too often the motives and rationales of the enslaved are assumed to conform to modern norms. The attempt to ‘return’ agency to slaves has paradoxically led some scholars to assume, in the absence of evidence, that slaves were modern, liberal individuals, with motives and rationales identical to our own.”<sup>cccxxix</sup>

This modern rationale of appealing to liberal ideas of moral suasion as the harbinger of change in race-relations, often overshadows the fact that enslaved Africans were astute with legal principles, statutes and legal avenues on which to make their appeals against injustices of slavery. Legal historians have identified freedom suits, petitions and civil suits in which enslaved people appealed as defendants in the court system. The identification of “the emphasis on criminal rather than private law has importance consequences for how we view African Americans relationship to law and the courts, revealing a long history of linking people of color to criminality and regulation. Such depictions partially reflect later, more modern concerns with African American’s treatment by the criminal justice system writ large. They also proceed from a reading of slave codes themselves- that is, draconian legislation. As a result, we sometimes



have a reductive understanding of African Americans and the law.”<sup>ccccxx</sup> Enslaved Africans’ political involvement in the debates about the legality of slavery and the use of the law to petition and sue for their freedom has been overlooked in Africana philosophy and political theory circles. For example, before writing his first auto-biography in 1845, Douglass gave two speeches that spoke to the way he came to understand the ideas of abolishment and freedom. In a speech titled “I Have Come To Tell You Something About Slavery,” given in Lynn Massachusetts in 1884, Douglass said:

I remember getting possession of a speech by John Quincy Adams, made in Congress about slavery and freedom, and reading it to my fellow slaves. Oh what joy and gladness it produced to know that so great, so good a man was pleading for us, and further, to know that there was a large and growing class of people in the north called abolitionists, who were moving for our freedom.<sup>ccccxxi</sup>

Douglass’s own admission in his autobiographies hearing about abolitionists for the first time from white sailors, and then reading about Garrison’s work as a runaway slave in the Baltimore area, has caused my scholars to write about Douglass’s emergency into the abolitionist movement and his views about the constitution and slavery as necessitated by being a protégé of Garrison.<sup>ccccxxii</sup> Overlooked in Africana philosophy is Douglass’s admission of pursuing congressional debates about slavery, and the role petitioners and figures like John Quincy Adams and pro-slavery congressional members like John Calhoun had on his views debating slavery on the plantation and in intellectual societies as a slave.<sup>ccccxxiii</sup> Douglass’s development of a legal consciousness about his condition as property, reading newspapers that contained news about petitions sent by abolitionist, has also been overlooked, especially Douglass’s engagement with slavery and the law as follower of Garrison. The inability to study the fore-stated interests in Douglass’s fight for Emancipation is a disservice towards understanding how enslaved Africans developed the legal culture that allowed them to petition against slavery and use freedom suits

from the Revolutionary era through the civil war to gain their freedom.<sup>cccxxxiv</sup> Douglass was clear about the ideas of the legality of slavery and the legal culture that developed on plantations. In a speech titled “The Union, Slavery, and Abolitionist Petitions,” delivered in Hingham Massachusetts in 1841 he stated:

My first knowledge of the abolition movements was through the petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. These petitions delight the hearts of the slaves; they rejoice to know that something is going on in their favor. Waiters hear their masters talk at tables, cursing the abolitionists, John Quincy Adams, e.t.c; the masters imagine that their poor slaves are so ignorant that they always pretend to be very stupid, they commit all sorts of foolery and act like baboons and wild beasts in the presence of their master; but every word is noted in the memory, and is told to their fellow-slaves; and when they get together, they talk over what they have heard, they talk about liberty, and about these petitions.<sup>cccxxxv</sup>

What is remarkable here is Douglass documents the legal awareness that gripped slaves during his time, and how those who read newspapers, listened to the debates about the nature of slavery and legal actions were able to disseminate what they heard to their fellow slaves. As historians of Black Abolitionists noted, enslaved Africans were astute adherents of the legal system who, at the beginning of the revolutionary era were the first to petition an end to slavery and first to successful use freedom suits to gain freedom.<sup>cccxxxvi</sup> After Elizabeth Bett of Massachusetts became the first slave to sue and win freedom, legal suits became an important, and the most effective way to challenge slavery. In Massachusetts, a state that granted slaves the right to institute civil suits to set themselves free, courts were filled with freedom suits.<sup>cccxxxvii</sup> Legal suits varied in that “cases that dated from the pre-Revolutionary era were decided in favor of the slaves except when the lawsuit hinged on ideological claims such as slavery was immoral rather than wrongful enslavement.”

In the revolutionary era eleven cases show that enslaved Africans sued based on the “claim that he or she was illegally enslaved. Of those six, claimed to have made contracts of

emancipation with dishonest owners, two claimed free parentage, and three argued that slavery was illegal in Massachusetts.<sup>»cccxxxviii</sup> Similarly, from 1630-1854, Virginia had 225 freedom suits. Enslaved Africans in Virginia sued for emancipation in freedom suits based on the following: 1) they were descendant(s) of a free female ancestor, typically a Native American, 2) failure of slave-owner(s) to abide by the 1778 slave nonimportation act, or 3) claimed to have been freed by slave owner(s) by deed of emancipation or last will and testament. Virginia was interesting in that it passed two statues on which enslaved people could file for their freedom—the Importation Act of 1778, and the Freedom Suit Act of 1795. In 1778, Virginia legislature passed a statue preventing the importation of slaves. The Importing Act prohibited the importation of all non- slaves by either Virginians and it required slaveholders moving into the state to swear that any slaves accompany them were not intended for sale. The penalty was forfeit of the slave by emancipation.<sup>cccxxxix</sup> The importation act also provided a window of opportunity for some slaves to petition Virginia courts for their freedom by claiming that their masters had transported them illegally and/or failed to swear the oath.<sup>cccxl</sup>

What is remarkable about these freedom suits is the manner in which enslaved Africans flaunted legal knowledge that helped them construct their suits to earn freedom. For example, in 1809, a slave by the name “Negro Charles” charged that he had be “imported into the county of Alexandria from the State of Maryland, and confined in prison for the space of about twenty one days, when he was sold to a person from one of the Southern States, and carried to the State of South Carolina.”<sup>cccxli</sup> After fleeing from South Carolina, Charles was arrested and imprisoned and was sold out of his prison fees by a Henry Nicholson of Alexandria who purchased him for twenty-five dollars. The first owner hearing about this accosted Nicholson claiming Charles for his property to which Nicholson paid three hundred dollars. The case is explained as follows; It

was on such grounds “alone [the] petitioner humbly conceives he has a just claim to sue for his freedom as he has been imported from the state of Maryland into the said County of Alexandria and kept therein more than twelve month at different times, and no entry has been made of him, as directed by the Act of the Virginia Legislature, to prevent the Importation of Slaves, which is now in force in the said district.”<sup>cccxl</sup>

On these grounds Charles proved that the law of importation was violated as he was imported to be sold in a county of Virginia which forbade the importing of slaves for sale. If these grounds were not sufficient, Charles argued “there is another still more certain ground which is that on or about the 26<sup>th</sup> day of August 1801, Henry Nicholson of his own free will and accord emancipated your petitioner, and executed a deed of emancipation in presence of Henry Moore and Matthew Sexsmith, as appears by affidavits hereto annexed, and by an indenture between the said Charles was free man having been this day liberated by the said Henry Nicholson.”<sup>cccxli</sup> Charles not only argued based on the law but also attached an affidavit of his manumission to the petition suing for his freedom. Cases such as the fore-stated are rarely featured in Africana philosophy, and therefore, scholars fail to show that enslaved Africans were often abreast in matters of law, wills, manumission criteria, importance of testimonial accounts, which they used to construct genealogies and chronologies of the freedom to challenge enslavement.

Challenging enslavement based on importation was one of the significant features on which slave-narratives constructed notions of freedom that addressed claims of enslavement. Over 100 petition of importation were filed in Virginia, while over 225 were filed based on the Freedom Suit Act of 1795. The difference between the importation act and the freedom act suits is that “freedom suits existed not as a means for blacks to alter their legal status from slave to

free, but as a recourse for those who were in fact free, and who thus possessed a remedy for illegal enslavement. De jure, those enslaved illegally were not slaves at all, but free persons wrongly deprived of their legal rights.<sup>”cccxliv</sup> Beyond the legal realm, freedom suits were important in shaping the reception of slave narratives as most enslaved Africans referenced them in their narratives and engaged in debate about the legality of enslaving Africans. Edlie Wong’s *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* contains slave narratives structured with references to freedoms suits to create a broader claim about importing slaves and enslavement. Wong notes “the contexts, forms, and stories of these freedom suits structured the legal culture of travel in the nineteenth century. In an Atlantic world divided into free and slave territories, travel across the legal and geopolitical boundaries enabled abolitionists opportunities and alliances, even while disclosing the powerful constraints on freedom that abolitionism had difficult recognizing. Freedom suits reveal the contradictions at the heart of an emerging American national culture that had begun to constitute itself around individualistic notions of consent and free will.”<sup>cccxlv</sup>

The legal culture of freedom suits challenged the very treatment of slaves as property by providing genealogical lineages on which enslaved Africans traced their freedom based on parentage. Together, enslaved Africans understood the indeterminate nature of slave laws in different states that allowed them to sue for their freedom. More impressively, enslaved Africans used petitions to shape the discourse of property rights that would later create a culture of civil suits in the pre-civil war and post-reconstruction area. Historian Kimberley Welch in *Black Litigants in the Antebellum South* analyzed court cases from the Natchez district of Mississippi and Louisiana between 1800 and 1860 and found more than one thousand cases involving black litigants using the law to protect their interest, lawsuits that highlight African-descended people

in a broad range of civil actions.<sup>cccxlvi</sup> Most of the cases Welch analyzed involved freedmen who were able to own property and sued whites who attempted to grab or rob their property through unscrupulous means. Welch writes; “free blacks went to court with full knowledge of their rights to property and they expected the courts to deal with them fairly and protect those rights, just as they would white southerners. They sued whites and other people of color in disputes over real and personal property. They also appealed to the courts to protect the dignity of their labor and sued to protect labor contracts or recover back wages. Like many antebellum Americans, free people of color viewed their labor as a form of property.”<sup>cccxlvii</sup>

While Welch’s thoroughly researched text focuses on the individual efforts of free people of color to own their labor, it is important to note that enslaved people beginning in the revolutionary era, developed a distinct philosophy on which they challenged property rights. The four petitions sent to the Massachusetts Council and the House of Representatives between June 1773 and January 1777 are distinct in that they are the first collective petitions for Black freedom and compensation. The most philosophical petition was the 1774 petition sent to Thomas Gage and the Massachusetts Council and the House of Representatives. The petitioners wrote:

The petition of a great number of blacks of this province who by divine permission are held in slavery within the bowels of a free and Christian country. That your petitioners apprehend, they have in common with other men, a natural right to be free, and without molestation, to enjoy such property, as they may acquire by their industry, or by means not detrimental to their fellow men; and that no person can have any claim to their services unless by the laws of the land they have forfeited them, or by voluntary compact become servants; neither of which is our case.<sup>cccxlviii</sup>

The petition signed by Prince Hall, Lancaster Hill, Peter Bess, Brister Slenser, Jack Pierpont, Nero Funelo, Newport Summer, and Job Look, show an astute understanding of the claims of property right as the basis of freedom. The petitioners challenged the construction of civil society and civil rights predicated on the protection of property. While civil law stops people from

violating an individual's right to property, nothing prohibited others from claiming others as property. In other words, denied their right to property, enslaved Africans, without their consent were deemed property, ready available for someone else. If the definition of property rights was defined through one's ability to accumulate property through one's labor, then enslaved Africans had their rights violated since their labor was rendered someone else's property. The petitioners go on to state:

We do not claim rigid justice: but as we are deserving like other men, of some compensation for all our toils and sufferings; we would therefore in addition to our prayer, that all of us, excepting such as are now infirm through age, or otherwise unable to support themselves, may be liberated and made free men of this community, and be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of its free and natural born subjects.<sup>cccxlx</sup>

What's impressive is the legal understanding of what constituted slavery, compensation and what Africans were entitled to for being wronged by being treated as property. As the above excerpt from the petition shows, Africans understood that it would take more than theological appeals to end slavery. The shifting terrain of America's government and ability to participate in American society was predicated on property rights.<sup>cccl</sup> Slavery would have to be confronted on the theologically and legal grounds. Civil law began the basis on which enslaved Africans would address their construction as property in the public. As Welch notes "by leveraging the language of property in their lawsuits, and exploiting its attendant presumptions about independence and reliability, black litigants also made claims to civic inclusion. The language of property was simultaneously necessary to describe the cases at hand, and it was bound inextricably to a broader national narrative of what it meant to be a member of the polity, to be autonomous, and to be eligible to voice one's opinion or assert one's claim."<sup>cccli</sup>

Perhaps what is important to bear in mind is that while contemporary philosophers have attempted to revise ethics from the vantage point of those oppressed by the atrocities of the

World War and Colonialism, enslaved Africans in the Enlightenment period were among the first to challenge oppression and formulate ethics that addressed atrocities committed by their masters. The afore-stated claim has been under-theorized in philosophical circles.<sup>ccclii</sup> It is also important to note that slavery was the first colonial system requiring European nations and the U.S. to develop a new ethical system for the humane treatment of slaves to further exploit them. Conversely, enslaved Africans in developing their own ethical theories tied to a political economy on which they justified their freedom, were among the first to create ethics based on the decent and equal treatment of humans. Lynda Morgan in *Known For My Work: African American Ethics from Slavery to Freedom* asserts, “the fulcrum of freed people’s ethical views pivoted on the interdependence of political economy and morality, which to them meant a universal human responsibility to work for the common good. This emphasis on community placed them far from the individualistic ethics that were ascendant in nineteenth-century America. Slaves employed the foundational nexus they identified between work and ethics as the springboard for multifaceted deliberations about human nature, oppression, liberation, fairness, justice, and opportunity.”<sup>cccliii</sup>

Morgan’s observations deserve serious scholarly acknowledgement, more so when we consider that between 1819 and the outbreak of the Civil War, two dozen agricultural journals were started in which plantation owners often held “Prize and Commissioned Essays” which awarded the essayist with the best philosophies of managing slaves. For example, the 1851 winning essay appeared in the Southern Central Agricultural Society of Georgia journal, stating thus:

No question of domestic economy, at the present eventful crisis in the history of the slaveholding states, demands more the attention of the slaveholder and philanthropist than the treatment and management of slaves; and none has stronger claims on the



fostering care of an association formed for the purpose of advancing the interest of Southern Agriculture...the rules and regulations for their government should be founded in mercy as well as justice; and while it is our imperative duty so to govern them as to make them, as property, conducive to our pecuniary interest, it is equally our duty to regard them as frail, erring humanity, subject to like temptations and passions as ourselves. We should therefore exercise our power and authority over them in such a manner as to inspire them respect and authority, and with a fear of disregarding it...should they willfully and flagrantly violate orders they should be reprimanded, and if nothing else will effect a reformation and insure obedience, as a last resort, the rod should be applied not in severity, or in such manner as to induce the belief on their part that you take pleasure in correcting them, but that you do it from a sense of duty for their good as well as your interest.<sup>cccliv</sup>

What is noteworthy about the above passage is what 21<sup>st</sup> philosophers would call consequential ethics. Consequentialism is the class of normative ethical theories holding that the consequences of one's conduct are the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that conduct. In the case of the passage, the actions of an individual are weighed best on the return of self-interest in the act as opposed to utilitarianism an important ethical theory during the Enlightenment age which called for individuals to forego self-interest and act in the interest of others. The subjection of enslaved people required a different ethical system which encouraged obedience and inspired reverence in slave-masters to illicit productive of labor. The interest in labor was based on how much "mercy and justice" would serve as axioms for the enslaved to understand why they were punished. As Douglass noted based on his experience as a slave and his criticism of treatment of enslaved Africans on plantations; "public opinion seldom differs very widely from public practice.

To be a restraint upon cruelty and vice, public opinion must emanate from a humane and virtuous community. To no such humane and virtuous community is Col. Llyod's plantation exposed. [A] plantation is a little nation of its own, having its own language, its own rules, regulations and customs. The laws and institutions of the state, apparently touch it nowhere. The

troubles arising here, are not settled by the civil power of the state.” While slave masters commissioned prize essays on how to illicit production from enslaved Africans through philosophies of mercy and justice that inspired reverence in the power and authority of slave masters, between 1836-1841, Black leaders formed the American Moral Reform Society. The aims and aspirations of the new organization were comprehensive. “The members planned to emphasize education, temperance, economy, and universal liberty...to accomplish their aims the Moral Reformers planned to appoint lecturers, establish a press, petition Congress, and encourage free labor.”<sup>ccclv</sup> Among the most notable members of The American Moral Reform Society were Reverend Lewis Woodson and his protegee Martin Delaney who were the principal theoreticians of Black Nationalism.<sup>ccclvi</sup>

Between 1841 and 1867, Black freedmen began to hosted annual National Negro Conventions which focused on issues such as “temperance, education, economy, agricultural and mechanical trades, also, the development of a manual labor school, debates about moral suasion or violence as a means to end slavery, the pro-slavery and anti-slavery interpretations of the constitutions, the development of national Black press, and use of petitions which were agendas placed in forming State conventions. Notable figures in the debates included James McSmith, Alexander Crummell, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnett and Martin Delaney, all instrumental figures in shaping Black political philosophy and strategies about how to seek collective freedom by challenging the legality of slavery.<sup>ccclvii</sup> Between 1841 and 1867 the debates were largely characterized by two camps comprising advocates of emigration and challengers of the constitution. Such debates resulted in the formation of National Equal Rights League in 1864. Founded at the National Convention of Colored Men at Syracuse, New York,

and dedicated to the liberation of Black people in the United States, the organization aimed to “serve as the instrument through which unity of action and opinion could be effected.

In addition, resolutions were passed which proclaimed the concept of equality and human rights and advocated for political and civil rights for Negroes.<sup>”ccclviii</sup> Frederick Douglass served as the President of the National Equal Rights League.<sup>ccclix</sup> Black thinkers were not mere passive subjects of slavery, they shaped the discourse on emancipation that provided the categories used to justify their freedom. Black thinkers developed moral theories challenging the ameliorate philosophy that slave-masters used to justify humane treatment of slaves to illicit more productivity. Similarly, they engaged in legal debates about their enslavement, often understanding the contours of the law on which they provided documents of genealogies of parentage and their emancipation. Black thinkers founded conventions on which they debated the constitution, its Anglo-Saxon and Roman roots and the implications of such laws towards their freedom.<sup>ccclx</sup>

In all, Black thinkers were instrumental in the discourse and petitions that freedmen used to advocate for suffrage rights. As Hugh Davis noted “the language contained in the documents disseminated by the Syracuse Convention in 1864 served as the model for northern blacks during the six-year struggle for manhood suffrage rights.”<sup>ccclxi</sup> It is the observation of this dissertation that although Black men were at the forefront of a developed discourse and language that provided the criteria of suffrage solely based on race or property ownership, their achievements are hardly acknowledged in African Philosophy when it comes to producing egalitarian ideals. As Marth Jones has shown in *Birthright Citizens*, Black men were at the helm of legal and political discourse that challenged state constitutions in New-York, Pennsylvania, Baltimore and South Carolina. They all used a similar criteria of citizenship with which to challenge the

14<sup>th</sup> amendment's definition of citizenship.<sup>ccclxii</sup> Black men often drew from their travels to Haiti, Canada, Liberia and the West Indies to learn how enslaved men and women abolished slavery and created constitutions and laws that gave Black people citizenship rights.<sup>ccclxiii</sup>

Black activism was instrumental in helping Black women pass the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment which removed gender from the criteria of voting.<sup>ccclxiv</sup> It is also the observation of this study that Black people in the revolutionary era and during the civil war played an instrumental part in shaping legal discourse about freedom, citizenship, and inheritance, and that their achievements are overlooked in Africana philosophy and political theory circles. At the most provincial level, scholars fail to acknowledge that it is Black people who ensured equality became an ideal of Western democracy. Inequality was a fundamental political fixture of Western political theory well up to the civil war. Nicholas Guyatt in *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened American Invented Racial Segregation* states:

In the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War, the idea that the races might be separated became a mainstay of the movement against slavery in North and South alike... Racial separation had become the most popular means of imagining a world after slavery... racial separation served as a rallying point for slavery's opponents for more than seventy years, from the publication of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1785 to the first years of the Civil War—perhaps even later. For much of the nineteenth century, the most respectable way to express one's loathing for slavery was to endorse the logic of colonization. Free blacks came to see this logic as the biggest threat to their future in the United States.<sup>ccclxv</sup>

Legislators and politician ensured inequality was the fundamental political feature of western democracy. Their principles were central to arguments of gradual emancipation and colonialization as a process of civilizing Africans. When we anachronistically read ideas of equality as espoused by the founding fathers, we forget about the struggles of enslaved Africans who organized, fought and died to present equality as a reality of their lifetime and future generations. Africana philosopher's failure to fully recognize enslaved Africans as producers of

civilizing ideals instead of violent “savagery” reactionary tinctures to the decadence of Western political theory, hinders scholarship ability to understand that the brains of Black people were picked by white statesmen to theorize notions of universal freedom;<sup>ccclxvi</sup> that enslaved Africans are the progenitors of equality. A people subjected to some of the worst atrocities on earth created moral philosophies and ideas of political economy in which equality was an ideal attained in the present and future. It was mainly on plantations and not congressional convening enslaved Africans used calculated insurrections, revolts, and revolutions to achieve equality as a civilizing ideal in the present moment. It was from the plantations that Douglass began to understand the legality of slavery based on his experiences, reading, and debates about slavery. Douglass’s political development through reading of *The Columbia Orator*, his understanding of slavery’s illegality, and his fight for freedom on the plantation and in the surrounding community of freedmen is hardly recognized in Africana philosophy.

### **The Columbia Orator: Runaway Slaves and Rights**

Writing about the influence *The Columbian Orator* had on his intellectual development.

Douglass in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* stated:

Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation which took place between them, when the slave was retaken the third time. In this dialogue, the whole argument on behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed of by the slave. The slave was made to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master-things which had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation resulted in the voluntary emancipation of the slave.<sup>ccclxvii</sup>

For a precocious enslaved young Douglass “A Dialogue between a Master and His Slave” exemplified the forms of tyranny he experienced while shaping his philosophical acumen about the origins, nature and justification of slavery in America. The dialogue begins with the master

scolding the slave for his second attempt to run away. The master perplexed by the slaves attempt to escape asks the slave why he would run away as though he was not well fed, housed and not overworked:

Slave: Since you condescend to talk with me, as man to man, I will reply. What have you done, what can you do for me that will compensate for the liberty which you have taken away?

Master: I did not take it away. You were a slave when I fairly purchased you.

Slave: Did I give my consent to the purchase?

Master: You had no consent to give. You had already lost the right of disposing of yourself.

Slave: I had lost the power, but how the right? I was treacherously kidnapped in my own country, when following an honest occupation. I was put in chains, sold to one of your countrymen, carried by force on board his ship, brought hither, and exposed to sale like a beast in the market, where you bought me. What step in all this progress of violence and injustice can give a right? Was it in the villain who stole me, in the slave-merchant who tempted him to do so, or in you who encouraged the slave-merchant to bring his cargo of human cattle to cultivate your lands?<sup>ccclxviii</sup>

Douglass was reading about the development of notions of consent as applied to slavery. It was common lore for English kidnappers and merchants to argue that enslaved Africans sold themselves into slavery and gave up their rights to slave-catchers to escape the conditions in Africa.<sup>ccclxix</sup> The slave in the dialogue rebuffed such accounts by averring his position as an equal to his master and challenging the very terms of his enslavement. The slave's rejoinder "since you condescend to talk with me, as man to man" begins the discourse on a plan of equality by showing that the slave can reason and therefore capable of a rational political manhood. During the Enlightenment age, reason and virtue served as signifiers of race, gender and political rights. Reason was defined as a masculine trait, while virtue was defined as feminine trait.<sup>ccclxx</sup> Which is to say the category "man" served both as a racial and gender classification in which only men

were seen as capable of using reason. This also meant only White men were seen more capable of using reason given the civilization, sciences, arts, and systems of government they created as forms of political manhood that other races emulated.<sup>ccclxxi</sup> Consequently, races deemed incapable of using reason to achieve political manhood were deemed subordinated and feminine under the category of gender.<sup>ccclxxii</sup> By showing he could reason, the slave disrupts the enlightenment idea that slaves were incapable of using reason to govern themselves.

Doing so the slave asserts his right to political manhood, arguing he did not consent to slavery. The master's response about the disposability of the slave to consent, highlights a fundamental political issue that dominated the debates between the colonies and England leading to the revolutionary war. Legal historian Holly Brewer in her text *By Birth or Consent: Children, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* shows consent developed as a political right during the American Revolutionary War. The idea being that America created a modern republic based on consent of sovereign citizens who chose their leaders and participated in the political affairs of the nation. The idea of consent and sovereign citizens differed from the idea of subjects who were born obedient to a king and monarch and had no say in the political affairs of the kingdom. Brewer explains; "this paradigm shift, from authority based on birthright to authority based on reasoned consent, reconstituted the nature and legitimacy of power."<sup>ccclxxiii</sup>

Consent however, was a restricted category based on reason. Brewer argues, groups deemed incapable of reasoning and achieving political manhood constituted a broader category of children:

Children and childhood held a central place in seventeenth and eighteenth century political thought. The word itself, in its various forms (child, children, infant) was omnipresent in the political debates, as other names differentiated from 'men' were not (such as women, blacks and Indians, slaves and servants). This word was critical because the debates over authority had deep roots in the Reformation. One side invoked biblical

injunctions about children's obligation to parents to justify monarchical authority. The other side did not challenge this obligation, but emphasized that it ended when a child became an adult: adults could *reason and consent* to authority, whereas children could not. Adult's subjects, therefore, should be able to consent to their government.<sup>ccclxxiv</sup>

It is from this vantage point the slave-master alludes to the disposability of the slave's ability to consent. In as far as the master was concerned, the slave was a child, incapable of reasoning and thus outside the bounds of political manhood. It therefore surprised him to see his slave rebuff him, showing his ability to reason and asserting his political manhood by arguing he did not consent to slavery as a form of government appropriate for him. The slave continued:

I had lost the power, but how the right? I was treacherously kidnapped in my own country, when following an honest occupation. I was put in chains, sold to one of your countrymen, carried by force on board his ship, brought hither, and exposed to sale like a beast in the market, where you bought me. What step in all this progress of violence and injustice can give a right? Was it in the villain who stole me, in the slave-merchant who tempted him to do so, or in you who encouraged the slave-merchant to bring his cargo of human cattle to cultivate your lands?<sup>ccclxxv</sup>

By posing the question of who gives credence to rights and consent in the class system of slavery categorized by the kidnapper, the slave-merchant and the slave-owner, the slave questions the idea of consent only ascribed to sovereign subjects who achieved political manhood by choosing the best form of governance they chose to live under. Subverting the logic of sovereignty means giving up self-governance and consenting to be ruled by someone else. The slave rejects slavery as the best form of governance, asking to whom he consented to be enslaved, the slave-catcher, the trafficker, or the plantation owner:

Master: It is in the order of Providence that one man should become subservient to another. I found the custom and did not make it.

Slave: You cannot but be sensible, that the robber who puts a pistol to your breasts may make just the same property; it gave my enemies a power over my liberty. But it also has given



me legs to escape with; and what should prevent me from using them? Nay, what should restrain me from retaliating the wrongs suffered, if a favorable occasion should offer?<sup>ccclxxvi</sup>

As demonstrated by the slave, slavery presented a problem in the ideology of consent. As freedmen often extolled, enslaved Africans did not consent to slavery, they were kidnapped and turned into colonial subjects of a white nuclear family on plantations.<sup>ccclxxvii</sup> To fix the foil of slavery and consent, American legal theorists and politicians made slavery a function of hereditary law.<sup>ccclxxviii</sup> Since slaves could not marry without the consent of their masters, progenies of enslaved women followed the condition of their mother. Treated as property and denied the privilege of marriage, slaves were excluded from the praxis of consent that deemed them incapable of using reason to show their ability to engage in politics and governance. Much like the slave in the dialogue, Douglass developed a fondness for interrogating America from the vantage of someone criminalized for seeking freedom by challenging the Enlightenment idea of slaves defined as those who could not reason and outside the bounds of consent and political manhood.<sup>ccclxxix</sup> Douglass first encountered these ideas while reading “A Dialogue between a Master and His Slave.” Equally important, Douglass, like the slave in the dialogue interrogated the claim that slave-owners were entitled to their slave’s labor as stipulated in the property rights.

### **Douglass’ Own Master and Slave Dialogue**

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1849, two years after his escape, Douglass celebrated the anniversary of his escape by writing a letter to his former slave master Captain Thomas Auld to deride him for enslaving him.<sup>ccclxxx</sup>

You will remember that your promise to emancipate me precede my first attempt to escape; and that you then told me that you would have emancipated me, had I not made the attempt in question. If you ask me why I distrusted your promise in the first instance, I could give you many reasons; but the one that weighed most with me was the passage of a law in Maryland, throwing obstructions in the way of emancipation; and I had heard

you refer to that law as an excuse for continuing slaves in bondage; and, supposing the obstructions alluded to might prove insuperable barriers to my freedom, I resolved upon flight as the only alternative left me short of a life of slavery.<sup>ccclxxxix</sup>

Remarkably, Douglass points to his understanding of the laws that governed slavery and that Auld had no intention to free him. Douglass understood that the law created him a slave by birth which also made him property. The slavery system was undergirded by man-made laws that displaced the consent of slaves by stating slaves did not need to consent to slavery when hereditary law was the basis of slavery. Douglass in his first autobiography wrote:

Slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lust, and make a gratification of their desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder in case not a few sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father. I know of such cases; and it is worthy of remark that such slaves invariably suffer greater hardships, and have more to contend with than others. They are in the first place a constant offence to their mistress. She is ever disposed to find fault with them; they can seldom do anything to please her; she is never better pleased than when she sees them under the lash, especially when she suspects her husband of showing to his mulatto children favors which he withholds from his black slave.<sup>ccclxxxii</sup>

Slavery complicated the Black family structure. While the white nuclear family was constructed around inheritance laws, the slave family was constructed under hereditary laws. As Douglass noted in his letter to former slave master Auld, he understood the clash of inheritance and hereditary law served as the basis of property law, manumission and fugitive laws.<sup>ccclxxxiii</sup> In the slave system, manumission was only possible under the consent of the slave-master. Douglass also alludes to the fact that inheritance laws and hereditary laws ensured that husbands consented to the wishes of their wives. The idea of consent between husband and wife was not only relegated to men but also to their wives as legal heirs. Historian Kristen Wood in her text *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War*, shows how slaveholding widows through intestacy laws and wills devised a different version of

womanhood beyond the legal category of wife as bound to a husband. Because they were women in a patriarchal society that defined womanhood through subordination, they created the legal category of ladyhood. Wood elaborates:

Ladyhood mattered to widows in particular because they had no husband to defend them, and widowhood gave slaveholding women new opportunities to assert themselves as ladies. When combined with legal independence and property, ladyhood helped widows stand up to men within and beyond their own families. In conflicts with sons, brothers, overseers, and neighbors, slaveholding widows repeatedly defended their interests and actions in terms of their prerogatives as ladies and their duties as loyal wives and devoted mothers. Widows evicted tenants, fired overseers, and sold slaves, all in the name of obeying dead husbands, and protecting children.<sup>ccclxxxiv</sup>

Under the category of ladyhood, mastery was defined by the ability to manage a household and its affairs, thus women often learned to manage the affairs of the household in absence or death of their husbands. While white women could not participate in public politics, the household served as a political sphere that through intestacy laws and wills gave them legal dominion over slaves under the idea of domestic economy of the plantation household.<sup>ccclxxxv</sup> Stephanie Jones Rogers in *They Were Her Property* has shown that from as early as the age of 3 white women were encultured in a domestic economy in which they could enact violence on enslaved people, owned enslaved people and went to auctions and inherited enslaved people from their fathers.

Jones writes that as mistresses (a term that meant “woman skilled in anything”), “Southern women were savvy and skilled indeed. They studied the slave market and evaluated its fluctuations. They blended into the crowds that surrounded public auction blocks...white southern women conducted transactions with slave traders, who bought slaves from and sold slaves to them as they lounged comfortably within the confines of their homes...slaved owning women brought legal suits against individuals, both male and female, who jeopardized their claims to human property, and others sued them in kind.”<sup>ccclxxxvi</sup> In treating slaves as property,

inheritance and hereditary laws ensured the ideas of consent in the public and private domain excluded Black people from political manhood and their right to own their own labor and property. Douglass while in England in 1846, gave a speech at Finsbury Chapel titled “An Appeal to the British People,” in which he stated:

Slavery in the United States is the granting of that power by which one man exercising and enforces a right of property in the body and soul of another. The condition of a slave is simply that of a brute beast. He is a piece of property- a marketable commodity, in the language of the law, to be bought or sold at the will and caprice of the master who claims him to be his property; he is spoken of, thought of, and treated as property. His own good; his conscience, his intellect, his affections, are set aside by the master.<sup>ccclxxxvii</sup>

Douglass understood the laws of bondage through property, inheritance and hereditary laws that gave the government, states and plantation owners, economic incentives for slavery. The fundamental problem for a nation building its ideas of sovereignty and political manhood on consent and property rights, was that Africans did not consent to slavery and were being robbed of their property rights as their labor benefited slave-masters and not them. Douglass saw this as the fundamental issue that led to the civil war and advocated that Black people be awarded their labor and the wealth they created, and that they were entitled to property rights and citizenship as defined in the nations legal document. On August 21, 1850, four weeks before the Fugitive Slave bill became law, Douglass presided over a Fugitive Slave Convention held in Cazenovia, New York. Douglass at the convention read “A Letter to the American Slaves from those who have fled from American Slavery.” In the speech Douglass encouraged fugitive slaves to take solace in their actions to seek freedom. Douglass said:

You are taught to respect the rights of property. But no such right belongs to the slaveholder. His right to property is but the robber-right. In every slaveholding community, the rights of property all center on them, whose coerced and unrequited toil has created the wealth in which their oppressors riot. Moreover, if your oppressors have rights of property, you, at least, are exempt from all obligations to respect them. For you are prisoners of war, in an enemy’s country-of a war, too, that is unrivalled for its

injustice, cruelty, meanness and therefore, by all rules of war, you have the fullest liberty to plunder, burn, and kill, as you may have occasion to do to promote your escape.<sup>cccxxxviii</sup>

Douglass said slaves, as a people who did not consent to slavery, were in a state of war on American plantations. Their labor which entitled them to property was instead beneficial to the slave-master who did not labor to earn property. Moreover, Douglass spoke about the same problems as John Locke did in his “State of War” speech, stating “he who attempts to get another man into his absolute power does thereby put himself into a state of war with him, it being to be understood as a declaration of a design upon his life. For I have reason to conclude that he who would get me into his power without my consent would use me as he pleased when he had got me there.”<sup>cccxxxix</sup> In noting familiarity with Locke’s ideas that governed political and legal discourse of property and slavery in America, Douglass showed that Locke’s ideas equally gave credence to slave revolts and insurrections since Africans were constantly in a state of war against kidnappers, fugitive slave catchers and slave-masters. Slave-masters’ claim to property through the labor of slaves was what Douglass called robber-right and not property rights. Locke in “State of War” expressed similar views:

[a] thief, whom I cannot harm but by appeal to the law for having stolen all that I am worth, I may kill when he sets on me to rob me but of my horse or coat. Because the law, which was made for my preservation, where it cannot interpose to secure my life from present force, which, if lost, is capable of no reparations, permits me my own defense, and the right of war, a liberty to kill the aggressor.<sup>cccxc</sup>

Douglass appealed to would-be fugitive slaves to see themselves in a state of war and within their rights to retaliate since they did not consent to being enslaved and were robbed of their labor and right to property.<sup>cccxcii</sup> Douglass over his lifetime developed rationales to why it was right to kill a kidnapper as well as why slaves should participate in the civil war to end slavery.<sup>cccxciii</sup> The claims of owning one’s labor as a right to own property were personal to

Douglass. Before Thomas Auld died he transferred Douglass' property deeds to his brother Hugh Auld. While on speaking tour in London, Douglass's friends collected money and paid for his manumission. This caused the ire of abolitionists like Henry C. Wright who thought Douglass was going against Abolitionist ideology and furthering slavery by accepting his manumission papers.<sup>cccxciii</sup>

Douglass wrote a letter to Wright expressing that he understood his disagreement with him paying for manumission, claiming abolitionist ideology prevailed, and stating that:

Every man has a natural and inalienable right to himself, the inference being that no one can make someone their property, (2) Because a man cannot hold another as property, neither can Hugh Auld nor the U.S government claim Douglass as property, (3) Having no right to make Douglass into property, they equally were no rights to sell Douglass, (4) Having no right to sell Douglass, no one had the right to buy Douglass.<sup>cccxciv</sup>

Douglass refuted Wright's claims, stating that his friends would have been violating the fundamental principles of abolitionist if (1) those who purchased him did so to make him a slave instead of a freedman, (2) it would have been a violation of that principle, had those who purchased him done so to compensate the slaveholder for what he believed was his right to own Douglass as property.<sup>cccxcv</sup> Douglass in his rebuff raised five points:

1. Paid not because he had just claim to it, but to induce him to give up his legal claim to something which they deemed of more value than money
2. Not to establish my natural right to freedom, but to release me from all legal liabilities to slavery
3. Error consists in confounding the crime of buying men into slavery with the meritorious act of buying men out of slaver
4. The other error consists of mixing the purchase of legal freedom with abstract right and natural freedom

5. They say: if you buy, you recognize the right to sell. If you receive, you recognize the right of the giver to give.<sup>cccxcvi</sup>

Douglass was not satisfied with the moral arguments of natural rights and morality that abolitionists advocated. For Douglass, the claims of slaves as property were grounded in hereditary laws that had more material ramifications on Black families than moralism did. Douglass in his rejoinder argued that slavery places economic restitution and liability on the slave. The slave was liable to the slave-owner to compensate for loss of wages and labor if they escaped or destroyed crops and livestock.<sup>cccxcvii</sup>

Douglass referred to the absurdity of liability and negligence of slaves as an example of how a permanent subordinate class was exploited for economic gain and property rights. Douglass insisted such could only end if laws ensured that slave-owners had clemency to economic compensation that both the state and national government recognized. In 1845, appearing before the American Anti-slavery Society, Douglass stated:

The twenty-six states that blaze forth on your flag, proclaim a compact to return me to bondage if I run away, and keep me in bondage if I submit. Wherever I go, under the aegis of your liberty, there I'm a slave. If I go to Lexington or Bunker Hill, there I'm a slave, chained in perpetual servitude...now I ask you if you are willing to have your country the hunting ground of the slave. God says thou shalt not oppress: the constitution says oppress: which will you serve, God or man?<sup>cccxcviii</sup>

It was on this premise that Douglass disagreed with Lysander Spooner and William Garrison on the Constitutionality of Slavery. For Douglass, slavery was supported by an economic law that superseded the ideas of morality and notions of equality and liberty in natural law.

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1851, Frederick Douglass wrote a letter to his friend Gerrit Smith noting his changing view on whether it was enough to disavow the Constitution as a pro-slavery document based on morality. Douglass explained:

Is it good morality to take advantage of a legal flaw and put a meaning upon a legal instrument the very opposite of what we have good reason to believe was the intention of the men who framed it? Just here is the question of difficulty with me. I know well enough that slavery is an outrage, contrary to all ideas of justice and therefore cannot be law according to Blackstone. But may it not be law according to American legal authority? <sup>cccxcix</sup>

Douglass's question raises an important point; if moralism and natural law does not condone slavery, what within the American jurisprudence condones and gives legitimacy to slavery? The fore-question was motivated by Douglass's familiarity with William Blackstone's *Commentaries* and the debates about slavery the commentaries provoked nationally. Elizabeth Bauer in *Commentaries on the Constitution 1790-1860* argues William Blackstone's *Commentaries* were not only important to the development of American legal education, but also served as a source for the creation of an American Jurisprudence between the American Revolutionary and Civil War. However, Blackstone's second edition of the *Commentaries* was deemed anti-republican or conflicting with the views of Americans in general.

Bauer argues American commentaries "recognized the difficulties and endeavored to point out those subjects on which Blackstone's treatment was deficient, biased against the American form of government, or antiquated."<sup>cd</sup> The first commentator to attempt to fix the problem was St. George Tucker who was a prominent and popular law professor at William and Mary and Judge in Virginia. Tucker's work on the *Commentaries* is featured in the appendix of his essay *A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of it in Virginia*. The dissertation was a proposal based on Blackstone's work on how to end slavery in Virginia through a gradual system. Referencing Blackstone's work, Douglass noted that he was conversant with the legal debates of slavery in America. As a scholar of American slavery Douglass had not only read Blackstone's *Commentaries* but quoted from reference case books



and court cases such as Thomas Ritchie's *The Revisited Code of Laws of Virginia*, Oliver H. Prince A's *Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia*, David Christ's *Cotton is King, or Slavery in The Light of Political Economy*, Joseph Brevard *An Alphabetical Digest of the Public Statute Law of South Carolina*, and George Blaxland's *Codex legum anglicanarum*.

Douglass believed the commentaries on the constitutionality of slavery could not be left solely to jurists and politicians. Douglass intended to engage in these legal debates by publishing his own arguments and philosophies into a book. In the letter to Smith, Douglass wrote:

My good friend, Julia Griffith, forwarded to your address one copy of my first lectures in Rochester this morning. I hope it will reach you. I am greatly pleased by your good opinion of these lectures. I sometimes fear that being delivered by a fugitive slave who has never had a day's school constitutes the only merit they possess. Yet I am so much encouraged by my friends here and elsewhere, that I am seriously intending if I can command the money to publish them in book form.<sup>cdi</sup>

Douglass in writing to Smith had already come to a different understanding of the question of the constitution and slavery and his own interpretation of what justified slavery. Scholars have generally focused on Douglass's 1860 speech "The Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery" in which he pronounced break from Garrisonian ideals.<sup>cdii</sup> Yet his letter to Smith in 1851, shows he had been working out his own ideas of the constitutionality of slavery and what gave slavery its "American legal authority," that he sought to publish a book. Douglass' first article in 1849 titled the "Constitution and Slavery" set the stage for his engagement with constitutional interpretation and slavery. In the article, Douglass takes on Gerrit Smith and Lysander Spooner who were advocates of natural law. The most explicate references in the 1849 article are directed at Spooner's arguments of the applicability of natural law to the constitution.

## Spooner's Arguments

In 1845, Lysander Spooner published *The Unconstitutionality of Slavery* as a defense of natural law and its application to the question of slavery and the constitution. Spooner's arguments about the unconstitutionality of slavery hinged on the use of legal definition and his push to get to a precise scientific definition of law he called natural justice.<sup>cdiii</sup> For Spooner, law had to be normative for the ideals of freedom, and liberty were both universal. Spooner drew on natural law to construct the idea of what he called natural justice as the basis of civil society and government rooted in natural law.<sup>cdiv</sup> Spooner defined natural justice as the innate goodness that guides social relations between individuals.<sup>cdv</sup> Individuals in civil society came together to create contracts on which to honor the terms as a form of natural justice. Similarly, Spooner argued that the Constitution was a contract between the government and citizens bound by natural justice. Therefore, legal definitions in the Constitution such as, "freedmen", "aliens", "other people" and "citizens" were terms of a social contract between citizens and the government that grounded the rules on which natural justice was served to citizens by the government. Spooner wrote:

A constitution is nothing but a contract, entered into by the mass of the people, instead of a few individuals. This contract of the people at large becomes law unto the judiciary that administer it, just as private contracts, so far as they are consistent with natural right are laws unto the tribunals that adjudicate upon them. All the essential principles that enter into the question of obligation, in the private contract, or a legislative enactment, enter equally into the question of the obligation of a contract agreed to by the whole mass of the people.<sup>cdvi</sup>

Given these terms of conditions of natural justice between the government and citizens, Spooner argued that while slavery existed in the colonies nothing as far as the national constitutions endorsed it.<sup>cdvii</sup> In Spooner's view it was inconceivable to have a national constitution that stipulated citizenship rights while denying rights to other groups without a way to correcting the

anomaly. Spooner in the second part of his treatise underlined fourteen principles on which to interpret the constitutional under his theory of natural justice.<sup>cdviii</sup> To clarify the meaning of free persons and freedmen in the constitution, Spooner applied two of his principles to Article 1, Sec 2 of the constitution.<sup>cdix</sup> Article 1, Sec 2 states “representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within the Union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and including Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons.”<sup>cdx</sup> Using *Noah Webster and Jacob’s Law Dictionary*, Spooner argued that term free was used to denote “citizens, native or naturalized, and those specially entitled, as a matter of political and acknowledged right to participate in or be protected by the government, as distinguished from aliens, or persons attained, or deprived of their political privileges as members of the state.”<sup>cdxi</sup>

In this regard free person implied someone with political privilege as a citizen of a city or state. Given this definition, Spooner argued, “free and freeman are used as legal terms, they are never used as the correlatives, or opposites of slaves or slavery.”<sup>cdxii</sup> In other words, Spooner argued slavery was never endorsed in the Constitution since the only legal definitions that appeared in the Constitution related to those of citizens under the terms free persons, and freedman. Therefore, in Spooner’s analysis Article 1, Sec 2 should be read as implying the conditions of citizenship since the terms free persons implied a category of naturalization as a process towards citizenship. Spooner argued “the power of naturalization is by the constitution, taken from the States, and given exclusively to the United States. The constitution of the United States, therefore supposes the existence of aliens and thus furnishes the correlative sought for. It furnishes a class both for the word ‘free’, and the word ‘all other persons’, to apply to.”<sup>cdxiii</sup>

For Spooner the Constitution was centered on a process of protecting citizens and created terms on which those who were not yet citizens could be naturalized as a function of natural justice.

### **Douglass's Rebuttal**

In the 1849 article, "Constitution and Slavery," Douglass argued against Spooner's appeal to natural law and natural justice and the constitutionality of slavery:

Had the Constitution dropped down from the blue overhanging sky, upon a land uncursed by slavery, and without an interpreter, although some difficulty might have occurred in applying its manifold provisions, yet so cunningly is it framed, that no one would have imagined that it recognized or sanctioned slavery. But having a terrestrial, and not a celestial origin, we find no difficulty in ascertaining its meaning in all parts which we allege to relate to slavery. Slavery existed before the Constitution, in the very states by whom it was made and adopted. Slaveholders took a large share in making it. It was in view of the existence of slavery, and in a manner well calculated to aid and strengthen that heaven daring crime.<sup>cdxiv</sup>

Per Douglass's insight, slavery itself was a social contract between the states. The question of sustaining it meant people would have to pay the states to sustain slavery. While Spooner read the citizenship clause in Article 1, Section 1 of the Constitution and perceived the Constitution as a document about protecting citizenship and naturalization, Douglass read Article 1, Section 2 as a taxation clause incentivizing a compromise to regulate slavery in the new economy. Douglass argued:

The parties that made the Constitution, aimed to cheat and defraud the slave, who was not himself a party to the contract or agreement. It was entered into understanding on both sides. They both designed to purchase their freedom and safety at the expense of the imbruted slave. The North were willing to become the body guards of slavery-suppressing insurrection- returning fugitive slaves to bondage- importing slaves for twenty years, and as much longer as the Congress should see fit to leave it unprohibited, and virtually to give slaveholders three votes for every five slave they could plunder from Africa, and all this to form a Union by which to repel invasion, and otherwise promote their interest.<sup>cdxv</sup>

To sustain slavery it would have to have economic benefit to the States. It meant that slaves already robbed of their labor and property rights were taxed as part of the State's population

alongside indentured slaves or fugitive slaves who were captured.<sup>cdxvi</sup> For Douglass the constitution was explicit about which classes of people to be taxed. The classes included people under the categories of “free person”, “those bound to service for a term of years,” and “three-fifths of all persons”. Douglass argued Black freedmen and slaves were not citizens as Spooner had argued but counted as part of the state’s population who had to be taxed. Douglass wrote:

...a diversity of persons are here described; persons bound to service for a term of years, Indians not taxed, and three fifths of all other persons. Now we ask in the name of common sense, there be an honest doubt that, in States where there are slaves, that they are included in this basis of representation? To us it is plain as the sun in the heavens that this clause does, and was intended to mean, that the slave States should enjoy a representation of their human chattels under this Constitution. Beside, the term free, which is generally thought not always used as the correlative of slave, ‘all other persons’, settles the question forever that slaves are here included. It is contended on this point by Lysander Spooner and others, that the words, ‘all other persons’ used in this article of the Constitution, relate only to aliens. We deny that the words will bear any such construction. Are we to presume that the Constitution which so carefully points out a class of persons for exclusion, such as ‘Indians not taxed,’ would be silent with respect to another class which it was meant equally to exclude?<sup>cdxvii</sup>

For Douglass what confused the framers of the Constitution was how to accept the States as they functioned independently while ensuring that they participated in the national government. The clauses then meant people within the state had an obligation to the government to sustain the economy of slavery. Douglass expressed his disagreement with Spooner as follows:

When it is remembered that the language used after the words, ‘excluding Indians not taxed’ (having done with exclusions) it includes ‘all other persons.’ It is as easy to suppose that the Constitution contemplates including Indian, (against its express declaration to the contrary,) as it is to suppose that it should be construed to mean the exclusion of slaves from the basis of representation, against the express language, ‘including all other persons.’ Where all included, none remain to be excluded. The reasoning of those who take the opposite view of this clause, appears very much like quibbling, to use no harsher word. One thing is certain about this clause of the Constitution. It is this- under it, the slave system has enjoyed a large and domineering representation in Congress, which has given laws to the whole Union about slavery, ever since the formation of the government.<sup>cdxviii</sup>

The fore-rebuttal was for Douglass the basis of what he called economic slaveholding compromises of the Constitution. Douglass's analysis of the economic slaveholding compromises shows the economic interests that slavery had for both the North and South and why abolishment required a war that would determine who would control Black labor in a shifting economy.<sup>cdxix</sup> Doing so Douglass created a different argument about the constitution than that proposed by Garrisonian Abolitionists and Lysander Spooner. The themes of economic compromise and the need for Black labor and property ownership to be compensated would animate Douglass evolving philosophies of the Constitution. Douglass used such philosophies to champion the development of manual schools that would ensure Black people created models of economies to ensure they were compensated for their labor. Douglass understood the need to recreate moral philosophy and the economy so Black people owned their labor as progenitors of civilizing ideals that modern republics built themselves on. Douglass addressed the themes of economic compromise in his short story *The Heroic Slave*. In the story, he narrates how Black men fought for their freedom and that of their family members using mechanic arts. Douglass argued the labor in the mechanic industry that slave masters used to exploit the labor of enslaved Africans could be used as tools to free enslaved Africans of the chains of slavery. These ideas are the focus of Chapter 4.

**CHAPTER V**

**CONCEPTUAL INCARCERATION: THE CURRENT POSITION OF  
SLAVERY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY**

Conceptual incarceration is the term for Black imprisonment in White belief systems and knowledge bases, according to psychologist Wade Nobles.<sup>cdxx</sup> Contemporary Africana philosophers are awash in a sea of finely designed mainstream philosophy that has cut them off from self-knowledge. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, mainstream philosophy has forced Africana philosophers to draw exclusively from its concepts and made it impossible to expand their pedagogical frames of reference to the Transatlantic Slave Trade on which the basis of African American history lies. By limiting themselves to a small facet of the slave trade, and concentrating mainly on matters of race and racism, contemporary Africana philosophers have failed to adequately philosophize notions of *freedom*, the *person*, the *citizen*, *justice*, emerging from centuries of the institutionalization of the enslavement of Blacks in the U.S. For instance, Africana philosophers have failed to account for the human value of the Black man under slavery, developing concepts of manhood that were different from the patriarchal ideals that defined mastery of enslaved Africans by white men, women and their children.

As Tommy Curry has noted in *The Man-Not*, Africana philosophers are locked in anachronistic [European civilization] understanding of the development of the categories of race and gender and how patriarchal as a socialization tool between white men and women was essential to rendering gender categories as solely conscriptions that defined differences in the civilizing responsibilities among white men and white women during slavery. Curry helps to understand how patriarchal, a concept used to define mastery over enslaved people, was shifted

as marker from White men and women to Black men as the paragon of patriarchal under the current concept of masculinity. According to Curry, “while the male descendants of colonizers are recognized for the naturally occurring varieties of masculinities within their group, this insistence on multiple masculinities has often been denied to Black men who are the descendants of slaves. Theories concerning Black masculinity revolve around a fixed political idea in the United States that is deemed progressive by the extent to which it is sufficiently feminist and deemed patriarchal by the extent to which it is not.”<sup>cdxxi</sup>

In other words, one significant failure of feminist theories is that they fail to recognize the concept of manhood, masculinity, and patriarchy as constructs that evolved from slavery. The fore-stated notions are important to the historical study of the experiences of Black manhood during slavery. Mark Okuhata in “Unchained Manhood: The Performance of Black Manhood During the Antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction,” notes “manhood or manliness refers to male character traits and identities that belong to the nomenclature of nineteenth-century America. Whereas in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the term ‘masculinity’ connotes an innate set of male traits corresponding with the supposed physical, aggressive, and sexualized nature of the male body...in the nineteenth century, the term and meaning of masculinity was unknown to Americans. Instead, nineteenth century American culture employed the terms manhood and manliness as a set of cultural ideals that aspired to rather than something they inherently possessed.”<sup>cdxxii</sup> The conflation of the difference between manhood as the definition of man versus the traits that defined the slave, and the construction of masculinity that emerged at the end of the civil war when white men needed to distinguish themselves from enslaved men through biological markers and acts of aggression against other men, has led to the failure of



understanding how Black men since slavery have and continue to construct different definitions of traits that are central to their humanity.<sup>cdxxiii</sup>

Curry states while masculinity theory in the global south has challenges the notion of a hegemonic masculinity, feminism in the U.S. academic, as the dominant theoretical lenses, has conscripted notions of Black masculinity to a fixed point-patriarchal. Curry further asserts “feminist inspired theories of Black masculinity establish their legitimacy by racially profiling Black males. These theories assert a priori that Black males, as a group, are aspiring patriarchs, then surveil the individual behavior of Black men in society or, throughout a narrowly selected corpus of literatures accepted by disciplines, as evidence of the defect.”<sup>cdxxiv</sup> These assertions are ahistorical.

Curry notes in the age of slavery “patriarchy evolved to project white womanhood because white womanhood is not only the foundation on which empire is built but also the nascence of expandable white male surplus needed for imperial conquest.”<sup>cdxxv</sup> Which is to say patriarchal developed as a socialization tool between white men and woman was a form of mastery and governance over enslaved people. White women as the paragon of virtue, educated White man who went out to conquer the world. From a young age White women were imbued with values that allowed them to assert dominance over enslaved men and women. To this point, Stephane Jones in her work *They Were Her Property* notes that from childhood young women were trained in the “Management of Negroes.” Such training reinforced the dominance of White girls over enslaved men and women when inherited, purchased, and managed. Jones states, “all around them, white girls found evidence of their difference from and superiority to enslaved people, as well as of the many privileges their whiteness brought them. They recognized who was and who was not chained to others in slave coffles; who was and who was not shrieking and

reaching for a child torn from a family's arms. They noticed who was and who was not missing from the fields and the households, and whose absence the remaining enslaved people mourned."<sup>cdxxvi</sup> The preceding quote is illustrative of the colonial system of slavery patriarchal functions as the basis of gender system of mastery. Curry further states "patriarchy depends on White femininity for its propagation. Just as 'Man' and his expression of masculinity have meaning within Western patriarchal logics, so, too, are the female of this order."<sup>cdxxvii</sup> Given this circumstance, patriarchal is the wrong characteristic to employ in understanding the fixed point of Black male development. Yet because under feminism all males are seen as progenitors of patriarchal, this logic produces theories of Black men as aspirants of White men's colonial ideas.

According to Curry "Black males, who are stereotyped as hyper-masculine and violent throughout society, are intuitively marked as patriarchal within theory. Instead of being similarly disrupted by the critiques of hegemonic masculinity's failure to account for the class and cultural diversity within white masculinities, hyper-masculinity is proposed as the phylogenetic marker of Black maleness. Consequently, Black males are thought to be the exemplifications of white (bourgeois) masculinity's pathological excess."<sup>cdxxviii</sup> This conscription as Curry notes is detrimental in that it renders the different forms of violence targeted towards Black males, imperceptible when Black men are theorized as aspirants of white notions of masculinity based on slavery. In this regard, Curry's work has been effective in showing how forms of violence such as rape of black males on plantations functioned as homoeroticism and phallic violence. Curry's point in relation to the concept of Black manhood can be traced to the way enslaved Black men developed different notions of manhood during slavery. Curry traces the ethnological theories that define the way white ethnologists describe the traits of slaves as sensual and incapable of restraining their sexual passions, importantly, Curry shows Hegel was the focal

point of these ethnological theories. Curry notes “in the 1830s the domestication of American slavery marked a decisive shift from the previous century’s idea of the natural slave unfit for liberty to the slave as the undeveloped savage in need of civilization and improvement. G.W.F Hegel’s commentary on the Negro and Africa actually serve as a grounding of the ethnology used in America regarding enslaved Africans.”<sup>cdxxxix</sup>

Hegel’s postulation was that “human flesh is but an object of sense-mere ‘flesh’; it holds no meaning beyond its perception. The sensual, savage Negro was trapped in the natural condition of being, a stage of absolute injustice...slavery is itself a phase of advance from merely isolated sensual existence-a phase of education- a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality and the culture connected with it.”<sup>cdxxx</sup> According to Hegel, the Negro as savage and sensual slave could only be educated into higher morality and culture through slavery as a phase of education. To free the Negro was to unleash beings with excess savage and sensual proclivities into white society. These imposed traits of the slave were instrumental to the debates that developed between white men and white women in the pre-civil war and reconstruction era, developed around the myth of the Freedman as black male rapist.<sup>cdxxxii</sup> These ideals were central to the redefinition of white males as masculine beings and white women as feminine during the reconstruction era up to the contemporary order.

As Curry observes “it was the newly won freedom of Black men that launched the theorization of our modern concept of gender. Their freedom inspired ethnologist and feminist to give accounts of femininity that were vulnerable to male violence.”<sup>cdxxxiii</sup> In essence, Black male as quintessential definition of the slave has been central to the shifting definitions of gender and notions of governance beginning in the political philosophies of American republicanism through the contemporary concepts of democracy. For example, John Saillant in “The Black

Body Erotic and the Republican Body Politic, 1790-1830,” argues “an eroticized black male body appears in a number of antislavery writing published in America between 1790 and 1820. In these writings arose two entirely new elements in American writing. First is an erotic representation of the black male body- its visage, hands, muscle, skin, height, sex-unparalleled by the representation of any other body, black or white, male or female. Second is a communitas, blending sentimentalism and homoeroticism, shared by black men and white men who unite in opposition to slavery.”<sup>cdxxxiii</sup> In the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, White men created Black male traits from their physical qualities or their moral qualities in relation to the construction of America as a model republic rooted in slavery. As such, the “black man who appeared between 1790 and 1820 in antislavery narratives, essays and poems is the ‘poor negro,’ deserving benevolence but denied it by his white masters. This sentimentalized poor negro, on American soil, became an eroticized ‘friend,’ echoing the homoeroticism of classical martial virtue as well as gesturing toward nineteenth-century blackface and its interracial homoerotics.”<sup>cdxxxiv</sup> Yet while scholars noted a tradition on which the Black male body, as slave, functioned as a proxy of ideas of American republicanism and democracy, they at the same time observed the way Black men and women developed their own notions of manhood and womanhood from the revolutionary area through reconstruction that challenged the notions of slave traits central to America. For example, Manisha Sinha in “Cast Just Obliquely on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution,” argues that “African American abolitionists used the metaphor of revolution to argue for a host of ideas and positions, and their use of revolutionary tradition involved more than just extending the principles of the American Revolution to black Americans.”<sup>cdxxxv</sup>

The metaphor of revolution was used as a critique of the American Revolution, as a preserve of chattel slavery, and the ideas as noted earlier about the congenial traits of the “poor negro” deserving benevolence for a master, and the “eroticized friend” used to describe the traits of the slave. To this end Black abolitionists “...developed a powerful counternarrative to the history of revolutionary republicanism in the United States that highlighted slavery rather than freedom and independence. Revolution to black abolitionists meant not just the incomplete promise of the American Revolution but the Haitian Revolution, a way to justify the overthrow of slavery through slave rebellion and abolitionist instigation.”<sup>cdxxxvi</sup> Africana philosophers have not cared to explore the preceding treatise on Black manhood to see how it relates to Frederick Douglass’s philosophical concepts of racial uplift. By investigating Douglass experience of slavery through the paradigm of the slave we fail to interrogate the character traits that Douglass argued define Black manhood. As a former slave, Douglass developed traits outside the colonial system of slavery that he juxtaposed alongside other the manhood of other former enslaved men. These reflections for Douglass began with his days on the plantation that he theorized about in his autobiography. For example, James McCune Smith in the introduction to Douglass’ *My Bondage and Freedom* argued that given his experience of slavery it was astounding that Douglass developed a successful career as an editor, orator and thinker who organized to abolish slavery that earned him [Douglass] accolades and high acclaim. Smith noted:

And the secret of his power, what is it? He is a representative American man- a type of countryman. Naturalists tell us that a full-grown man is a resultant or representative of all animated nature on this globe; beginning with the early embryo state, then representing the lowest forms of organic life, and passing through every subordinate grade of type, until he reaches the last and highest manhood. In like manner, and to the fullest extent, has Frederick Douglass passed through every gradation of rank comprised in our national make-up, and bears upon his person and upon his soul everything that is American.<sup>cdxxxvii</sup>

Smith's allusion to "early embryo state", "the lowest forms of organic life", and "passing through every subordinate grade of type, until he reaches the last and highest manhood" highlights the debates between German physiologist and philosophers about the developmental cycle of human life from plants, and animals under the biological categories of ontogeny and phylogeny.<sup>cdxxxviii</sup>

Smith cited an article from the October 1854 edition of *The Medico-Chirurgical Review and Journal of Medical Science*, about the discovery of German physiologists who found a link between the developmental cycle of plants and humans.<sup>cdxxxix</sup> In developmental terms, Ontogeny sought to describe the developmental processes of the human embryo linked to the development of adult animal species. Phylogeny under the theory of recapitulation sought to prove that the development of the adult reverted to the early developmental stages in lower animals and plants.<sup>cdxli</sup> According to Smith, the biological concept ontogeny, that is, the early embryo state, represents in man "the lowest forms of organic life, and passing through every subordinate grade of type, until he reaches the last and highest manhood." Douglass's autobiography is a narrative of ontogenic development of a Black child into manhood. Douglass wrote his second autobiography when the theory of phylogeny and recapitulation dominated debates about racial development. In the U.S., phylogenists sought to argue that the white child's developmental stages were comparable to the development of an average Black adult.

The most prominent phylogenic argument and recapitulation theory in the U.S. was provided by Edward Drinker Cope who in his *The Developmental Significance of Human Physiognomy* stated:

Let it be particularly observed that two of the most prominent characters of the negro are those of immature stages of the Indo-European race in its characteristic types. The deficient calf is the character of infants at a very early stage; but, what is more important,

the flattened bridge of the nose and shortened nasal cartilages are universally immature conditions of the same parts in the Indo- European.<sup>cdxli</sup>

German physiologist and philosopher Karl Vogt presenting his *Lectures on Man* concurred with Cope, stating:

In the brain of the Negro the central gyri are like those in a fetus of seven months, the secondary are still less marked. By its rounded apex and less developed posterior lobe the Negro brain resembles that of our children, and by the protuberance of the parietal lobe, that of our females.<sup>cdxlii</sup>

James McCune Smith's reading of the German physiologist and philosopher's debates about the developmental cycle of human beings informed his framing of his intro to Douglass's second autobiography. Smith sought to argue Douglass's own development from childhood to manhood refuted racist phylogenetic arguments about Black people. Notions of manhood and the development traits central to Douglass's autobiography have been undertheorized in Africana philosophy. For example, in *My Bondage and Freedom* Douglass argued the difference between a young enslaved black boy and white boy:

The slave-boy escapes many troubles which befall and vex his white brother. He seldom has to listen to lectures on propriety of behavior, or on anything else. He is never chided for handling his little knife and fork improperly or awkwardly, for he uses none. He is never reprimanded for soiling the table-cloth, for he takes his meals on the clay floor...thus freed from all restraint, the slave-boy can be, in his life and conduct, a genuine boy, doing whatever his boyish nature suggests; enacting, by turns, all the strange antics and freaks of horses, dogs, pigs, and barn-door fowls, without in any manner compromising his dignity, or incurring reproach of any sort. He literally runs wild.<sup>cdxlili</sup>

The importance of imbuing enslaved Black boys with mannerisms that afforded them lessons about conduct and character essential to manhood were not elemental to the colonial system of slavery. Instead the enslaved Black boy with no lessons on conduct was treated like a domesticated animal. Recall that Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* argued the felicity

Black men to recognize the superiority of whiteness is comparable to an Orangutan's preference of Black women over that of its own species.<sup>cdxlv</sup> To authenticate his claim, Jefferson added:

The circumstances of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? Beside those of color, figure, and hair, there are other physical distinctions proving a difference of race. They have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidneys, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odor. This greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat, and less of cold, than the whites. Perhaps too a difference of structure in the pulmonary apparatus, which a late ingenious experimentalist has discovered to be the principal regulator of animal heat, may have disabled them from extricating, in the act of inspiration, so much of the fluid from the outer air, or obliged them in expiration, to part with more of it.<sup>cdxlv</sup>

Jefferson argued if we can accept that they are different forms of beauty in the stature and color of animals why can't we accept the same about the differences in humans? Jefferson links the odor of Africans to that of animals, by referencing Adair Crawford (ingenious experimentalists) who discovered and publicized the principal regulator of animal in an article "Experiments and Observations on Animal heat and the Inflammation of Combustible Bodies." The reference to experiments conducted on animals and their similitude to humans was a feature of 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. The experiments were intended sought to create taxonomy of variations in humans and animals while maintaining a heterogeneity feature of the anatomical structure.<sup>cdxlv</sup> In other words, humans seized to be human when they exhibited characteristics of animals, like acting without reason, and that humans lacked self-control and were consumed by passions and emotions. Further, the experiments indicated that animals seized being animals when they displaced features like intelligence, empathy and courage, reminiscent of humans.<sup>cdxlvii</sup> For Jefferson though, Blacks could not be relegated to animals since they had similar sweat glands as those of animals.



Slavery has produced contenting theories about why enslaved Africans were destined to be slaves. In the antebellum period, notions of manhood and womanhood were defined by character traits. What's remarkable about Douglass is his autobiography points to the way the community of Black men shaped concepts of Black manhood that turned into philosophical ideas, challenging mainstream postulations that Black people were created to be slaves. Africana philosophers have undertheorized the challenge, and instead, peddled Hegelian concepts of the master-slave dialectic in their understanding of Douglass experience of slavery.

### **Angela Davis Lecture on Liberation and Frederick Douglass Autobiography**

In her first job at UCLA, in the Fall Quarter of 1969, Angela Davis presented a two-day lecture "Recurring Philosophical Themes in Black Literature." Davis began the first lecture with the following words; "the idea of freedom has justifiably been a dominating theme in the history of Western ideas. Man has been repeatedly defined in terms of his inalienable freedom."<sup>cdxlviii</sup> While freedom is a domineering idea of the history of western ideas that define Man, Davis noted there was a seemingly oddity in that "one of the most acute paradoxes in the history of Western society is that while on a philosophical plane freedom has been delineated in the most lofty and sublime fashion, concrete reality has always been permeated with the most brutal forms of unfreedom, of enslavement."<sup>cdxlix</sup> Davis noted that such contradiction of freedom being a domineering idea of western history had the most brutal forms of unfreedom and enslavement, traced from the Greek society, and applied by the Founding fathers in their drafting of the U.S. Constitution which they used to preserve interest in enslaved Africans.<sup>cdl</sup>

Davis proceeded to argue that history of Black literature provided, "in my opinion, a much more illuminating account of the nature of freedom, its extent and limits, than all the philosophical discourses on this theme in the history of Western society."<sup>cdli</sup> She justified her

claim: "...black literature in this country and throughout the world projects the consciousness of a people who have been denied entrance into the real world of freedom."<sup>cdlii</sup> In her brief passages, Davis introduces Hegels' concept of world history and consciousness. By juxtaposing freedom, as a domineering idea of western history, Davis pointed out that western society itself was structured with brutal forms of unfreedom and enslavement. This paradox set up a condition on which freedom in western philosophical thought was a form of idealism. On the other hand, Black literature as applied her classes illuminated the nature of freedom, its extent and limits, because Black literature throughout the world projects the consciousness of a people denied real freedom.

Davis sees Black people as engaged in a struggle to attain the ideal of freedom denied them in western society and revered in the history of western ideals. She further argues; "black people have exposed, by their very existence, the inadequacies not only of the practice of freedom, but of its very theoretical formulation. Because, if the theory of freedom remains isolated from the practice of freedom or rather is contradicted in reality, then this means that something must be wrong with the concept, that is, if we are thinking in a dialectical manner."<sup>cdliii</sup> Black people's consciousness of their condition has espoused the practice and idea of freedom, as Davis notes; "the pivotal theme of this course will thus be the idea of freedom as it is unfolded in the literary undertaking of Black people."<sup>cdliv</sup> This undertaking would start "with The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, we will explore the slave's experience of his bondage and this the negative experience of freedom. Most important here we will be the crucial transformation of the concept of freedom as a static, given principle into the concept of liberation, the dynamic, active struggle for freedom."<sup>cdlv</sup> Davis uses Douglass as an exemplar of Black literatures impulse for exposing Western definition of "freedom" as one of the most

ferocious ways of perfecting western society. To elaborate, Davis presents a working definition of consciousness that she engages to show how those denied entry into the real freedom, work to attain freedom. Davis further notes; “the authentic consciousness of an oppressed people entails an understanding of the necessity to abolish oppression. The slave finds at the end of his journey towards understanding a real grasp of what freedom means. He knows that it means the destruction of the master-slave relationship. And in this knowledge of freedom is more profound than that of the master.”<sup>cdlvi</sup> Davis’s Hegelian reading of freedom as a struggle between the slave and master is such that “the master feels himself free and he feels himself because he feels himself free at the expense of the freedom of another. The slave experiences the freedom of the master in its true light. He understands that the master’s freedom is abstract freedom to suppress other human beings. The slave understands that this is a pseudo concept of freedom and at this point is more enlightened than his master, for he realizes that the master is a slave of his own misconceptions, his own misdeeds, his own brutality, his own effort to oppress.”<sup>cdlvii</sup> The authentic consciousness of the slave is such that he recognizes the master has misplaced the notion of freedom by oppressing another him, and is, therefore, operating from a pseudo concept of freedom. The recognition is the first time on the journey to freedom for the slave.

Davis points to “the first part of Douglass called Life of the Slave,” to embark on her exegesis of authentic consciousness and the voyage the slave takes to understand the slave master is operating on a “pseudo concept of freedom” noting “the point of departure for this voyage, Frederick Douglass asks himself as a child: ‘why am I a slave? Why are some people and others masters?’ His critical attitude when he fails to accept the usual answer that God had made Black people to be slaves and white people to be masters, is the basic condition which must be present before freedom can become a possibility in the mind of the slave.”<sup>cdlviii</sup>

Douglass's rejection of the slave-master relationship recognizes the slave-masters are operating under a pseudo concept of freedom, yet concomitantly this consciousness imposes on slavery a condition on which slaves are those without freedom. Davis reminds the students "let's attempt to arrive at a philosophical definition of the slave - we have already stated the essence; he is a human being who, by some reason or another is denied freedom."<sup>cdlix</sup> Since the slave is not free, he cannot be considered a human. The contradiction of slavery from the slave master is having to justify slavery as a condition in which others are not free thus not human, as Davis notes; "the failure to deal with the contradictory nature of slavery, the imposed ignorance of reality is exemplified in the notion that the slave is not a man, for if he were a man, he should certainly be free...the white slave-owners were determined to mold Black people into the image of the sub-human being which they had contrived in order to justify their actions. A vicious circle emerges in which the slave-owners loses all consciousness of himself."<sup>cdlx</sup> The "pseudo concept of freedom" places the slave-master in a contradictory position—to validate the enslaved person as man, thus free, or a slave thus not free, a conundrum that, Davis asserts, sends the slave-master into a vicious circle and causes him to lose all consciousness.

For the enslaved person, the vicious circle does not create paralysis as "there is a way out: Resistance."<sup>cdlxi</sup> Davis states that as a child, Douglass's notion of resistance was inspired by a slave he saw resist to be flogged by his master. Davis notes; "Frederick Douglass seems to have had his first experience of this possibility of a slave becoming free upon observing a slave resist a flogging."<sup>cdlxii</sup> Douglass stated "that slave who had the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer, although he might have made stripes at first, became while legally a slave, virtually a free man. 'You can shoot me,' said a slave to [his master] Rigby Hopkins, 'but you can't whip me', and the result was he was neither whipped nor shot."<sup>cdlxiii</sup> Authentic

consciousness of the pseudo concept of the masters notion of freedom, leads into the concrete realization of freedom in the slave through resistance. As Davis notes “already we can begin to concretize the notion of freedom as it appeared to the slave. The first condition of freedom is the open act of resistance, physical resistance - violent resistance. In the act of resistance, the rudiments of freedom are already present.”<sup>cdlxiv</sup> For Douglass, this act of resistance was actualized when his master Thomas Auld scorned his wife for teaching Douglass to read. Auld told his wife, “if you give a nigger an inch he will take an ell. Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. If he learns to read the bible it will forever unfit him to be a slave. He should know nothing but the will of his master, and learn to obey it.”<sup>cdlxv</sup> Douglass upon hearing this was resolved, “very well thought I. Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave. I instinctively assented to the proposition, and from that moment I understood the direct pathway to freedom.”<sup>cdlxvi</sup> Douglass’s experience functions as a liberatory catalyst in which consciousness, and resistance are transformed into knowledge and the development of a mind.

In reading about Douglass, Davis notes; “his first concrete experience of the possibility of freedom within the limits of slavery comes when he observes a slave resist a whipping. Now he transforms this resistance into a resistance of the mind, a refusal to accept the will of the master and a determination to find independent means of judging the world.”<sup>cdlxvii</sup> Davis’s first lecture was marked by the particularity she sought to underscore to the students about the importance of Black literature and the concrete ways Black people, faced with brutal forms of unfreedom and enslavement, have worked themselves out of the paradox of unfreedom, a dominating ideal for freedom in the western world. This literature projects the consciousness of a people who have journeyed to freedom through resistance. Davis further notes; “I’d like to end here by pointing to the essence of what I have been trying to get across today. The road towards freedom, the path of

liberation is marked by resistance at every crossroad: mental resistance, physical resistance, resistance directed to the concerted attempt to obstruct that path. I think we can learn from the experience of the slave.”<sup>cdlxviii</sup> Davis in the first lecture sought to explicate how Douglass’s life as a slave serves as an exemplar of the tradition of resistance found in Black literature that narrates “freedom as it is unfolded.” The “unfolding” creates mental and physical resistance as concretized experiences on the journey to freedom.

Davis’ second lecture is marked by an all too familiar experience that confronts Black philosophers who engage critically with the western canon. Davis relates that after the first lecture “one of the white students in the class came to my office and wanted to know how I was going to conduct the course.”<sup>cdlxix</sup> The white student’s hubris lead him to ask “whether or not I was going to limit the course to the philosophical experiences of the slave, of the Black man in society, or whether I was going to talk about people.”<sup>cdlxx</sup> The student saw no relation as to why Douglass’s experience as a slave had a correlation to modern Black experience let alone “people.” The portrayal of a Black slave producing literature that discussed how he developed mental and physical resistance to concretize freedom, was lost in the white student’s consciousness. The white student understood philosophy as an exercise in abstract ideals and not the concrete praxis. In other words, he failed to appreciate the importance of philosophy as produced by a slave even when represented in western philosophical categories and terms. Davis proceeded to say “now aside from the fact the slaves and Black people are people there is something in my mind which I think you should be aware of - and it is not unrelated to what I was just saying about alienation. Oppressed people are forced to come to grips with immediate problems every day, problems which have a philosophical status and are relevant to all people. One such problem is that of alienation.”<sup>cdlxxi</sup>

In the second lecture Davis started thus; “there is something which I think we might call the concept of the slave-breaker and we can unfold this concept according to the concrete behavior of Covey, the Negro-breaker under whose authority Frederick Douglass lives for a year.”<sup>cdlxxii</sup> In the most direct reference to Hegel and the concept of master and slave-breaker, Davis noted “in the *Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel discusses the dialectical relationship between the slave and the master. He states, among other things, that the master in reaching consciousness of his own condition, must become aware that his very independence is based on his dependence on the slave.”<sup>cdlxxiii</sup> Given the dialectical nature of the relationship of the master being dependent on the slave, Davis wanted to show that Hegel’s dialectical can be over-turned through struggle, and the slave can become the master. Davis argued “the independence of the master, we are saying is based on his dependence on the slave. If the slave were not there to till the land, to build his estates, to serve him his meals, the master would not be free from the necessities of life...only, the slave is the buffer zone, and in this sense, the slave is somewhat of a master: if he does not work, when he ceases to follow orders, the master’s means of sustaining himself has disappeared.”<sup>cdlxxiv</sup> Obsequiously, the slave possesses the power of life over the slave-master since the slave master is dependent on slave labor, this then, Davis argued, should demonstrate that “the master is always on the verge of becoming the slave and the slave possesses the real, concrete power to make him always on the verge of becoming the master.”<sup>cdlxxv</sup> To demonstrate, Davis points to “The Last Flogging” in Douglass’s *Life and Times* in which Douglass narrates what has become a famous reading in Africana philosophy, the fight between Douglass and the slave-breaker, Covey.

In the passage, Douglass notes after their fight, Covey “was frightened and stood puffing and blowing, seemingly unable to command words or blows.”<sup>cdlxxvi</sup> Douglass further narrates that

when Covey's attempts to call another slave called Bill, to help him subdue Douglass failed because he had no authority, he turned to Caroline an enslaved women owned by Covey who also refused to help him, leaving him helpless. The fight and refusal by other slaves to help, challenges Covey's identity as master dependent on the slave. Davis argued "the act of open resistance challenges his [Covey] very identity. He is no longer the recognized master, the slave no longer recognizes himself as slave. The roles have been reversed. And think about this as a concrete example of that proposition I put forth earlier, that the master is always on the verge of becoming the master. Here, it has happened. Covey implicitly recognizes the fact that he is dependent on the slave, not only in a material sense, not only for the production of wealth, but also for the affirmation of his own identity."<sup>cdlxxvii</sup> Davis showed how physical resistance was a concretized experience of freedom for Douglass. In the two lectures, Davis presents Douglass as one who achieves the model of resistance.

The first lecture is about mental resistance, the second lecture is about physical resistance. Together the ideal of freedom as an abstract concept is affirmed. The fight shows that Douglass's mental resistance confirmed the slave master operated on a "pseudo concept of freedom;" that by physically resisting to have the slave-master dependent on his labor, Douglass becomes the master through physical resistance. For Davis, Black literature is the projection of the consciousness of mental resistance and the embodiment of physical resistance. Black people have developed resistance to resolve the paradox of freedom as the "dominating theme in the history of Western ideas." Davis ended the second lecture by explaining to the students how mental and physical resistance had changed Frederick Douglass's relation to him as a slave, and how the experience had changed Covey's conception of himself as a slave-breaker.



## Methodological Issues in Davis Reading of Douglass

Angela Davis' reading of Douglass has been influential in the field of Africana Philosophy.<sup>cdlxxviii</sup> The themes of mental and physical resistance that Davis first developed from Douglass's *Life and Times* were central to her foray into feminism that began with her essay "The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," in which she picks from *Lectures of Liberation*. I argue that Davis reading of Douglass rooted in Hegelianism locked Douglass's thinking on the question of autobiography as a problem of how the slave attains consciousness and removes Douglass for the community which raised him and was central to his understanding of slavery and his development into Black manhood. This reading of Douglass has resulted in Africana philosophers failing to comprehend and expound the concepts of manhood that inspired Douglass during slavery. This failure can be linked to the influence of the Moynihan report in the 1980 that dominated debates about the black family between black feminist and black male and black family theorists. Named after Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the 1965 Moynihan Report based on African American families, remains the most controversial document of the twentieth century.

Under the title "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," the report focused on African American poverty and controversially concluded that the high rate of single-mother families was hindering progress for African Americans toward economic and political equality. African American female academics attacked the report for its use of "matriarchy" and "patriarchy," arguing that the terminologies could not be used to define African American families because of the way slavery had affected the African-American family. The report remains predominant in the debates between Black scholars in the establishment of Black

studies, and Black feminism and Black Woman studies, both in their effort to study the state of Black people and the Black family.

In the case of Davis, her work on feminism omitted to present Douglass as a theorist of Black manhood central to the abolishment of slavery. Instead, what becomes central in Davis's work is what Douglass's experience of slavery tells us about how Black literature concretized the paradox of freedom in western society. This, I argue, is attributed to her usage of Hegel's ideas of consciousness when she argues that "black literature in this country and throughout the world projects the consciousness of a people who have been denied entrance into the real world of freedom."<sup>cdlxxxix</sup> Douglass himself came to conceive notions of freedom given his own experience of enslavement. Douglass did not rely on theories of Hegel who tirelessly wrote, in multiple texts, that Africans were best situated to be slaves in the modern world. It is not exactly clear what Davis means by 'Black literature' in relation to Douglass's work. Douglass wrote a short novel titled *The Heroic Slave* where he explored his own philosophical ideas of Black manhood, freedom, labor, the mechanic arts and the skills of being a sailor as important to Black liberation.

While awaiting trial in the Marin County Jail, Davis wrote an essay titled "The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." The essay was a response to the Moynihan report and focused on the concept of matriarch which was a common feature in Black studies and Black feminism.<sup>cdlxxx</sup> In the report, Moynihan argued that with Emancipation, "the negro American family began to form in the United States, but it do so in an atmosphere markedly different from that which produced the American family."<sup>cdlxxxix</sup> The said difference was marked by the fact that the Negro male, particularly in the South faced intense White hostility based on some measure of fear. When Jim Crow made its appearance towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was the Negro male who was humiliated. The phrase "keeping the negro in his place" was aimed at keeping the

male Negro in place. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “a particular type of exaggerated male boastfulness became almost a national style. Not for the negro male. The ‘sassy nigger’ was lynched.”<sup>cdlxxxii</sup> Moynihan argued that between Reconstruction and the 1960s, the threatening of Black males by lynching, public humiliation by barring Black males from jobs, public facilities, meant that segregation in Jim Crow and the “submissiveness it exacts, is surely more destructive to the male than to the female personality.”<sup>cdlxxxiii</sup>

It is from targeting Black males in the reconstruction and construction eras that segregation, as a system aimed at the destruction of Black male personality, put the Black family structure in a perilous situation; the “negro family made but little progress toward the middle class pattern of the present.”<sup>cdlxxxiv</sup> As Moynihan argued, the Black male, and not the Black female, was construed as a threat. Moynihan quoted E Franklin Frazier, arguing, E. Franklin Frazier made clear that at the time of Emancipation, Negro women were already “accustomed to playing the dominant role in family and marriage relations and that this role persisted in the decades of rural life that followed.”<sup>cdlxxxv</sup> Moynihan further argued Black males from the Reconstruction period up to the 1960s, were targets of Jim Crow that limited their ability to create Black family structures. As a result, Black women were forced to assume the dominant role in the family, given efforts by Whites to annihilate Black males. Moynihan in chapter 4 of the report titled “The Tangle of the Problem,” thus argued; “in essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and in consequence on a great many Negro women as well.”<sup>cdlxxxvi</sup> It is this notion of matriarch that Davis sought to address in her essay “The Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves.” Davis shows that by building on the concepts of mental resistance, the

slave master operates under pseudo concept of freedom, and physical resistance. In this case, the slave master's freedom is dependent on the labor of the slave.

Davis states in her essay that “lingering beneath the notion of the black matriarch is an unspoken indictment of our female forebears as having actively assented to slavery. The notorious cliché, the ‘emasculating female,’ has its roots in the fallacious inference that in playing a central part in the slave ‘family,’ the black woman related to the slaveholding class as collaborator.”<sup>cdlxxxvii</sup> Davis insinuates that “inherent in the very concept of the matriarchy is ‘power’.”<sup>cdlxxxviii</sup> Such implication is misleading because it would be “exceedingly risky for the slaveholding class to openly acknowledge symbols of authority—female symbols no less than male.”<sup>cdlxxxix</sup> No slaveholder would want to uphold symbols of authority, as such Davis declared “the American brand of slavery strove toward a rigidified disorganization in family life, just as it had to proscribe all potential social structures within which black people might forge a collective and consciousness existence.”<sup>cdxc</sup> The lack of a collective responsibility caused mothers to have their children separated from them, creating an impression that mothers were not always the ones whom reared their children into adulthood.

Davis narrates how “mothers and fathers were brutally separated; how children who became of age, were branded and frequently severed from their mothers.”<sup>cdxcxi</sup> To illustrate, Davis points to Frederick Douglass's experience, and writes; “Frederick Douglass, for instance, had no recollection of his father. He only vaguely recalled having seen his mother - and then on extremely rare occasions. Moreover, at the age of seven, he was forced to abandon the dwelling of his grandmother, of whom he would later say: ‘she was to me a mother and a father.’”<sup>cdxcii</sup> In other words, Douglass's mother and grandmother's experience take more primacy over his own experiences. In attempting to use Douglass as an example to counter the notion of matriarch,

Davis obscures Douglass's experience, living without a father figure. In presenting Douglass, a paradigmatic example of mothers losing their children and children often losing elders within their family, particularly grandmothers emerges. What Davis dwell on is the consequences of Douglass and young men like him growing up without a father figure. For Douglass, he is lost in a world where he has no recollection of his father and rarely sees his mother and loses his grandmother, the only mother/father he knows. Under the concept of matriarchal, Davis fails to identify and discuss the Black man who acted as Douglass's father figure and helped him to understand the world in which "he had no recollection of his father," and was "forced to abandon the dwelling of his grandmother." Davis's reading of Douglas has spawned a litany of literature from scholars in the humanities who argue that the absence of a father figure in Douglass life meant that he spent the majority of time rewriting his autobiographies to fashion his own sense of father. Eric Sunquist commented on Douglass's sense of father, stating; "the intricate attitude toward fathers and family in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is directly related to Douglass's growing literacy, his sense of self-reliance, and his imagined role as another Madison Washington. In a typically American gesture, he makes himself his own father. This fictional self is composed at once of the absent father who so absorbs his attention in *My Bondage and My Freedom*."<sup>cdxciii</sup> This characterization of Douglass is highly misleading. In "Religious Nature Awakened," in *My Bondage and Freedom*, Douglass recalls while he first became awoken to the scriptures by a "white Methodist minister, named Hanson."<sup>cdxciv</sup> It was a "good old colored man, name Charles Lawson" who became his "spiritual father."<sup>cdxcv</sup> Douglass and Lawson developed a relationship where "Uncle Lawson lived near Master Hugh's house; and becoming deeply attached to the old man, I went often with him to prayer-meeting, and spent much of my leisure time with him on Sunday. The old man could read a little, and I was a great help to him, in

making out the hard words, for I was a better reader than he. I could teach him ‘the letter,’ but he could teach me the ‘spirit’.”<sup>cdxcvi</sup> Douglass’ relationship was not lost on his Master Hugh who “became averse to going to Father Lawson’s, and threatened to whip me if I ever went there again.”<sup>cdxcvii</sup> Douglass however was not deterred by the admonishment of his master, he was influenced by the relationship he developed with Lawson as his spiritual father such that Lawson told Douglass the lord had great work for him to do, and he must prepare to do it; and that he had been shown that he must preach the gospel. Douglass writes; “his words made a deep impression upon my mind, and I verily felt that some such work was before me...the advice and the suggestions of Uncle Lawson, were not without their influence upon my character and destiny. He threw my thoughts into a channel from which they have never entirely diverged. He fanned my already intense love of knowledge into a flame, by assuring me that I was to be a useful man in the world.”<sup>cdxcviii</sup>

Africana scholarship on Douglass has attempted to assert a parental link to white males and particularly the founding fathers “because Douglass’s act of self-fathering is embedded in the rhetoric and ideals of the Revolutionary fathers, the literacy he says he acquired from reading speeches on the meaning of liberty in *The Columbian Orator*, his first secret textbook, takes on a special tone in *My Bondage and My Freedom*.”<sup>cdxcix</sup> As I stated in Chapter 3, Douglass’s reading of the *Columbian Orator* inspired him to become familiar with the British common law and notions of consent that shaped laws of slavery. Beside Uncle Lawson, nowhere in his writings does Douglass discuss an absent father, let alone a white absent father. Literature review reveals that Africana scholars have failed to recognize Uncle Lawson as a father figure, to whom Douglass was deeply attached, and with whom he spent most of his leisure time, reading and

discussing the scriptures. It was Uncle Lawson who affirmed Douglass's devotion to take seriously the life of the mind and apply it to abolishing slavery.

Incidentally, Douglass discusses other Black men instrumental in his development as a man; Uncle Tony the blacksmith; Uncle Harry was maker of carts; Uncle Abel the shoemaker. Douglass describes them as the men who assisted him in their departments. Douglass writes; "these mechanics were called 'uncles' by all the younger slaves, not because they really sustained that relationship to any, but according to plantation etiquette, as mark of respect, due from younger to the older slaves."<sup>d</sup> The plantation etiquette prompted Douglass to write; "there is not to be found, among any people, a more rigid enforcement of the law of respect to elders, than they [slaves] maintain...there is no better material in the world for making a gentleman, than is furnished in the African."<sup>di</sup> Douglass asserts that African tradition of respect and honor to elders was fundamental to the plantation etiquette for it demonstrated how Africans in the new world maintained their values on their way to manhood. Douglas, wrote the following about the enslaved African: "he shows to others, and exacts for himself, all tokens of respect which he is compelled to manifest towards his master. A young slave must approach the company of older with hat in hand, and woe betide him, if he fails to acknowledge a favor, of any sort, with the accustomed 'tank'ee.' So uniformly are good manners enforced among slaves, that I can easily detect a 'bogus' fugitive by his manners."<sup>dii</sup>

Douglass further stated Black manhood developed out of the culture of African traditions. Customs and traditions were treated as law that demanded one has respect for elders as much as one has self-respect and regard for his own personhood. The etiquette was not merely practiced in veneration of elders but it also formed the relationships Douglass had with his peers. Douglass recalls when he was moved to a new plantation, he found himself in "congenial society," with

Henry Harris, John Harris, Handy Caldwell, and Sandy Jenkins. In his autobiography he writes; “I’m indebted to the genial temper and ardent friendship of my brother slaves. They were, every one of them, manly, generous and brave, yes; I say they were brave, and I will add, fine looking.”<sup>diii</sup> While Douglass had a penchant for being humorous while underscoring the beauty of Black people physically and culturally, he seriously acknowledged the brotherly relationship amongst his comrades that shaped his sense of self and manhood, noting “it is seldom the lot of mortals to have truer and better friends than were the slaves on this farm.

It is not uncommon to charge slaves with great treachery toward each other, and to believe them incapable of confiding in each other; but I must say, that I never loved, esteemed, or confided in men, more than I did in these. They were as true as steel, and no band of brothers could have been more loving.”<sup>diiiv</sup> Henry Harris, John Harris, Handy Caldwell, Sandy Jenkins and Douglass were close. When their plan to run away was foiled, Douglass wrote: “I felt a friendship as strong as one man can feel for another; for I could have died with and for them...of one thing I could be glad - not one of my dear friends, upon whom I had brought this great calamity, either by word or look, reproached me for having led them into it. We were a band of brothers, and never dearer to each other than now.”<sup>dvi</sup> Such details about the African slave trade are seldom studied in African philosophy. That Douglass from his tender age was shaped by African values of manhood has received little attention in Africana scholarship.

As I have argued throughout this project, Africana philosophers have imported categories from their training in mainstream philosophy into Black literature which has made it difficult to understand early Black philosophers on their own terms. I give the example of Davis who entrapped in Hegelian logic attempts to speak about consciousness and how consciousness for the slave beings with “authentic consciousness of an oppressed people.”<sup>dvi</sup> If we return to the



essay “The Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” notice that Davis in critiquing the matriarch in slavery that cannot capture the painful experiences of Black women, she observes “the designation of the black woman as a matriarch is a cruel misnomer. It is a kinship structure within which the mother exercises decisive authority. It is cruel because it ignores the profound traumas the black woman must have experienced when she had to surrender her child-bearing to alien and predatory economic interests.”<sup>dvii</sup> Despite this reality, Davis notes that it would be wrong to assume that Black women were passive participants to the destruction of the Black family. Given such experiences Black woman were instrumental in shaping the consciousness of the community. Davis returns to the concepts of resistance and consciousness from her *Lecture on Liberation*, stating; “it will be submitted that by virtue of the brutal force of circumstances, the black woman was assigned the mission of promoting the consciousness and practice of resistance.”<sup>dviii</sup> In what I see as a turn of mind, Davis argues; “a great deal has been said about the black man and resistance, but very little about the unique relationship black woman bore to the resistance struggles during slavery.”<sup>dx</sup> How are we to understand this break in Davis’s thinking when in her *Lectures on Liberation* all the authors she listed as important to the study of Black literature’s concretization of the paradox of freedom were Black men? It was Douglass, Davis used to embark on her teaching journey at UCLA, noting “starting with *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* we will explore the slave’s experience of his bondage and thus the crucial transformation of the concept of freedom as a static, given principle into the concept of liberation, the dynamic, active struggle for freedom,”<sup>dx</sup> then “we will move on to W.E.B Dubois, to Jean Toomer, Richard Wright and John A. Williams. Interspersed will be poetry from the various periods of Black History in this country, and theoretical analyses such as Fanon and

Dubois' A.B.C of color. Finally I would like to discuss few pieces by African writers and poems by Nicolas Guillen, a black Cuban poet, and compare them to the work of American Blacks.<sup>dx1</sup>

It is unclear why Davis chose to use Douglass's third autobiography *Life and Times* and not his first *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* or his second *My Bondage and Freedom*. Douglass in each autobiography had a habit of revealing more. When Davis begins her *Lectures on Liberation* to describe how Douglass came to authentic consciousness that led him to challenge the master's pseudo concept of freedom, Davis used "the first part of the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, called 'Life of a Slave'" in which Douglass as a child asked why he was a slave and why some people were masters.<sup>dxii</sup> Davis said about Douglass; "his critical attitude when he fails to accept the usual answer that God had made Black people to be slaves and white people to be masters - is the basic condition which must be present before freedom can become a possibility in the mind of the slave."<sup>dxiii</sup> Again, Davis applies Hegelian concepts to Douglass's narrative of how he developed a critical disposition to be free. Narrating the same story about critical disposition found in *Life and Times*, Douglas notes:

Once, however, engaged in the inquiry, I was not very long in finding out the true solution of the matter. It was not *color*, not *God*, but *man*, that afforded the true explanation of the existence of slavery; nor was I long in finding out another important truth, viz: what man can make, man can unmake. The appalling darkness faded away, and I was master of the subject. There were slaves here, direct from Guinea; and there were many who could say that their fathers and mothers were stolen from Africa - forced from their homes, and compelled to serve as slaves. This, to me, was knowledge; but it was kind of knowledge which filled me with a burning hatred of slavery, increased suffering.<sup>dxiv</sup>

Douglass presents a different account of what led him to develop a critical disposition to slavery after being dissatisfied with the White belief that slavery was God ordained, and that it was a crime. Douglass developed his disposition of slavery as a crime within the community of Africans who had both a mother and a father. The point is, Davis's reading through Hegelian

concepts hinders the ability to understand the community as a place in which Africans convey notions of ontological sovereignty, and how they function to convey the message that slavery was a crime against Africans. Subsumed in Hegelian concepts, Douglass is stripped of the reality of how his community shaped his perceptions of being free. In Hegel's formulation what we get is Douglass's transformation from slave to man. Under this dialectic, manhood for the slave is attained through mental and physical resistance on which the slave replaces the master by attaining the ability to define himself as a free being. Yet, Douglass sees the formulation of slavery as a function of crime.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass argues that the perpetuation of crimes was not only in the courtroom, plantations themselves where sights on which crimes were permissible against enslaved Africans. Douglass writes; "...I never knew a solitary instance in which a slave-holder was either hung or imprisoned for having murdered a slave. The usual pretext for killing a slave, is, that the slave has offered resistance. Should a slave, when assaulted, but raise his hand in self-defense, the white assaulting party is fully justified by southern, or Maryland, public opinion, in shooting the slave down. Sometimes this is done, simply because it is alleged that the slave has been saucy."<sup>dxv</sup> Resistance, as Douglass pointed out, was used as a justification to kill slaves. In the *Lectures on Liberation*, Davis noted that resistance, as a way to break the hold the slave master had on the slave, was learned from "Frederick Douglass who had observed a slave resist flogging.

In "The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Davis noted that "if resistance was an organic ingredient of slave life, it had to be directly nurtured by the social organization which the slaves themselves improvised."<sup>dxvi</sup> The flogging Douglass observed was due to resistance—physical resistance, violent resistance. In the *Lectures on Liberation*, the

resistance of the Black male slave is not seen as causing Douglass to develop defiance as a characteristic trait of Black manhood. This counters the argument that Davis makes that resistance as an organic ingredient of slave life was nurtured by social organization, and as such “could only be located in and around the living quarters, the area where the basic needs of physical life were met.”<sup>dxvii</sup> In locating resistance as beginning in the living quarters, Davis notes “via this path, we return to the African slave woman: in the living quarters, the major responsibilities ‘naturally’ fell to her. It was the woman who was charged with keeping the ‘home’ in order. This role was dictated by the male supremacist ideology of white society, in America; it was also woven into the patriarchal traditions of Africa.”<sup>dxviii</sup> This assertion in effect places Black women in the slave community as objects on which labor can be exploited by the white patriarchies while rendering Black men as dependent on Black women in the home through their labor.

Alexander Crummell in a speech titled “The Need of New Ideas and New Aims,” addressed to the Graduating Class of Storer College delivered in 1885, noted slavery was detrimental to the Black family and household “for if you will think but for a moment all that is included in the word family, you will see at once that is it the root idea of all civility, of all the humanities, of organized society. For, in this single word are included all the loves, the cares, the sympathies, the solitudes of parents and wives and husbands; all the active industries, the prudent economies and the painful self-sacrifices of households, all the gentle refinement, the pure speech and the godly anxieties of womanhood; all the endurance, the courage and the hardy toil of men”<sup>dxix</sup> In other words, the home was important place in which the ideas of womanhood and manhood were transmitted equally.

In the antebellum age when ideals of womanhood and manhood were defined by traits, Crummell's speech indicated that Black manhood imbued endurance, courage and hardy toil, while Black womanhood imbued gentle refinement and pure speech. The economy of the household represented all the active industries, the prudent economies and the painful self-sacrifices of household—the “business capacity and the thrifty pertinacity of trades and artisanship and mechanism; all the mortal and physical contributions of multitudinous habitations, formation of towns and communities and cities, the formation of states, commonwealth and cities, churches and empires.”<sup>dx</sup>

For Douglass, understanding these notions meant understanding his relationship with his mother upon learning of her death, and that she was the only enslaved person in Tuckahoe who could read. To this effect, Douglass noted; “That a ‘field hand’ should learn to read, in any slave state, is remarkable; but achievement of my mother, considering the place, was very extraordinary; and in view of that fact, I am quite willing, and even happy, to attribute any love of letters I possess, and for which I have got, despite of prejudice, only too much credit, not to my admitted Anglo-Saxon paternity, but to native genius of my sable, unprotected, and uncultivated mother - a woman who belonged to a race whose mental endowments it is, at present, fashionable to hold in disparagement and contempt.”<sup>dx</sup> Under the category of ‘field hand’ it was impermissible to learn to read and write, yet despite this fact, Douglass's mother learned. Douglass traced his intelligence and love of reading to his mother. Davis in her *Women, Race and Class* noted that she was wrong in her assertion about the exploitation of Black women by Black men, stating “I have since realized that the special character of domestic labor during slavery, its centrality to men and women in bondage, involved work that was not exclusively female...the salient theme emerge from domestic life in the slave quarters is one of sexual

equality. The labor that slaves performed for their own sake and not for the aggrandizement of their masters was carried out on terms of equality.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> While this revision is important, it still fails to give Douglass an autonomous voice about his own experiences that should be studied on their own merit outside the purview of German idealism vis a vis through Hegel as has become the norm in Africana philosophy.

Entrapped in reading Douglass through Hegel, Africana philosophers foreclose the reality that Douglass had a vested interest in translating his second autobiography *My Bondage and Freedom* in German. On July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1858, Douglass sent a letter to Ludmilla Assing, Otilie Assing’s elder sister describing how Otilie was inspired by the book and translated Douglass’s speeches in German newspapers. More specifically Douglass noted that his experience of being a slave for twenty years led him to work tirelessly to abolish slavery and to that end he hoped his book would help champion the German emigrants to work to help abolish slavery. Douglass wrote:

I was a slave during twenty years - and never had a day of schooling in my life. I have nevertheless made good my escape from slavery - and have been at work here for the freedom of my people during the last twenty years. In the prosecution of this object I wrote a book three years ago entitled 'my bondage and my Freedom,' in which I give my own personal experience of the operations of the slave system. This Book soon after its publication came to the knowledge of your Sister Otilia [sic] Assing - Her interest in the Book and the Cause it was designed to promote has led to an acquaintance and a friendship for which I have many reasons to be grateful. Upon suggesting the fact that the German people, emigrating to this country, must have an important influence upon the Institutions of this Country and especially upon the vital institution of Slavery - we mutually wished that the Book could be circulated in Germany. The result is that Miss Otilia [sic] has devoted, during the last year, all her otherwise leisure hours to translating 'My Bond- age and my Freedom' into German. Her industry and perseverance - especially in view of the fact that the work might never find a publisher - are remarkable and admirable. I have no doubt, owing to her large command of English as well as her own language and the passionate interest she has taken in the work that she has succeeded very well in making me speak in another tongue. Now what we want is that you, if possible find a publisher for the work in Germany. That is just the extravagant request which I have to make. Can you not spare a few hours to this work? I leave yours [sic]

kind sister to say all else. With respect - your Unknown Correspondent. Frederick Douglass.<sup>dxiii</sup>

Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* was translated as *Sklaverei und Freiheit:*

*Autobiografie von Frederick Douglass* in 1860.<sup>dxiv</sup> How are we understand the fact that Lucius Q.C Lammar II a Mississippi politician and jurist on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1860 in the House of Representatives cited Hegel's Philosophy of History to justify enslaving Africans, while in the same year Douglass had his book finally translated in German? Douglass believed his reflections on his experiences to attain freedom and his work to abolish slavery where enough to kill the narrative of the character traits of slaves imposed on Africans and used to justify slavery as an education in high morality as Hegel asserted. Instead of expounding on Douglass's character traits, and his relationship with other Black men and women on the plantation, Africana philosophers approach Douglass from a slave point of view and rarely articulate notions of consciousness or existential themes. Douglass revised his autobiographies in accordance with how he developed, mingled, and learned from his fellow enslaved Africans who denounced the White man's characterization of them as slaves.

### **Scholarship and the Heroic Slave**

Evidentially, there are more themes in Douglass's third autobiography than the problem of freedom Davis attempts to underscore. For instance, in his short work *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass narrated the story of Madison Washington the slave who led a rebellion on the Creole Ship. In doing so, Douglas mixed Washington's account with his own autobiographical accounts and infused his ethnological views of Black manhood. Douglass also highlighted the importance of the mechanic arts to slave rebellion, education, and moral philosophy of racial uplift, he used as the basis of his philosophy about Black liberation in America. *The Heroic Slave*, represents

Douglass's ideas of Black manhood that he argued was essential to ending slavery. Given the inability of scholars in the humanities to distinguish the concepts of manhood and masculinity in slavery and reconstruction, Africana scholars have erroneously read concepts foreign to Douglass's own conception of Black manhood. As a result, Africana scholars have failed to situate Douglass' role in the Colored Nation Conventions. African scholars have made little effort to address the manual labor, emigration and the advocacy of the development of Mechanic arts schools. They have failed to show Douglass as an exemplar of Black liberation.

Furthermore, Africana scholars have failed to analyze in detail Douglass's speeches, including "American Prejudice Against Color" (Ireland, October 1845), "America's Compromise with Slavery and the Abolitionists Work" (Scotland, April 1846), "America's and Scottish Prejudice Against the Slave" (Scotland, May 1846), "Farewell to the British People" (London, March 1847), "The Slaves' Right to Revolt" (Boston, May 1848), and "Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano" (New York April 1849) in which Douglass discusses Madison Washington as a paragon of Black manhood.

Contemporary Africana philosophers' failure to study Douglass in more detail than is the case, has resulted in some scholars in the humanities to argue Douglass short story is an attempt to emulate the ideals of the founding fathers. For example, in *Storytelling in Early Afro-American Fiction: Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave,'* Robert Stepto points out that Douglass picks Virginia as the location from where Madison Washington will lead his rebellion and proclaim Washington loves liberty as much as the three famous Virginia statesmen—Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington. The equivocation of heroic statesmen and heroic chattel has led scholars to argue that Douglass short story mirrors the patriarchal values of White male slave masters. The impression is a predominant critique perpetuated by Black



feminist and African American literary theorists of the 1980s. Literary scholars argued that Black nationalism was a male chauvinism ideology aspiring to attain same values and nationalistic goals as White nationalism.<sup>dxxv</sup> In the same vein, Black feminists of the 1980s, responding to the Daniel Moynihan Report that claimed Black family in slavery was matriarchal and emasculated Black men from their socio-sexual roles, contended that the family structure resulted in Black pathologies since Black men were not heads of the household. Black feminists of the time equated men of the 1980s to enslaved men on plantations who branded racial equality with being patriarchs.<sup>dxxvi</sup> Such standoffs led to various theoretical works that claimed Black masculinity and nationalism were a paragon of white nationalism; that it entrapped Black masculinity into reproducing patriarchal ideals that were traced in Black male writings during slavery. In *Race, Violence, and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass's The Heroic Slave*, Richard Yarborough argues Douglass in the short story was “unable or unwilling to call into question the white paradigm of manhood itself. Consequently, his celebration of Black heroism was subverted from the outset by the racist, sexist, and elitist assumptions upon which the Anglo-American male ideal was constructed and that so thoroughly permeated the patriarchal structure of slavery.”<sup>dxxvii</sup> Subverting the ideologies of White masculinity that were congenial towards preserving slavery meant that Douglass and his character Madison Washington fought to liberate themselves so as to participate in the patriarchal ideals of slavery.

To this end, Krista Walters in *Trappings of Nationalism in Frederick Douglass's The Heroic Slave*, notes Douglass “adopts a host of nationalistic suppositions underpinning the ideology of American slavery: the primacy of Eurocentric historical and cultural perspectives, the belief in America's glorious origins, the projection of a kind of manifest destiny based on such origins, and the necessary adherence to patriarchal values.”<sup>dxxviii</sup> To this effect, Africana

philosophers fail to distinguish manhood from masculinity, and the manner in which enslaved men developed concepts of manhood. As a result, the character traits ascribed to enslaved people as justifications for why Black men were incapable of political manhood are hardly explored. As Manisha Sinha has argued beginning in the revolutionary era through reconstruction, Black abolitionist "...developed a powerful counter-narrative to the history of revolutionary republicanism in the United States that emphasized slavery rather than freedom and independence. Revolution for black abolitionists meant not just the incomplete promise of the American Revolution but the Haitian Revolution, a way to justify the overthrow of slavery through slave rebellion and abolitionist instigation."<sup>dxix</sup> For example, an article that appeared in the *Freedom's Journal*, April 6, 1828 titled "Haytien Revolution" written by J., states thus; "the commencement of the revolution of St. Domingo was looked upon with horror by men in all parts of the world.

It was thought so unnatural a crime that slaves should rise against their masters, that their downfall was earnestly desired and frequently prayed for by everyone."<sup>dx</sup> J., offered an observation he found contradictory to the celebration of revolutions:

Other revolutions have happened; other governments have been formed, but under far different auspices. The American revolution which first led the way in asserting the great principles of liberty, was hailed with enthusiasm by the wise and the good. It found advocates even in England, against whose oppression they were contending. The French revolution too, ere it acted those deeds of terror and madness which will not soon be forgotten, had supporters and well wishers in every heart, except those whose feelings were blunted in the service of a cold and chilling despotism. But the revolution of St. Domingo, which taught the world that the African, though trodden down in the dust by the foot of the oppressor, yet had not entirely lost the finer sensibilities of his nature, and still possessed the proper spirit and feelings of man-no one wished it well-no fervent prayer was put up for its-success-none bid it 'God speed'."<sup>dxxi</sup>

The Black abolitionist understood that the Haitian revolution, insurrections, and revolts were not celebrated because they were deemed crimes of the nature of slave. The Africans who revolted

demonstrated the character traits of manhood that stood outside the political manhood synonymous with the American and French revolutions. It is from this vantage point Douglass celebrated Madison Washington and the insurrection he led on the *Creole* ship. Despite this historical fact, contemporary Africana scholarship argues that romanticism is the influential movement that supports *The Heroic Slave*. Stanley Harrold in “The Nonfiction Madison Washington Compared to the Character in Frederick Douglass’s *The Heroic Slave* and Similar Civil War Era Fiction” argued that “romanticism dominated American literature, art, and culture from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the Civil War. The movement emphasized emotion, heroes, intuition, mystery, natural forces, and those who live close to nature.”<sup>dxxxii</sup>

Given this assertion, Harrold sees Douglass, Williams Wells Brown and Lydia Child’s account as works that show “romanticism influenced abolitionist accounts of the revolt’s best known leader, Madison Washington.” In an attempt to pivot to a different source of the celebration of Washington in Douglass work, Linda Barnes in “Insurrection as Righteous Rebellion in the *Heroic Slave* and beyond,” correctly observes that for Douglass his models for insurrectionists were fellow Black insurrectionists “in his mind [Douglass], Madison Washington joined the ranks of Vesey as heroes of the freedom struggle. However, Douglass and others invoked their names and actions as more than a celebration of the violence in the overthrow of slavery.”<sup>dxxxiii</sup>

Barnes assessment is important as she shows that Black thinkers had developed a tradition on which they venerated their Black insurrectionists as models of political manhood. However, her analysis falls back into the paradigms of perceiving Black political thinking as imitating notions of natural law and natural rights. Barnes states; “An examination of the *Creole* affair and other acts of rebellion reveal a political awareness among the rebels and their admirers that shows slavery stood in opposition to ‘natural rights principles’ and therefore justified

violence against slavery. A careful consideration of the rebel heroes reveal that Washington and others were themselves aware of ‘natural law,’ but used ‘natural rights’ to justify their actions.”<sup>dxxxiv</sup> The fore-stated contention makes natural law and natural rights universal assertions that fail to account for “rebel heroes.” The natural law and natural rights principles used to enslave Africans rendered them outside of political manhood. Africana philosophers have failed to show how Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, and Denmark Vesey constructed different forms of Black manhood that offered liberatory models on which Black activists could organize to champion liberation and universal suffrage rights. Historians have noted the role of Africana political ideology, military experiences and skills in mechanic arts as instrumental to the Haitian Revolution and insurrections from the revolutionary war to the antebellum period. For example, John Thornton has shown that most of the Africans in Haiti ten years before the revolution were born in Africa and were captured as a result of the colonial wars to bring Africans to the new world.

Thornton in “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” notes, “In fact, a great many of the slaves had served in African armies prior to their enslavement and arrival in Haiti. Indeed, African military service had been the route by which many, if not most of the recently arrived Africans became slaves in the first place, since so many people had been enslaved as a result of war. Under these circumstances, their military performance may not be as remarkable as historians have assumed. As ex-soldiers and veterans of African wars, they may have needed little more than the opportunity to serve again, in a rather different sort of war in America.”<sup>dxxxv</sup> Similarly Walter C. Rucker in *The River Flows On*, shows how Virginia had a community of Africans revered for their mechanic and spiritual skills, some who likely shaped the blacksmith skills and conjurer of Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey who plotted and carried

out insurrections. Rucker notes; “Mande-speakers and others from Senegambia made up roughly 17 percent of all enslaved Africans sent from identifiable ports in Atlantic Africa to Virginia during the eighteenth century. Like the Igbo and others from Biafra, they also brought with them particular understandings of the spiritual powers of blacksmiths...there was a great degree of association between blacksmiths and conjurers among the Mande. In many cases, Mande smiths were viewed as priests with the uncanny ability of combining technology and sorcery. These smith-priests were responsible for making protective amulets and weapons forged in wrought iron and imbued with a techno-spiritual force known as nyama.”<sup>dxxxvi</sup> As noted earlier, Douglass lived in a community of African conjurers (his friend Sandy Jenkins who gave him a root he believed would help in his fight against Covey), and ‘Uncles’ enmeshed in the African etiquette that he believed was nurturing his growth into a gentleman.

Perhaps no other scholar has performed sleights of hands with the construction of Douglass and Madison Washington than Celeste-Marie Bernier. Bernier makes it clear that Douglass looked to Washington to inspire his break from William Garrison through the speeches. Bernier correctly states that Douglass gave six speeches about the Creole incident: “American Prejudice Against Color” (Ireland, October 1845), “America’s Compromise with Slavery and the Abolitionists Work” (Scotland, April 1846), “America’s and Scottish Prejudice Against the Slave” (Scotland, May 1846), “Farewell to the British People” (London, March 1847), “The Slaves’ Right to Revolt” (Boston, May 1848), and “Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano” (New York April 1849).<sup>dxxxvii</sup> The two most detailed accounts that he gives about having knowledge of Madison’s life are “American Prejudice Against Color,” and “Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano”. Bernier suggests that the six speeches can be characterized in the three themes Douglass attempts to convey; “first, his self-conscious rupturing of seemingly

straightforward juxtapositions intended to establish British moral superiority and United States depravity; second, his realization of the slipperiness of language, particularly given that signification within racist discourse operated differently according to national and transatlantic contexts; third, his determination to situate his own resistance within a context of wider and subversive black movements towards liberation.<sup>»dxxxviii</sup>

Bernier explains what motivated her analysis; “given scant attention by critics, Douglass’s speeches on the Creole revolt debate a number of questions integral to representations of black masculinity throughout the period and beyond. They posit various relationships between black heroic representation, dramatic spectacle, audience identity, and reader response, which reflect upon Douglass’s awareness of the fundamental importance of reconceptualizing the definitions of permissible subject matter and style established by mainstream white abolitionists.”<sup>dxxxix</sup> Bernier shows that Douglass, speaking to white audiences in Ireland, Britain, Scotland, and Boston used Madison Washington’s story as a demonstration of his own circumstances. Bernier states; “it is clear that he saw in Madison Washington’s heroism the chance to extend the range of his abolitionist oratory, which he had previously been circumscribed by the events of his own life. The *Creole* revolt suited his abolitionist agenda because it enabled him to garner British support by denouncing North American brutality while at the same time liberated his pretensions to the status of independent orator endowed with the right to choose his own subject matter.”<sup>dxl</sup>

Six months before Douglass gave his speeches in Ireland, Britain and Scotland, he spoke at the American Anti-Slavery Society. Drawing from his speech titled “My Slave Experience in Maryland,” Douglass narrated his experiences, and spoke about Derby, the slave who resisted flogging by an overseer. Derby escaped but was shot to death in the creek. Douglass expressed

anger about his wife's cousin who was beaten to death with a billet of wood. During his speech, Douglass answered a rhetoric question he posed 'why don't you rise?' If we were thus treated we would rise and throw off the yoke. We would wade knee deep in blood before we would endure the bondage."<sup>dxli</sup> Douglas chaffed at this remark noting "you'd rise up! Who are these that are asking for the manhood in the slave, and who say that he has it not? Because he does not rise? The very men who are ready by the Constitution to bring the strength of the nation to put us down."<sup>dxlii</sup> Douglass, in his speech noted, the constitution had given Whites the ability to put down slave insurrections, this he would repeat throughout his travel in England.

Douglass continued his speech; "we don't ask you to engage in any physical warfare against the slaveholder. We only ask that in Massachusetts, and the several non-holding States which maintain a union with the slaveholder, who stand with your heavy heels on the quivering heart-strings of the slave, that you stand off. Leave us to take care of our masters."<sup>dxliii</sup> Even while working with Garrison, Douglass had espoused violence against slave-masters and substantiated his claims by arguing that the constitution was a document that fundamentally protracted White interest by arming Whites to bring down slave insurrections. As I stated in chapter 2, Douglass given his experience as a slave, and learning about the law while enslaved had a different interpretation of the laws of slavery and the constitution that differed from the views of White abolitionists. African scholarship have failed to investigate what exactly got Garrison and his camp mad about Douglass's speeches. The question of violence particularly slave violence is an experience Douglass held on as a thematic aspect of his difference with Garrison and natural law theorists. Douglass continued to argue; "You say to us, if you dare carry out the principles of our fathers, we'll shoot you down. Others may tamely submit; not I. You may put the chains upon me and fetter me, but I am not a slave. My master who puts the

chains upon me, shall stand in as much dread of me as I do of him.”<sup>dxliv</sup> Douglass was espousing ideas of insurrection and rejecting notions that enslaved people were complicity in their own slavery by remaining enslaved even after witnessing horrid conditions, murder, and brutal treatment of their fellow enslaved Africans.

### **Douglass’s Reading of Madison Washington as an Exemplar of Black Manhood**

Douglass published his first autobiography on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1845, the same year he first spoke of Madison Washington as the main character in a short piece of fiction entitled *The Heroic Slave* published in 1852. In this segment, I focus on two speeches that Douglass used to convey that Madison Washington as an exemplar of Black manhood. The first was delivered on October 27<sup>th</sup> 1845 in Cork, Ireland and the second speech on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1849 in New York. The October 27 speech was the first time Douglass spoke about Madison Washington. Douglass used the character to critique the imposed natural inferiority of Black people as justification for their enslavement. In his speech he stated: “there is perhaps no argument more frequently resorted to by the slaveholders in support of the slave trade, than the inferiority of the slave. This is the burden of all the defense of the institution of slavery ‘the negro is degraded - he is ignorant, he is inferior - and therefor tis right to enslave him.”<sup>dxlv</sup> Douglass argued that in no sound philosophy could slavery be justified. He posed questions; “what if we are inferior? Is it valid reason for making slaves of us? For robbing us of our dearest rights? Can there be any reason found in moral or religious philosophy, justifying the enslaving of any class of being, merely on the ground of their inferiority-intellectual, moral, or religious?”<sup>dxlvi</sup> Douglass argued the perpetuation of inferiority as the basis of enslavement seemed counter to moral or religious philosophy. Douglass contended inferiority was not a condition for slavery in slavery laws. To this Douglass argued: “the people of America deprive us of every privilege, why we don’t stand up erect? They



tie our feet, and ask us why we don't run? The laws forbid education, the mother must not teach her child the letters of the Lord's Prayer; and then while his unfortunate state of things exist they turn round and ask, why we are not moral and intelligent; and tell us, because we are not, that they have the right to enslave us."<sup>dxlvii</sup>

Douglass continued; "there are charges brought against coloured men not alone of intellectual inferiority, but of want of affection for each other."<sup>dxlviii</sup> Douglass used Madison as a "glorious illustration of affection in the heart of a black man."<sup>dxlix</sup> Douglass proceeded "if enslaved man had no affection for their families and friends how would you explain that Washington in his initial flight from Virginia to Canada helped him attain liberty from 'American republican slavery to monarchical liberty.'"<sup>dli</sup> In *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass writes that even after achieving liberty from American republican slavery, Washington's affection for his family superseded that of attaining liberty: "I can't be free while my wife's a slave."<sup>dlii</sup> Douglass wrote of Washington: "he left Canada to make an effort to save his wife and children, he arrived at Troy where he met with Mr. Garret; a highly intellectual black man, who admonished him not to go, it would be perfectly fruitless."<sup>dliii</sup> After returning to Virginia, Washington was captured and placed on the Creole ship. When the American Congress learned Madison Washington had imitated George Washington and gained freedom, he was labelled a robber, thief, and murderer.<sup>dliiii</sup> In response to the idea of imitating White men, Douglass stated, "we are branded as not loving our brother and race," yet if this was the case "why did Madison Washington leave Canada where he might be free, and run the risk of going to Virginia?"

The general response was that "persons who have a mixture of European blood distinguish themselves" in acts of valor and freedom.<sup>dliiv</sup> Douglass rebuffed the claim, and responded: "this is not true. I know that the most intellectual and moral colored man that is now

in our country is a man whose veins no European blood courses - tis the Rev. Garrett; and there is the Rev. Theodore Wright - people who have no taint of European blood, yet they are those possess as elegant manners as I see among almost any class of people.”<sup>dlv</sup> Douglass aware that a Black man was instrumental in stopping British invasion at Bunker Hill, remarked; “indeed my friends those very Americans are indebted to us for their own liberty at the present time, the first blood that gushed at Lexington, at the battle of Worcester, and Bunker Hill, General Jackson has to own that he owes his farm on the banks of the mobile to the strong hand of the Negro.”<sup>dlvi</sup> Douglass in this speech showed different models of Black manhood in enslaved Africans. He described Madison Washington as a “glorious illustration of affection in the heart of a black man,” Henry Garnett as a “highly intellectual Black man,” and Rev Theodore Wright as having “elegant manners.” Douglass also made reference Salem Poor who killed British lieutenant Colonel Abercrombie, and Peter Salem who killed Major John Pitcairn at Bunker Hill.<sup>dlvii</sup>

In the tradition of Black abolitionist, Douglass equated himself with Madison. Douglass’s experiences, like Madison Washington’s were shaped and aided by other Black men who inspired him to work to abolish slavery. Through insurrections, working as abolitionists and fighting as soldiers these constructed notions of manhood that were outside the character traits colonialist ascribed to them as slaves, even when whites wanted to claim that these man must have white blood in them, Douglass argued on the contrary “that is not true I know that the most intellectual and moral colored man that is now in our country is a man whose veins no European blood courses-tis the Rev. Garrett; and there is the Rev. Theodore Wright-people who have no taint of European blood, yet they are those possess as elegant manners as I see among almost any class of people.”<sup>dlviii</sup> In effect Douglass had inserted Madison Washington in a tradition of Black abolitionist, his experiences like Madison Washington were shaped and aided by other Black

man who inspired him to work to abolish slavery. In this regard Madison Washington and Douglass were separated by a degree in virtue of their relationship to Henry Garrett.<sup>dlx</sup>

The April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1849 speech was at the Meeting of The Colored Citizens, an anti-colonization meeting organized to confront the founding of the American Colonization Society which sought to send Black people back to Africa. Douglass accused the American Colonization Society and its colonization schemes of waging a war against Black people. Douglass observed that he was not solely speaking to the Black audience, but that they were reporters as well who would publish his remarks. Douglass spoke; "...it would be greeted with great joy the glad news should it come here to-morrow, that an insurrection had broken out in the Southern states. I want them to know that a *black man* cherishes that sentiment - that one of the fugitive slaves holds it, and that it is not impossible that some other black men may have occasion at some time or other, to put this theory into practice."<sup>dlx</sup> Douglass used the insurrection to affirm Black manhood, indicating that the sentiments of insurrection could be practiced by those called fugitive slaves to assert their manhood since they were not slaves or complicity to the colonial schemes of the American Colonization Society. Douglass added; "I want to alarm the slaveholders, not by mere declamation or by mere bold assertions, but to show them that there is really danger in persisting in the crime of continuing slavery in this land. I want them to know that there are some Madison Washingtons in this country."<sup>dlxi</sup>

In this regard, Washington serves as a reminder to the South, that Black men are capable of pursuing crimes against slavery, and importantly that "there are more Madison Washingtons in the South, and the time may not be distant when the whole South will present again a scene something similar to the deck of the *Creole*."<sup>dlxii</sup> The fore-remarks were not random and off the cuff, in his speech Douglass presented another Black man helped Madison Washington when he

returned to free his wife. Douglass identified him as Robert Purvis: “he advised him [Washington] not to go, and for a time he was the man: he advised him not to go, and for a time he was inclined to listen to his counsel. He told him it would be of no use for him to go, for that as sure as he went he would only be himself enslaved...under the influence of his counsel he consented not to go.”

Douglass narrated how Washington after leaving Purvis’ house could not fathom being without his wife and made up his mind to go to Virginia, to which Douglass stated, “that was a noble resolve and the result was still more noble.”<sup>dlxiii</sup> In 1889, Purvis told a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter the story of how Madison Washington was inspired by a portrait of Joseph Cinque, a West African man of the Mende people who led the revolt on the Amistad when he visited Purvis; “I was at the time in charge of the work assisting fugitive slaves to escape. Among the slaves who came into my keeping in this way was a man named Madison Washington. We sent him to Canada, but, to my astonishment, on the day that I received this painting Washington returned and came to my house and asked me to help him secure the release of his wife.”<sup>dlxiv</sup> Purvis proceeded; “I showed Washington this painting and he asked me who it represented. I told him the story of Cinque, and he became intensely interested. He drank in every word and greatly admired the hero’s courage and intelligence.”<sup>dlxv</sup> Such accounts were not merely for entertainment value, they served as a way for Black thinkers to reflect and pass down knowledge about how to attain freedom.<sup>dlxvi</sup> For example, consider how Purvis narrated the story of Cinque and how Douglass narrated the story of Washington on the slave ship. Purvis said; “These slaves, including the three women, were placed on board the Amistad. They were put below decks and fettered. When the vessel had been out two days, Sinque, although unable to get his own fetters off, assisted the others and succeeded in freeing them of their chains. They armed

themselves with short knives, which were to be used to cut sugar cane, and sprung on deck, seized the vessel and killed the captain.”<sup>dlxvii</sup>

Douglass in his April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1849 speech noted: “On the 8<sup>th</sup> day it seems that Madison Washington succeeded in getting off one of his irons, for he had been at work all the while. The same day he succeeded in getting irons off the hands of some seventeen or eighteen others. When the slaveholders came down below they found their human chattels apparently with their irons on, but they were broken.”<sup>dlxviii</sup> On the 9<sup>th</sup> day, Washington “leapt from beneath the hatchway, gave a cry like an eagle to his comrades beneath, saying we must go through. Suiting the action to the word, in an instant his guilty master was prostrate on the deck, and in a very few minutes Madison Washington, a black man, with woolly head, high cheek bones, protruding lip, distended nostril, and retreating forehead, had the mastery of that ship.”<sup>dlxix</sup> The character traits of Madison Washington and Joseph Cinque were of courage and intelligence. Black men applied their mechanic skills. They broke the chains that were attached to their limbs and picked up arms to kill their oppressors and gained mastery of the slave ships that caused international commotion. In his address to the “Slaves of the United States” at the National Convention of Colored Citizens, on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1843, Henry Highland Garnet who also had contact with Madison Washington placed him in the pantheon of Black revolutionaries. The patriotic Nathaniel Turner followed Denmark Veazie.

He was goaded to desperation by wrong and injustice. By despotism, his name has been recorded on the list of infamy, but future generations will number him among the noble and brave. Next arose the immortal Joseph Cinque, the hero of the Amistad. He was a native African, and by the help of God he emancipated a whole ship-load of his fellow men on the high seas. And he now sings of liberty on the sunny hills of Africa, and beneath his native palm trees,

where he hears the lion roar, and feels himself as free as the king of the forest. Next arose Madison Washington, that bright star of freedom, and took his station in the constellation of freedom.”<sup>dlxx</sup> Douglass in his speeches had seen Madison Washington as exemplar of his definition of Blackmanhood. Madison his Douglass speech was a “glorious illustration of affection in the heart of a black man” in which had created “a noble resolve” to not only free his wife but using mechanic skills breaks the chains of his fellow enslaved Africans and commandeer the ship. These themes were replete in his short story

### **Reading the Heroic Slave as a Story of Black Manhood: What is Freedom to Me or I to It?**

*The Heroic Slave* is divided in four short chapters. In the first chapter, Douglass identifies Madison Washington as a native of Virginia and recognizes other representatives from Virginia who received historical acclaim not accorded to Washington. Douglass states “that a man who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry- who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson - and who fought for it with valor as high, arms as strong, and against odds a great, as he who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence, lives now only in the chattel records of his native state.”<sup>dlxxi</sup> The preceding passage has produced various opposing Africana scholarship that argue Douglass “adopts a host of nationalistic suppositions underpinning the ideology of American slavery: the primacy of Eurocentric historical and cultural perspectives, the belief in America’s glorious origins, the projection of a kind of manifest destiny based on such origins, and the necessary adherence to patriarchal values.”<sup>dlxxii</sup> Some Africana philosophers contend that Douglass was “unable or unwilling to call into question the white paradigm of manhood itself. Consequently, his celebration of Black heroism was subverted from the outset by the racist, sexist, and elitist assumptions upon which the Anglo-American male ideal was constructed and that so thoroughly permeated the patriarchal

structure of slavery.<sup>”dlxxiii</sup> The afore-accounts contradict the fact that Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington were slave-owners who fought to preserve slavery as an institution germane to the new republic. Madison Washington as an enslaved African was framed by different notions of manhood than those Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington ascribed to the Africans they owned as slaves. Africana scholars has missed the fact that Douglass in the first chapter is deconstructing the notions of enslaved Africans as complicity in their enslavement by not rebelling against their oppressors.

Douglass begins this exposition of Washington in the woods, reflecting on how animals in the woods are freer than him. Douglass juxtaposes Washington’s condition with the birds and snakes that are freer than he, as they fly where they please or crawl into homes where they please. Washington extolls “but what is freedom to me, or I to it? I am a slave, I am a slave - born a slave, an abject slave - even before I made part of this breathing world, the scourge was plaited for my back; the fetters were forged for my limbs.”<sup>”dlxxiv</sup> The conditions before Washington was born were such that he entered a world in which fetters were made for his limbs. Such were the conditions on which masters deemed slaves with no manhood. Douglass exposes this contradiction by comparing Washington to the snake, stating, “he [the snake] escaped my blow, and is safe. But here I am, a man - yes a man - with thoughts and wishes, with powers and faculties as far as angel’s flight above the reptile - yet he is my superior, and scorns to me as his master, or to stop to take my blows. When he saw my uplifted arms, he darted beyond my reach, and turned to give me battle.”<sup>”dlxxv</sup> Being free, the snake is willing to fight Washington to preserve itself freedom. Washington proceeds to query if his nature is to be submissive to the blows of his slave-master: “I neither run nor fight, but do meanly stand, answering each heavy blow of a cruel master with doleful wails and piteous cries.”<sup>”dlxxvi</sup>

Washington questions if it is nature to be submissive and enable to enact courage to protect his life, or run away, or fight the oppressor, just like the snake was ready to do battle with him. To this, Washington counteracts by recounting his courage: “perish the thought, I dare do anything which may be done by another. When that young man struggled with the waves, for life, and others stood back appalled in helpless horror, did I not plunge in, forgetful of life, to save him? The raging bull from whom all others fled, pale with fright, did I not keep at bay with a single pitch-fork? Could a coward do that? No, no - I wrong myself, I am no coward. Liberty I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it...what others have done, I will do. These trusty legs, or these sinewy arms shall place me among the free. Tom escaped; so can I.”<sup>dlxxvii</sup>

Douglass subverts the logic of the slave-master and the character traits ascribed to the slave as passive and complicity in their own enslavement. Washington is presented as capable of achieving what others cannot, he recounts the ways he showed courage in multiple situations in which others coward, importantly heroic feats were done on the behest of saving the lives of others. Douglass shows that liberty and freedom are attainable by rebelling against slavery. With Tom in mind, Washington notes “I will at least make the trial. I have nothing to lose. If iam caught, I shall only be a slave. If iam shot, I shall only lose a life which is a burden and a curse. If I get clear, liberty, the inalienable birth-right of every man, precious and priceless, will be mine. My resolution is fixed, I shall be free.”<sup>dlxxviii</sup> The transformation here is predicated on the fact that Washington is already a runaway slave, in the woods, pondering on the nature of slavery and the state in which enslaved Africans are born into a condition that make them believe their nature is to be a slave and submissive to the construction of life as a slave. Yet for Washington, multiple acts in his own life prove he is capable of valor, courage and bravery. Moreover, he has Tom as an example of courage. In this context, Douglass is asserting notions of Black manhood.



We see Washington begin to formulate ideas of Black manhood that counteract the theories of the nature of slaves as complicity in their enslavement. In the first chapter, Washington resolves to not only get himself free by ensure that his wife is free as well. Freedom become a communal praxis.

Some of the themes in Chapter 1, reappear in Chapter 2, when years later, Washington meets Mr. Listwell, the White man who was eavesdropping on him in the woods and had resolved to be an abolitionist upon hearing Washington affirm his manhood by rejecting the colonial logic that being a slave is being complicity to slavery. Washington was housed by Mr. Listwell. Recounting the story of how he run away from his slave master and found his way to the plantation on which his wife Susan lived: “peeping through the rents of the quarters, I saw my fellow slaves seated by a warm fire, merrily passing away the time, as though their hearts knew no sorrow. Although I envied their seeming contentment, all wretched as I was, I despised the cowardly acquiescence in their own degradation which it implied, and felt a kind of pride and glory in my own desperate lot. I dared not enter the quarters, for where there is seeming contentment with slavery, there is certain treachery to freedom.”<sup>219</sup> Here Douglass again presents the idea that slaves are seen as complicity in their enslavement when they return to their quarters, despite knowing that their conditions will not change. Washington as a runaway understood to enter the quarters would engender a mass exodus since “where there is seeming contentment with slavery, there is certain treachery to freedom”.

Out of the colonial logic of the slave, Washington had to act and adopt manners that challenged the system. Washington recounted how he and his wife resolved he lives within the vicinity, so both can plot their escape. Washington chose to hide in the woods, however, a fire burned down the woods which forced him to flee. Left without the provision of food,

Washington had to steal from nearby plantations. As Washington explained to Mr. Listwell, “your moral code may differ from mine, as your customs and usages are different. The fact is sir, during my flight, I felt myself robbed by society of all my just rights; that I as in an enemy’s land, who sought both my life and my liberty. They had transformed me into a brute; made merchandise of my body, and, for all the purposes of my flight, turned day into night, and guided by my own necessities, and in contempt of their conventionality, I did not scruple to take bread where I could get it.”<sup>dlxxx</sup> As I stated in chapter 3, Douglass argued slavery was a crime rooted in robbing enslaved Africans of the right to their body and labor. Slavery transformed enslaved Africans into brutes and merchandise. The colonial system of slavery had a social system in which kidnapping Africans in Africa and the Americas was the perquisite to property rights. Stealing by enslaved people was a way to reclaim oneself. By stealing, not only is Washington asserting his manhood, but proclaiming his rights.

In chapter 3, the reader meets Washington as part of a chain gain to be sent to New Orleans. The reader learns of fugitive slave catchers were sent out to recapture Washington. Learning of Washington’s whereabouts, fugitive slave catchers capture Washington. While the fugitive slave catchers are waiting to ship Washington and the other enslaved Africans, Mr. Litwells discovers Washington amongst the slave gang, horrified he asks Washington what happened. Washington responds:

“Sir, I could not be free with the galling thought that my poor wife was still a slave. With her in slavery, my body, not my spirit, was free. I was taken to the house-chained to a ring bolt, my wounds dressed. I was kept there three days. All slaves, for miles around, were brought to see me. Many slave-holders came with their slaves, using me as proof of the completeness of their power, and of the impossibility of slaves getting away. I was taunted, jeered at, and berated

by them, in a manner that pierced me to the soul.”<sup>dlxxxii</sup> Here Douglass shows the system of degradation that reinforced the idea that slaves were without recourse to acts of rebellion; that enslaved Africans were inferior to the strength and manhood of white men. Washington shows how slaveholders brought slaves from their plantations as proof their complete power, and that slaves were best suited for submission.

In chapter 4, Douglass subverts this logic. In this chapter a couple of sailors reflect on the rebellion on the *Creole*. Tom Grant happened to be on the ship, while Jack Williams happened to attempt to understand from their friend what happened. The curious Jack Williams exclaimed to his friend who happened to be on the *Creole*, “those black rascals got the upper hand of ye altogether, the whole disaster was the result of ignorance of the real character of darkies in general. With half a dozen resolute white men I could have had the rascals in irons in ten minutes, not because im so strong, but I know how to manage em. With my back against the caboose, I could, myself have flogged a dozen of them; and had I been on board, by every monster of the deep, every black devil of em all would have had his neck stretched from the yard-arm.”<sup>dlxxxiii</sup> Tom Grant added; “it is quite easy to talk of flogging niggers here on land, where you have the sympathy of the community, and the whole physical force of the government, state, and national, at your command, and where, if a negro shall lift his hand against a white man, the whole community, with one accord, are ready to unite in shooting him down. I say, in such circumstances, its easy to talk of flogging negroes and of negro cowardice.”<sup>dlxxxiii</sup>

To this regard, Douglass is arguing that notions of the slave as a coward and his inability to assert manhood is a function of a communal structure that justifies the American government to undermine, flog, and kill enslaved Africans. This social structure however belies the reality of

the courage and rebellious acts like the *Creole* which substantiated enslaved people were capable of asserting their manhood. Grant explained; “the fact is, Mr. Williams, you underrate the courage as well as the skill of these Negroes...the leader of the mutiny in question was just as shrewd a fellow as ever I met in my life, and was as well fitted to lead in a dangerous enterprise as any white man in ten thousand.”<sup>dlxxxiv</sup> Douglass also subverts the logic of Jack Williams by having Tom Grant show enslaved Africans were capable of proving manhood that lies outside the colonial logic of them as complicity to slavery. Washington is presented as a shrewd fellow with courage and skills that contradicts the portrayal of slaves as illiterate, submissive and timid. Of Madison Washington, Grant notes; “the name of this man strange to say was Madison Washington. In the short time he had been on board, he had secured the confidence of every officer. The Negroes fairly worshipped him.”<sup>dlxxxv</sup>

In Madison Washington, Douglass presents a counter-revolutionary who leads his people from the confines of the colonial system of slavery, his valor and intelligence are beyond the comprehension of the sailors. Douglass adds; “it was a mystery to us where he got his knowledge of language; but as little was said to him, none of us knew the extent of his intelligence and ability till it was too late. It seems he brought three files with him on board, and must have gone to work upon his fetters the first night out; and he must have worked well at that; for on the day of the rising, he got the irons off eighteen besides himself.”<sup>dlxxxvi</sup> Black manhood was defined through courage, intelligence, the use of mechanic skills to defy the logic that enslaved people were cowards, unintelligent, submissive and thus complicity to their enslavement. In this respect, Madison Washington, after capturing *Creole*, appealed to the surviving slavers; “my men have won their liberty, with no other weapons but their *Broken Fetters*. We are nineteen in number. We do not thirst for your blood, we demand only our rightful freedom.”<sup>dlxxxvii</sup>

In this chapter, Douglass reflects on Chapter 1, the part where Washington, in fetters “forged for my limbs,”<sup>dlxxxviii</sup> envies the freedom of birds and snakes, roaming around and pleased in their habitat. After capturing the ship, Madison Washington tells the remaining sailors attempting to attack him, “your life is in my hands. I could have killed you a dozen times over during this last half hour, and could kill you now. You call me a black murderer. I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not malice, is the motive for this night’s work.”<sup>dlxxxix</sup> If the logic of slavery and fighting to wrestle its economic benefit from the British was at the center of the revolutionary war, Washington shows that his motive had nothing to do with economic exploits, and property rights. Rather, his motive was freedom from the fetters on his limbs. It is through the use of mechanic skills; the use of the very fetters, that Washington obtained freedom for himself and all the slaves aboard *Creole*. Madison concluded: “we have stuck for our freedom, and if a true man’s heart be in you, you will honor us for the deed. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they.”<sup>dx</sup> If liberty was an ideal actualized in the revolutionary war to preserve slaves, enslaved Africans were the true embodiment of liberty as they rebelled against the colonial system of slavery. The liberty attained by Madison Washington on *Creole* is about restoring justice to crimes against humanity.

In closing, *The Heroic Slave* presents a different notion of Black manhood worthy of study in Africana philosophy. Douglass portrays a Black manhood that counteracts the logic of a colonial system of slavery. Black manhood is formed in the crucible not of appeals, but of subverting the colonial system by literally using the master’s tools to bring down his house. In the essay he wrote during the Civil War titled “Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?” Douglass noted “You should enlist to learn the use of arms, to become familiar with the means of securing,

protecting and defending your liberty...the only way open to any race to make their rights respected is to learn to defend them. When it is seen that black men no more than white men can be enslaved with impunity, men will be less inclined to enslave and oppress them. Enlist therefore, that you may learn the art and assert the ability to defend yourself and your race.”<sup>dxci</sup>

Douglass’s admonishment centers at the center of this project, what are the different arts that Black people learned to assert to defend themselves and the race to ensure slavery is not assumed a normative axiom of the Africa personality. At the heart of this chapter is the rejuvenation of Black intellectual tradition engaged in intellectual warfare against a world built on the colonial system of slavery that enslaved Africans.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation was sparked by a renowned anthropologist and African American novelist Zora Neal Hurston, a person not featured in any of the five chapters. I stumbled on Hurston's interview with Cudjo Lewis, the last African kidnapped and shipped to the plantations of Alabama. In July, 1927, Hurston, while conducting ethnographic research in American slavery, travelled to Plateau, Mobile, Alabama to seek an audience with Cudjo Kazoola Lewis (c. 1841- 1935). Upon meeting, Hurston recalls calling out Cudjo by his African name. Tears rolling down his face, Cudjo exclaimed, "Oh Lor', I know it you call my name. Nobody don't' calle me my name Kossula, jus' lak I in de Affica soil!"<sup>dxcii</sup> The exchange accentuated the humanization of Kossula. He was elated that Hurston came over to learn how he was enslaved, the part of Africa he came from, and how he fared as a slave and freeman. To that he exclaimed; "somebody come ast about Cudjo! I want tellee somebody who I is, so maybe dey go in de Afficky soil some day and callee my name and somebody dere say, 'Yeah, I Know Kossula.' I want you everywhere you go to tell everybody whut Cudjo say, and how come I in Americky soil since de 1859 and never see my people no mo'."<sup>dxciiii</sup>

Hurston was able to record Cudjo's firsthand account of the raid that led to his capture and the bondage fifty years after the transatlantic slave trade. By skillfully illuminating the tragedy of slavery, the interview became a matter of serious thought for me. It was to me, what Africana philosophy exemplifies. But two years into my philosophy program I began to learn

that histories of Africana philosophy tend to be silent about the articulate thoughts and writings of enslaved Africans as genealogies within Africana philosophy.

In the 50 years Africana philosophy has been in existence it has been embraced by the American Philosophical Association, and has established itself as an academic discipline. However, the problem at the core of Africana philosophy has to do with self-definition in contemporary scholarship. Many Africana philosophers still utilize the mainstream conceptual tools of myth and rationality. Too often, Africana scholars delve into mainstream sources hitherto largely drawn from Western philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Georg Wilhelm Hegel based on Eurocentrism that justifies slavery as a benevolent system. As such, very few Africana scholars have succeeded in synthesizing the historical insights provided by early Black thinkers into a coherent account of African American values, aspirations, and sense of identity. Ignored in all this is the root cause of African American state of affairs—the transatlantic slave trade whose legacy still lingers up to this day. In is the conclusion of this dissertation that the problem at the core of Africana philosophy has to do with the lack of identity. Africana philosophers have failed to embrace and philosophize the culture, intelligence, and self-respect of the enslaved African, and create their own tropes of manhood. Instead, they collude with mainstream philosophers in sketching a genial impression of the slave trade that portrays slavery as one of those unfortunate benevolent events in history.

This dissertation was centered on the question of the nature and use of method in Africana philosophy. Its purpose was to push to the forefront the issue of slavery and draw Africana philosophers to the nature of the experience of enslaved Africans like Cudjo. Upon reading Hurston's interview with Cudjo in *Barracoon: The Story of the Last Slave*, I realized Cudjo was helping Africana philosophers broaden their knowledge of the transatlantic slave



trade by presenting an aspect of the Black experience mischaracterized by mainstream scholars and educators. Like many other freed slaves, Cudjo was dying to tell his story about how he became a slave and found himself in America in 1859, all in the hope someday someone would trace his roots to Africa. In the presence and comfort of Hurston, a Black thinker, Cudjo resorted to using the African idiom of Sanfoka [to go back and get it]. Sanfoka is often represented by a mythical bird with an egg in its mouth reaching backward, a posture that symbolizes “gems or knowledge of the past upon which wisdom is based; it also signifies the generation to come that would benefit from that wisdom.”<sup>dxciiv</sup> Hurston in beginning her relationship with Cudjo by referencing his African name Kossula and focusing her interview by wanting to know how he became a slave, what part of Africa he emerged from, centers the knowledge and culture that Kossula emerged from and how those traditions helped him endure the experience of slavery and becoming a freedman.

Cudjo’s compelling story was the reason I dedicated the first chapter to Black narricide. By telling his story, Cudjo, like the Black thinkers featured in the chapter, was “killing” western narratives emerging out of slavery. Cudjo was dismantling mainstream affable depiction of the slave plantation: decent living conditions for all, only the lightest punishments, and general Hurston centered Kossula into a community of people whom his story would matter in his homeland in Africa and future generations of Black people. The concept of Black Narricide is motivated by the request of countless enslaved Africans like Kossula whom longed for a future when their stories about life in Africa, enduring slavery, reclaiming one’s freedom would composite of the most profound heart-breaking, humane, compassionate and philosophical laden life stories.

The concept Black Narricide in this body of study, is an attempt to humanize enslaved people as intellectually gifted individuals who theorize the human condition from the barrows of colonial system of slavery. The concept seeks to capture the different approaches and genre of discourse that violently raptured the mythologies that sustained colonial systems of slavery. Kossula for example, in explaining how he got the name Cudjo Lewis exclaimed “my name, is not Cudjo Lewis. It Kossula. When I gittee in Americky soil, Mr. Jim Meaher he try callee my name, but it too long, you understand me, so I say, ‘well, I yo’ property?’ He say, ‘Yeah.’ Den I say, ‘You callee me Cudjo. Dat do.’ But in Afficky soil my mama she name me Kossula.”<sup>dxcv</sup> Demonstrating the incompetence of his slave master to pronounce his whole name, Cudjo preys on the slave master’s self-interest to own him as property, forcing him to give up his Kossula name. In the brief quip, Cudjo retains his identity as a son and reclaims his agency to give himself another African name, Cudjo, thus maintaining his African heritage. It is this line of thinking that the concept of Black Narricide seems to capture.

In 1917, John Edward Bruce renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century journalist, member of the American Negro Academy and secretary to Marcus Garvey, gave a speech on the “The Importance of Thinking Black,” at Virginia Theological Seminary and College where he implored the newly ordained men and women ministers to meet organized wrong with organized resistance intelligence directly.<sup>dx cvi</sup> Bruce further noted how universities in the post-reconstruction era had no textbooks centered on the achievement of the Black race in their curriculums. In his effort to combat this purposeful erasure of Black contribution to world history, Bruce implored the new alumni to understand that “our environment makes us think white, and some of us think white so persistently that we haven’t time to think black. But this complexion we must ultimately overcome, and I urge upon you gentlemen to help with voice and pen to hasten the coming of the

morning when Negroes all over this broad land will wake up to the importance of thinking black.<sup>”dxcvii</sup>

Bruce’s emphasis on the importance of thinking Black, was rooted in understanding Black history or what in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was called profane history, in which Black thinkers centered Egypt as the mecca of modern civilization.<sup>dxcviii</sup> Bruce reminded the graduates; “there was a time, as of you know who are familiar with the history of Egypt, our ancestral home, when the whole of then-civilized world went to School to Africa. The Greeks and Romans journeyed into that country annually for the purpose of gathering knowledge and wisdom at the feet of its black philosophers, who were then like the black keys on a piano-above the whites...they even represented their favorite goddess of wisdom, Minerva, as an African Princess in compliment to the wisdom, piety and erudition as scholars of thee sable blacks.”<sup>dxcix</sup> In heeding Bruce’s charge, and remembering the Black philosophers who gained their freedom with their feet, created the first modern Black nation and constitution rooted in universal rights, the concept of Black Narricide is a call for serious engagement with intellectual contours of Black thought, not as subservient to white thought, but as progenitor of Black values that sustain Black humanity.

Specific to this project, Black Narricide asks if philosophy as a discipline produced slavery apologists whose work sustained colonial systems. How did enslaved Africans, often banned from reading and writing on plantations and cities, think through their oppression such that they abolished slavery and colonial systems that philosophers valorized? What forms of knowledge did they possess and discover that they dedicated their lives to bequeath a world in which future generations of Africans would not have to endure slavery? Stated differently, why has the thinking of slavery apologists become the normative fixture to then read the accounts of slavery and the humanity of Black people in order for those narratives to be given credence as

“philosophical”? Instead of engaging the thoughts of those who abolished slavery, and the organizations they created to abolish it, the discipline of philosophy provides theories of slavery apologists use to articulate the suffering of our ancestors.

In *Black narricide*, the heuristic Black differs from the contemporary discourse on Blackness that currently permeates academic discourse. I employ “Black” as a classification that people of African descent in general, and early Black thinkers in particular, have politicized since the 17<sup>th</sup> century in their effort to reclaim their African heritage, and deconstruct and destroy or “kill” colonial systems in slavery and ethnocentrically determined ideologies designed to exclude Africans and African Americans from world history. It is clear from Chapter 1, that Black thinkers paved the way for emancipation. Using *Black narricide* as a genre, they developed propaganda campaigns against slavery. They used the traditional arguments against slavery, protesting it in their writings, and challenging it on moral, economic, and political grounds. Their role in the antislavery movement not only led to the abolition of the slave trade, but became a source of pride to Africans, and African Americans. Yet African scholarship honors them only in half.

When the transatlantic slave trade ended, defenders of slavery continue to argue the end of the slave economy was going to have devastating impact on White America. Like they had done throughout the slave trade, they argued that slavery had existed throughout history and was the natural state of mankind. Chapter 2 touches on the most important rationalization for slavery—the so-called “Curse of Ham,” picked up by some of the most revered philosophers like Aristotle who developed his own justification for slavery: the notion of the “natural slave.” Slaves in his view, lacked the higher qualities of the soul necessary for freedom. African philosopher Achille Mbembe in *Critique of Black Reason* notes that the justification for slavery

led to “not only a collection of discourses but also practices - the daily work that consisted in inventing, telling, repeating, and creating variations on the formulas, texts, and rituals whose goal was to produce the Black Man as a racial subject and site of savage exteriority, who was therefore setup for moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization,”<sup>dc</sup> suited for the plantation. Mbembe further states that the state of the enslaved African led to the invention of Blackness. It was the cog that made possible the creation of the plantation.<sup>dc</sup> Blackness became a submersing logic such that since 1670, the world wrestles with what Mbembe calls Black reason.

It can be concluded here that, as Mbembe postulates, Black reason was as a result of Black consciousness. Enslaved Africans sought answers to questions like “Who am I? ‘Am I, in truth, what people say I am?’ ‘Is it true that I am nothing more than that- what I appear to be, what people see me as and say of me? What is my real social status, my real history?’”<sup>dcii</sup> The questions were in response to White consciousness, preoccupied with understanding the Black man by seeking to answer the question ‘who is he?’ The question sought to name a reality exterior to it and to situate that reality in relationships to an *I* considered to be the center of all meaning. “From this perspective, anything that is not identical to that *I* is abnormal.”<sup>dciii</sup>

White consciousness gave rise to Black thinkers, the best known being Frederick Douglass, featured extensively in Chapter 4. As a former servant, Douglass was able to read and write. In 1841, he began to speak to the crowds about what it was like to be enslaved. But Douglass, who always attacked White Americans for selfishly proclaiming their love for liberty while at the same time denying basic rights to so many humans beings, was excluded from mainstream philosophy. Race and racism became the heuristic on which philosophy was studied. Its bifurcation was complicated by the debates from sociologist and legal theorists about how

class and gender, as post-civil rights identification markers, could be useful in broadening the discourse of race and American history. The fusion of race, and racism became the disciplinary approach to American history, fashioned to understanding race relations in America. This was more salient given the multicultural orientation and focus on prejudice reduction. The result was that mainstream academics became preoccupied with tracing the racist history and prejudices of Black people leading to inter-racial conflicts.<sup>dciv</sup>

The world in which owning a slave and seeing slaves on college campuses has been turned into a world in which the dominant race carries forms of racial bias. In scholarship, Africana philosophy, a recent discipline, has been caught up in the same web. Africana philosophers have concentrated on race and racism as social constructs. Beneath this veneer is the colonial structure of slavery, while we debate if race is social constructed or not, slavery, as demonstrated in this dissertation, literally made humans fungible, their bodies and flesh were tethered, and branded with whip slashes and were claimed as property. Those whom were deemed slaves were a reality and part of the social fabric of American domestic life and the public polity. Mainstream philosophical investigations relying on slave theorists on whom slave-masters relied to justify slavery, treated slavery as a philosophical puzzle and indeterminate debate about the morality and legality of owning people.

Up to this day, philosophers puzzle over ingenious ways to textualize and contextualize what Aristotle, John Locke, Hegel meant by slavery by doing close readings of their texts, and construct dialogical exegeses that humanize the slave theoretician. It is inconvincible for contemporary philosophers to wrestle with the fact that slave masters and slave theorists never considered a world in which slavery would end. Given the moral industry that the contemporary academy has developed around race, race is a discursive discourse that allows academics to call

figures racists while attempting to reclaim their importance to the philosophical canon. The ending of segregation has motivated a belief in the academy that racist thinking can be done away with. Mainstream scholarship convinced many Africana scholars that it is much easier to be vigilant with racism than it is to deal with the everyday horrors of slavery that governed American life for well over three hundred years. The legislation of ending segregation and the death of few Black men and women by government agencies and assassins is much better to deal with to erect heroes than the protracted civil war between Northern and Southern white men lost hundreds of slaves to earn their progenies freedom. Racism is treated as something we can give rational attention to, the law as rational instrumental showed that reason can be applied to ending racist laws, conversely slavery and the laws of slaves that were foundational and indeterminate structures of the foundation of this country that took a civil war to contend with have been buried as part of the failed experiment of American democracy.

The overarching conclusion is that Africana philosophy must not be primarily concerned with philosophy of race. And as earlier intimated, the emergence and rapid expansion in the 1600s of the transatlantic slave trade, built America on the backs of African American labor. Yet when you turn to scholarship on Africana philosophy, the study of slavery from the African American point of view is absent. In actual fact, rarely, if at all is slavery studied in Africana philosophy. This dissertation shows that Africana philosophy can best be studied in the conventional African American thought that is driven by a history of slavery.

## ENDNOTES

### Chapter 1

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- This theory which would identify the human race with the brutes of the forest, and avers them to be subject to the same laws and doomed to the same fate, tends to work national as well an individual evil When sinful and selfish and sensual beings, as fallen humanity are found to be are taught as they are by the theory of natural selection, that it is a law of nature to man, no less than to beast, that the strong should trample down and exterminate the weak and that when they are successful in doing so, they are only inheriting their legitimate destiny as 'the fittest to survive' what results, what fruits could be looked for from such a doctrine but high handed injustice, oppression and cruelty, on the one hand, and suffering, slavery and extermination on the other? pg 25.
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## Chapter 2

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<sup>cxvi</sup> Dubois's work is the often correlative link between Philosophy and History, figures like George Washington Williams, Carter G Woodson, and Arthur Schomburg are undertheorized Black thinkers who made important philosophical interventions. Let alone we don't study the debates between Black Historians and how these might inform Africana Philosophy beyond the evolving concept of Race. For example we have yet to study a Black Legal Historian tradition and how that might inform Africana Philosophy.

<sup>cxvii</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington, "Coloring Universal History: Robert Benjamin Lewis's Light and Truth (1843) and William Wells Brown's The Black Man (1863)" *Journal of World History*, Vol. 20 (2009), 106.

<sup>cxviii</sup> Erik Seeman, "Justice Must Take Place: Three African Americans Speak of Religion in Eighteenth Century New England," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no.2 (1999): 411.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> Ruth Bogin, "Liberty Further Extended: A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 1(1983): 95.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> A.J Meyers, *Destructive Impulses: An Examination of an American Secret in Race Relations: White Violence* (University Press of America, 1994). Curry, *The Man-Not*. Woodard, *The Delectable Negro*. Lamonte Aidoo, *Slavery Unseen: Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian History* (Duke University Press, 2018). Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power*.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> Bogin, "Liberty Further Extended," 102.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>cxviiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>cxxx</sup> Anthony Bogues in his text *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (Routledge, 2003) places Cugoano as the progenitor as of a Black heretic tradition. I agree with Bogues, I merely differ in saying that Cugoano also theorized a different understanding of the foundations of Western Civilization that rejected the claims of natural vs. positive law that would lead into the concerns of slavery and property rights. Cugoano transcended this binary to argue for Africans to understanding the foundations of Western civilization outside the natural law vs. positive law binary.

<sup>cxxxi</sup> Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (Penguin Classics, 1999), 10.

<sup>cxxxii</sup> Samuel Sewall, "The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial" (1700), 3.

<sup>cxxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>cxxxiv</sup> Elman Service. *A Century of Controversy: Ethnological Issues from 1860 to 1960*. (Academic Press, 2014)

<sup>cxxxv</sup> Melissa Stein *Measuring Manhood: Race and the Science of Masculinity, 1830–1934* (University of Minnesota, 2015), 74.

<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Tobin, James. *A farewell address to the Reverend Mr. James Ramsay: from James Tobin, Esq. to which is added a letter from the Society for Propagating the Gospel, to Mr. Anthony Benezet of Phila-delphia: and also a translation of the French King's declaration relating to the situation of negroes, &c. in his European dominions. London [etc.] Printed for G. and T. Wilkie, 1788. The Making Of The Modern World. Web. 26 Dec. 2016.* "I shall therefore, content myself with observations, that after all which has been produced on fruitful an interesting theme, slavery many perhaps be considered as one of those evils which, like pain, sickness, poverty were originally interwoven into the constitution of the present world, for purposes wholly unknown to its short sighted inhabitants, and to account for the origin of which has hitherto baffled our most acute and laborious metaphysicians" P. 7

<sup>cxxxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>cxxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>cxxxix</sup> We grant to you full and free power, through the Apostolic authority by this edict, to invade, conquer, fight, subjugate the Saracens and pagans, and other infidels and other enemies of Christ, and wherever established their Kingdoms, Duchies, Royal Palaces, Principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps and any other possessions, mobile and immobile goods found in all these places and held in whatever name, and held and possessed by the same Saracens, Pagans, infidels, and the enemies of Christ, also realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps, possessions of the king or prince or of the kings or princes, and to lead their persons in perpetual servitude, and to apply and appropriate realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, possessions and goods of this kind to you and your use and your successors the Kings of Portugal. "Dum Diversas", accessed Dec 18, 2016

<http://unamsanctamcatholicam.blogspot.de/2011/02/dum-diversas-english-translation.html>

<sup>cxl</sup> Vernon Valentine Palmer, "The Origins and Authors of the Code Noir," *56 La. L. Rev.* (1996)

<sup>cxli</sup> James writes Jail laws stipulated 1) A specific allowance of clothing under penalty of fine on their masters to be levied on oath, by justice, constables 2) Provisions to be planned on every estate in proportion to the number of its slaves, 3) Jail keepers, having delinquent slaves in custody to supply them with proper food, water, and lodging, under a proper penalty. 4) Female convicts pregnant recaptured after a proper time after delivery, 5) Masters and mistress are to endeavor as much as possible at the instruction of heir slaves in the knowledge of the deity and the principles of Christianity and to promote their conversion and baptism, 6) Slaves not to work on Sunday, Good Friday, Christmas, 7) Liberty of slaves to plant and to carry about and sell the fresh meat, poultry, small flock and vegetables, with penalties on such as interrupt or deferral them 8) Slaves not to suffer captivity for particular thefts of flock under the value of five pounds 9) Slaves not to be maimed or mutilated at the will of their owners under very heavy penalties 10) Persons killing slaves wantonly or inhumanly to be deemed guilty of felony with benefit of clergy for the first offense but to fine and imprisonment for the second offence to suffer death. P.24

<sup>cxlii</sup> Politicians and Judges used the theory to argue for laws to subjugate Black people and deny them rights. Texts Charles Carroll *The Tempter of Eve or The Criminality of Man's Social, Political, and Religious Equality with the Negro* John Campbell *Negro-Mania: Being and Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men* John H. Van Evrie's *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination*. Minister D.G Phillips *Nachash: What is it? Or An Answer to the Question, Who and Wha is the Negro? Drawn from Revelation, Sister Sallie The Colorline. Devoted to the Restoration of Good Government, Putting an End to Negro Authority and Misrule, and Establishing a White Man's Government in the White Man's Country by Organizing the White People of the South*, challenge the normative idea of natural law as being nothing more than ethnological jurisprudence that affirms White supremacy.

Thus, a Black philosophy of law helps us to understand that law in the binary of natural law and positive law is driven by an indeterminacy to never relinquish racism as a logic of subordinate Black people to a permanent subordinated class subjugated to the permanence of white violence.

<sup>cxliii</sup> This became known as the Out of Asia theory in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century popularized by Ernest Haeckel, Eugene Dubois, Henry Fairfield Osbon, Roy Chapman Andrews which said the origins of the human races begun in Asia. This theory said Africans were primates who came about either through sexual intercourse between white men, Asians with monkeys, Felix V. Luschan proclaimed this thesis at the First Universal Races Congress in 1911. Dubois attended the Conference his paper “The Negro Race in the United States of America” was later turned into the book *The Negro* a response to the Out of Asia theory an Luschan claim of the origins of Africans.

<sup>cxliv</sup> Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 32.

<sup>cxlv</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>cxlvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>cxlvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>cxlviii</sup> Cuagano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 20.

<sup>cxlix</sup> William P. Quigley, “Five Hundred Years of English Poor Laws, 1349-1834: Regulating the Working and Nonworking Poor” 30 *Akron L. Rev.* 73 (1996-1997) ,7.

<sup>cl</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>cli</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>clii</sup> See Trevor Burnard *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>cliii</sup> Slavery Under the Mosaic, The Roman, and the American Code. *Old Guard: A Monthly Journal Devoted to the Principles of 1776 & 1787*. Jul 1865, Vol. 3 Issue 7, p319-323.

<sup>cliv</sup> Cuagano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 159, endnote 53.

<sup>clv</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>clvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>clvii</sup> Ana Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History* (Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2017)

<sup>clviii</sup> Andrew Fede, *Homicide Justified: The Legality of Killing Slaves in the United States and the Atlantic World* (University of Georgia Press, 2017).

<sup>clix</sup> Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 53.

<sup>clx</sup> *Ibid.*, 34: That slavery was an ancient custom, and that it became the prevalent and universal practice of many different barbarous nations for ages: this must be granted; but not because it was right, or anything like right and equity. A lawful servitude was always necessary, and became contingent with the very nature of human servitude. But when the laws of civilization were broken through, and when the rights and properties of others were invaded, that brought the oppressed into a kind of compulsive servitude, though often not compelled to it by those whom the were obliged to serve. This arose from the different depredations and robberies which were committed upon one another; the helpless were obliged to seek protection from such as could support them, and to give unto them their service, in order to preserve themselves from want, and to deliver them from the injury either of men or beasts.

<sup>clxi</sup> For a judicious critical of this line of reasoning see Charles Mill, *The Racial Contact* (Cornell University Press, 1999), for a historical account see George Washington Williams *History of the Negro Race in America, 1619 - 1880* (G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1883).

<sup>clxii</sup> For while civil society continued in a rude state, even among the establishers of kingdoms, when they became powerful and proud, as they wanted to enlarge their territories, they drove and expelled others from their peaceable habitations, who were robbed of their substance, and drove from the place of their abode, make their escape to such as could and would help them; but when such relief could not be found, they were obliged to submit to the yoke of their oppressors, who, in many cases, would not yield them any protection upon any terms. Cuagano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 35.

<sup>clxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>clxiv</sup> If this right, we have a different understanding of John Locke’s theory of government, property and slave as the relate to his book *Two Theories of Government* and his writing of the South Carolina Constitution. See David Armitage’s essay “John Locke, Carolina, and the Two Treatises of Government” *Political Theory*, Vol: 32 no5 October 2004 for account of the influence of Locke’s theories in the constitution of South Carolina.

<sup>clxv</sup> That men of activity and affluence, by whatever way they are possessed of riches, or have acquired a greatness of such property, they are always preferred to take the lead in government, so that the greatest depreddators, warriors, contracting companies of merchants, and rich slaveholders, always endeavor to push themselves on to get power and interest in their favour; that whatever crimes any of them commit they are seldom brought to a just punishment.

Cuagano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 70.

<sup>clxvi</sup> Dubois' *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade 1638-1870* (Cosimo Classics,2007) and *Black Reconstruction 1860-1880* (Free Press,1998) highlight this phenomenal well with the creation of different white labor classes that grew to oversee Blacks as a permanent subordinate class. Robert J. Steinfeld's text *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) and *Coercion, Contract and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2001)are insight in the creation of free labor through law.

<sup>clxvii</sup> John D. Bessler, *The Birth of American Law: An Italian Philosopher and the American Revolution* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2014).

<sup>clxviii</sup> Cesare Bonesana di Beccaria, *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments* (Albany: W.C. Little & Co., 1872).

<sup>clxix</sup> Cuagano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 57.

<sup>clxx</sup> When the property of others is taken away, either by stealing, fraud, or violence, the aggressors should be subjected to such bondage and hard labor,(and especially when the trespass is great, and they have nothing to pay) as would requisite to make restitution to the injured, and to bring about a reformation to themselves. And if they have committed violence either by threats or force, they ought to suffer bodily punishment, and the severity of it according to their crimes, and the stubbornness of their obduracy; and shall punishments as are necessary should be inflicted upon them without pitying or sparing them, though perhaps not to be continued forever in the brutal manner that the West-India slaves suffer for almost no crimes. *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>clxxi</sup> *Ibid.*, *Slavery*,98-100.

<sup>clxxii</sup> W.E.B Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (Free Press, 1998)

<sup>clxxiii</sup> Henry, "Between Hume and Cugoano,"

### Chapter 3

<sup>clxxiv</sup> Max Horheimer & Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Standford University Press, 2002), 137.

<sup>clxxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>clxxvi</sup> Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Louisiana State University Press, 2007)

<sup>clxxvii</sup> Emmanuel Eze,ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Wiley-Blackwell Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>clxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>clxxix</sup> Lewis Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14

<sup>clxxx</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Duke University Press, 2017), 2-3.

<sup>clxxxi</sup> Robert Bernasconi, Tommy Lott, eds., *The Idea of Race* (Hackett Publishing Company,2000), vii.

<sup>clxxxii</sup> Wylie Sypher, "Hutcheson and the 'Classical' Theory of Slavery," *The Journal of Negro History* 24, no.3 (1939): 263.

<sup>clxxxiii</sup> Justin Roberts, *Slavery and The Enlightenment in the British Atlantic*,( Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>clxxxiv</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press,1994). Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>clxxxv</sup> Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery*, 54-57.

<sup>clxxxvi</sup> David Hume, "Of National Characters," in *Essays and Treatises on several Subjects* (London: A.Miller, 1758), 12.

<sup>clxxxvii</sup> David Hume, " Letter to Francis Seymour Conway, First Earl of Hertford, 20 March 1776," in *Further Letters of David Hume*, ed. Felix Waldmann (Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 2014), 67.

<sup>clxxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*,66.

<sup>clxxxix</sup> John Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica; With Remarks on the Moral and Physical Conditions of the Slaves, and on the Abolition of Slavery in the Colonies* (Oliver & Boyd, Tweddale House, 1823; reprinted by Negro Universities Press, 1969), vi



- exc Ibid., 18-19.
- exci Ibid., 112.
- excii Ibid., 112.
- exciii Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting For Slavery*, 48.
- exciv John Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica*, 79.
- excv Ingrid Tague, *Animal Companions: Pets and Social Change in Eighteenth Century Britain* (The Pennsylvania University Press, 2015), 53-54.
- excvi Ibid., 57.
- excvii Ibid., 324.
- excviii Ibid., 324-325.
- excix Ibid., 256.
- cc Marlene Daut, *Tropics of Haiti : Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789-1865*. (Liverpool University Press, 2016), 4.
- cci Ibid., 4.
- ccii Baronde Vastey, *The Colonial System Unveiled*, trans. Chris Bongie (Liverpool University Press, 2014), 108.
- cciii George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage'," *The Review of Metaphysics* 19, no.4 (1966):794.
- cciv "A Defense of the African Slave Trade, 1740," *London Magazine*, 9 (1740), 493-494, in Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1930), 469.
- ccv Ibid., 469.
- ccvi Ibid., 469.
- ccvii Edward Rugemer, *Slave Laws and Resistance in the Early Atlantic World* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 7.
- ccviii Louis Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment*, trans. John Conteh-Morgan (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 8.
- ccix Ibid., 124.
- ccx Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism," 136.
- ccxi Ibid., 148.
- ccxii Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (Verso Press, 1998). Nicholas Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* (Basic Books, 2016)
- ccxiii Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism," 136.
- ccxiv Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism," 136.
- ccxv Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Harvard University Press, 1982).
- ccxvi Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 33.
- ccxvii Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 2.
- ccxviii James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 62.
- ccxix Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 17-18.
- ccxx William Klooster, "Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no.3 (2014): 403.
- ccxxi Ibid., 409.
- ccxxii John Thornton, "I am the Subject of the King of Congo: African Political Ideology and Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4, no, 2 (1993): 181.
- ccxxiii 34 Nineteenth-century examples of rebelling slaves led by "kings" include a conspiracy in 1822 and a revolt in 1838, both in Bahia, Brazil: Jose Alipio Goulart, *Da fuga ao suicídio: Aspectos de rebeldia dos escravos no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972), 161, 231. For Cuba, see Manuel Barcia, *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848* (Baton Rouge, La., 2008), 43. These kings tended to be members of the black militia: Matt D. Childs, "'The Defects of Being a Black Creole': The Degrees of African Identity in the Cuban Cabildos de Nación, 1790-1820," in *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Jane G. Landers and Barry M. Robinson (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 2006), 209-45, esp. 222. Besides the conqueror king, the

alternative African model was that of the blacksmith king, whose governance was based on consensus and consent. John K. Thornton, “‘I Am the Subject of the King of Congo’: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 181–214, esp. 189–91. Maroon communities were also often led by “kings,” some of whom even claimed to have been kings or royalty in Africa. See Richard Price, “Introduction: Maroons and Their Communities,” in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Price, 2d ed. (Baltimore, 1979), 1–30, esp. 20; Marina de Mello e Souza, *Reis negros no Brasil escravista: História da festa de coroação de rei congo* (Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2002), 239–40; Jane Landers, “Leadership and Authority in Maroon Settlements in Spanish America and Brazil,” in *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections during the Slave Trade*, ed. José C. Curto and Renée Soulodre-La France (Trenton, N.J., 2005), 173–84.

ccxxiv Joseph Rezek, “The Orations on the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the Uses of Print in the Early Black Atlantic,” *Early American Literature* 45, no.3 (2010): 657

ccxxv Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 31.

ccxxvi Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First, 194-195*.

ccxxvii *Ibid.*, 232.

ccxxviii *Ibid.*, 210.

ccxxix Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Harvard University Press, 2002). S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Harvard University Press, 2011). Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Southern Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Omohundro Institute of History and the University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Harvard University Press, 2007)

ccxxx Lorena S. Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake 1607-1763* (Omohundro Institute of Early American History and the University of North Carolina Press, 2010). David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

ccxxxi Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Institute of Early American History and Culture and the University of North Carolina), 25.

ccxxxii Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

ccxxxiii Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo- American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Harvard University Press, 2001)

ccxxxiv Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 7.

ccxxxv Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 140.

ccxxxvi Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn On Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (University of Virginia Press, 2006), 74.

ccxxxvii Carl Richards, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome and the American Enlightenment* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 118-119

ccxxxviii Carl Richards, *Golden Age of the Classics in America*.

ccxxxix Gerald Horne, *Negro Comrades of the Crown: African Americans and the British Empire Fight the U.S Before Emancipation* (NYU Press, 2012). Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States* (NYU Press, 2016)

ccxl Felix Nwabueze Okoye, “Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1980): 3.

ccxli Robert Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (UNC Press, 2016)

ccxlii Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on The State of Virginia* (Norton Company, 1954), 142

ccxliii Charles Richard Baker, “What can Thomas Jefferson’s Accounting records tell us about plantation management, slavery, and Enlightenment Philosophy in Colonial America?” *Accounting History* 24, no.2 (2018): 245.

ccxliv George Washington, *Letters on Agriculture from his Excellency George Washington to Arthur Young*, ed. Franklin Knight (Washington, 1847), 66.

ccxlv *Ibid.*, 66.

- ccxlii Ibid., 66.
- ccxliiii Eli Cook, *The Pricing of Progress: Economic Indicators and the Capitalization of American Life* (Harvard University Press, 2017), 25.
- ccxliiiii W.E.B Dubois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870* (Harvard Historical Studies, 1896). Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994)
- ccxlix Eli Cook, *The Pricing of Progress*, 99.
- cccl Henry Wiencek, *Master of The Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 70.
- cccli James McCune Smith, *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, ed. John Stauffer (Oxford University Press, 2007)
- ccclii Ibid, "On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia," 264
- cccliii Eric Ashley Hairston, "The Ebony Column: Classics and the African-American Literary Tradition 1772-1910" (PhD diss.,2004),18
- cccliv Ibid., 135.
- ccclv Ibid., 135
- ccclvi Ibid., 135-136
- ccclvii Smith was a vocal critique of Thomas Jefferson *Notes on Virginia* as a racist text. It's possible the use of Romulus and Remus was a jab at Jefferson and the rape of Sally Hemming. Jefferson also when discussing the Slavery and the Missouri Question on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1820 wrote to John Holmes "But, as it is, we have the *wolf by the ear*, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other." Anna Berkes argues "Wolf by the ears" is a phrase attributed to the emperor Tiberius by the biographer Suetonius: "The cause of his hesitation was fear of the dangers which threatened him on every hand, and often led him to say that he was 'holding a wolf by the ears. Jefferson owned a 1718 edition of Suetonius's works." <https://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/wolf-ear-quotations>. Both Smith and Jefferson had an affinity for classical literature.
- ccclviii Cristina Mazzoni, *She- Wolf: The Story of a Roman Icon* (Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- ccclix Michael Newton. "The Child of Nature: The Feral Child and the State of Nature." PhD diss., University College London, 1996.
- ccclx Francesca Prescendi, "Romulus and Remus, the Wolf and the Prostitute," *AnthroZoologica*, 52, no1. (2017), 4.
- ccclxi Ibid. 4.
- ccclxii Hosea Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States: And the Prejudice Exercised Against Them* (Isaac Knap, 1837)
- ccclxiii Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 136
- ccclxiv Ibid., 136-137
- ccclxv Williams Wells Brown, *The Rising Son; or; The Antecedents, and Advancement of the Colored Race* (Boston, 1874). W.E.B Dubois, *The Gifts of Black Folks; The Negro in the Making of America* (Stratford,1924)
- ccclxvi Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 152.
- ccclxvii Ibid., 136.
- ccclxviii Joseph E. Hayne *The Negro in Sacred History, or, Ham and his immediate Descendants* (Walker & Cogswell, 1887) argued against the emergence of Darwinist theory as ascribed to Black people:  
 This theory which would identify the human race with the brutes of the forest, and avers them to be subject to the same laws and doomed to the same fate, tends to work national as well an individual evil When sinful and selfish and sensual beings, as fallen humanity are found to be are taught as they are by the theory of natural selection, that it is a law of nature to man, no less than to beast, that the strong should trample down and exterminate the weak and that when they are successful in doing so, they are only inheriting their legitimate destiny as 'the fittest to survive' what results, what fruits could be looked for from such a doctrine but high handed injustice, oppression and cruelty, on the one hand, and suffering, slavery and extermination on the other? pg 25.
- ccclxix James W. C Pennington *A Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored People* (Skinner,1841). Robert Benjamin Lewis's *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History; Containing the*

*Universal History of the Colored and Indian Races from the Creation of the World to the Present Time* (Boston, 1844), Henry Garnet *The Past and Present Condition, and the Destiny of the Colored Race* (1848).

cclxx Jefferson, *Notes on the State*, 141

cclxxi *Ibid.*, 140.

cclxxii William Hamilton, “An Address to the New York African Society, for Mutual Relief, Delivered in the Universalist Church, January 2, 1809,” in *Early Negro Writing 1760-1837*, ed. Dorothy Porter (Beacon Press, 1971), 36

cclxxiii David Walker, *Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens* (Boston, 1830), 3.

cclxxiv *Ibid.*, 4.

cclxxv *Ibid.*, 12

cclxxvi *Ibid.*, 16.

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