‘Power in the Tongue’
Staging American Voice

By

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Abstract

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Voice is the chief metaphor for power and enfranchisement in American democracy. Citizens exercising rights are figured as ‘making their voices heard,’ social movements are imagined as ‘giving voice to the voiceless,’ and elected leaders represent ‘the voice of the people.’ This recurring trope forces the question: does citizenship have a sound, and if so, what voices count? Scholars of American studies and theater history have long been interested in nineteenth-century national formation, and have turned to speech, oratory, and performance to understand the role of class, gender, and race in shaping the early republic (Fliegelman 1993, Looby 1996, Gustafson 2000, Lott 1993, Deloria 1998, Nathans 2009, Jones 2014). However, these studies are dominated by textual and visual modes of critique. The recent academic turn to sound studies has produced scholarship on the sonic formation of minoritarian American identity and an American cultural landscape. Yet this body of research all but overlooks voice performance as site of inquiry. As a result, research has disregarded a central sensory pathway through which democracy operates. Without academic inquiry on the vocal contours of citizenship, we are left with an incomplete understanding of how America selects its constituents, and on what terms.

My project, ‘Power in the ‘tongue’: Staging American Voice addresses this lacuna by analyzing the racialized and queer disabled dynamics of American voice from 1828 to 1861. Leading up to the Civil War, socio-political shifts in settler colonialism and slavery necessitated a new mode of American governmentality. These exigencies catalyzed the reconceptualization of voice from embodied performance practice to a sonic symbol that could record, reproduce, or contest a soundtrack of American citizenship. Taking up dramatic and dramatized literature, and using original archival research on minstrelsy and melodrama, dime museum exhibition, concert song, and dramatic reading, I show how popular performances “split” black, Native, and queer disabled voices from their originary bodies nearly half a century before the phonograph. Staged as the signs of corporeal difference, these voices were deployed in contradictory ways and in service of competing social interests. In this dissertation, I go behind the scenes of performances by Edwin Forrest, Chief Pushma-ta-ha, P.T Barnum, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mary E. Webb, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, and Japanese Tommy to understand how each deployed subaltern voice to underscore their claims for national rights and recognitions.
‘Power in the Tongue’ began in the archives. In examining playbills, broadsides, newspaper reviews, songsters, and scripts at research centers like the Harvard Theatre Collection, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, the Library Company of Philadelphia, and many more, I began to hear a pattern that disrupted dominant narratives of American history. While scholars concur that by the nineteenth-century the ascendancy of print culture eclipsed public speech as the primary medium of national formation, the primary archival materials I viewed told a different story. They attested to the persistent importance of oral culture as a site of struggle over belonging in antebellum America, particularly for persons excluded from the elite, literary idea of nation: women, especially women of color, Native Americans, African Americans, and, prior to Andrew Jackson’s election, the white, common man. This dissertation hones in on voice performance as the site of struggle of, and between these social actors. Further, the dissertation plots how race and queer disability influenced an evolving counterpoint between embodied voice performance and textuality. I argue that whites like Edwin Forrest, P.T Barnum, and Harriet Beecher Stowe deployed subaltern voice performance alongside textual innovations to ensure their own entrée to American cultural hegemony and bring black, Native, and queer disabled bodies under control, while vocalists of color like Push-ma-ta-ha, Mary Webb, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, and Japanese Tommy played-back their sonic difference to contest both the aesthetic and ideological foundations of American citizenship, and white attempts to (re)produce such sonic and written scripts through subaltern bodies. In tracking the sonic signs of race and queer disability as they reel between archive and repertoire, I offer an historically located genealogy of performativity that accounts for the socio-political force of speech act. ‘Power in the Tongue’ also develops new methods for hearing history and listening to the past – methods that ultimately offer new strategies for registering vocal difference today.
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**Introduction: Sounding American**

At the dawn of the 19th Century, the United States was a new political entity and a burgeoning cultural formation just beginning to stake a nation out of the sprawling North American continent. Speech, the primary arbiter of affairs of state and the moral public sphere, was central to the new republican project. Clark and Halloran describe this period as the golden age of American “oratorical culture,” wherein “[t]o become a “complete orator” was not a personal achievement but rather the public responsibility of citizenship.” As the century wore on, however, scholars chronicle the decline of American oratorical culture, arguing that literacy and a culture of letters progressively supplanted the national emphasis on oral and aural performance as the primary mechanisms for making Americans. Yet, as Malea Powell notes in her powerful “Rhetorics of Survivance,” such a text-centric, master narrative is relentlessly Euro-American, and points to the forced absencing of subaltern figures in the recorded history of American speech and rhetoric. Indeed, as this dissertation argues, oral performance persisted as a central site for claiming national rights and recognitions well through the American Civil War, particularly for persons excluded from the elite, literary idea of nation: women, especially women of color, people with disabilities, Native Americans, African Americans, and, prior to Andrew Jackson’s election, the white common man.

In discussing “oral performance” in antebellum America, I want to clarify that scholarship on the topic has heretofore largely been concerned with the question of rhetoric, or the formal features of persuasion deployed in the verbal composition of argument. Such concern, and its current disciplinary ties to writing and composition, means that studies of oral persuasion generally fail to analyze oral performance qua performance or performativity. In studies by Cmiel, Fliegelman, Gustafson, Warren, and Kramer, oral performance collapses into text. As Matthew Rebhorn has pointed out, such a methodological approach fails to recognize the space of difference between text

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and performance, between utterance and iteration. It is in this space, I argue, that America, Americans, and American cultural history are made.

This dissertation searches what it meant to “sound American” in the antebellum era by analyzing how nineteenth century performances of race and disability recorded, reproduced, and contested a soundtrack of a new American citizenship. I parse this soundtrack in two cultural sites: in drama and dramatized literature, and on the scene of popular entertainments such as minstrelsy and melodrama, dime museum exhibition, concert song, and dramatic reading. Thinking in the vein of disability rhetorician Jay Dolmage—who is interested in locating the body of rhetoric as one, he emphatically claims, that is always already disabled, gendered, and disavowed—this project explores the rhetoric of the body staged in these sites by attending and attuning to the speaking and singing voice. I contend that between 1823 and 1861, cultural shifts in American settler colonialism and slavery necessitated new techniques of governmentality. These exigencies catalyzed the reconceptualization of voice from embodied performance practice to sonic symbol. This is to say that during the nineteenth century, voice became a new and discreet cultural object, one whose sonorousness developed a rhetoric of its own that, by midcentury, could mediate the contentious politics of national belonging.

As it was frequently the sole forum available to the politically dispossessed for public address, vocal performance provided excellent space for what Roshanak Kheshti and Daphne Brooks term the “sonic subaltern” to voice complaint, appeal for recognition, and articulate disparate concepts of freedom. Other juridical or political avenues of national engagement were foreclosed to all but elite, white men. For example, Cherokee Nation versus Georgia, the 1831 supreme court case, denied Native Americans legal standing as they were considered wards under US guardianship (Wald, Constituting Americans). The Dred Scott decision of 1857 similarly denied African American citizenship, upholding the principle that blacks were property, not persons, and therefore ineligible for legal standing. Power was limited to the white, male elite in the public world of letters and opinion, which was largely gate-kept by English language literacy and oppressive ideologies of female respectability. Under such circumstances, the public stage (broadly conceived) became the space and place where white women, women of color, white common men, black, and Native men could stand and deliver, with the promise that their voices would be picked up, echoed, and circulated throughout the nation’s political and cultural consciousness.

Plotting a counterpoint between textuality and live performance, I reveal antebellum techniques for “splitting” Native, black, and disabled voices from their originary bodies nearly half a century before the phonograph. Staged as sonic symbols of corporeal difference, these voices were deployed in contradictory ways by white female or working-class male “authors,” and by performers of color—two groups who fought competing claims for political autonomy and cultural control. I argue that relatively marginalized whites like Edwin Forrest, P.T Barnum, and Harriet Beecher Stowe manipulated live and written performances of vocal difference to ensure their own entrée to American cultural and political hegemony; simultaneously, performers of color like Mary Webb,

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7 Kara Keeling and Josh Kun, “Introduction: Listening to American Studies,” in “Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies” ed. Kara Keeling and Josh Kun, special issue, American Quarterly 65, no. 5 (2011): 445-459. In 2011, American Quarterly published “Sound Clash,” a special issue on sound in American Studies. One of the primary questions put forward by editors Kara Keeling and Josh Jun was, “[d]oes citizenship have a sound?” (446). This dissertation is indebted to and inspired by such a line of inquiry.
8 Jay Timothy Dolmage, Disability Rhetoric (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013).
Positioning voice performance as a central site of socio-political struggle in antebellum America acknowledges sound as a central sensory pathway through which democracy operates, and provides insight on how the lived experience of black, Native, and disabled performers are shaped both by technologies of embodied practice, and by technologies of sonic figuration. Important, these two technologies are not dichotomously opposed and may overlap. I argue in chapter 2, for example, that embodied performance could and did figure voice as sonic symbol. It is my hope that these interventions into American vocal history force the reader-cum-listener to re-evaluate how they hear and understand vocal difference. By extension, my focus on the sonic subaltern also seeks to upend American narratives of “history” and “progress” that pin our national formation to textuality. Excavating voice performance from the margins reveals a hybrid time of American cultural history: a past that has never been wholly traditional (oral), never wholly modern (text-based). Parsing these disjunctures in history denaturalizes our understanding of national formation, and the breaks in the timeline between traditionality and modernity reveal the subaltern as forceful cultural workers in the shaping of American identity and history.

As this dissertation analyzes the nineteenth-century socio-political struggles that played out through voice, I look to the work of Joseph Roach in the text, The Player's Passion, which charts the evolution of modern acting technique as “a history of the theatricalization of the human body.” Following this, I frame this dissertation as a history of the theatricalization of the voice. Using original archival research, I go behind the scenes of popular performances to study how the performative force of voice was staged, and to what political ends. In analyzing voice performance, I consider the dramaturgical apparatuses that frame, produce, and activate voice, including performance practices, acting techniques, stage machinery, dramatic texts, cultures of display, and ideologies of race and disability. Drawing on these materials I argue voice is not a biological given or an organ of nature: voice is a dramatic effect.

11 Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Hybridity is a term I draw from Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs’ *Voices of Modernity*, a text indebted to the work of Science Studies scholar, Bruno Latour, and what is arguably his most famous work, *We Have Never Been Modern*. According to Latour, modernity was ushered in with the construction of science and society as discrete and autonomous realms. Mediation is the process wherein the scientific is yoked to and invested with the power of the social (and vice versa) in the creation of *hybrids*. Bauman and Briggs, improving on Latour’s scant definition of terms, describe mediation as “a structural relationship, the synthetic bringing together of two elements…in such a way as to create a symbolic or conventional relationship between them that is irreducible to two independent dyads. A hybrid is thus a mediating form.” Bauman and Briggs, *Voices of Modernity*, 5. For Latour, hybridization furthers the project of modernity by continuously generating sites for the intervention of the modern: hybrids reproduce the conditions of possibility for modernity in the act of forestalling it. Purification is the erasure of the work required to produce hybrid forms, it is the labor of generating the “unmarked,” or seamlessly natural categories of science and society; purification, from Bauman and Briggs, is “epistemological work.” The intervention of *Voices of Modernity* is in Bauman and Briggs’ realization that language itself operates much like Latour’s nature and culture, where an epistemological schism instantiates the temporal time-lag between “modern” print culture and “traditional” orality. See also Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
I glean this idea from Don Ihde’s 1976 volume, *Listening and Voice*. In the chapter on “Drammaturgical Voice,” Ihde describes voice as the “double ‘grammar’” of language. By double grammar Ihde refers not only to the paralinguistic features of language generally ascribed to voice, but, more importantly, to the audible traces of power that structure the significance and/or meaning in utterance. Because the body is the subject of power, the body staged and arranged by power sounds its organization. Ihde terms this sound “drammaturgical voice”: “it is the voice of dramaturgy that lies at the center of language-as-word.” Ihde’s imagination of voice as a tangle of language and dramaturgical effect is useful to this dissertation. Unfortunately however, Ihde’s text does not offer much in the way of analysis from which to extrapolate a method as to how to analyze the staging or dramaturgy of voice.

To that end I turn to Brian Kane’s recent essay, “The Model Voice.” Although Kane’s essay is preliminary and descriptive as opposed to prescriptive, he nonetheless suggests a model for comparing and diagnosing theories of voice. Scholars ought, Kane suggests, engage in analyses that approach voice holistically as *echos*, *topos*, and *logos*. Stated in plain language, scholarship needs to approach voice as sound, space, and sense (or meaning). These are rather straightforward categories, and the only clarification I offer here is that Kane understands studies of *topos*, or space, as including the space of the body. In addition to these three categories, Kane also includes *tecnhe*, which he defines as “both technologies and techniques”:

> [techne] disturbs the circulation of phone by rearranging and redistributing topos, logos, and echos…A vocal technology or vocal technique can draw attention toward or away from the source of the voice; it can efface or underscore the vocal proposition; it can amplify its meaning or alter its timbre.

Techne, according to Kane, mediate the sound, space, and sense of voice. I want to emphasize here that *tecnhe* might also be translated as *craft*, and specifically, in my reading of Kane, as theater craft. These four categories of analysis, Kane suggests, are necessary for any theory or method of voice. And while I echo Kane’s statement that this dissertation doesn’t necessarily put forward a theory of voice, I work towards a cultural history of an American theory and practice of voice. I do so by approaching voice performance in each chapter as *echos*, *topos*, *logos*, and *tecnhe*. What was the theater craft of voice in the American antebellum era, and to what ends did the dramaturgy of sound, bodies, and meaning cohere in the complex performance we understand as voice? Why did certain voices make it onto America’s historical record, while others did not? By revealing the sounds, bodies, meanings and theatrical techniques surrounding the vocal performances in this dissertation, I trace the forces that condition the audibility of voice and forge the uni-vocality of American cultural history.

This is not to say that the sonic subaltern did not leave grooves in the historical record, but to suggest that attending to these grooves requires new methods of historical attunement. This dissertation further textures them by calling upon feminist sound studies scholars of color including Roshanak Kheshti, Daphne Brooks, and Beth Piatote. In the introduction to her monograph, *Modernity’s Ear*, Kheshti lays out a theory and method of *aural traces*, or how sound technologies don’t actually record “authentic” sounds of subaltern others, but rather record the gendered and racialized subject positions that structure ethnographic scenes of recording. Aural traces ask a

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14 Ibid., 168.
16 Ibid., 674.
listen-cum-reader to attune to the sonic absence of subaltern subjectivity on or in a recording. Sonic absence sends the listen-cum-reader back to the scene of recording to reconstruct the technologies of power that produced and produce modern hearings. Or in her essay, “Musical Miscegenation and the Logic of Rock and Roll,” Kheshti traces a contemporary desire for the “miscegenated” sound of rock and roll (i.e. the sound of white bodies appropriating or mimicking “black” sound) to the racialized and gendered American histories of forced conception. Homo-social desire to reproduce the scene of miscegenation, therefore, is the primary technology Kheshti defines as underpinning contemporary indie rock.

Daphne Brooks, in her masterful Bodies in Dissent, develops a concept of fugitive sound: sound that artfully escapes objectification and capture. Parsing out sonic fugitivity, Brooks contends, the potential of an aural space of black liberation and simultaneously registers the lines of power that structured black life under slavery. The fugitive sounds of people like Thomas Dilward and Mary Webb can only be heard in conversation with how Beth Piatote theorizes in “Juris-sonics” how Native sonic sensoriums and epistemes are mobilized as decolonizing tactics in indigenous literature. In particular, Piatote’s work models how Salish sound performs indigenous relationality to tribal lands and to tribal kinship. These practices heal Native communities wounded by and through the experience of US colonialism, and also resist the dominant visual modality of American surveillance. Slipping under the radar of white hearing, the Native sounds of Chief Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory that I examine in this dissertation are, as Piatote describes, felicitous and rebellious subaltern techniques for asserting Native sovereignty.

Following these women’s trailblazing work, this dissertation listens to the skips, slips, and stutters in the archival record, which as sound studies scholar Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman argues, is always a recording of how the past listened. By skips I refer to the historic disavowal of Chief Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory as the source of Edwin Forrest’s iconic performances of “native-ness.” Slippages reference the sonic illusions of race and disability produced by the Euphonia automaton and the uncanny audience responses that, in their break from decorum, bend my ear to the fact that the machine’s mysterious vocal production was more about antebellum networks of power than about circus theatrics. Slips are also at play in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin and in her patronage of Mary Webb and Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, who reperformed the story throughout the US and UK. Their miscegenated vocality enabled these mixed race social actors to slip, or pass (if ever so precariously), into circuits of white power that Stowe mistook for freedom. Finally, I imagine “stutter” not as a negative metaphor, but as material instance of historical repetition, where the mixed race little person Thomas Dilward, often performing as Japanese Tommy, repeats Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s performance in a burlesque repertoire that registers black and mixed

19 Daphne Brooks, Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Here I paraphrase James E Ford III’s description of fugitivity as drawn from his call for papers for a special issue of Black Camera on “Fugitivity and the Filmic Imagination”: “Frank Wilderson, Saidiya Hartman, Daphne Brooks, and Nathaniel Mackey, among others, have taken up the im/possibilities of fugitive life. Drawing from their work one can define fugitivity as a critical category exploring the artful escape of objectification, whether objectification occurs through racialized aesthetic framing, commodification or juridico-political discipline.” Black Camera 5, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 3.
race aesthetic force. Tommy’s archival repetition, when parsed through a crip and fugitive lens, reveals this stutter as a performance with the radical potential to upend the archive and how we hear American history itself.

**Racial Genealogies of Performativity**

When I stress that this dissertation intends to produce a cultural and political history of American vocal culture, broadly I am proposing to offer a critical race and disability studies genealogy of American performativity, or what Harriet Beecher Stowe fetishized as “power in the tongue.” This cultural investigation shares something of the archaeological impetus behind Shannon Jackson’s 2004 monograph, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*, but most explicitly hails Tavia Nyong’o’s call in his 2009 monograph *Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Race of Memory* for critical attention to voice and the bodies that produced it in the historiography of American democracy: “If declaring independence is among the most thrilling of speech acts…then greater attention deserves to be paid to how this illocutionary force was obtained and how revolution selected its representative acts of eloquence in corporeal and racialized terms.” Here Nyong’o references and makes an entreaty for scholarly work that engages and challenges Jay Fliegelman’s *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance*, a landmark text that provides the theoretical and historiographic bass to the figures of my own project. As Fliegelman argues, Thomas Jefferson’s recitation of the Declaration of Independence instantiated a mode of performance in which voice mediated what it meant to be American in a profoundly new way. Both a text and an event, the Declaration drew upon late 18th century principles of New Rhetoric and natural language to recast independence as a speech act. Theorized by men like Thomas Reid, James Burgh, John Rice, and Thomas Sheridan, New Rhetoric and natural language were epistemic shifts that held that man was best persuaded not by the artifice of classical rhetoric, but by genuine appeal to his natural passions. Genuine appeals were those that argued for self-evidence: the presencing of a speaker’s subjectivity not through his words, but through a new, natural and universal language of tones, rhythms, and gestures that registered innate, moral feeling—what Jay Fliegelman defines as “natural theatricality.”

In practice, there was nothing natural about self-evidence. John Adams himself was vociferous in his opposition to Jefferson’s staging of the Declaration, writing off his contemporary’s political achievement as a mere “coup de theatre.” Adam’s anti-theatrical prejudice is notable here in that it signals the widespread acknowledgement that, although self-evidence claimed to be a rhetoric of human nature, it relied, by nature, on theatricality. Thus, the foundational concept of American republicanism was the produce of a “complex interpretive performance” wherein sounded displays of emotion resonated with an audience’s already cultivated ear for “truth.” This resonance, the ideal doubling of subjectivity between a speaker and an audience, formed the basis for “representation as the political operation of sympathy.” Sensible ears and tongues, therefore, were

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22 Harriet Beech Stowe to Oliver Johnson, 7 October 1855, Kirkham Collection of annotated Harriet Beecher Stowe letters, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center.
24 Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*.
25 Ibid., 79.
27 Fliegelman, 21.
28 Ibid., 43.
the fabric of the American body politic, and the organs of feeling that were instrumental in providing a political hearing for the Declaration. Jefferson was able to stage sovereignty for two reasons. First, he rhetorically framed Americans as a unified people with organs of feeling radically superior to the physically and ergo morally disabled British, whom Jefferson depicted as “deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity.” Second, in reciting the Declaration, he also performed an audible pathos that inaugurated sounded sympathy as a uniquely American structure of acoustic governmentality, a sonic, performative mode that the British could neither comprehend nor match.

Nyong’o rightfully brings attention to the partial and unsatisfying way Fliegelman’s work addresses how American illocutionary force was predicated on and produced racialized bodies and voices. Dwight Conquergood unpacks this sonic whiteness that Fliegelman’s study examines in order to highlight how elocutionary practices like Jefferson’s (though Conquergood’s study focuses on elocutionary tactics 80 years after Jefferson’s Declaration) specifically produced “Other Figures of Speech”: the vocal difference excluded by white elocutionary norms were not ambiguously marked, but explicitly understood as the grotesque figures of blackness:

Elocution represented the high end, a respectable interest in vocal quality, dignified presence, and improvement for the rising classes. Minstrelsy expressed the low end, a disreputable fascination with vocal difference, burlesque bodies, and vulgar entertainment... Elocution existed in dialectical tension with minstrelsy... Whereas blackface minstrelsy was a theatrically framed mimicry and parody of blackness, elocution can be thought of as the performativity of whiteness naturalized.

Though this quotation establishes elocution and minstrelsy as constitutive others, further in his essay, Conquergood turns to a reading of Bartley Townsley’s slave biography to disrupt the dichotomy between blackness performed and white speech and literary forms. I engage extensively with this reading later in the dissertation, but will note here Conquergood’s thesis: though elocution and literature produced and disciplined “Other Figures of Speech,” these technologies, themselves tied to an antebellum politics of freedom, were in fact predicated on the performativity of a disavowed blackness.

To be sure, I want to draw our ears closer to the fact that scholars have heretofore largely conceived of antebellum vocality in black and white. The subset of sound studies, musicology, and performance studies texts that address voice and race overwhelmingly analyze black vocal production and sonic blackness. Yet the performers of color I consider in this dissertation are described as mixed race individuals. Mary E. Webb’s parents were Spanish and African, and both Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Thomas Dilward had African American, Native, and (as some stories go), white heritage. It is historically uncertain whether the narratives of racial mixing circulating around these performers were true, or were fantasies crafted by whites looking to manipulate the spectacle of legibly black bodies on the public stage for their own socio-political ends. Nonetheless, it holds that these performers were simultaneously read by audiences as both black and mixed. Additional archival research on each of these performers is necessary to fully contextualize their lives and careers, though evidence suggests that each drew on an emergent black abolitionist aesthetic and what, for lack of a better term, I will describe as a mixed aesthetic. Thus while these performers took to the stage to play with and subvert the sonic color line, their ability to force the capitulation of this sonic dichotomy was linked to the semiotic slipperiness of their own

racialized bodies and voices. Webb, who was sometimes described as “Mexican,” not only played black, white, and creole, but also Indian: she was the first to perform Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Hiawatha, and did so in full “Indian” regalia. 31 Greenfield too often personated both black and white characters, and Thomas Dilward, aka “Japanese Tommy,” earned a stage name that less reflected his racial repertoire (he only played an Asian character in one minstrel sketch towards the end of his career) than signaled his racial mutability in audiences’ eyes.

While attending to the production of a sonic black/white binary in early nineteenth-century performance, this dissertation specifically argues that focusing on this sonic binary represses and disavows the appropriation of Native oratory in the production of white American voice and speech. As a way to begin to tease out the imbricated racial genealogies of what we think we hear as “white,” “red,” and “black” voice, and as a way into a more complex sonic image of the American voicescape, this project introduces a third term into this black and white acoustic binary: indigenous voice. Thus, in chapter one I consider the oratory of Choctaw Chief Push-ma-ta-ha in light of what Native studies and literary scholar, Beth Piatote, describes as indigenous techniques of sonic sovereignty. 32 I make recourse to Piatote to think how Push-ma-ta-ha’s vocal performance challenged American removal rhetoric, and Edwin Forrest’s own colonial attempts to settle and expropriate Choctaw culture.

Across the network of white, black, and indigenous voice that this dissertation explores, there emerges a significant discourse of disability. In other words, the performances I discuss are not only moments where the racial and ethnic barriers to American citizenship are produced and contested, but are moments where specific discourses about one’s physical inability are mapped onto these racial and ethnic signifiers and are thus taken into account as determining one’s belonging or not to the new nation. 33 I want to emphasize here my interest here in discourses of disability, while also reaffirming the dissertation’s commitment to examining the lived realities of disability: Thomas Dilward was a little person, Mary E. Webb died of tuberculosis, and P.T Barnum’s speaking machine was predicated on knowledge extracted from study of deaf communication, and was imagined as a voice prosthesis for the deaf mute. Ostensibly able-bodied, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s early and forced separation from her birth parents at the hands of her owner requires an historian to understand her life as shaped by an at the hands of violence and trauma. And, in her professional career she was certainly perceived as a racial and gender deviant. As this project unfolds, I attend both to the embodied performances and performativity of these social actors and acts, and also to the performativity of the discourses of race and disability surrounding their bodies.

Voice is a unique phenomenon in that it is both an embodied and discursive/figurative entity. In this way, we might consider how it might operate akin to something like blackness, which in addition to being a performative and discursive figure, is also an ontology that that lived bodies abide in. The same might be said of disability and impairment, where disability defines the discursive, social construction of disability, and impairment considers the lived reality of embodied difference. What interests me about these three sites of inquiry is the moment where the material

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32 Beth Piatote, “Juris-sonics.”

33 Indigeneity as biological “race” was, as Professor Tallbear has argued, originally a colonial concept. Kim TallBear, “The Political Economy of Tribal Citizenship in the US,” Aboriginal Policy Studies 1, no. 3 (2011), 77. However, as Yagelski contends in “A Rhetoric of Contact,” the concept of Native American racial unity, the concept underlying Pan-Indianianism, was clearly articulated by Tecumseh in 1811 and reflected emergent, 17th century notions of polygenesis that were the product of colonial contact. Robert Yagelski, “A Rhetoric of Contact: Tecumseh and the Native American Confederacy,” Rhetoric Review 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 64-77.
moves to metaphor — the instance when the embodied becomes figurative. Specifically, I am interested in tracking the socio-political conditions or context that impels this transformation, a transformation that, I argue, produces performative force.

Discussing her own experience with her prosthetic leg, Vivian Sobchack gives an excellent account of the transformation between embodiment and figure in her essay “A Leg to Stand On.” Critiquing the tendency of contemporary critical and cultural studies to wield “prosthesis” or “the prosthetic” inaccurately and irresponsibly, Sobchack joins scholars such as Katherine Ott who decry use of such terms to describe the mediation of subjectivity by technology, or as reductive synonyms for “body-machine interface.” Scholars are guilty, Sobchack charges, of a fetishization of techn-animism, a flight of fantasy that gives prosthetics a life of their own while “the animate and volitional human beings who use prosthetic technology disappear into the background—passive, if not completely invisible.” Sobchack argues that this is a *metonymic* effect, whereby a prosthetic (normally incorporated *synechdochically* by a disabled person as part of a functioning ensemble, as part of a lived bodyscape) suddenly become “an absolute separate whole,” an “an absolute other.”

Yet Sobchack claims that shift of a prosthesis between synecdoche and metonymy can also happen in the lived experience of disabled people, as when she loses the necessary suction in her connection to her leg, or when hot weather and sweat produce an abrasion. In these instances when the prosthesis fails Sobchack feels a disconnection to her unruly leg, which “is transformed metonymically…to another (inhuman) species of thing.” External conditions, Sobchack claims, produce prosthetics as uncanny social actors at the very moment they become tropological. Sobchack also explains that this transformation can also go both ways, and discuss double amputee Aimee Mullins’ “Cheetah” and “pretty” legs to highlight that the prosthetic-as-figure can also materialize lived experience and embodied entities:

> [T]he tropes that are articulated here discursively (“Cheetah foot” and “Barbie legs”) are also materialized literally—but materially realized as legs, they maintain their figurative status as tropes nonetheless. That is, like language used figuratively they are literally “bent out of shape” both in context and material form. Furthermore, as realized figures, they literalize both male and female gender fantasies and confuse such categories as human and animal or animate and inanimate…

Figures, Sobchack claims, are taken up by and incorporated by bodies in quotidian living. Nonetheless, even when working synechdochically with the body, prosthetics maintain their tropological status, performatively producing Mullins’ complex and liberating embodiment as female, animal, human, and machine. To think the prosthetic, Sobchack claims, ultimately requires a recognition that “lived body experience is always also being imaginatively ‘figured’ as it is literally being ‘figured out.’” I love the ambivalence Sobchack plays with here in the slipperiness between “figure” and “figure out.” She implies that performativity making goes both ways: that prosthesis, as a trope, literally figures lived bodily experience, and vice versa.

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36 Sobchack, “A Leg to Stand On,” 23.
38 Ibid., 27.
39 Ibid., 28.
40 Ibid., 35.
41 Ibid., note 4, 39.
Taking my cue from Sobchack, the chapters in this dissertation consider both how discourses of disability act as *narrative prosthesis* to performatively figure (un)American voices, and how performing bodies figure the sounds of disabled voices. Narrative prosthesis is a term I borrow from Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, who coin it to describe how “disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary [and cultural] narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potential, and analytical insight.”

Disability, Snyder and Mitchell argue, serves literary and cultural authors as a rhetorical device, as “an artistic prosthesis” used to shore up both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives. Just as prosthetics function to rehabilitate a disabled body, mimicking and performatively producing the illusion of a normal and natural body, narrative prosthesis underwrites the power of narratives to mimic and therefore figure reality. While the reality that disability discourse mimes might in fact be illusory, Snyder and Mitchell indicate the power of narrative prosthesis to accomplish what it mimics. As I discuss in chapter one, racist thought that led nineteenth-century whites to imagine Native Americans as defined by debility and evolutionarily stunted character, morality, and civilization. Although such racial ideology was fallacious, I show how this narrative prosthesis authorized American settler colonialism, an exercise of power that, in operation, produced disabled Native bodies.

As this dissertation chronicles, the white “authors” and cultural impresarios I examine—Edwin Forrest, P. T. Barnum, and Harriet Beech Stowe—all deployed narrative prosthesis in their engagements with and stagings of racialized and disabled bodies in order to enact compelling narratives about America and Americans. And while some of these narratives (Stowe’s in particular) have been understood as historically and politically progressive, I will emphasize the degree to which each inaugurated a vision of nation and citizen that foreclosed belonging and autonomy for disabled people/people of color. Thus, the narrative of American-making figured by this dissertation is one of ablenationalism: “the degree to which treating people with disabilities as an exception valorizes able-bodied norms of inclusion as the naturalized qualification of citizenship.”

Each chapter understands disability, whether figured or lived, as a rhetorical device used to shore up an emergent, vocal sound of American nationalism.

The ablenationalism I explore is a narrative strategy that is sutured to rhetorics of race—to discourses and vocal performances of redness, blackness, and whiteness. Though I look at race and

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43 Ibid., 51.
44 Ibid., 7.
45 Sobchack had differing ideas on prosthesis. She quotes Kurzman: “Artificial limbs …reinforce our publicly perceived normalcy and humanity…[A]rtificial limbs and prostheses only disrupt…what is commonly considered to be the naturally whole and abled Body.” See Steven L. Kurzman, “Presence and Prosthesis: A Response to Nelson and Wright,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001), 380. (Quoted in Sobchack, “A Leg to Stand On,” 23). These two opinions—prosthesis as conservative, prosthesis as radical—reveal the ambivalence and performative precarity of prosthesis.
46 In the special journal issue of *Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, “Disability and Indigenous Studies,” Siobhan Senier writes poignantly about how, in her article of the same title, “Traditionally, disability was not seen as such.” Senier emphasizes that the concept of medicalized and pathologized disability was the result of settler colonial contact. See Senier, ““Traditionally, Disability Was Not Seen as Such’ Writing and Healing in the Work of Mohegan Medicine People,” *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013): 215-229.
disability as they intersect, I also explore how they come to co-articulate one another. In “My Body, My Closet,” Ellen Samuels warns against easy analogies between identity categories, historicizing such a practice as well intended but misused in past struggles for social justice.\textsuperscript{48} Intersectionality represents the scholarly turn that, instead of erasing lived difference through the equation of social categories, replaces analogy with analysis of the structural co-articulations between difference categories. However, in his essay “Rehabilitating Analogy,” African American and Disability studies literary scholar Todd Carmody makes a compelling case for the study of analogy between race and disability. Carmody’s essay takes as its starting point Oliver Wendell Holmes’ 1863 analogy between prosthetic limbs for Civil War veterans and black emancipation. In this conceit he “equates freedom with rehabilitation into mobility...[L]ike disability, Holmes suggests, race can be overcome.”\textsuperscript{49} Carmody takes up Holmes’ analogy, “not as a mode of identitarian argument, but as a method of formalist inquiry.”\textsuperscript{50} Referring to the equation that analogy sets up wherein “one term is like another,” Carmody advocates a move away from the equating verb of such a construction, is, and towards a new emphasis on like; “if we instead stress the descriptor like, our focus shifts from social identity to the discursive forms that shape social identity. We begin to compare the cultural grammars of race and disability, the syntactical patterns and structural contours by which each is made socially legible...”\textsuperscript{51} By charting the figurative resemblances within discourses of race and disability, Carmody seeks to “turn the discursive fabric inside out and reveal the seams by which figurative and material histories are stitched together.”\textsuperscript{52}

Working from Carmody’s own analogy, I take voice as the “fabric” of my inquiry. Going behind the scenes of performance to understand how racialized voices were staged and produced and activated by discourses of disability, I turn the fabric of voice “inside out” to reveal the theatrical techniques that sutured embodied and figurative rhetorics of race and disability to another. I then chart how the discourses of racialized and disabled voice were deployed in practice to produce white-authored sounds of independence and national belonging. Doing so establishes a framework for understanding how performances by performers of color gave rise to black fugitive aesthetics that undergirded crip strategies and fashioned liberation in the service of the sonic subaltern.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter one of my dissertation considers Native American oratory, and analyzes the appropriation of the verbal art form in the performance of the 1829 Indian play, Metamora, or the Last of the Wampanoags. The chapter puts forward the analytic of sonic redface, which I define as a national repertoire wherein Anglo authors and social actors, posing as Indian, adopt rhetorical and vocal styles heard as characteristic of Native American speech. Passing as authentic “Indian talk,” sonic redface is in actuality a synthesis of stage Indian dialect and revolutionary era republican rhetoric. I look at Edwin Forrest and his own performance of sonic redface modeled after the oratory of Choctaw Chief Push-ma-ta-ha, with whom Forrest purportedly “went native” in 1823. I argue that Forrest “split” Native oratory from its embodied and cultural context, and redirected it for the


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 432.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 432-5.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 434.
political gain of the white, common man. By figuring his own, white body and speech as a sanitized surrogate for the debilitated and vanishing Indian, Forrest established working-class whites as “native” American, furthering the Jacksonian policy of Indian removal and “settling” the Indian problem by seizing performative control over Native, oratorial strategies of redress.

In addition to parsing the performative force of Forrest’s sonic redface, I also return to Push-ma-ta-ha’s rhetoric. I locate the Chief’s historic oratory as the disavowed source material for Forrest’s characterization and iconic vocal sound, and read the decolonial work of both Push-ma-ta-ha’s rhetoric, and the sonic, vocal figure of thunder he produced through it. I conclude the chapter by arguing that though voice performance before 1828 was conceived of as a mode of theatricality, Forrest’s turn as Metamora staged voice as the natural, biological issue of an essentialized body. In subsequent chapters I analyze the effect of Forrest’s move to link voice to immutable understandings of race.

Chapter two analyzes the theatrical mechanism wherein essentialized voice was split from the material, performing body. I examine P.T. Barnum’s “Wonderful Talking Machine,” an early, keyboard-operated speech synthesizer that harnessed bellow-lungs, a reed-larynx, and articulating organs in brass, rubber, and leather to speak through a grotesque, truncated effigy of a Turkish sheikh. Referencing both Wolfgang von Kempelen’s famed chess playing Turk, and the controversy surrounding the purported automatization of Barnum’s first freak exhibit, Joice Heth (a black slave woman Barnum framed as Washington’s 161-year-old nurse), the machine was described as speaking with a racialized and speech impaired voice. Though the talking machine foregrounded the richly material production of voice, it ultimately used the macabre corporeality of the dummy to stage, in grand sonic illusion, the disembodiment of black and disabled voice. Liberating voice from the confines of the body, Barnum’s talking machine set blackness and debility “free” to circulate as sonic, discursive symbols in the American cultural sphere. Ironically, this discursive move brought the (re)production of sonic, vocal difference under white control at roughly the same time Frederick Douglass debuted upon the public lecture stage.

In chapter three I investigate how Harriet Beecher Stowe took up the signs of sonic blackness to convey her anti-slavery message. Eager to give her book, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a public hearing, Stowe seized upon mixed-race bodies to score freedom as the sonic strains of a miscegenated, white-and-black vocality. In the first half of the chapter I analyze how Stowe first staged this acoustics in George Harris’s passing scene of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. To combat the pro-slavery Tom shows that exploded onto the American stage after 1852 and threatened to corrupt her message, Stow cast mixed-race vocalists Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Mary Webb as publicly performing body doubles for her novel’s characters. Greenfield and Webb, who went by the stage monikers the “Black Swan” and the “Black Siddons,” were both adept and versatile mixed-race female performers who gave voice to “white” vocal repertoire; specializing respectively in classical vocal music and dramatic interpretation, these women highlighted the performativity of sonic whiteness and blackness. To Stowe however, these women’s voices were useful evidence of their amalgamated biology: their vocal refinement a reflection of their white heritage, their sonic pathos the representation of the debility of blackness. It was these women’s miscegenated sounds, therefore, that made them effective mouthpeices for Stowe’s politics. After analyzing these women’s vocal performances through Stowe’s sonic schema of containment, I turn in chapter four to exploring how Greenfield manipulated essentialized sonic symbols of racialized, gendered, and sexual abnormality to steal her body and voice away from Stowe’s control.
Chapter 4 begins with the performance of a second “Black Swan.” Japanese Tommy (ne Thomas Dilworth). A mixed-race, black and Native little person who performed in dime museums and white minstrel troupes, Tommy/Dilworth was a renowned vocalist and female impersonator. He specialized in burlesquing prima donnas, including Greenfield, and his send-up of Greenfield relied on leveraging his own blackness and disability to land an explicit parody of the freak-show elements of her ostensibly refined vocal concerts. Instead of reading Tommy/Dilworth’s performance as towing the line vis a vis ablebodied and white supremacist takes on Greenfield, I understand his burlesque as a wink to Greenfield, a nod to and with an aesthetics of black disability and freakery. I then trace out an antebellum history of performances of blackness and disability, discussing Tommy/Dilworth’s career between the minstrel show and side show, disability masquerade on the plantation, and Ellen Crafts passing performance before turning to Daphne Brooks’ study of Henry Box Brown, who also produced and deployed his own disabled body as an integral part of his fugitive escape from slavery. Understanding disability aesthetics as crucial to black projects of freedom, I re-read Greenfield’s performance of the Stephen Glover composition, “I am Free,” as an example of crip voice and fugitive song. In “I am Free,” Greenfield not only signifies on Stowe’s vision for African Americans, but puts forward her own sonic image of black liberation.

The conclusion of the dissertation turns once again to Japanese Tommy, arguing that his burlesque of Greenfield is not aligned with the conservative socio-political function of blackface minstrelsy, but instead leveled a covert critique of the socio-political conditions animating the black and crip struggle Greenfield staged in her performance of “I am Free.” In his Black Swan Burlesque, Tommy seized on an American soundtrack of citizenship and turned it against itself, cripping it to reveal its reliance on and exploitation of disabled, and red/black existence. What’s more, by staging his voice as disabled, female, black or white (and perhaps yellow and red too), Tommy composed his own freedom pass, evoking other bodies and imagining other, crip forms of liberation. This final chapter locates the performative force of voice in an archive of theatrics that staged the sonic as operating beyond, while simultaneously (re)producing the raced and disabled body. The power of Tommy’s performance therefore, lies in its ability to capture and critique voice as a site for making the American body politic.
Chapter 1: A Voice Like Thunder. Metamora’s sonic bodies.

“The blind might have seen him in his voice, and the deaf have heard him in his visage.”

On November 15th, 1829, Edwin Forrest stepped onstage of New York’s Park Theater in the title role of John Augustus Stone’s newly commissioned play, Metamora, or the Last of the Wampanoags. Costumed in buckskin, feathers, and a smear of redface, Forrest was an imposing spectacle of the familiar stage Indian. But audience members were unprepared for the radical revolution in American theater and national belonging that roared forth through the sound of Forrest’s voice. Thunderous and striking, Forrest’s voice was patterned on the “savage” oratorical style the actor had purportedly gleaned from Choctaw Chief Push-ma-ta-ha during a theatrical tour of the American west in 1823. While scholars today widely acknowledged the transformative force of Metamora, research on America’s premiere Indian play has overlooked Forrest’s voice as a catalyst of dramatic national change.

Metamora arrived on the American cultural scene at a pivotal point in the new nation’s narrative. Andrew Jackson had just been elected, ushering in an era of the common man and upending the reign of the revolutionary father figures who had previously steered the nation’s course. Geographically, the nation was bursting at its seams: settlers sprawled onto indigenous tribal lands from New York to Georgia, and rapidly spread west into Louisiana Purchase territory, bringing increased contact and conflict with Native peoples. Further, as Jill Lepore remarks in The Name of War, just one week before curtains went up on Metamora, curtains went down on any pretense of friendly relations between Native tribes and the US government: Andrew Jackson officially announced his policy of Indian Removal, a ruthless and systematic plan for the forced removal and relocation of Native peoples from their cultural homelands to nearly valueless reservation lands. In this chapter, I contend that as Metamora, Forrest’s voice greased the wheels of these national transitions.

The vocal power that managed the national turn to Jacksonian democracy and Removal is described in the quote that opens this chapter. Originally the epigraph from Gabriel Harrison’s biography of Edwin Forrest, the quote describes a voice with almost miraculous capabilities. Forrest possessed, according to Harrison, a voice and a body sutured together like one, each with the ability to conjure the other. Voice and body are also attributed wondrous rehabilitative powers, enabling the blind to see and the deaf to hear. I define this as the sonic body; the idea that voice and body are linked by a naturalized one-to-one correspondence. Fundamental to this correspondence is the assumption that the body, and specifically race, can be heard through the voice. The hallmark of the sonic body therefore, is that it laminates an essentialized voice to a racialized body, defining this pairing as “natural” so that one may be used as a tool to discipline or regulate the other. In the case of Metamora, the sonic bodies produced through the text and performance of the play were deployed to manage America’s growing “Indian problem.”

A racist mode of hearing that doggedly persists today, the sonic body found its origins in Metamora. In and through his performance of the Indian chief, Forrest produced two diametrically opposed versions of the sonic body. The first of these was the unmarked white voice and body that was attributed to the actor himself — the voice and body that was hailed by his contemporaries and

1 Gabriel Harrison, Edwin Forrest, the Actor and the Man. Critical and Reminiscient (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle, 1889), epigraph.
historians as “quintessential(ly) American.” The second of these was the constitutive other of Forrest's sonic whiteness -- the redded up voice and body of the fictional Metamora, brought to life by Forrest to represent the vanishing American Indian. The structure of relationality between these two sonic bodies was such that Forrest's voice drew its widespread political power from the well plotted demise of its racialized other. Supplanting and standing in as a purified and ablebodied version of Metamora's, Forrest's voice garnered the cultural force Harrison attributes to it. As I will argue throughout the chapter, in commissioning and crafting Metamora’s redded up sonic body, Forrest staged the rehabilitation of America's revolutionary promise, resurrecting and fulfilling the nation's foundational ideals by staging the white common man as the true inheritor of the republic. A break from previous models of constituency based on class, Forrest's turn as Metamora established whiteness as the foundation of American belonging. Further, the racial project of Forrest's dual sonic bodies was activated by discourses of disability and ablenationalism, discourses that narrated the ascent of the common man as a “native” American -- the proper heir to the land, resources and natural rights of indigenous forbearers who were depicted as fading from history and political influence due to inherent racial degeneracy.

In this chapter I analyze the theatrical mechanics that staged Metamora’s competing sonic bodies by taking the actor’s vocal characterization of Metamora as my primary object of inquiry. I enter my analysis however, by investigating how the performance of Metamora appropriated and repeated, with a difference, indigenous oratorical tradition, specifically the oratory of Choctaw Chief Push-ma-ta-ha. A culturally hybrid diplomatic rhetoric forged in the crucible of colonial contact, Push-ma-ta-ha's Native oratory becomes a site of racial masquerade within the context of Metamora. Unlike most considerations of racial masquerade that address visual modes of impersonation, the masquerade of Metamora played out at the level of the text and at the level of the voice. I define this form of masquerade as sonic redface, a historic American performance tradition wherein Anglo social actors, masquerading as Indians, adopt rhetorical and vocal styles understood as characteristic of Native American speech. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, Native American oratory was highly prized for its evocative, and “natural” force, and was understood by whites as politically agentive, if degraded and primitive speech. Through text based and live performances of sonic redface, men like Edwin Forrest seized the performative power of Native oratory to define an American body politic and shape the subjects of the new, national experiment in republican democracy. New sonic representations of “genuine” or “real” Indians are, I argue, the calculated effects of sonic redface, and it is this dimension of authenticity that produces the conceit of the sonic body.

I also develop and deploying the analytics of whitescrubbing in this chapter, a term that describes the transformational effects of appropriating indigenous oratory through sonic redface at both the level of hearing and the level of the archive. Importantly, this concept brings Native oratory, in particular the disparaged oratory of Choctaw Chief Push-ma-ta-ha (1767-1824) out of the shadow of Metamora’s totalizing history to reveal it as the lynch pin for the performative effects of Forrest’s sonic bodies. I also apply indigenous theories of rhetoric and sound to read the decolonial, performative effects of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory. By reconstructing the specificity of Push-ma-ta-ha’s eloquence, I also hone in on and track the technological work of (mis)hearing and re-citation that enabled Forrest to divert the political felicity of Native verbal art away from a project of indigenous sovereignty and towards the project of American nation building. In reconstituting the sonic, cultural history of Metamora, this chapter thus also hopes to reconstitute the archive.

revealing the performative mechanisms through which indigenous voice has been scrubbed from the historical record.

Part I: Edwin Forrest’s Sonic Redface

Written by John Augustus Stone in 1829, *Metamora: Or, the Last of the Wampanoags* is the paragon “Indian play” of the nineteenth century, and is generally heralded as the first truly American specimen of dramatic literature. Briefly, *Metamora* dramatizes a bloody, seventeenth-century war between the Wampanoags of Massachusetts, and British settler colonists. Metamora, the play’s protagonist, launches a war against the conniving British, and is killed at the end of the conflict. While the British are reviled in Stone’s play, the lovers Walter and Oceana—who, as a new-world born character is the living embodiment of the antebellum nationalist symbol, Columbia—survive the fray as emblems of the emerging national, American consciousness. *Metamora* went on to national acclaim, though primarily as a star vehicle for Edwin Forrest, who commissioned the play, and played the lead role exclusively until just before his death in 1872.

Stone based the work loosely on the historic 17th century events of King Philip’s War, also known as Metacom’s rebellion. In 1676 King Philip—néé Metacom, the son of Wampanoag sachem Massasoit (of “First Thanksgiving” fame)—led a confederacy of New England Indian tribes against colonial British encroachment in what Jill Lepore has described as “the deadliest war in American history...in proportion to population.” At the time of the rebellion, Philip was seen as a barbarous savage. Following his defeat, his head was placed on a spike in Plymouth village, and many of his surviving warriors were sold into slavery.

Yet Philip’s image was revived and substantially rehabilitated in the wake of the American Revolution, when men such as Washington Irving and John Greenleaf Whittier refigured the sachem as the quintessential American patriot. Stone’s melodrama falls squarely in this tradition, revisioning Metacom as Metamora, a prototypical revolutionary and, therefore, a forefather of the American nation. How did Stone effect this transformation in the American psyche, and to what ends? In what follows, I argue that *Metamora* established its title character, and by extension, its lead actor as mythic national figures by channeling a distinctly American mode of Indian masquerade – a “playing Indian,” as Philip Deloria would have it, where individuals could inhabit an indigenous Other to

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fashion a unique national identity for themselves. However, unlike the colonists from the Boston Tea Party who used feathers and soot to masquerade as Mohawk Indians, Stone costumed his patriot in the making, Edwin Forrest, in the oratory of American Indians. Before proceeding with an analysis of Forrest’s sonic redface and the cultural repercussions of this masquerade however, Native verbal art and its importance to Anglo-American public culture, as well its centrality to Forrest’s own positionality within that culture, must be contextualized.

**New Rhetoric and Native American Oratory**

The vogue for Native American oratory peaked in the mid-nineteenth century. The previous century, Fliegelman argues, had seen an “elocution revolution” where classical models of rhetoric were discarded in search of a “New Rhetoric” based on the language of nature. And, as heard through the filter of white romantic racialism, what could be more natural than Native American oratory? The Indian’s seemingly savage, uncivilized state meant that he was closer to land and nature, and therefore to man’s original passions and urges. Euro Americans heard this supposedly natural connection in Native speeches and therefore deemed them full of pathos, rhythm, muscular feeling, and artful persuasion. At the same time, the perceived poetry of Native Oratory led whites to assume that indigenous peoples were incapable of concrete thought -- bound to metaphor and limited by an inherent intellectual degeneracy. The Indian therefore often appeared in 18th and 19th century works of American drama, literature, and poetry as what Lepore has termed the “eloquent savage,” an avatar of Rousseau’s Noble Savage. A product of Enlightenment ideology, the noble savage is a contradiction that “both juxtaposes and conflates an urge to idealize and desire Indians and a need to despise and dispossess them.” The eloquent savage crystallizes this paradox with an image of Native oratory that is on one hand idealized, and on the other rejected as racially inferior.

While many Native tribes possessed robust oratorical traditions as a means of participating in tribal politics or rituals, the Native oratory heard by Americans – that on which they based the figure of the eloquent savage-- was an oratory of imperial contact: the oratory deployed by indigenous peoples in treaty negotiations, or in other diplomatic engagements with white settler colonials or government officials. Most Native speeches were translated and transcribed by interpreters, and recorded in government archives or circulated as accounts in the popular press. These records of Native oratory were understood by whites as official “Indian speak,” but in reality reflected hybrid oratorical models that blended indigenous epistemes and traditions with western discourse. For example, the Iroquois ritual of condolence was remade under contact into a

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8 Lepore, "Wigwam Words" 98, 101.
diplomatic and “inter-cultural discourse of peace.” In Forrest and Stone's own lifetimes, powerful rhetors like Tecumseh and Red Jacket deployed such hybrid models of political speech to resist white encroachment and imperial government policies. For example, Red Jacket’s powerful oratory at the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua secured Native sovereignty over tribal lands in what is now upstate New York, and his speech at the Ogden Council of July 1819 thwarted the sale of remaining Seneca lands. Tecumseh’s 1810 speech to William Henry Harrison deployed hybrid oratory to refute the Fort Wayne Treaty’s cession of Native lands in central Indiana, and to performatively enact what would evolve into a Pan-Indian confederacy. Although breaking from the aforementioned speeches in its delivery to Natives as opposed to whites, Push-ma-ta-ha’s 1811 speech to Tecumseh, refusing the latter’s call for the Choctaws to join the Pan-Indian confederacy, also notably deploys a blend of indigenous and republican discourse. Transcriptions of Push-ma-ta-ha’s speech, which resulted in the Choctaw tribe’s alliance with the United States army and General Andrew Jackson during the war of 1812, read today like red-blooded American patriotism. While Push-ma-ta-ha undoubtedly drew on classical models of American rhetoric for his speech, surviving records of it reflect the filter of romantic racialism that pervaded the antebellum listening culture. Such modes of listening paradoxically redirected the intent of Red Jacket, Tecumseh, and Push-ma-ta-ha’s speeches, perceiving them not as specimens of Native resistance and sovereignty, but as “totem[s] of the federal republic.”

For his own part, Edwin Forrest was drawn to Native oratory because it challenged the New Rhetoric that was controlled and gate kept by the literary elite. After all, Forrest was born into an unremarkable immigrant family, and had received almost no formal education. He obtained some elocutionary training as a young teen in Philadelphia, but had very little in terms of family influence or cultural capital that could have enabled him to broker his way into the upper echelons of American power. And New Rhetoric was designed to withhold power and influence from men like Forrest. The American elocution revolution had sought to make a rhetorical and cultural break from Britain while consolidation political power for the landowning men of letters. Based on a set of rigid performance standards for public speech, New Rhetoric purposely excluded blacks, Natives, women and common men from social advancement. Native Oratory, on the other hand, enabled Forrest to buck the the American class structure by critiquing New Rhetoric, which, in contrast to the supposedly natural inspiration of indigenous verbal art, seemed “textbound” and out of touch both with nature and the emergent Jacksonian ideology of the yeoman. For Forrest, Native oratory represented a vehicle for revolutionizing America’s socio-political culture and the aesthetics of American drama.

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20 Rebhorn, “Edwin Forrest’s Redding Up,” 455. Deloria also argues that 19th century performances of playing Indian aligned contemporary protest with established, historical acts of rebellion and right. This citational practice insisted that the work of the revolution was still incomplete, or still in process. Contemporary acts of playing Indian therefore claimed to realize the promise of the revolution while remaking American history.
**Dressing up in Sonic Redface: Edwin Forrest “Goes Native”**

“Never did an actor more thoroughly identify and merge himself with his part than Forrest did in Metamora. He was completely transformed from what he appeared in other characters, and seemed Indian in every particular, all through and all over, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. The carriage of his body, the inflection of his voice, his facial expressions, the very poise of his head and neck on his shoulders were new. For he had recalled all his observations while on his visit among the Choctaws... Accordingly, when he came to impersonate Metamora, or the last of the Wampanoags, modeled after that celebrated New England sachem, the son of Massasoit, known in history as King Philip of Pokanoket, it was the genuine Indian who was brought upon the stage, merely idealized a little in some of his moral features.”

One of the best known stories about Edwin Forrest, repeated by nearly every one of his biographers and all contemporary historians, is the romantically racialized tale of the time he “went native” with the Choctaw of Mississippi. Lore has it that Forrest, who was based in New Orleans as a touring actor in 1823, had a falling out with his manager over a woman: “[h]e then betook himself to the wigwam of his Indian friend, where, in commune with nature new and fascinating, he sought solace for his disappointment. In the study of his model for “Metamora” he learned to forget the pangs of his refusal, and Push-ma-ta-ha by the wigwam fire consoled his pale-faced friend with the history of his own wild loves.” This tale, or some version of it, functions as an authenticating narrative for Forrest, emphasizing his turn as Metamora was less a performance than a replica of a “genuine Indian.” It also serves as an origin story for Forrest, America’s first theatrical star. As Alger details, Forrest's brief sojourn among the Choctaw Indians of the American west furnished him the opportunity to engage in an exercise we might today recognize as “method acting avant la lettre.” That is, Forrest positioned himself as anthropologist, or participant observer in what he perceived to be authentic Choctaw culture. In fact, as Theresa Strouth Gaul has noted, Forrest fashioned his body “as an ethnographic text,” and as the site of “the inscription of his close observations of American Indians in the southwest;” by mimicking Choctaw culture, Forrest would be able to communicate or transmit his authentic knowledge on Indians “for eastern audiences who had little direct contact at this point [1824-1828] with indigenous peoples.” According to Forrest’s biographers, therefore, his body became the record of American Indian subjectivity, specifically Push-ma-ta-ha’s subjectivity.

Although Push-ma-ta-ha remains a loosely drawn figure in accounts of Forrest’s life, William Rounseville Alger is the biographer who provides the most complete account of the Choctaw Chief. According to Alger, “Push-ma-ta-ha was a natural orator of a high order” with “a voice of guttural music like gurgling waters.” Yet while it is acknowledged that Push-ma-ta-ha was the template for Forrest’s performance of Metamora, the Chief’s influence over Forrest’s vocal characterization has gone off the record. Metamora remained Forrest’s signature part throughout his career because it

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25 William Rounseville Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest, the American Tragedian* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1877), 127. I find Alger’s description of Push-ma-ta-ha’s voice as “like gurgling waters” interesting in so far as it is an intentional deception. As I will discuss in part two of this chapter, Push-ma-ta-ha’s voice was publically associated with the figure of thunder. To cop to this figuration, however, would have been to weaken Forrest’s brand and reveal that the actor had appropriated this sonic figure of vocal thunder as his own. Hence, Alger’s red herring.
was the role in which he developed a singular acting style, one that became synonymous with an American aesthetic. The most famous, and indeed the most salient aspect of this acting style was Forrest's booming, stentorian voice. “Forrest,” prominent elocutionist Gabriel Harrison recounted, “was the finest elocutionist we ever heard...[he] was a wonderfully made man; indeed, he was a gladiator in physique, and had a voice of power suitable to his physique. Its flexibility and melody were equal to a church organ, and could roll forth the deep tones of thunder (emphasis added), or the tender notes of the flute.”

References to Forrest’s unique vocal style, a voice like thunder, also echo through Alger’s tome, James Rees’ 1874 biography of Forrest, and several other contemporaneous works. America’s first star branded his unmistakable voice as thunderclap, and I contend that he appropriated this scintillating sonic imagery from the crucible of colonial encounter.

Alger’s biography of Forrest provides vivid description of this moment of contact. Relying on Forrest’s supposedly first-hand experience of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory, Alger paints a picture of a young actor around a Choctaw campfire, listening with rapt attention to an equally youthful Chief.

In this contact scene, Alger even provides a transcription of Push-ma-ta-ha’s verbal art.

"Push-ma-ta-ha," said Forrest, in wondering admiration, "who were your grandparents?" His nostrils curled with a superbly beautiful disdain, and, stretching forth his arms with a lofty grace which the proudest Roman orator could not have surpassed, he replied, “My father was never born. The Great Spirit shivered an oak with one of his thunderbolts and my father came out, a perfect man, with his bow and arrows in hand!”

In this passage, Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory is imbued with both earthly and celestial power. His voice takes on the silvery clap of lightening, the profound and ominous bass of rolling thunder, and the same tone of pragmatism rooted in the oak that birthed his ancestors. These sonic signifiers make an almost identical appearance in Metamora. The quotation below is extracted from Metamora’s first oration. In the play, has just returned to his “Indian village” following soured peace talks with the scheming British colonials. In the preceding council chamber scene, the British have lured Metamora to their settlement with the pretense of negotiation. In reality, colonial authorities intend to accuse and try Metamora for the murder of a Christian Native based on the paid, potentially false testimony of one Wampanoag traitor, Annawandah. This scenario is based loosely on the events leading to King Phillips War, but Stone skews historic events to narrate the corruption of British colonials, who he portrays as greedy, conniving, dishonest, and as traitors to the bonds of peace and aid established by Metamora’s father, Massasoit. The unjust trial, Stone implies, is a deceitful front to enable the British to imprison and execute Metamora and to seize Native land. After murdering the traitor Annawandah and narrowly escaping capture and death, Metamora returns to his people ready to fight against British tyranny. Metamora’s oration is calculated to rally his tired and weary people to the cause of war:

“Chief of the people,” said a voice from the deep as I lay by the seaside in the eyes of the moon — “Chief of the people, wake from thy dream of peace, and make sharp the point of thy spear, for the destroyer’s arm is made bare to smite. O son of my old age, arise like the

26 Gabriel Harrison, Edwin Forrest: The Actor and the Man: Critical and Reminiscent (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle Book Printing Department, 1889), 163.

27 James Rees, Life of Edwin Forrest: with Reminiscences and Personal Recollections (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson & Brothers, 1874), 499. The citation of the voice like “thunder” comes in the form of a reprint of a poem, “A True Incident” by Lucy A. Hooper that Rees claims was published in Lippincott’s magazine. In this poem, Forrest plays the good Samaritan who comforts a mother’s screaming infant through a night of violent weather. More archival research is merited in order to ascertain whether the close association between Forrest and the vocal figure of thunder was contemporaneous to the actor’s life, or rather came into heavy circulation only upon his death.

28 Alger, Life of Edwin Forrest, 139.
tiger in great wrath and snatch thy people from the devourer’s jaws!” My father spoke no more; a mist passed before me, and from the mist the Spirit bent his eyes imploringly on me. I started to my feet and shouted the shrill battle cry of the Wampanoags. The high hills sent back the echo, and rock, hill, and ocean, earth and air opened their giant throats and cried with me, “Red man, arouse! Freedom! Revenge or death!” (Thunder and lightening. All quail but Metamora). Hark, warriors! The Great Spirit hears me and pours forth his mighty voice with mine.29

Matthew Rebhorn also highlights this passage in his essay, “Edwin Forrest’s Redding Up: Elocution, Theater, and the Performance of the Frontier.” He specifically describes the “redness” of Metamora’s oration, noting that the exclamation points preserved in the script serve as rhetorical figures for Forrest’s passionate delivery – a delivery that would have been received as racialized in its emotional excess.30 Rebhorn remarks on the stage effects of “thunder and lightening” as well, noting the sound design “punctuates” Forrest’s transgression of the elocutionary codes of New Rhetoric.31 It is this invocation of Native oratory, Rebhorn argues, that enabled Forrest to deterritorialize an American culture of speech – seizing it and its attendant political power from elite control and settling it in the aesthetics of the common man.

But what does Rebhorn miss? He fails to explicitly flag that the thunder and lightening in this moment mimic the tropes from Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory. Rebhorn misses this intertextual citation even though he himself references Alger’s famous contact scene and even quotes from Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory that is contained therein. It is therefore a misreading to claim the “redness” of Metamora’s speech stems solely from the general excess Forrest displayed in his delivery. In fact, excessive feeling was falsely attributed to many racial groups during the antebellum era -- to African Americans in particular -- and wasn’t particular to redfaced representations of Indians. And while exaggerated depictions of black sentiment were central in the making of Americans, blackface racial masquerade did not produce the same nation-building operation that is at work in Metamora’s oration: the elision between Native American and “native” American patriot.32 Rebhorn however fails to analyze the process of racialization that connects Push-ma-ta-ha’s “performative rhetoric” to the rhetorical revolution Forrest performatively enacted in citing Choctaw oratory.33 In fact, Rebhorn fails to even mention what might be “performative” about Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory outside of its instrumentalization by Forrest. I argue that this failure occurs because Rebhorn is “tone deaf” to the fact that Metamora’s oration is a sonic redface masquerade of Push-ma-ta-ha’s verbal art. Not only does Forrest lift the central rhetorical elements of Push-ma-ha-ha’s oratory -- he channels the Great Spirit-as-father theme, and the warrior-thematic that is figured in and through Push-ma-ta-ha’s evocation of a speaker who is a “perfect man, with his bow and arrows in hand!” – but Forrest outright appropriates the Choctaw Chief’s central sonic tropes. Forrest replays the sounds of thunder and lightening through stage effect, and though his own vocal performance. In a brief abstract of the reading that will follow in the second part of this chapter, I contend that Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory figured his own public speaking voice as the sound of thunder and lightening. This rhetorical and sonic figure, I will claim, was essential to the decolonial and performative work of the

31 Ibid., 465.
32 On black sentimentality and American national formation see Heather S. Nathans, Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage 1787–186: Lifting the Veil of Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
Chief’s oratory. Forrest, sensible to the power if not the meaning of Push-ma-ta-ha’s sonic figuration, patently stole it from the Chief, passing a voice like thunder off as his own aesthetic invention – a truly American innovation -- and redirecting the performative ends of this voice towards a cultural revolution of his own.

**Whitescrubbing the Archival Record**

I want to return to my use of the idiom “tone deaf” in my critique of Rebhorn. Far from using this figure metaphorically in a way that disparages D/deaf or hard of hearing individuals, I employ the expression to describe a material effect of Edwin Forrest’s archival record of Choctaw Chief Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory. Roshanak Kheshti, in the introduction to her monograph, *Modernity’s Ear*, makes an important argument about how recording mediates sound, and in particular, about how white recordists mediate the sound of Native American voice. Kheshti takes as her object of inquiry a 1916 photograph of female ethnomusicologist, Frances Densmore, in the process of recording Blackfoot Mountain Chief. Designed as a remedy for the “epistemological formlessness” of Native music and language, the phonograph’s wax cylinder became a text where indigenous sounds could be captured, inscribed, and replayed at the will of the recordist. Kheshti thus argues that the image of Densmore and Blackfoot Mountain Chief does not reflect the process of making an “authentic” recording of Native voice. Rather, she claims the photo represents the “process by which Indigenous bodies…are subjected to and made subject through phonographic recording techniques.”

Densmore’s recording, she continues, is not a record of indigenous sound, but a record of how Densmore heard Blackfoot Mountain Chief – a hearing firmly contextualized by the colonial relations of power between the ethnomusicologist and her Indian subject. Stated otherwise, the technological process of Native subjection, and not any “real” indigenous speech, is the *subject* of Densmore’s recording.

I want to apply Kheshti’s insights on Densmore and Blackfoot Mountain Chief to the scene of contact and recording that unfolded between Forrest and Push-ma-ta-ha. Specifically, I want to debunk the myth that Forrest performed a “genuine Indian” in his personation of Metamora. The discourses of authenticity surrounding this role are based on tales of Forrest’s ethnographic contact with the Choctaw. Because Forrest and his contemporaries believed the actor’s body had served as a blank tablet for the inscription of Push-ma-ta-ha’s mannerisms, gestures, speech, and sound, the character of Metamora was seen explicitly *not* as a theatrical performance, but as a faithful representation of indigenous particularity. What Kheshti’s work clarifies, however, is that Forrest’s performance of Metamora was in fact a record of how the young actor listened to and interpreted the Choctaw Chief through the ideology of the eloquent savage. Push-ma-ta-ha’s Native subjectivity is not audible in Forrest’s performance because the act of recording performatively transforms that which it records. In being subjected to Forrest’s ethnographic inscription, Push-ma-ta-ha’s sonic particularity was supplanted in the archival record by Forrest’s own racialized representation of the Indian Chief.

Scholars have long described the effects of power on minoritarian subjects through the metaphor of “silence.” Push-ma-ta-ha, such discourse might conjecture, was “silenced” by Forrest’s representation of Metamora. The concept of silent victims, however, enacts violence upon historical subjects who were frequently anything but; as we will see shortly, Push-ma-ta-ha’s voice continues to resonate throughout the archive, and it will be our duty in this chapter to place that record in conversation with Forrest’s mythology of self-making. I therefore propose redirecting responsibility for the the archive’s sonic absences towards the listener. Rather than producing Push-ma-ta-ha as a

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“silent victim,” Forrest’s performance, I suggest, intentionally produced a listening population that was unable to hear the Choctaw’s Chief’s particularity. Thus, far from a metaphor of disability, “tone deafness” describes the state of being unable to hear the valence of Push-ma-ta-ha’s tropes in the archival record as a calculated effect of power.

I coin the term whitescrubbing to describe the process wherein a white recordist fundamentally alters the tone of subaltern discourse in the technological process of recording, rendering it inaudible. By “whitescrubbing,” I play on two common expressions. “Whitewashing” is an idiomatic expression that refers to when discourse is sanitized of unsavory details. It also astutely captures the racial dynamics of power wherein white supremacy generates a narrative that subsumes non hegemonic discourse. “Scrubbing” is a term referring to digital sound design, and describes a process wherein manipulation of a recorded track can result in changes to the audio, such as pitch shifting. In scrubbing, the track remains intact, but is sonically altered. Whitescrubbed sound therefore refers to subaltern discourse that is present in the archive but it is only accessible through white ideology and hearing. For example, Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory is represented only from Forrest’s point of hearing.

I want to suggest however, that whitescrubbing leaves sonic artifacts behind. These “aural traces” as Kheshti refers to them, signal the structuration of sound by power. By tracing out the mechanism of that structuration—phonography in Kheshti’s argument, and Forrest’s performance in my own -- we can pinpoint those places in the archive where whitescrubbing occurs. Honing in on these locations enables us as sonic historians to send ourselves back through the archive, ears to the truth or “ground” of mediation, listening for what Ronald Radano has termed the resonance of subaltern discourse. In the case of Forrest’s sonic redface, noting the whitescrubbing unconsciously reproduced in Rebhorn’s text sends us to Alger, and demands we ask, “who is Push-ma-ta-ha? What happened to his body, and what happened to his speech?”

Part 2: Behind the Sonic Redface Mask: Putting Push-ma-ta-ha’s Native oratory back on the record

Despite the fact that some version of the Push-ma-ta-ha narrative appears in late nineteenth-century biographies of Forrest by Alger, Barrett, and Harrison, and despite the fact that some version of the story is picked up and reproduced by (as far as I can discern) every scholar writing on Edwin Forrest, no account—historical or contemporary—manages to provide a clear picture of who Push-ma-ta-ha was. In fact, no writing on Edwin Forrest ever makes clear that Push-ma-ta-ha was a real historical figure as opposed to a figment of Forrest’s celebrity machine.

In the first section of this part of the chapter I aim to disambiguate the Push-ma-ta-ha in Forrest’s origin story from the historical activist, Chief, and US Brigadier General. I then return to the Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory, and provide a reading of its performative effects from the vantage point of indigenous theory.

For the record, Push-ma-ta-ha was no fabrication of Forrest’s. Born sometime around 1764, he later became a Chief of the Choctaw tribe of Mississippi. Push-ma-ta-ha was a renowned and masterful orator, a skilled diplomat on behalf of the Choctaw people, and also a decorated General

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35 Ibid., 38.
36 Ronald Radano, Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 23. Radano defines resonance as “a formulation of sound into text and back again as a social articulation or utterance.”
37 Contemporary scholars writing about Forrest who reproduce, but never unpack, the Push-ma-ta-ha narrative include Richard Moody, B. Donald Grose, Rosemarie K Bank, Sally L Jones, Jeffrey Mason, Jill Lepore, Matthew Rebhorn, Mark E Mallet, Theresa Gaul, and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon.
in the United States Army. His most readily documented oratory comes as a transcription of his 1811 speech against Tecumseh.\(^{38}\) Having established a Pan-Indian coalition in alliance with the Colonial British, Tecumseh appealed to the Muskogean tribes for their allegiance in waging war against the United States, and against the American settlers in the region who were usurping Native territory. Push-ma-ta-ha refuted Tecumseh’s argument with the primary design of keeping the Choctaw people from battle. Later, Push-ma-ta-ha allied with the United States government and fought alongside Andrew Jackson against the British in New Orleans during the War of 1812. He received his commission with the United States Army for this service and perceived display of allegiance. He also joined Jackson’s campaign against the Creek in 1813 -1814. In 1820 he again encountered Jackson during the negotiation of the Treaty of Doak’s Stand, and successfully resisted Choctaw removal to depleted reservation lands in bordering Arkansas. Though residing on tribal lands for the majority of his life, Push-ma-ta-ha traveled to D.C. in 1824 on diplomatic business as part of a deputation to resist further US cession of Choctaw land. There, he sat for a portrait by Charles Bird King shortly before his death.

Vanderwerth and Carmack claim that Pushmataha played a prominent role in Jackson’s inaugural procession, but this is an historical impossibility, considering that Push-ma-ta-ha died in Washington D.C. in December 1824, five years before Jackson was sworn in as Chief of State.\(^{39}\) Such an historical error, from their 1979 publication, *Indian Oratory*, is illustrative in revealing the romantic racist discourse surrounding Push-ma-ta-ha, and the impetus of such discourse to frame the Chief as an American hero and patriot. In fact, the epitaph on the headstone where he is interred in the Congressional Cemetery reads: “Push-ma-ta-ha, a Choctaw chief, lies here. This monument to his memory is erected by his brother chiefs who were associated with him in a delegation from their nation in the year 1824 to the general government of the United States. Push-ma-ta-ha was a warrior of great distinction—he was wise in council—eloquent in an extraordinary degree, and on all occasions & under all circumstances the white man's friend.”\(^{40}\)


\(^{39}\) Ibid., 71.

\(^{40}\) “Chief or Choctaw Pushmataha Unkown,” *Our Family History and Ancestry: Bernethy-Eby-Scribner-Hord*, last modified May 9, 2013, [http://www.bernethy-eby.scribner.com/getperson.php?personID=I272008484161&tree=Eby](http://www.bernethy-eby.scribner.com/getperson.php?personID=I272008484161&tree=Eby). This resource appears to be compiled by a member of the Choctaw tribe, and an individual with family lineage to Push-ma-ta-ha. There are few biographical resources on Push-ma-ta-ha aside from Gideon Lincecum’s biography of the Chief, and this work must be considered within the imperial framework of its writing (Lincecum was a settler colonist fluent in Choctaw). More research with the oral historian of the Choctaw tribe is required as this chapter moves into manuscript stage. Additional research on the Cherokee Phoenix, which printed
This discourse of friendship and intimacy was reproduced in William Rounseville Alger's biography of Edwin Forrest (1877). Although littered with historical inaccuracies, Alger's biography approximates historical truth. He accurately notes (though severely underplays) Push-ma-ta-ha's oratorical skill, and comments that the Chief died in Washington. Push-ma-ta-ha's extensive military service to the US government, and his centrality to treaty negotiations were expunged from Alger's record. The following anecdote from Alger's biography is most frequently quoted by contemporary scholars. I repeat it here both because it exemplifies Alger's gross historical inaccuracies, and the extreme asymmetry of power between Forrest and Push-ma-ta-ha. Even if the following anecdote is pure fabrication, it's fantasy of stripping Push-ma-ta-ha naked both captures white libidinal energy vis-a-vis the racialized masculinity of the “Indian,” and role of performance and display in the subjugation of black and indigenous peoples in the nineteenth century:

One night Push-ma-ta-ha and Forrest were lying on the ground before a big fire which they had kindled a little way out from the village...Like an artist, or like an antique Greek, Forrest had a keen delight in the naked form of a man, feeling that best image of God we have is dude humanity in its perfection...Push-ma-ta-ha, then twenty-four years old, brought up from his birth in the open air and in almost incessant action of sport and command, was from head to foot a faultless model of a human being. Forrest asked him to strip himself and walk to and from before him between the moonlight and the firelight, that he might feast his eyes and his soul on so complete a physical type of what man should be. The young chief, without a word, cast aside his Choctaw garb and stepped forth with dainty tread, a living statue of Apollo in glowing bronze.\(^{41}\) Although my archival work to date does not verify the actor actually met Push-ma-ta-ha, let alone encountered him in the buff, it seems plausible that the two came into contact with one another. Forrest embarked on a tour of the western US territories in 1822, and, after changing performance troupe, reportedly debuted in in New Orleans on February 4, 1823.\(^{42}\) It is possible he first encountered Push-ma-ta-ha in New Orleans, where the Chief purportedly enjoyed the cultural scene.

Additionally, Alger's assessment that the two rode roughly one hundred miles from New Orleans to Choctaw tribal lands is geographically accurate and would have placed the two on sovereign Choctaw land in Mississippi.\(^{43}\) However, the image Alger paints of two young men in their prime is massively inflated. Though Forrest would have been approximately 20 years old in 1823, the naked Native treading between the moonlight and fire (assuming that such a story is merely exaggerated as opposed to blatantly fabricated) for Forrest's viewing pleasure would have had the supreme physique of the jowly and potbellied 60 year-old depicted in Charles Bird King's portrait from 1824. Again, the image of Push-ma-ta-ha’ as the bronzed Apollo in a homoerotic, fireside strut with Forrest tells us more about white antebellum circuits of fantasy and desire than anything else. Additionally, the palpable sensual attraction depicted here between Forrest and an exotic who articulates an ideal rhetoric of the body that is simultaneously indigenous and racialized and classical and unmarked may be read (as I later will) as an allegory for Forrest's self-fashioning in and through Metamora.

One consideration heretofore unexamined by scholars, is the simple thesis that Forrest, who in 1829 was simultaneously making a play to seize the demographic support of the Jacksonian

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common man and attempting to vault into the upper echelons of an emergent celebrity power, chose to align himself with the historical figure of Push-ma-ta-ha because the recently-deceased Chief and patriot was closely associated in the American cultural imagination with Jackson himself.44 A cultural borrowing from a deceased but semi-well-known Native-cum-patriot certainly follows the aesthetic template followed by Stone and Forrest of forging Metamora from the fantasy of an indigenous revolutionary forefather. Even after Forrest’s death in 1872, Alger’s brief mention of Push-ma-ta-ha in Forrest’s biography demonstrates that while Push-ma-ta-ha’s name must have still held some cultural currency nearly 50 years after his death, it was only historically important insofar as it authenticated Forrest as the original “native” American.

What is certain however, is that on tour in the American southwest Forrest would have been closer to “contact” with Native American lands and culture than in the major metropolitan cities of Philadelphia and New York where he played previously. Thus, whether or not Forrest heard the allegory of Push-ma-ta-ha’s birth from Push-ma-ta-ha himself, or whether this story was already widespread in cultural circulation amongst the Choctaw at the time (which seems likely, as the allegory is still espoused today by the Choctaw as part of their cultural patrimony), the borrowed sonic figure of thunder in the 1829 play text of Metamora attests to the fact that Forrest certainly did come into contact with Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory. In fact, Metamora remains the earliest written tract I can find where traces of this allegory are audible. This is not to say that the story originated in its telling to Forrest. After all, the story is a cemented part of Choctaw oral history, and Forrest, or at least Alger, got the story wrong when setting down the actor’s biography. For while Alger claims Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory about the oak tree and the thunder recounts his grandfather’s origin, writings by amateur Choctaw historian, Gideon Lincecum, and by the Choctaw tribe itself confirm that the oratory instead communicated Push-ma-ta-ha’s birth story.

Listening to Push-ma-ta-ha’s Oratory

One can find myriad versions of Push-ma-ta-ha’s origin allegory in multiple late nineteenth-century and contemporary sources. Current resources, particularly those on the web, tend to be from sources relating to Mississippi state history, or to Choctaw tribal history. Every account of Push-ma-ta-ha’s origin contains three common elements: thunder and lightening, the oak tree, and Push-ma-ta-ha, who emerged from it’s splinters. While Gideon Lincecum’s own, undated account of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory demands scrutiny in so far as it is a settler colonial anthropology of Choctaw lore, it is worth quoting at length here for the insight it ultimately provides about Push-ma-ta-ha’s decolonial oratory and rhetorical critique of US removal discourse:

Jupiter was a god of power and gave birth, in a very extraordinary manner, to the impersonation of the highest order of intellect. With a blow of his brazen hatchet, Vulcan cleft the head of Jupiter and Minerva leaped forth in panoply. This is a beautiful allegory, but it is not as grand in its conception as that of the birth of Pushmataha (Son of Thunder), who had neither father nor mother, but directed by the Great Spirit a thunderbolt struck a

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44 Such a thesis, if proved out, would certainly put an end to the scholarly bickering over the questions “was Metamora pro or anti-removal?” and “was Metamora Forrest’s political bid for Jacksonian power”? If my hunch is correct, these questions become obsolete. See Martin, Rebhorn, and Grose for an overview of this line of inquiry. Evaluating the accuracy of this thesis will require additional research to ascertain the exact date at which Forrest’s authenticating narrative about his contact with Push-ma-ta-ha emerged in the archive.
giant oak, and Pushmataha leaped forth, a young warrior, armed and painted, to go on the
warpath.\textsuperscript{45}

I note the hybrid rhetorical models reflected in this quote from Lincecum. Here, as in the citation
from Alger above regarding Push-ma-ta-ha as the bronzed Apollo, two epistemes are reflected: that
of classical Greek myth and oratory, and indigenous myth and oratory. Though the injection of
the classical context might appear at first to be a colonial framework, one placed forcibly onto an
“authentic” Native allegory, I want to suggest that Lincecum’s telling actually recounts something
essential about Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory: that it articulated both hegemonic and indigenous models
of rhetoric.

In his essay, “Native Resistive Rhetoric and the Decolonization of American Indian Removal
Discourse,” Jason Edward Black argues persuasively that a common decolonial strategy used by
members of the five “civilized” tribes was to appropriate removal discourse in order to resist and
critique it.\textsuperscript{46} As Black clarifies, natives adopted and refigured the “master’s tools” in order to position
themselves more advantageously in negotiations with the US government. Native oratory of the
nineteenth-century, after all, was commonly deployed in diplomatic contact situations where there
was an asymmetrical balance of power between indigenous peoples and Washington. Thus, Natives
“adapted” to dominant discourse not only as a decolonial tactic, but also as a technique of political
survivance. Tension between indigenous and dominant discourses, however, was always present, and
Black contends that this hybridity reflects the “heteroglossic qualities of intercultural
exchanges…when subjugated people work through dominant discourses and assert their own
rhetorical inventiveness.”\textsuperscript{47} Working from transcriptions of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory as recorded in the
indigenous and anti-removal paper, \textit{The Cherokee Phoenix} and in published negotiations of the
Treaty of Doak’s Stand, Black analyzes how Push-ma-ta-ha redeployed US discourses of
paternalism, godly authority, and territory to decolonize removal rhetoric and assert Native
sovereignty.\textsuperscript{48}

Returning to Lincecum’s reportage of Push-ma-ta-ha’s birth oratory, I want to now reread
the hybridity of Lincecum’s citation as representative of the decolonial work of Push-ma-ta-ha’s
speech. Lincecum’s evocation of the story of Minerva’s birth from the head of Zeus can, in the
context of Black’s claims, be understood to metonymically simulate how Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory
operated with the frame of US governmental discourse. The linkage between Greek mythology and
indigenous oratory is one that, if not explicitly drawn by Push-ma-ta-ha in the way Lincecum lays
out, was certainly and intentionally conjured by Push-ma-ta-ha’s rhetoric. What’s more, in this
linkage, classical discourse stands in for the discourse of a political aggressor. Recall that Jefferson’s
deployment of New Rhetoric in the declaration was to assert US sovereignty over Britain. Fifty years
later, Jefferson’s New Rhetoric had become stale and out of touch with the common sense of the
American common man. Taking a cue from Jefferson, Forrest deployed “native” oratory to
articulate a new elocutional legacy in contrast to the elite rhetoric of revolution that, by 1829, had
become “classical” and “old guard.” In Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory, his citation of classical rhetoric

\textsuperscript{45} Gideon Lincecum, \textit{Pushmataha: A Choctaw Leader and His People} (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press,
2004), note 1, 98. Lincecum’s writings were published in the Mississippi State archives in 1901, but predate
that publication.

\textsuperscript{46} Jason Edward Black, “Native Resistive Rhetoric and the Decolonization of American Indian Removal

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{48} Curiously, though Push-ma-ta-ha passed away in 1824, Black cites his published speech from a 1829
print of the paper. This may indicate that Push-ma-ta-ha, who died prior to the official implementation of
Removal policy (1830), was nonetheless understood by the native community as a speaker whose oratory
strongly resisted such removal discourse, as it did during Doak’s Stand.
implicates the official discourse of the US government, and insinuates such discourse is on the wrong political side of history. By patterning his birth allegory after Minerva, Push-ma-ta-ha placed himself in direct conversation, and critique, with the rhetorical tools of the master.

His oratory also appropriates and redeployes discourses of paternalism, godly authority, and territory. Paternalist discourse during the Jacksonian era figured the US government as a protector, and indigenous peoples as the government’s children or wards. The parent-child relationship, reflected in Jackson’s label as the “Great White Father” naturalized the uneven power relations between tribes and Washington, and provided moral justification for the removal of indigenous people under the pretense of protectionism.49 By claiming the Great Spirit, a thunderbolt, and an oak tree as his parentage, Push-ma-ta-ha resisted discourse positioning the US as his father and protector, and also asserted that his allegiance to the government was as an equal political partner, and not as a political dependent. Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory also subtly critiques US discourses of godly authority, which justified territorial expansion with the rationale that white settler colonials were the chosen race. Godly authority also underwrote the “doctrine of discovery” which recognized white rights, under manifest destiny, to claim whatever land they came in contact with.50

In Push-ma-ta-ha’s birth allegory however, godly authority is not on the side of settler colonialists, but aligned with indigenous peoples. What’s more, Push-ma-ta-ha’s claiming of the oak tree as his birth mother and the Great Spirit’s thunderbolt as his father positions godly authority as underwriting an explicit genealogical connection, and therefore claim of natives to land and territory. Such decolonial readings of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory frame the radical and resistive nature of the Chief’s speech. These elements are further heightened if one imagines this speech as directed to Forrest, a white frontiersman searching for adventure and a sense of purpose in Native tribal territory. And, should the resistive discourse of his speech be missed by auditors, Push-ma-ta-ha concluded his allegory with the image of a warrior, “armed and painted, to go on the warpath.” In this final line, Push-ma-ta-ha the live, performing orator elides himself with Push-ma-ta-ha the warrior, thus performatively enacting his speech-as-revolt.

Black supports his method of reading Native decolonial rhetoric as debunking the perceived “silence” of Natives in the archive. Far from silent, Black argues, Native Americans vociferously “talked back” to US power in terms it could understand (but that history has seemingly failed to register, or as I will show with Forrest below, that white power has aggressively worked to garble.51 Beth Piatote furthers Black’s work in her talk on “Juris-Sonics” where she argues that natives also use sound to figuratively decolonize US imperialism, particularly in spaces where legal and political frameworks render resistive strategies of “talking back” beyond the conditions of possibility for indigenous peoples.52 Juris-sonics, according to Piatote, is an analytic term “sound that reinscribes the boundaries of Native homelands, affirms indigenous autonomy, and contests the mappings of settler colonial administration.”53 Piatote notes the relationality between sound and space as crucial to the critique juris-sonics levels at settler colonialism. Space becomes an especially trenchant analytic for indigenous sound, Piatote argues, since the question of territory and land has been and remains the primary issue animating Native and colonial relations: “sound is not ambient but active; it is the vibrational expression of territorial homelands. Sound is doing something…Sounds

52 Beth Piatote, “Juris-Sonics in D’Arcy McNickle’s The Surrounded” (working paper, CSLS Speaker, Berkeley, California, October 26, 2015).
53 Ibid., 10.
constitute a historical claim to territory." Piatote describes such claims to territory as practices of “sonic sovereignty,” and in what follows I listen for these claims in Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory.

Push-ma-ta-ha’s origin story is rich with the sonic imagery of thunder and lightening, and the “crack” of the thunderbolt as it splinters the oak tree from which he emerged. The thunderbolt also allegorically figures Push-ma-ta-ha himself, acting as the paternal extension of the Great Spirit as it penetrates and shatters the oak tree, Push-ma-ta-ha’s earthly mother. Yet the supernatural figure conjured by the story stands before the listener as the story’s speaker. In this rhetorical move, the Push-ma-ta-ha of the story elides with Push-ma-ta-ha the orator, and the story’s celestial figuration maps onto the body of the speaker, whose voice, I argue, becomes the sonic figure of thunder and lightening that is central to the performative effect of the rhetoric. In this doubled rhetorical move, Push-ma-ta-ha asserts a genealogical connection to land and territory that is claimed both through the meaning of his words (the spirit, thunder, and tree are his parents), and through the sonic sense of his words: his voice and oratory, figured as thunder, is the sonic index of his God-given and earthly inheritance. This is the decolonial work of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory at both the level of speech and sound. What’s more, Push-ma-ta-ha’s voice is understood to represent the force backing-up the anti-removal stance of his rhetoric. Just as Push-ma-ta-ha’s origin story figures the chief as a warrior, his voice second this figuration with a sonic profile that communicates Native speakers as unpredictable, ordained by a higher power, and outside the control of white men. Inextricably tied to the land and to the heavens, a voice like thunder also figures Push-ma-ta-ha as a force of nature, and one to be respected, as lightening, by definition, strikes. This is not to say that Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory figured him as a threat to whites, or even portended retaliatory action. Lightening strikes in an arbitrary as opposed to targeted fashion, and this figuration best communicates Push-ma-ta-ha’s power by signaling how he, like nature, could not be conquered.

I want to emphasize the non-violence of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory because easy metaphors with nature, and particularly a nature that is violent, abound in Metamora’s dialogue. For example, in the scene in which he confronts the colonial council, Metamora likens himself to a venomous snake, that, while dormant, strikes when trampled upon: “Do no tread too hard upon the serpent’s folds. His fangs are not taken out, nor has its venom lost the power to kill.” This bit of rhetoric was meant to figure Metamora as a noble savage, and though it blatantly cites American revolutionary and freemason rhetorics of independence, it couches such violent discourse in a poor impression of indigenous oratory. I conclude this section with the above example to foreshadow my ensuing analysis of how Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory was whitescrubbed in Forrest’s sonic redface performance, and how this whitescrubbing enabled the performative effects of the actor’s racial masquerade. Whether or not Forrest ever convened with Push-ma-ta-ha around the fireside, it is clear that he registered the power of the speech of Push-ma-ta-ha, “Son of Thunder.” Nonetheless, Forrest completely misheard the decolonial gist of the Chief’s speech, interpreting the thunderous elements of Push-ma-ta-ha’s rhetoric as the roar of an eloquent savage.

**Whitescrubbing a Voice Like Thunder**

“One touch of nature makes the whole world akin.” Never was this truth more emphatically demonstrated than in Mr. Forrest’s performance of Metamora. Many of the little speeches which the great actor pronounced as from the lips of the Indian king were so finely and truthfully inflected that

54 Ibid., 11.
56 Push-ma-ta-ha is shortened version of the Chief’s name: Apushimataha. Lincecum translates this to mean “Son of Thunder,” but multiple competing translations of Push-ma-ta-ha’s name persist.
they dwelt with much force and meaning in the memory of the hearer and became at the time constant quotations, and were as familiar upon the public's tongue as the name of Washington…no stronger evidence could be given of the actor’s merit than the fact that the whole public became, as in this case, respondent to the strokes of his masterly touches by an effort at imitation” 57

I invoke this citation from one of Forrest’s many biographers, Gabriel Harrison, for two reasons. First, the quote enables us to analyze how whitescrubbing shifted Push-ma-ta-ha’s decolonial Native oratory into the sounds of Edwin Forrest’s sonic redface. Second, I take up the two orders of elision framed in the quote, considering first how Forrest’s sonic redface enabled the young actor to frame himself as a white “Indian King,” and finally, revealing how the elision between the white Indian and America’s founding father altered the formation of American public culture.

The quote is striking in that it recounts the process of racialization that transformed Push-ma-ta-ha’s Native oratory into Forrest’s sonic redface. Harrison reveals this process in his citation of Shakespeare’s line from Troilus and Cressida: “One touch of nature makes the whole world akin.” In the context of his entire quote, Harrison produces a slippage between “akin” and “kin.” Three entities being brought close together (akin) in Metamora, Harrison contends. These three entities are: Edwin Forrest, the “Indian King” (Metamora standing in for Push-ma-ta-ha), and the founding father of America and the American Revolution, George Washington. The author continues to describe the mechanics through which these three disparate figures, when brought close together (akin), become one and the same (kin). The elision occurs, Harrison claims, through “one touch of nature” and the “public’s tongue.”

I want now to read this figure of “nature” as Forrest presented it his performance of Metamora. For Forrest, the nature he first encountered in Choctaw Country, that which he recorded through his actorly body, was the indigenous vocal sound of thunder produced by Push-ma-ta-ha. But Forrest was unable to hear this sonic figure outside the racially codified structure of hearing and listening in 19th century America. This is to say that Forrest heard Push-ma-ta-ha’s vocal thunder split from the context of its indigenous specificity and decolonial performativity. Nature, as Forrest heard it, was a racialized nature, the thunder of an eloquent savage. In a move I define as whitescrubbing, Forrest recorded and reproduced this sonic, racialized representation of indigenous nature in Metamora.

Racialized nature, the sound of thunder, appears in Metamora as sonic redness. It is this racialized figuration, I contend, that inaugurates the performative elision between the Indian Chief and Forrest, transforming Native Americans into white, “native” Americans. Let’s revisit the central sonic and rhetorical moment of the play, where Metamora rallies his tribe for armed conflict with the British colonists:

“Chief of the people,” said a voice from the deep as I lay by the seaside in the eyes of the moon —“Chief of the people, wake from thy dream of peace, and make sharp the point of thy spear, for the destroyer’s arm is made bare to smite. O son of my old age, arise like the tiger in great wrath and snatch thy people from the devourer’s jaws!” My father spoke no more; a mist passed before me, and from the mist the Spirit bent his eyes imploringly on me. I started to my feet and shouted the shrill battle cry of the Wampanoags. The high hills sent back the echo, and rock, hill, and ocean, earth and air opened their giant throats and cried with me, “Red man, arouse! Freedom! Revenge or death!” (Thunder and lightening. All quail

57 Gabriel Harrison, Edwin Forrest, 39-40.
but Metamora). Hark, warriors! The Great Spirit hears me and pours forth his mighty voice with mine.⁵⁸

In this passage Metamora’s monologue is designed to *sound like* or mimic Push-ma-ta-ha’s speech, but it cites such speech with a racialized difference. Like Push-ma-ta-ha, Metamora’s voice is staged as the sound of nature: when Metamora unleashes his battle cry into the wilderness, his voice is mirrored back to him through the voices of the “rock, hill, and ocean, earth and air.” However, this “voice of nature” *explicitly* racializes Metamora with an echo that is also an address and an evocation: “Red man, arouse!” Here, Metamora’s voice is sonically figured as “red” because it is wild and savage -- literally calling for war and bloodshed against the British colonists. Nature itself, explicitly the sound of thunder, is racialized as well in the final lines of the oration. The instant after Metamora exclaims “Red man, arouse! Freedom! Revenge or death!” the monologue is punctuated by the sound effect of thunder. Meant to represent the voice of the Great Spirit, the thunder “pours forth his mighty voice with” Metamora’s roar, signifying that the thunder both repeats and endorses the Indian Chief’s racialized war cry. There is a double movement in this moment -- thunder is racialized as the sonic signifier of the red man’s battle cry, and Metamora’s voice is figured as the savage sound of thunder.

### From Native to “natives”

I interrupt the flow of argumentation to walk more slowly through the elisions from Harrison’s quote above -- namely the elisions between Forrest, the “Indian King,” and America’s Founding Father. Using evidence from Metamora’s oration (in block quote above), I will show how Forrest’s sonic redface -- the racialized voice like thunder -- is the mechanism that makes “native” Americans from the raw material of Push-ma-ta-ha’s Native oratory.

*Metamora* premiered with a prologue and an epilogue. Poet, playwright, and producer James Lawson composed the epilogue, and famously included the following line: “A native bard—a native actor too, Have drawn a native picture to your view.”⁵⁹ I take this quotation as playing out in miniature the process through which *Metamora* enacted an elision between Native Americans and white American patriots. In this line, both the “native bard” and “native actor” refer to white Americans: *Metamora’s* playwright and lead actor respectfully, John Augustus Stone and Edwin Forrest. The “native picture” of the play, however, is a sketch of Indian life—a fictionalized and fantasized rendition of Metacom’s rebellion, injected with “genuine” representations of American Indians. Lawson creates a conceptual elision between “white” and “red,” between Americans and American Indians, by playing on the double entendre of the term “native.”⁶⁰ A similar tactic of elision operates in the deployment of sonic redface during Metamora’s oration. Just as the term “native” could be understood by audiences to reference native born Americans and Indians at one and the same time, Metamora’s speech was arranged so as to strike listeners ears as equal parts founding father and eloquent savage. In the oration, Metamora’s racialized voice like thunder, the one that proclaims “Red man, arouse! Freedom! Revenge or death!” is meant to mimic not only

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⁵⁸ Stone, *Metamora*, 78.
⁶⁰ Luke Goble, *Indians and the National Unconscious: Discourses of Nationalism and Democracy in the United States and Bolivia, 1780-1850* (PhD dissertation, SUNY Buffalo, 2007), 59. In his dissertation, Luke Goble reads the importance of the Native/native power dynamic, but does not closely analyze the rhetoric of Lawson’s epilogue. In a similar vein, Theresa Gaul argues that the stage portrayal of “redmen” produced a native American “whiteness,” though the performative dynamics of this transformation are not examined. See Gaul, “‘The Genuine Indian’”, 3.
Choctaw Chief Push-ma-ta-ha, but another famous America, Patrick Henry. Metamora’s sonic redface evokes and elides a whitescrubbed Native oratory with Henry’s famous proclamation: “Give me liberty, or give me death!”

But wherefore couch Patrick Henry’s revolutionary exhortation within Metamora’s sonic redface? Here, the evocation of Henry’s speech casts Metamora as a revolutionary figure – an American forefather so to speak. Metamora’s fight against the British in a reimagined 17th-century was meant to both evoke audience member’s memory of the Revolution, to offer a fictional precedent for it, all the while resonating with the struggle of most Americans in 1828 to free themselves from British cultural patrimony. One way that audiences could imagine themselves as American was if they identified an “aboriginal of this country,” not the British, as their cultural ancestor. Metamora’s evocation of Henry certainly accomplished this, as did the play’s plot in general. After all, Metamora was established quite literally as an American father figure. Recall the play’s lead protagonist, Oceana. The only character born on the new continent, Oceana represents a virgin America. When Oceana’s own father, Mordaunt, refuses to bless her rebellious love match with Walter, Metamora steps in as a surrogate father to bless the union. Later in the play, Ocean is metaphorically redded-up when bequeathed Metamora’s eagle plume. Wearing this plume in her braid, Oceana partakes in a met-a-theatrical mode of “playing Indian,” and her costume piece endows her with the revolutionary character traits formerly attributed to the Indian Chief himself: “justice…bravery…love of country, child and wife and home.” When Metamora, “last of the Wampanoags,” expires at the play’s end, his revolutionary spirit lives on in Oceana, a white Indian and the only surviving “native” of the continent.

The racial narrative of Metamora then, is that a white Indian supplants her indigenous father figure, racially sanitizing and refiguring his revolutionary violence as the patriotism of a “native” American. Metamora’s oration, I argue, enacts this very narrative, figuring Forrest as America’s white Indian and “native” patriot. To return a final time to the oration, while the citation of Patrick Henry frames Metamora as revolutionary forefather, the bloody violence of revolution is displaced onto the Indian Chief through the sonic, racialized figure of Metamora’s oratory. Forrest, as the real-world double of the fictional Indian Chief, became the sanitized white-Indian-patriot of the play’s narrative when curtain dropped and he wiped off his redface at play’s end. In this way, through the...

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61 Both Lepore (The Name of War), and Rebhorn note the citation of Henry in this oration.
62 Forrest’s Indian play single handedly ended the dominance of British theater and British theater stars in America. In commissioning a play about Native Americans, Forrest inaugurated a “native” American drama.
63 This quote is taken from the advertisement Forrest placed publicizing the playwriting contest that eventually produced the script for Metamora. The full text of that advertisement is as follows: “Feeling extremely desirous that dramatic letters should be more cultivated in my native country, and believing that the dearth of writers in this department is rather the result of a want of the proper incentive than of any deficiency of the requisite talents, I [tender] the following offer. To the author of the best Tragedy, in five acts, of which the hero or principal character shall be an aboriginal of this country, the sum of five hundred dollars.” Quoted in Richard Moody, Edwin Forrest: First Star of the American Stage (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 88.
64 Werner Sollers also notes the kin relationship established between Metamora and Oceana: “Indians were...metaphorically portrayed as pseudo-ancestors, yet nonetheless as advocates of spouses against parents, of consent against descent, and blessed not only the new principle of marriage based on love but also young America as the rebellious daughter of Europe.” Quoted in Rebhorn, “Edwin Forrest’s Redding Up,” 475.
65 Stone, Metamora 64.
figure of sonic redface Forrest became the icon and epitome of the “native” American the play elevated – a common man made “(a)kin” to indigenous Americans and the nation’s founding fathers.

**Edwin Forrest’s Sonic Bodies**

"[H]is walk, the inward turn of his feet, the carriage of his whole body, the gestures of his arms, the new and strange inflections of his voice, and even the manner his head posed upon his shoulders... …it was a new human nature.”

Gabriel Harrison, one of Edwin Forrest’s biographers, recalls seeing the actor’s performance of *Metamora* in the above quote. The majority of the quote trots out familiar discourse regarding Forrest’s extensive corporeal work for the role of Metamora, implying that the actor’s study of the Choctaw influenced everything from “the inward turn of his feet” to “the strange and new inflections of his voice.” What makes Harrison’s observations notable however, is that these physical transformations are not attributed to masterly characterization or mimicry. Rather, Harrison remarks, Forrest had crafted “a new human nature.”

My claim here is that this “new human nature” struck audiences as novel because it was the first time that a racialized human nature, one passing as “genuine Indian,” had graced America’s boards. True, the conceit of the Stage Indian had thrived in the United States since the early 1800’s, but early Indian plays had never claimed to present, or re-present (as Forrest did), images of “real” Natives. Evoking an intoxicating cocktail of nostalgia, awe, pity and fear, the racialized nature of Metamora’s voice like thunder compellingly elided indigenous discourse with revolutionary discourse, producing Edwin Forrest as a magnetic celebrity and bringing American audiences and American theater firmly under his spell. Though this chapter has debunked the mythology of authenticity surrounding Metamora’s oration, I want to emphasize how key such discourses were to materializing the most impactful effect of *Metamora*: Edwin Forrest’s sonic bodies. Unlike past Indian plays where Stage Indian characters were understood to function as masks, Edwin Forrest claimed to have brought a three dimensional “genuine Indian” to the American stage. Though Forrest had merely approximated Push-ma-ta-ha’s vocality, and used face paint to cover his body with a tawny hue, narratives about the actor’s authentic knowledge of Native Americans sutured these theatrical representations together to animate and naturalize Metamora’s sonic body: the aural assumption that a voice always has a racialized message about a corresponding racialized body.

Importantly, Metamora’s sonic body in turn nurtured the authenticity discourses surrounding the play, since one of the hallmarks of a sonic body is that it dissimulates the racialized conditions of its own production through correlation to an essentialized human nature. Stated otherwise, Metamora’s sonic body brought the stereotype of the eloquent savage to vivid life, just as surely as it inaugurated its constitutive other – Edwin Forrest’s sonic body, the naturalization of white American speech and a white American body as the nation’s baseline constituency.

As I conclude this chapter I’d like briefly to evaluate and catalogue the performative effects that Forrest’s two sonic bodies had on American politics and aesthetics. First, Forrest’s white sonic body became, as Harris observed, part of the public tongue – revolutionizing both how Americans sounded and how they narrated their national identity. Second, Forrest’s sonic body also inaugurated an American drama by materializing a literary and aesthetic tradition – that of the white Indian— that successfully challenged British hegemony by sourcing a cultural legacy that was distinct to the new world. And finally, Forrest’s sonic body enacted a new political ethos -- that of the Jacksonian common man.

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But what of the performative effects of Metamora’s sonic body, and the effects of Forrest’s white sonic body on the indigenous populations that were the raw materials for his aesthetic and political coup? To begin, Metamora’s sonic body transformed of Native oratory into white dramatic literature, speech, and the performance of national whiteness, thereby “settling” decolonial, indigenous knowledge and practice in the closed hermeneutic loop of white hearing and imagination. Forrest’s bid to settle the sense of indigenous sound for himself had the effect of attacking and weakening the successful transmission of Push-ma-ta-ha’s sonic sovereignty; Margaret Jacobs notes that such attacks ultimately dismantle Native claim to and knowledge of ancestral lands, paving the way for further settler encroachment. Additionally, as a living example of the vanishing Indian, Metamora’s sonic body perpetrated Removal and settler colonial discourse by justifying paternal protectionism. Because the body and speech of the eloquent savage was always at risk of disappearing, Metamora’s sonic body justified white recording and mimicking of Native oratorical culture with the intentions of “preserving” or “rehabilitating” it. Metamora’s sonic body thus perpetuated the cycle of displacement and removal initiated by sonic redface practices that engender the white Indian and threaten indigenous sovereignty. Lastly, the history of white usurpation of Native verbal art is masked by the un-markedness of “native” American oratory, meaning that the “Indianization” at the heart of white democratic speech is disavowed and inaudible. As I will argue in ensuing chapters, this consolidation of a sonic whiteness at the expense of Native oratory provides the sonic bass for the racial figuration of other American vernaculars through the Civil War, namely sonic blackness. The unmarkedness of white, “native” oratory has profound repercussions for the historical record and how we hear—or rather, don’t hear the history of Native and black subjugation through rhetoric and sound.

And, one of the performative effect of the sonic body is the way it simulated reliance on the pure, brute force of the (racialized) body and voice, alone. Restated, Forrest’s sonic bodies seemingly removed the question of text from the equation of American voice and power. This was a democratizing move for the white masses for whom racialized tropes were far more accessible than, say, literacy. Forrest’s claim to unmediated Native authenticity was, of course, pure illusion: the play’s currency was built upon the actor’s ethnographic inscription of Push-ma-ta-ha’s oratory, and of course, Stone’s play text. Thus, even if the performative power of Metamora’s sonic bodies appears to reside primarily in live performance, I want to emphasize how these racialized mechanisms produce the archive by entextualizing Native particularity, and, most importantly, I want to emphasize how these mechanisms dissimulate the racial breaks in the archive that such imperial recording engenders.

On a concluding note, it has been my aim to sketch or thematize, if not quite to analyze the ableism behind the concept of the sonic body. As Harrison’s quote at the beginning of this chapter makes clear, the hyper ableism of Forrest’s sonic body worked to recuperate the disabled. This epigraph is, of course, to a certain degree just a metaphor, one I read as indexing the power of Forrest’s sonic body to revive the political purchase of the white common man and to save or rehabilitate the degenerate American Indian race. Of course, discourses of disability surrounding disenfranchised whites and Native Americans are also metaphorical. However, I hope that this chapter’s analysis of the real effects of vocal practice and its sonic and discursive figures have, if anything, emphasized the lived repercussions of metaphor. I therefore stress the role of American ablenationalism in catalyzing the racial project of Forrest’s sonic body. Earlier in the chapter I also described how recording practices produces an epistemological impairment—a tone “deafness” to

indigenous sonic sovereignty. My point here is twofold: that discursive disability, including metaphoric concepts of disability, both catalyze racial projects and are the products of them. These concerns, and the mechanics of the discursive link between race and debility will be further explored in the following chapter where I note how, twenty years after the debut of *Metamora*, the surge in racialized voices on the public stage (spurred by Frederick Douglass’ abolitionist work) motivated whites to stage the official schism of voice and body. Rendering the sonic body asunder, voice could circulate “freely” as a sonic symbol in the American soundscape. While this ostensibly promised to further democratize American oratorical culture, in reality such moves brought the cultural (re)production of sonic difference under the control of a white political and libidinal economy.

In 1844, American sideshow was unnerved by a novel exhibit that sought to synthesize the human: Professor Faber’s speaking automaton. Consisting of 16 keys and keyboard, lung-like bellows, an ivory reed for larynx, and articulating “organs” of brass, rubber, and leather, the Euphonia imitated “the anatomy and physiology of human language” leading one news critic to declare: “so far as talking is characteristic of man, [Faber] has made a man.”

A pneumatic automaton, the Euphonia produced speech through a careful set of mechanical manipulations. After pumping an air supply through a reed or set of vibrating ligaments, Faber “played” the speaking machine’s keyboard to coordinate movements of the tubal trachea, jaw, lips, and tongue. Though turning a small screw could pitch the machine’s voice up or down, intonation could not be varied within a speaking event. The result of these careful choreographies and Faber’s practiced dexterity produced a voice that was ostensibly able to articulate an extensive (if labored) performance repertoire, speaking in Greek, Latin, French, English, and Faber’s native German. Further, with an agile operator the machine could even laugh, whisper or sing, though the renowned theater impresario John Hollingshead’s famous recollection of the Euphonia described its disturbing and pathetic musical rendition of “God Save the Queen” to be more appropriately titled “God save the inventor.”

Hollingshead’s oft-cited account captures the uncanny paradox of the Euphonia. Though undoubtedly a remarkable contraption, and one that is frequently a footnote in contemporary histories of telephony and sound reproduction, the crowds that flocked to Faber’s automaton during the machine’s extensive career from roughly 1844 through the mid 1870s were not drawn by the machine’s perfect scientific mimicry, but by its magnetizing, if repellant, vocal performance of the not-quite-human. Newspaper clips, primary spectator accounts, and contextualizing scholarship on mid-century popular entertainment indicate that this monstrous performance was enacted through

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2 *New Hampshire Sentinel*, February 2, 1844.
5 Ibid., 354.
7 The Euphonia is noted briefly in Hankins and Silverman, Sterne, and Connor.
the Euphonia’s two salient registers of difference (the complex inter-relations of which this essay asks after): its widely perceived speech impairment and overtly racialized appearance.

A spectacle of fun and terror, and one that traded in a genre-specific repertoire of race and disability, the Euphonia found a home on the dime museum circuit of the day, making its way across the UK and then the US under the auspices of PT Barnum in 1846 and 1873, respectively. Scholars of sideshow have long argued that this popular performance mode evoked the authority of “scientific” exhibit to stage a cultural process known as enfreakment. Enfreakment, a term coined by David Hevey and elaborated by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, is best described as techniques of display that “choreographed bodily differences that we now call ‘race,’ ‘ethnicity,’ and ‘disability’ in a ritual that enacted the social process of making cultural otherness from the raw materials of human variation.” At the height of popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, sideshows staged corporeal difference as abnormality in order to outline and buttress the contours of a new, unmarked epistemological category of the normate. In Figure X, culled from a broadside advertisement for Barnum’s 1873 traveling circus, the Euphonia (renamed “The Wonderful Talking Machine” and featuring a young woman’s head in place of a Turk’s) is depicted alongside several of Barnum’s most famous “freaks”: the little person Tom Thumb; a bearded girl; the “Siamese Twins” Chang and Eng; an armless woman; and Zip, or Barnum’s “What is it?” (In actuality, Zip was an African American man with a purported cognitive disability named William Henry Johnson whom, in 1860, Barnum dressed in an ape suit and touted as the “missing link”).

Unpacking the figures of the freak and the normate, Garland Thomson argues that in the midst of antebellum American cultural upheaval, enfreakment provided a corporeal principle of republican governance. The appeal of the Euphonia therefore, was that, in following an historical moment where theories of voice and natural language provided the underpinnings for a new science of man, one that authorized the concurrent rise of the modern nation-state, the machine’s racialized display of disabled speech provided audiences in a new-world (bio)political order the negative measure of human intelligence, civilization and progress, clearly demarcating and disciplining the conferral of human-ness, and therefore, republican “rights of man.”

Though scholars of disability studies and critical race studies have argued extensively for the material body as a site for the negotiation of the human, this chapter aspires to complement and

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8 Altick, Shows of London, 355.
10 Ibid., 64.
To be sure, in Barnum’s broadside depiction of “The Wonderful Talking Machine,” all printed figures (save one) are calculated to produce the freak through staged *corporeal* difference. The *Euphonia* sits in contrast as a non-human machine—its dummy head paradoxically signaling fleshy absence while indexing the material (if ontologically ambivalent) presence its voice will conjure. The *Euphonia* is less a visual than a sonic spectacle of difference. Through analysis of the Euphonia, and the performance of Joice Heth, who I understand as the machine’s cultural precedent, this chapter draws attention to the complicated fault-lines of raced and disabled difference in modernity to examine how these fault-lines operate in and through the material voice as a space and site of biopolitical making.

Recent work in Disability Studies is highly relevant to this essay in its commitment to thinking race and disability as co-articulated formations amplified by the Industrial Revolution. Notable works include Dea H. Boster’s *African American Slavery and Disability* and Nirmala Erevelles’ *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts*. A 19th century rise in disability has ultimately been linked to the ascendance of industrialism, and in particular, the ur-sites of industrialism: the factory and the plantation. Disability Studies scholars have long pointed to the industrial north in the US and injuries resulting from new, unpredictable, and unregulated technologies as the sources of a national increase in people with disabilities in the 19th century. Despite Nirmala Erevelles’ and Dea H. Boster’s work on slavery as a becoming disabled and the plantation’s mass production of disability however, the plantation-machine does not currently figure into the Disability Studies canon as a space for thinking the manufacture of disability. Thinking these two sites together lets us recognize that the automated uncanny as disabled both conjures an underperforming piece of machinery that imitates human life—as in the *Euphonia*—or the automatism of a person with disabilities as he or she performs certain types of labor “perfectly” and “mechanically.” This second category might well refer to the automatism of prosthetic performance (the way a prosthetic functions with a user to imitate or replace a body part), or to the automatism of disabled sideshow performers like Heth, who were expected to consistently perform their spectacular roles as “freaks” in grueling show and tour dates. To be sure, following Reiss, slaves themselves were imagined to “become, if guided by a master’s rational will, something like machines or prosthetic devices.”

These texts too, however, hinge their analyses on the flesh, and unintentionally reinforce understandings of race and disability as categories marked solely on skin and limbs. As scholars such as Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, along with Rosemarie Garland Thomson have argued, the figure of disability in the industrial age was the very body itself, which was rendered as a signifier

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11 See Disability Studies scholars Thomson, Mitchell and Snyder, and Chen, and Critical Race theorists Gilroy and Hartman.


or, more accurately, as a text that could be read for signs of life and humanity, or lack thereof. I define this figuration as less clear, familiar, or explored than the figure of blackness because, though blackness and disability, as constructed figures of difference, are both inherently unstable. Studies of passing though, provide useful interventions against this intellectual force of habit: in their emphasis on invisible marks of race and disability, they remind us that, while power always ultimately targets the body, its operations are not always visually perceptible. Further, Mel Chen’s 2012 monograph, Animacies, and Todd Carmody’s 2013 essay, “Rehabilitating Analogy,” detach the categories of race and disability from (human) corporeality to highlight how these power structures might co-articulate materially (though not necessarily visually) through language, animals, and objects, and immaterially through discursive modes of power, such as analogy. This is not to argue that blackness and disability are not legible text. This is also not to overlook iconic tropes of crippledom, such as the limping gait that was classically recognizable in T.D. Rice’s blackface reel, Jump Jim Crow, a disability masquerade resulting, according to Susan Schweik, in “the compulsory crippling and enfeeblement of entire “colored” populations.”

Though in no way drawing equivalencies between the legacies of slavery and disability (while simultaneously acknowledging the prevalent historical intersections of both), I suggest that disability performed/perform as a biopolitical function analogous to race. The nature of their similar, but incongruous relationship will be discussed at greater length below. Notably, the figuration of the material body as the text of disability inaugurates a figurative or discursive use of the bodies of persons with disabilities for the purposes of restricting the allotment of rights and recognitions to them. Snyder and Mitchell have described this effect in literature as narrative prosthesis: the “perpetual discursive dependency upon disability” for the narration of literary, aesthetic goals. What I’d like to illustrate here, however, is the degree to which narrative prosthesis, as an uncanny dramaturgical effect of mimetic performance technologies, functions as a system for controlling and disciplining people with disabilities. In this line of thought, producing the automated uncanny as disabled materialized a distinctly white, technological, and ablebodied definition of modern man at the very moment when a burgeoning American industrialism redefined “rights” by a careful calculation of those that were and were not fit for labor.

The intersections of disability and critical race studies are central to some of the animating questions for this work: was the Euphonia heard as speech-impaired because it was visually raced? Can we ever hear disability without making racial attributions? Was the Euphonia sonically raced because it was visually marked by debility? Can we ever hear race without attributing disability? To what degree do these categories of difference, though discrete, operate in parallel, and how might studying voice, its material and immaterial investitures in power, reveal these complex operations? In this chapter, I account for both the racist and ableist dimensions of the vocally human, tracking the genesis and function of this modern idiom.

16 In a similar vein, Sound Studies scholar Jennifer Stoever argues that white supremacy is policed as much through the ear as through the eye. See Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, “The word and the sound: listening to the sonic color-line in Frederick Douglass’s 1845 Narrative,” Sound Effects 1, no. 1 (2011): 19-56.
19 Snyder and Mitchell, Narrative Prosthesis, 47.
20 Snyder and Mitchell, “Introduction,” 113-4; Snyder and Mitchell, Cultural Locations of Disability, 37-68; McRuer, Crip Theory, 8; and Davis, Enforcing Normalcy, 88.
While Faber’s inspirations for the *Euphonia* are lost to history, the scientific record clearly accounts for several speaking automats that pre-date the Professor’s mid-nineteenth-century invention. Erasmus Darwin (1771), Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein (1779), abbe Mical (1778/83), and Wolfgang von Kempelen (1783) all built speaking automata. What’s more, these men all sought to define and reproduce the vowels and other speech sounds by mechanically reproducing the human organs of phonation and articulation.

While these inventors are generally regarded as imitators of nature rather than as acousticians who divined the underlying scientific mechanisms of nature (a recognition granted Hermann von Helmholtz for example), such analyses miss the historic point: each of these men equated human voice with nature’s own. Ergo, by engineering the human vocal apparatus, man might master nature. Mastery of this degree was highly coveted in the era of burgeoning national formation. In harnessing nature, these men sought to standardize and discipline national bodies-politic (understood as territories corresponding to naturally evolving language groups) by upholding speaking automata as templates for ideal human speech. These machines were therefore deployed in nation-building projects such as alphabet reform, the disqualification of vernacular languages, standardized methods of phonetic short-hand, deaf Oral education, and the rehabilitation of speech impediment.

Arriving some 60 years after the heyday of this initial wave of experimentation, the *Euphonia* nonetheless had stakes in a similar, if slightly revised game. No longer modeling human nature, the *Euphonia* was designed to define and curtail access to the rights of man; it did so by performing a perfect counter example to the properly human with an uncanny display or disability and race. In performance, the machine’s ontological indeterminacy was evidenced by its purportedly impaired speech: its defective articulation, “unnatural” accent and “sepulchral” tone. Where the machine was meant to declaim, “Hooray for Queen Victoria!” it could simply manage what the satirical London newspaper *Punch* transcribed as “HOURRA FOR FIGDORIA.”

Farmer’s *Cabinet* reported that the *Euphonia*’s “utterance is of course very slow and sometimes difficult and indistinct,” though most papers believed its defective accent stemmed from operator failure, and blamed any speech handicap on the “German conception” of the machine’s keyboardist—as if German hands pronounced English language with a German accent, as if an operative American nativity could have in any way compensated for the limitations of human engineering.

Intonation, or lack thereof, also plagued the machine, lending its expression discordant affect. According to the *Chamber’s Edinburgh Journal*, the *Euphonia* “is defective in the want of variety of what is known as the speech-note...When an attempt is made to give a joyous intonation to the declamatory sentence...it proves unsuccessful, and the result...was melancholy and unpleasing.” The machine’s timbre was also eerily animated, inducing “visitors [to] believe that the figure contained an imprisoned human—or half human—being,” and producing the ghastly illusion that the machine’s voice resonated “as if from the depths of a tomb.” Ultimately, the *London Illustrated News* assessed, “It requires all our sense of the ingenuity and perseverance which have

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21 Hankins and Silverman, 178-98.
22 *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 1844.
23 *Punch* 11 (1846), 85.
24 *Farmer’s Cabinet*, February 1, 1844.
26 *Chamber’s Edinburgh Journal*, Nos. 131-156, July-December, 1846, 170.
been bestowed on the work, to induce our assessment to the proposition which calls the voice a human voice.”

To be sure the *Euphonia* and its presence or lack of a “human voice” was decidedly, heavily racialized. Following the work of Nina Sun Eidsheim, who argues that our ears hear the racialized spectacle our eyes perceive, we must also question the machine’s exotic, ethnological staging as a factor in producing its ambivalently human voice:

The half figure of a man...dressed in Turkish costume, is seen resting upon the side of a table, surrounded by crimson drapery, with its arms crossed upon its bosom. The body of the figure is dressed in blue merino, its head is surmounted by a Turkish cap, and the lower part of the face is covered with a dense flowing beard, which hangs down so as to conceal some portion of the mechanism contained in the throat. The chin is moveable, and is attached by appropriate mechanism to some of the vocal apparatus.

A few things must be noted about this curious guise. To begin, it is clearly a citation of Kempelen’s famous automaton Turk chess player, which, by 1846, was residing and enjoying public life in Philadelphia, Faber’s adopted city, where it was displayed and played by a number of chess enthusiasts who had purchased it after the untimely death of the machine’s second exhibitor, Johann Maelzel. As James W. Cook has argued, Kempelen’s automaton epitomized the uneasy tension between late 18th and early 19th century Orientalist fear and fantasy, and the machine represented an “exotic techno-horror...a kind of amusement hall Frankenstein appearing in robe and turban four years before Mary Shelley’s more famous...man-made monster sprang to life.” While Kempelen’s European inflected breed of Orientalism was clearly distinct from that circulating within the continental US, both strains of thought steeped the respective speaking machines in contemporary racial ideologies surrounding mastery and slavery. For Kempelen’s originary European audiences, the automaton chess player was “part of a cultural spectacle in which enlightened Westerners triumphed over dangerous foreign irrationalism.”

According to Enlightenment thinkers, the “traditional criteria for manhood [was] human appearance, vertical station, and speech.” Spoken language played an important role in human qualification because, as Descartes stated:

[[language is in effect the sole sure sign of latent thought in the body; all men use it, even those who are dull or deranged, who are missing a tongue, or who lack the voice organs, but no animal can use it, and this is why it is permissible to take language as the true difference between man and beast...]

Scholars like Condillac and La Mettrie further argued that man without language was man without thought, and therefore no man at all; without “spirit...which enters into the body” via the acquisition of language, one could never rise above the level of Descarte’s beast, Condillac’s famed statue, or La Mettrie’s machine. And to this string of non-human qualifiers, Condillac added the severely disabled: “take away the use of all kinds of signs [from a superior mind], so that he cannot

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32 Ibid., 240.
33 Ibid.
make even the least gesture correctly to express ordinary thoughts, and you will have an idiot.”

What is important to glean from this chain of analogized states (beast, statue, machine, idiot) is that they were philosophically grouped together precisely because their facility (or lack thereof) with speech masked any discernible ontological difference between them. In each case, a capacity for language indexed a low-order ability to *imitate*, but gave no evidence of the thinking or soul that defined man.

Speech thus was the epitome of the mimetic trap, contemporarily known as the Turing Test, wherein the performance of behaviors indexed to human-ness are paradoxically also performative of the less-than-human. So historically, when the deaf speak or write, when the presumed autistic communicate, or when black women take the stage, their performances are not deemed evidence of thought or feeling (or, authorship?), but are received as empty spectacle, mere show, or imitation. Douglas Baynton, in his account of the rise of deaf Oral education in the US, explicates the common assessment that oral language as spoken by the deaf was “more automatic than natural”;

“The automatic” was a word caught up in the nineteenth-century debate over materialism and the question of whether human life was inspired by more than mere mechanical impulse. To call the speech of deaf people automatic was to imply that it did not arise from the soul, but rather was merely the mechanistic act of an automaton.38

The “automatic” speech of the Deaf here refers to the regrettably stigmatized “Deaf accent.” This accent, arising since visual as opposed to sound based communication is the natural language of the Deaf, was assumed to symbolize the absence of rationality or morality on the part of the Deaf. Oralist approaches to deaf education eschewed signed language and used touch, mirrors, and phonetic hand symbols that also approximated the position of the articulators to induce deaf speech. Mara Mills has described Oralist pedagogy as the “thought that deaf children…could be ‘mechanically’ instructed to speak,” since pupils were forced to learn English through the mechanism of its production as opposed to the natural mode of language acquisition.39 Thus mechanically educated, Oralist students were able to speak English but not to understand what they were saying.40 [This is exactly the case of Kempelen’s speaking automaton]. This very real problem, though stemming from backwards pedagogy, unfortunately played directly to dominant anxieties over the emptiness of deaf speech. While it is understood today that accented Deaf voice has no correlation with language fluency, cognitive or moral capacity, historically these voices bolstered prevailing presumptions of deaf inferiority.

Deaf writing also provoked fears of automation. In 1774, Pierre and Henri Jaquet-Droz invented a true automaton writer. Run by a programmable clockwork mechanism, the child writer sat at its desk and, dipping quill in ink, copied out (in excellent handwriting) an infinite number of suggested words and phrases. The automaton possessed several uncanny flourishes, including eyes that fixed on and followed its work and, once completed, “cast a glance at the original from which it seems to be wanting to imitate the characters.”41 In her study of the copious textual objects

produced around the automaton writer—print reviews, encyclopedia entries, almanac descriptions—Voskuhl argues the explosion of reading, writing, and elocution at the heart of this information revolution paradoxically marked a modern turn towards the “mass production of individuals and of individuality.” Looking to Jaquet-Droz’s automaton writer as well as their automaton piano player, Voskuhl frames the prevailing questions surrounding them: if these automatons were engaged in performances of sentimental self-formation, audiences were left to wonder whether the machines themselves were political subjects.  

The quandary presented by these automatons was that the new mode of political, social, and subject formation was caught in the mimetic trap wherein something seemingly non-human ostensibly performed as an appropriate political subject. Restated, this mimetic trap provides no way to make ontological determinations outside a rubric of performance.  

Deaf writing therefore raised the fear that it was not the product of thought or understanding but the programmed work of mechanical writers. Reality in fact substantiated these prejudices. In The Wild Boy of Aveyron, Harlan Lane explains the abbee de l’Epee’s method of French-Sign instruction produced students who could translate readily between the two languages but lacked comprehension of the French. Epee was aware of this and complained to his predecessor: “You [Sicard] insist on training writers when our method can only produce copyists.” Again, though the lack of French comprehension on the part of Epee’s students was produced by structural oppression (the lack of access to a natural-sign based education), deaf writing nonetheless raised the question of whether “performing as a subject” was enough to secure the rights and recognitions of one; restated, was deaf writing merely an imitation of human capacity, or the proof of it?  

What is key in these debates about whether the disabled are machines or whether machines are subjects is the lamination of the new political idea of the subject to an emerging concept of the human. In Androids in the Enlightenment, Voskuhl further argues that late 18th and early 19th century anxiety over the human uncanniness of the automaton stemmed from uneasiness with the fundamental questions raised by modern subjecthood: does the mechanical nature of subject formation mean that humans are mere machines, and can political society truly be founded through the mass production of individual subjects? Voskuhl’s points are probing but don’t suggest a framework for considering the political import of linking the disabled and the mechanical through metaphor. I propose the cultural work of this alignment became politically useful at exactly the moment where performance as a modern tool for social formation gained ascendancy. The problem of performance—the ontological ambivalence aroused by those that ostensibly perform—brought heightened scrutiny to the level of performance itself. In other words it became paramount to ask not merely “what performs?” but rather “what performances count?” Displays of self-reliance (or possession over oneself), shows of discipline, and public acts of recognition were the necessary components of the modes of performance (reading/speaking, etc) undergirding modern civil society. Thus, felicitous performances demonstrated the thrall to agency so key to liberal ideology. Infelicitous performances, on the other hand, at best demonstrated a capacity for the imitation of agency.  

The question of the human, I argue, arose from the crucible of mimesis; human-ness suggested a rubric for parsing whether demonstrated agency was authentic or merely simulated. In this, human-ness provided structural support to modern modes of governmentality by disqualifying

42 Ibid., 441.
44 Lane, The Wild Boy of Aveyron, 87.
45 Voskuhl, Androids in the Enlightenment, 168.
from political rights and recognitions those whose ontology was incongruous with liberal ideology rooted in the able-bodied, self-determined, land-owning (white) man. Agentive performances were (and continue to be) simply inaccessible for those for whom possessive individualism was/is not performable because of physical, social, and cultural “disabilities”; for those requiring networks of care, or, in a historical example, American Deaf, because a linguistic minority in an otherwise English speaking public, were frequently seen as “foreigners” even though their failure to participate in linguistic acts of social recognition was the result of poor access to sound based discursive communities.  

The alignment of the disabled with machines, and the machine with the disabled therefore re-routed the prevailing question of political subjecthood through the question of the human, allowing the deferment of the question of rights and recognitions for those whose ontology challenged the very premises of the modern political structure. As opposed to 18th century automatons, who wrestled with the new, liberal political order by asking: “is it human or machine?”, 19th century automatons like the Euphonia both tested and reinforced the requirements of modern subjectivity by asking: “is it disabled or a machine”? Here, the metaphorization between machines and people with disabilities literally takes the question of subjecthood off the table via the elision of the question of the human. 

To be sure, for Faber’s American audiences, automaton machines—in thrall to their operator’s control—represented the idealized conditions of chattel slavery. The epistemological ties between automation and slaves-as-machines were materialized in the minstrel automatons that were circulating alongside the Euphonia in the 19th century US, as Benjamin Reiss notes:

Black people and apes were fitting forms for automata since they both posed—in different degrees-questions for white audiences about bodies that resembled dominant conceptions of “the human” but that may or may not have lacked fully human powers of intentionality or rational agency. Black automata, additionally, repeated at the level of amusement slavery’s system of bodily domination.

While the Euphonia certainly could not have been read outside this dichotomized racial framework—a framework, Luis Chude-Sokei claims, that ultimately gives “all forms of otherness—like machines—...an echo and, eventually, a (black) voice and face”—19th century American racial ideology furnished the machine with yet another valence of slavery. In Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, Linda Frost highlights that, as the 19th century wore on, Turks were commonly associated with the practice of trafficking “Circassian Beauties,” a tribe of women from Russia’s “Caucasian” region, who were understood as the most racially pure white women, and who were fabled to be kept as white slaves in Turkish harems. Faber’s Orientalized Euphonia therefore, was analogized with both the black slave and the racially marked owner of white slaves, animating the machine’s simultaneous sounded representation of both a perfectly entertaining docile body and a dark, sub-human menace, one threatening to upend an American racial order and enslave its white master.

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46 Lepore, A is for American, 105-6.
47 Reiss, The Showman and the Slave, 121.
Another way to describe the Euphonia’s ontological flickering would be through recourse to theories of the uncanny. For Bergson, working from Freud, something is uncanny when it becomes automized, when it becomes an imitation of life. The imitation of life can be performed by either a dead object that nonetheless simulates life (such as automata), or by a living being that, through the perceived mechanicalness of its performance, nonetheless produces the illusion that it is not wholly animate, or human. As discussed above, persons with speech or communication disabilities often fell into this later category. As we will elaborate below, black people were also caught in this mimetic trap. To be suspected of uncanny animation—to vacillate between the animate and inanimate—meant that one was caught in the limens between life and death, and between human and nonhuman, or human and object. These dichotomies are not listed here as absolutes. Rather, they are the masks that dissemble a more mingled logic that the Euphonia deployed.

The dichotomies themselves serve to establish clear ontological positions, and allow the reification of these positions. Following Taussig’s discussion of the ontological work done in RCA’s logo of a dog listening to a recording of his owner’s voice in the article “His Master’s Voice,” the function of the uncanny—the flickering moment of mimicry—is ultimately to reify the human-ness, the aliveness, and soulful animation of the spectator of the ad in contrast to the primitive. However, these two positions pivot around and are performatively brought into being by the or limen between them, the mimetic space that inaugurates the play where the dead may be alive, the object human, and vice versa. This is the space of the machine. The machine as a third term or middle term between race and disability, therefore, is essential because it highlights how this limen was used elide the question of the human for persons of color and persons with disabilities by disciplining these bodies in effigy: in this limens between animate and inanimate, human and non-human, and human and animal, the primitive uncanny can never actually be truly alive, animate or human. This is because in the moments when the primitive effigy flickers into the animate, like the speaking disabled subjects discussed above, its animacy is always suspect.

In the mimetic play of the uncanny, the primitive is either marked for death as an already object (an object-like death that mirrors that of the machine the primitive ‘moves into’—this is when the dog is a dog, an effigy an effigy), or at best is only partly alive (when it displays the mimetic power of the human yet maintains the mark of the dog —this is the effigy being, “at best,” black or disabled). The primitive can never be wholly alive, human or animate: it is always already either dead or mostly dead, nonhuman or mostly nonhuman, object or mostly object. All are marked states and all are designed to cordon the primitive from the rights and recognitions of the human. Moreover, this mixed state of uncanny mimetic play is necessary for the performative enactment of the Euphonia’s opposite: the stable ontological position inhabited by the able-bodied whiteness of the machine’s imagined spectator.

Amongst scholars of critical race and performance studies, Luis Chude-Sokei is remarkable in his recent work parsing how the uncanny logic of minstrel automatons served white hegemony by co-producing a modern “technological whiteness” alongside a blackness that existed in the space between human and animal, “between rational agent and soulless machine.” Though Chude-Sokei does not explicitly address Taussig’s theory of mimesis, he advances a powerful argument for both the “thingification” of blackness as staged by the mimetic play of minstrel automatons, and for the cultural work of “thingification.” Riffing on Aime Cesaire and Bill Brown, Chude-Sokei argues that the ontological flickering of uncanny minstrel automatons attested to and maintained the

50 Chude-Sokei, “The Uncanny History of Minstrels and Machines,” 119.
contradictory legal status of slaves as both humans and property, and served to allay white anxieties surrounding larger 19th-century social and economic transformations that heralded the ultimate political evolution of slaves from chattel to human citizens.  

Paramount in Chude-Sokei’s work is his careful unfolding of how “thingification” performatively enacted the symbolic realm of blackness in modernity—staging blackness as the “second nature” dramaturged from the raw material difference of black bodies. For Chude-Sokei, minstrel automatons represent the “the interbreeding and interdependence” of America’s two primary anxieties that, while appearing antithetical to one another, are in fact co-constituted. The first of these national preoccupations is what Chude-Sokei terms the “machine aesthetic,” a gestalt reflecting the nation’s industrialized turn and an evolving discourse of technological cum national determinism. Yet the thrall towards an industrialized modernity carried with it the equal but opposite affective movement towards a prelapsarian past, and this longing for a “natural” America was intimately tied to the slave labor that supported an agrarian or mercantile nation. Chude-Sokei terms this equal and opposite affective movement the “African aesthetic.” In the African aesthetic, “blacks” (an identity elided with that of “slaves”) were laminated to the very definition of the traditional, the natural and the pre-technological, and were positioned as the “dialectical other[s]” of modern civilization.  

Yet, Chude-Sokei attests, these two anxieties meet and originate at the ur-cite of slavery: the plantation. Scholars such as C.L.R James and Sylvia Wynter see the plantation not through the lens of pastoralism, but as a decidedly modern structure that disciplined modern citizens and that operated as a “social machine.” Wynter’s “Negro-in-the-machine” ultimately describes the dehumanization of blacks as a key mode of production for the plantation-machine. In fact, Benjamin Reiss highlights that slaves were often understood, at best, to exhibit potential for flawless, “mechanical performance of labor.”

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52 Ibid., 121, 115.  
53 Ibid., 112.  
54 Ibid., 111.  
57 Reiss, The Showman and the Slave, 121.
masks—in particular Sambo’s laziness — were figured to disseminate the blackness at the heart of modernity and instantiated the dichotomy between a human and technological whiteness, and a pre-technological and dehumanized blackness.

The minstrel automaton however performs the blending and passing of the machine and African aesthetics, displaying a blackness that is suddenly technological, or a whiteness suddenly debased, or perhaps showcasing the “play” between both.58 Regardless, minstrel automaton mimicking performs in miniature the slick set of moves and disavowals required for culture to stage a black/white binary as nature. Just as slaves occupied a precarious position between persons and property, the minstrel automaton similarly oscillates between human and object, and, like the blackface minstrel, uses the mask of mimetic blackface “play” to disavow black objectification while simultaneously reifying blackness. This re-presentation of the intimate and familiar “thingification” of blackness evokes laughter, yet also produces fear as the seemingly stable politics of life (i.e. who gets to be human) are nonetheless thrown into question in the moment that dehumanized blackness mechanically animates. The animacy of the minstrel automaton necessarily confronts spectators with questions like, “is the black object an object or a man?” and “if a black automaton can imitate life, must that mean that white life is automized?” As Chude-Sokei observes: “these technologies accomplish this fearsome invasion of the self initially by way of imitation—by ‘nature’ mimicking and therefore drawing attention to the “element of automatism” that is already there but masked as ‘nature.’”59 This is to say that the mimicry of minstrel automatons produced the uncanny by raising epistemological uncertainty over the question of white and black life.

And further, minstrel automatons laminated such epistemological uncertainty to the very blackness they also produced. In an era when the passing over of the plantation machine for a new, industrialized modernity also brought the threat of black enfranchisement, the epistemological uncertainty over the future valuations of black and white life was figured by minstrel automatons into a representational blackness that “function[ed] as a mask for the socioeconomic regime that the machine itself actually [stood] for.”60 This uncanny technological blackness, however, has lived on far beyond its time, maintaining its representational force and, according to Chude-Sokei, insisting that “all forms of otherness—like machines—also have an echo and, eventually, a (black) voice and face.”61

Imitation, as a paradigm, was deployed to question the human-ness of, and therefore defer political subject-hood for racialized individuals and people with disabilities. By analogizing black people and people with disabilities to machines that were imagined to have similar imitative capacities and similarly suspect ontological status, the calculations of “black = machine” and “disabled = machine” literally take the question of human-ness and its attendant rights and recognitions out of the equation and off the political bargaining table. What then are the exact dimensions of how the Euphonia, which staged voice as a performance wherein “black = machine = disabled,” deployed the middle term of “machine,” and to what specific ends?

I have scribbled out the above equation put forth by the Euphonia, black = machine = disabled, to show that the machine doesn’t draw equivalences between these the difference categories of race and disability, but instead produces a sonic analogy between them. Thus, I want to raise the possibility of ‘hearing across’ the discursive attributions of race and disability. This could mean that racialized speech is heard as disabled, and disabled speech is heard as racialized. This could mean that the visual sign of debility (The Euphonia’s half body) produces sound of racially

58 Chude-Sokei, “The Uncanny History of Minstrels and Machines,” 112.
59 Ibid., 119.
60 Ibid., 122.
61 Ibid., 122.
marked body. Or, it could mean that the visual sign of race produces the sound of debility. Such an analogy could also imply that racialized sounds conjure disabled bodies, and that disabled sounds conjure racialized bodies. I contend that the Euphonia actively produces such racialized and disabled phantasmagorias because it positions the machine—the question of the human—as the vanishing point between race and debility.

19th century modes of thought that analogized automatons to people with disabilities (and vice versa) and thus circumvented the question of rights and responsibilities for both people of color and persons with disabilities by eliding the question of the human. Following Chude-Sokei’s model of thought, in what follows I will endeavor to first lay out the contours of what “disabled automata” or “automized persons with disabilities” might be, and second, to parse what these uncanny objects might figure, and to what ends.

Joice Heth was a disabled female slave who was bought and exhibited by PT Barnum as George Washington’s 161-year-old nurse in 1835, just one decade before the showman acquired the Euphonia. Heth traveled extensively with the Barnum along the eastern seaboard between upstate New York and Connecticut until her death in 1836, at which time Barnum charged public admission to her autopsy. While slaving for Barnum, Heth worked long, grueling hours on display. She sat propped up in a chair (in addition to blindness and missing teeth she also had partial paralysis of the limbs) chatting with spectators, singing songs, laughing, and telling stories about the young George Washington. Heth drew tremendous crowds, but Barnum consistently invented new hokum, constantly changing his PR strategy to bring in new audiences, and to bring old audiences back. During a tour stop at Boston’s Concert Hall, Barnum met Johann Maelzel, the owner of the von Kempelen automatons, and most notably, the automaton Turk. As Reiss notes, by 1835 the Turk was well regarded as a hoax. Crucially, the most popular theory circulating about the machine was that it was operated by a little person who was secreted away in the gear cabinet just below the Turk’s chessboard. Reiss himself reproduces this disability narrative, which testifies to the tremendous grip it has held on the American imagination and cultural archive, despite the fact that Cook has revealed that the machine’s hidden operator was a number of chess-masters of average to above average height. Clearly however, the automaton Turk represented something more to Barnum than a played-out hoax. What made the uncanny machine potent was not only its racialized otherness and its mimicry of human thought. It was rather the confluence of these factors with the narrative of disability at the heart of the machine that made it so tantalizing and lucrative. Barnum then simply lifted this highly commercial cocktail of narratives about the disabled, racialized automaton, the disabled racial uncanny, and applied it wholesale to Heth. While in New Haven, Barnum’s associate, Levi Lyman, posed as “a Lady in Temple Street” and composed a letter to the editor of the New York Sunday News claiming that Heth was not an old, disabled slave woman, but in fact an automaton.

Chude-Sokei persuasively argues that the Heth automaton hoax was convincing and appealing to audience members – i.e. that it worked as a capitalist ruse – because Heth was black. Harking back to the disability story at the heart of the automaton Turk craze, I would argue that the economy of the machine was activated not only by Heth’s blackness, but also by her debility, and that the two cannot be understood as separate from one another. Extending and analyzing Benjamin Reiss’ observation that the leap between exhibiting Heth as a curiosity and then an automaton was aided by the close association “between the monstrous and the artificial that harks back to the early

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62 Benjamin Reiss notes that it is historically unclear whether Barnum outright bought Heth as chattel property, or merely bought the rights to exhibit her as a hoax. The historical ‘grey area’ of the matter is an accurate reflection of the fact that for Heth, there was not much difference between the two.
modern period,” I argue that P.T. Barnum leveraged Joice Heth’s debility to literally refigure her bogus performance of George Washington’s nanny as the mechanical performance of a minstrel automaton. In performing as Washington’s 161-year-old slave, Heth’s decrepit body and multiple, visible disabilities were framed as the “signs” of her advanced age. This framing of Heth’s body moved it beyond its material reality and dislocated it to the realm of the discursive, where it could serve analogously as Barnum see fit. The hoax of the Heth-as-automaton ruse then mirrored that played out by the automaton Turk: both performances convinced audience members that machines were masquerading as thinking and feeling, if racialized and disabled, humans. In fact however, both performances pivoted on the opposite truth, or something like it: both performances featured thinking humans who, manipulating essentialized signs of race and disability, successfully staged themselves as machines. In this move, race and disability animate the machine in America’s socio-cultural imagination. Once instantiated, the machine produces a discursive analogy between it’s constituent differences: race and disability.

The Second Nature of Voice
To return to the question of voice, what are we to make of the fact that the Euphonia routed epistemological uncertainty surrounding the human-ness of the racialized and crippled Turk through the uncanny space of the sonic? To phrase this question another way, what is the second nature of voice staged by Professor Faber’s wonderful talking machine?

Approaching this question demands, at first, a return to Taussig’s formulation for mimesis as the “nature that culture uses to create second nature.” In the preceding sections of this chapter I have highlighted how the “nature” mounted by the Euphonia straddled visible and audible raced and disabled particularity, and how this “nature” in fact oscillated between the seemingly natural and the unnatural, between the human and the non-, between life and death, and between the human and the object. First, the automaton staged visible racialized and crippled difference via the Turkish effigy. Second, and most significantly, the machine activated levers and pumps and bellows and whistles to produce a voice listeners could not identify beyond the uncanny boundaries of the marked (no)body Faber had used to frame — both visibly and audibly — the machine’s performance. As I’ve argued above, standing in as the primitive and the ‘human-in-the-machine,’ the Turk served to both recognize and misrecognize the Euphonia’s voice; moreover, the dummy was meant to pass for the author of it. The Turk furnished, without a doubt, the mimetic magic of an uncanny voice that made Faber’s Euphonia a genuine piece of show as opposed to a bland science experiment.

What should be clear by now is that although the Euphonia followed the well established scientific tradition of mechanically engineering the voice of ‘nature,’ in fact the voice that each of these historic machines crafted was never more than performances of ‘twice behaved behavior.’ Restated, the voices produced by these machines never captured any pure, authentic, or ‘natural’ Voice; rather, they merely reproduced, at the level of voice, contemporaneous ideologies and assumptions about what voice was and/or should be. For example, the Euphonia’s production of a marked voice “matches” the automaton’s production of a racialized body and a body with disabilities. In this

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63 Reiss, The Showman and the Slave, 120.
64 Michael Taussig, Mimesis and Alterity (New York: Routledge, 1993), xiii.
65 Faber first presented his talking machine to the Philadelphia based American Philosophical Society, where it was admired by numerous men of science, before the machine was picked up to tour by Barnum. See Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 1844-1847, 83.
instance, an essentialized voice (a voice held up as ‘naturally’ stemming from an ‘unnatural’ frame) indexes, is indexed by, and is in fact inextricable from the essentialized bodies it animates. Yet, as Nina Eidsheim has persuasively argued in her 2008 dissertation, *Voice as a Technology of Selfhood*, what was understood as voice’s “nature” — that bodies innately sound marked social categories of difference—is always already an elaborate cultural production.66 And in fact, Faber’s Euphonia even *enacts* the performance mechanisms through which voice is produced as difference. Following recent scholarship in Sound Studies that argues for the materiality of the voice, we can hold that some degree of the Euphonia’s audible ‘difference’ could be attributed to the innate properties of the ‘organs’ of the machine (to how flexible the vocal reed might have been, to how malleable the material forming the articulators was, etc), just as some degree of difference in vocal quality can be linked to physiology.67 However, the sounds of overwhelming sonic difference, what we have come to label as race, or gender, or ability, are not attributable to immutable corporeal difference, but to what scholars have identified as two sets of factors: to the different performance repertoires (or, in disability studies speak: the “built environments”) surrounding the extraordinarily complex exercise of voicing — repertoires that are themselves potentially raced, gendered, etc., and to the positionality of the listener, whose ability to hear and what he or she hears is structured by power, and by what he or she believes she sees. Thus the sound heard as non-normative could have resulted from one of several material conditions surrounding the Euphonia’s performance — the extraordinary difficulty of the key board work required to induce the machine to articulate, for example. However, the racialized and enfreaked performance repertoires that the machine traded in (the standard repertoires of a Barnum sideshow) ultimately functioned to dissimulate these material circumstances, performatively fashioning (and disavowing) an essentialized link between voice and corporeal difference in the figure of the Turkish dummy.

To understand the second nature of voice as staged by the Euphonia however, we must move beyond current trends in Voice Studies that highlight the materiality of voice to emphasize how voice was performatively *dematerialized* by the Euphonia. In this chapter’s previous discussion of minstrel automatons and the automatized disabled, I emphasized how the machinic leverages mimetic play to generate and disavow dichotomous categories of difference and epistemic uncertainty regarding the marginalized groups serving as the very raw material for such machinations. Ultimately these groups, rendered up to the vicissitudes of performance by an industrial modernity searching for an accounting of lives, are refigured by the uncanny process of automatization into a sign, or second nature that, in turn, functions to police the group it was figured from. In the case of the Euphonia however, the ontological flickering of the Turk doesn’t merely produce the dematerialization and figuration of a body with disabilities or a racialized body; instead, the Turk’s uncanny oscillations served to dematerialize a raced and disabled voice, figuring the sound of voice as a *sign* of difference, as a *sign* of race and disability. Thus, although the Euphonia revealed the construction of voice to be an unyieldingly material practice — one steeped in wood and brass and leather, in careful performance technique, and in all the accouterments required to stage race and disability — its simultaneous status as a body and a no-body, its uncanny quivering between the ontologically animate and inanimate (again, oscillations calculated to discipline black and disabled bodies) produced a new episteme wherein voice could exist as a radically dematerialized entity. Further, the disavowal of this figuration in the Euphonia’s mimetic play authorized the

67 As Eidsheim makes explicitly clear, differences in vocal and body physiology are in no way correlated to racial differences. Accounting for difference as linked to the body is an important methodological step that seeks not to erase— as the social constructionist model has, inadvertently—corporeal lived experience.
invisibilization of voice as figure. Stated otherwise, voice remade to signal ontological absence rather than presence was authorized to exercise a symbolic, discursive, and opaque power. While still rooted in racist and ableist material productions of voice, the dematerialized sound, or sign, of voice could simultaneously uphold, enact, and invisibilize/naturalize these material operations of power.

Originally indexical of an ascendant human nature (in fact, the mastery of nature by humans), by the mid 19th century voice had ceased to import such technological determinism; instead, it became a proving ground for man’s negative reflection: the not-quite-human. This destabilization, as represented by the uncanny Euphonia more than a full 30 years before the phonograph, remade the voice itself a site of epistemic uncertainty, and a cite that dissimulates, under the guise of ‘nature,’ the political force of the uncanny. Speaking machines raised anxiety and epistemological uncertainty over the definition of whiteness, ablebodiedness and therefore the very question of the human structuring the heart of the American political experiment because — as mechanical imitations of “nature’s voice,” they revealed the automatism of the defining characteristic, or nature of man. By blackening and crippling the voice of the Euphonia, it held that what made man man could not be mechanically imitated, but rested in the lacuna between the animate and the uncanny: in that space of half-life, half-objecthood occupied by black bodies and bodies with disabilities. And finally, as if to remove forever the possibility of black and disabled bodies bridging the gap to the human, the dematerialization of the process through which that gap is manufactured (the staging of the second nature of voice) sets up the difference between ablebodied whiteness and racialized disability as a profound disjuncture, and ensures that the sign of voice, the second nature figured through the automated uncanny, is, in turn, sanctioned to figure the bodies it seeks to discipline.

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68 For more on this aspect of voice see Caitlin Marshall, “Crippled Speech,” Postmodern Culture 24, no. 3 (May 2014), doi: 10.1353/pmc.2014.0020.
Chapter 3: The Acoustics of Passing

“The reading which Mrs. Webb will give in Boston will be a dramatization of Uncle Tom’s Cabin…The idea was suggested by Mrs. Webb’s peculiar faculty of rendering the negro character and intonation…while her power in the tongue gives a peculiar power to the character of Cassy.”

“It may be inferred by persons abroad that the success of Miss Greenfield resulted from some abolition or ‘higher law’ fanaticism, but it is not so. She is countenanced and especially patronized by distinguished Silver Greys and compromise men, so that, while we congratulate a worthy member of a proscribed race upon her remarkable success, we can assure the public that the Union is in no degree periled by it.”

In these two mid-nineteenth century epigraphs, Harriet Beecher Stowe and an anonymous writer for the Buffalo Express reflect on the vocal force of two popular mixed-race performers of the day: the dramatic reader, Mary E. Webb—also known as the Black Siddons—and the internationally renowned singer, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield—who frequently went by the sobriquet, the Black Swan. Two women with pasts seared by slavery, Greenfield and Webb were also abolitionists carrying their talents and political messages nationally and transnationally. As these epigraphs highlight, both women’s public voices were imagined as national threats with the agency to rend the American public in two on either side of the slavery question. As if their voices themselves were granted the power to deliver the enslaved from bondage.

Stowe, the first half of this chapter will argue, had a hand in staging this vocal power in white American imagination. Building off the growing cultural acceptance of voice as both an essentialized index of race and a discursive commodity, Stowe used her groundbreaking novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin to compose what I term the acoustics of passing, a sonic schema that harnessed the socio-political power of racial melodrama to invest anti-slavery speech and song with performative force. Later, Stowe deployed these acoustics to stage and manage Greenfield and Webb and their political messaging. While both Greenfield and Webb had independent performance careers prior to and after their intersections with Stowe, the author greatly promoted their work at home and abroad amongst abolitionists, and raised their public profiles and reach. While Stowe saw her patronage as part of her ‘good works,’ her ultimate interest in these women was her perception of their ability to felicitously enact the anti-slavery rhetoric of her novel. Because each woman was mixed race—Webb Spanish and African, Greenfield white, black, and Native—Stowe believed each woman’s voice also

1 Harriet Beech Stowe to Oliver Johnson, 7 October 1855, Kirkham Collection of annotated Harriet Beecher Stowe letters, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center.
2 Anonymous writer quoted in Milwaukee Daily Sentinel, October 29, 1851, Vol. VII.
3 As Thomas Riis has noted, the sobriquet of Black Swan references the admixture of a white cultivation and a racialized pathos in Greenfield’s sound: “Swans move with grace and pride. They exude a regal simplicity, an elegant proportion of body and an apparently effortless motion. Oddly, or perhaps not so oddly, they are usually white and they are also fairly silent (at least in nature). But as the familiar phrase “swan song” suggests…they finally sing before dying and in doing so they maintain both their beautiful carriage and their pathetic mien. Therefore they evoke both aesthetic as well as emotional sympathy.” Thomas L. Riis, “Concert Singers, Prima Donnas, and Entertainers: The Changing Status of Black Women Vocalists in Nineteenth-Century America,” in Music and Culture in America, 1861-1918, Michael Saffle ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 55. Webb too, as the Black Siddons, identified with the respectability and cultivation of white actress, Sarah Siddons, and, in “coloring” this identification, aligned it with an innate morality that was figured as the natural inheritance of blacks.
sounded equally mixed. Sonic symbols of racial mixing, the “black and “white” tones Stowe perceived in each woman’s voice made them living, breathing representations of the melodrama of slavery Stowe played out in her novel. By carefully stage managing Greenfield and Webb’s public appearances, “the little lady who made th[e] big war” sought to make each into a mouthpiece for her own anti-slavery platform.

Remixing the Acoustics of Freedom

If towards the end of the 18th century, white American imagination presumed “colored” women never “uttered a thought above the level of plain narration,” as Thomas Jefferson described Phyllis Wheatley’s poetry, what transpired that such tremendous force was attributed to “black” female voices less than 75 years later? As I have argued in the introduction and first chapter, whereas the Revolutionary sense of voice was as a radical New Rhetoric, a multi-cited and complex inter-corporeal and inter-textual performance, Edwin Forrest’s performance of Metamora inaugurated the conceptual solidification of the sonic body – the persisting idea that voice is indexical of a racialized ontology. Then, in the 1840’s as black abolitionist speakers first broke out onto America’s public lectern, the Euphonia catalyzed the disembodiment of essentialized vocal difference, deflecting white anxiety over black voice by enabling vocal difference to come under the control of whites impresarios such as P.T Barnum. By midcentury, I argue, this epistemic shift towards the myth of a disabled unmediated, racialized voice was further reinvented and given fresh political purchase by Harriet Beecher Stowe as she yoked historic and prevailing conceptions of voice to a powerful new representational medium: racial melodrama.

Motivated by the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act, a law which made all Americans directly complicit in the traffic of human chattel, Harriet Beecher Stowe began to pen and serially publish the anti-slavery novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin in the The National Era in 1851. A sentimental work of fiction Stowe claimed to be based on real life events, the novel dramatized the lives of black, mulatto, and mulatta slaves searching for freedom. Designed, per the cultural habit of the day, to be read aloud and or enacted by families within the feminized, domestic sphere of the white household, Uncle Tom’s Cabin permitted Stowe to quite literally “speak” to Christian Americans about their moral obligations to end slavery. Crucially, the novel gave Stowe a public voice without forcing her to take to the public lectern when to do so would have violated antebellum precepts of white female respectability and could have threatened the credibility and persuasiveness of her political message. Additionally, the fictional space of the novel enabled Stowe to compose a writerly voice that could speak out against slavery in tones far more efficacious than those of a white minister’s wife. To stage this rhetorically agentive voice, one that hinged on a sonic appeal to inter-racial sympathy, Stowe sampled and mixed two powerfully persuasive, if diametrically opposed, cultures of speaking and listening in the United States.

The first of these cultures revolved around revolutionary American understandings of political rhetoric. According to Jay Fliegelman, this tradition of republican oratory drew upon 18th century philosophical principles to recast Declaring Independence as a speech act. In his Declaration, Jefferson announced the ‘self-evidence’ of an American people by performing a nationally specific common sense in two important ways. First, he displayed a breed of American moral feeling in direct contrast to that of the colonial British; second, he did so through an oratorical style that inaugurated a common, American modality for articulating and hearing truth. This felt and sounded show of a common ‘self’ evidenced Americans’ natural rights to independence, and installed a markedly white revolutionary acoustics of freedom.

Stowe’s second sample was a misappropriation of a new mode of hearing ushered in by the 1845 Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. As Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman has argued in “The Word and the Sound: Listening to the Sonic Colour-line in Frederick Douglass’s 1845 Narrative,” Douglass’s narrative was a direct attempt to bend and subvert what she terms “the sonic colour-line.” An acoustic schema that racialized sound and recruited the ear in black subjection, the sonic color line was epitomized by the republican oratorical tradition wherein meaning was linked to white articulation, and meaninglessness to black utterance, heard simply as ‘noise.’ Contrastingly, the reformed sonic model presented in the Narrative sought to position black sound as a site of meaning and resistance, and challenged Northern readers to question and remap both their hearing of such sounds and their ethical relationship to black meaning. Jonathan Cruz, in Culture on the Margins, terms this new mode of hearing “ethnosympathy” and defines it as an “interpretive ethos of pathos.” Importantly, Stoever highlights that Douglass did not seek to cast black sound as “a sentimental appeal to truth,” but “rather [as] a challenge to dominant notions of truth produced and disseminated through the ear.”

Stowe however, did not hear Douglass’s message so subtly, and like many Abolitionists, was quick to commandeer black sound for a white social justice platform wherein it served as the innately moral (and romantically racialized) sound of sentimental suffering. Thus, it was this mishearing of the strains of black resistance that Stowe remixed with the white tones of revolutionary independence to spin a brand new soundtrack for the antebellum era. I term this soundtrack the acoustics of passing. A vocal melodrama (a literal speech act) in black and white, the acoustics of passing was an amalgamated grid of sonic intelligibility invested in the political power of voice that encapsulated the seemingly antithetical (to white America) tones of republican virtue and black experience, and was deployed by Stowe to narrate the fantastical passage of African Americans from bondage to freedom. Composed first through Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and propagated later in her paternalistic relationships with black female artists, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Mary Webb, Stowe’s acoustics was ostensibly a powerful tool in the fight against slavery, but was ultimately used by the author to recapitulate a vision of America that upheld principles of white supremacy. This is because, as Linda Williams has observed in her landmark text Playing the Race Card, racial melodrama may be an effective political mechanism for rights and recognitions but is ultimately politically conservative.

A narrative mode rooted in “excessive” performances beyond language, Williams identifies melodrama as staging black complaint and suffering as inherently sympathetic and therefore worthy of political recognition. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Williams claims, gave birth to this moral genre with the “moving” pictures of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Williams establishes five conventions as central to dramatizing melodramatic affect. First, Racial melodramas begin and end at home, or in the interracial amity that Williams locates in a “space of innocence”—a space where a freedom, of sorts, resides. The second convention of melodrama requires a spectacle of racial suffering in order to effect moral legibility. Third, melodrama is advanced through the interplay of narratives of action and pathos. Fourth, melodrama engages with realism by taking up real-world issues such as slavery.

9 Ibid., 12, 17.
10 Ibid., 29.
However, instead of offering a solution to these pressing problems, melodramatic narratives only appear to resolve them. In fact, by dissimulating narrative resolution, racial melodrama dissolves and dissipates the political stakes of real social conflict. Finally, racial melodrama is marked by flat characters with “black or white” moral make-ups wherein “moral forces [were] viewed as expressions of personality embodied in physical being and gesture.”

Williams’ arguments are compelling. However, in her rush to posit a specific genealogy of American visual culture, she does not investigate how Harriet Beecher Stowe’s text sounded racial hybridity. While Williams readily points to the ways in which Stowe narratively interpolated minstrel culture and song into Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the racially mixed voice that resonates through the novel has been overlooked. The black and white “hybrid” sounds of the antebellum era pertained not only to Foster’s minstrel home songs, but to the aesthetics of vocal performance, and that this “hybridity” was not a mixing at the level of narrative, but was in fact a sonic (re)production relying on the gendered and racialized logic of miscegenation.

Voicing George Harris’s Acoustics of Passing

To analyze how Stowe remixed racial melodrama with the American tradition of New Rhetoric and black ethnosympathy, I turn to Stowe’s dramaturgy of George Harris’s voice. In George’s well know passing scene in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Stowe composes her acoustics by linking revolutionary era oratory to dramatic action, and the black, sonic body to an essentialized pathos. Crucially, Stowe stages George – a mixed race man – as the embodiment of both sonic drama and sentiment precisely because he has presumably inherited such traits from his white father and black mother. Thus, Stowe positions an inter-racial voicescape, one produced by the specter of rape, as the melodramatic space of and for the performative seizure of George’s liberty. In what follows I read George’s passing scene as an example of Stowe’s acoustics, and conclude by analyzing these acoustics through the lens of what Roshanak Kheshti terms “musical miscegenation.” Emphasizing the history of forced conception between masters and slaves as the basis for Stowe’s sonic schema reveals the supremacist impact of her well-intended racial project. Additionally, by showing how a miscegenated vocal rhetoric was brought into the American home and normalized through the reading and recitation of Stowe’s text, I set the stage for ensuing analysis of how Stowe deployed her acoustics around Greenfield and Webb, and how Greenfield replayed and signified on Stowe’s racial project.

George’s passing scene plays out in the theater of a Kentucky tavern, not far from the plantation George absconded from. Julia Stern, in her “Spanish Masquerade and the Drama of Racial Identity in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” has argued that George’s passing is organized by specularity and that “both gazing and the failure of sight” drive the narrative and dramatic action of the scene.

While the role of the specular is crucial George’s passing, his voice performance cannot go unheeded. This oral performance was clearly not passed over by slave-owner Mr. Harris, who included it as a distinguishing feature in his fugitive slave advertisement for George:

Ran away from the subscriber, my mulatto boy, George. Said George six feet in height, a very light mulatto, brown curly hair; is very intelligent, speaks handsomely, can read and

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11 Ibid., 40.
12 Kheshti, “Musical Miscegenation and the Logic of Rock and Roll.”
write; will probably try to pass for a white man; is deeply scarred on his back and shoulders; has been branded in his right hand with the letter H. In this advertisement, George has been carefully described by three salient characteristics: his visual appearance (skin and hair color, physical build and hair texture), his oral performance (predicated, the handbill informs us, on George’s literacy), and the hidden scars that mark him as chattel. Further, it is these first two attributes, the advertisement warns, that dangerously empower George to pass for white. And herein lies George’s threat: how is one to confirm his status as property? His light skin and “fine European features” cast him as a free man. And where, the handbill implies, other runaways are betrayed by Negro dialect’s coarse articulations of the tongue, physique, and sociality, George’s eloquence and cultivation (which, because of his high-bred, white paternity “had always been perfectly natural to him”) do not reveal him as a slave but rather confer his proper ontological, and biological, whiteness. The menace of George’s imposture therefore, is not that he will “try” and succeed at passing “for a white man,” but that there is no fundamental way to evidence he is not one. Performing an inherited whiteness through both appearance and speech that display his “uncommon,” “high, indomitable spirit,” George could only be made legible as black through the mark of slavery: here, his scarred and branded, or murdered (wanted “dead or alive”) body.

Contrary to Mr. Harris’ predictions, George does not try to enter the public roadhouse as a white man, but as a Creole Spanish gentleman. To pull off this guise—one Stern identifies as a racial third term, and therefore passing because inescrutable — George darkens his skin and hair. Julia Stern argues that such darkening is a radical act because it “articulates the seemingly antithetical qualities of European-ness and dark complexion, both which speak the real truth about George Harris’s multiracial African American identity.” What’s more, in choosing to impersonate a Spanish Creole, a fictional identity that, from what we deduce from the anglicized, paternal, and well-known-slave-holding alias of “Henry Butler,” locates the legacy of slavery in the maternal line, George has

14 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly* (Irvine: Reprint Services Corp, 1992), 104.
15 Ibid., 98.
16 Ibid., 97-98. Through the ablebodied logic of whiteness, George’s “uncommon” performance permits him to hide these identifying scars. Yet George conceals these traumas (the logic of white-ablebodiedness is at work in this narrative formulation), and therefore he does not only look the part of a Spanish gentleman, but his ontological whiteness — here symbolized by his “Vocal Culture” — allows him to fully articulate, or in Stowe’s terms, “play the bold part he had adopted.” (98) “He was very tall, with a dark, Spanish complexion, fine, expressive black eyes, and close-curling hair, also of a glossy blackness. His well-formed aquiline nose, straight thin lips, and the admirable contour of his finely-formed limbs, impressed the whole company instantly with the idea of something uncommon.” (97) Aside from the stereotypical “white” features here attributed to George Harris (thin nose and lips), we would do well to note his striking ablebodiedness; in this narration, George’s “finely-formed limbs” are not simply cis-gendered objects of heterosexual desire, but more importantly, as markers belying the crippling beatings and branding he received at the hands of his master, testify to a corporeal soundness and ability that is only legible as white. How might one account for this tenacious and unwavering ablebodiedness, an ablebodiedness seemingly untouched by the physical abuse to which George was subject as a slave? According to Stowe, George’s hale form is the outward projection of an inner cultivation — the physical corollary, in true melodramatic style, of an “uncommon,” or morally elevated character.
19 Ibid., 110.
chosen to visually represent himself, in the Manichean racial logic of the day, with his preferred familial alliance.\textsuperscript{21} As George foreshadows in his masquerade, he may sound white sense, but he feels black.\textsuperscript{22} Though George’s identity politics, and the way they ultimately enable Stowe to write the problem of integration off to Liberia, are only made problematically explicit at the novel’s conclusion, it is important for us to register the subtle ways in which Stowe dramaturges George’s persona according to the black and white logic of the time. Thus, while Stowe indicates that George’s “blacked up” features and seemingly antithetical Vocal Culture enabled him to “play the bold part he had adopted,” we would do well to observe that George is passing for who he claims to be.\textsuperscript{23}

Having passed, un-apprehended, through the tavern, George takes a calculated risk and reveals his masquerade in private quarters to a flustered Mr. Wilson, his former bagging-factory employer, who George believes has recognized him. Thus, before George can break from the tavern on his way towards Canada and freedom, he must convince Mr. Wilson to discard a juridical sense of right in favor of the rights of man: he must convince Wilson (and a listening America) of the moral justice in permitting him to pass.

“Why, George, this state of mind is awful; it’s getting really desperate, George. I’m concerned. Going to break the laws of your country!”

“My country again! Mr. Wilson, you have a country; but what country have I, or any one like me, born of slave mothers? What laws are there for us? We don’t make them,—we don’t consent to them,—we have nothing to do with them; all they do for us is to crush us, and keep us down. Haven’t I heard your Fourth-of-July speeches? Don’t you tell us all, once a year, that governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed?* Can’t a fellow think, that hears such things? Can’t he put this and that together, and see what it comes to?”\textsuperscript{24}

With this republican overture, marked in-text by an asterisk and accompanied by a footnote, Stowe literally spells out her source material for George’s speech:

From the Declaration of Independence of the United States (1776): We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of

\textsuperscript{21} As Carolyn Berman, who argues for the creolized identities of Uncle Tom’s passing characters, clarifies: “the term Creole in English, like its counterparts in French and Spanish (creole and criollo), designated colonial subjects (crucially, both settlers and slaves) raised in the settler-slave colonies. By the nineteenth century, Anglo-Americans, even in the slave states, no longer called themselves Creoles because they were no longer colonials. But the residents of the Louisiana territories continued to call themselves creoles long after Louisiana had become part of the United States, suggesting that the Louisiana Purchase had not so much liberated them from a colonial relationship as re-placed their distant overlords with a new set closer to home. This helps to explain why the term Creole in American English came to refer to persons of French and Spanish descent, even as it continued to designate British colonials in British English,” 329-30).

\textsuperscript{22} Here I would counter Stern, who finds George’s third-term racial identity liberatory, and suggestive of a critique that Stowe levels at the institution of slavery. Drawing on Berman, who argues that Creole characters help Stowe wage her critique before they are erased in order to support Stowe’s white supremacist vision of domestic American life, I argue that George’s mixed heritage allows Stowe to both deploy and then despatch melodramatic (read: inter-racial) speech. Thus, it is essential for us to note the ways that, as Williams observes, family ties in Uncle Tom’s Cabin are entirely maternal and race-based, 59).

\textsuperscript{23} Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, 98.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 100.
Happiness—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed…

Stowe’s framing of George’s ensuing oratory makes explicit the interpretive schema she wishes to enact: readers are to hear George’s speech as a revitalization of, or better yet as the realization of Jefferson’s Declaration. Americans, Stowe argues, are in a state no better than the British of the 1770s: “we have cotton in our ears,” she insists, and are likewise “deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity.”

Stowe intends to jolt readers from this muddled perceptual state, represented through the character of Mr. Wilson, “not unaptly…represented by a bale of cotton,—downy, soft, benevolently fuzzy and confused,” with the downright revolutionary tones and “style of feeling” George’s speech performs.

A lengthy address, George’s monologue is (typical to the genre of the slave narrative) an account of the domestic crimes of slavery: the sale of his mother and siblings by his white, slave holding father, the sexual and physical harassment of his sister and her eventual sale down-river, and the polygamous lifestyle demanded by his owner. Above all, the speech is a complaint of personal injury at the hands of a nation, that, George argues, has been as negligent in looking after its blood kin as has his own father. Concluding with the passionate exclamation, “I’ll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe! You say your fathers did it; if it was right for them, it is right for me!”

George’s Declaration claims the rhetorical, and therefore natural, rights that are his white inheritance.

Performing, Stern notes, as “a nineteenth-century Patrick Henry in “yellow”-face, a revolutionary son of a white father whose mixed blood is so fired by its Caucasian endowment that it cannot help but to burn for freedom as if it were pure,” readers are keyed not only to parse George’s words, but to sense and figure them their aural imagination as the melos of dramatic, republican action. And should one doubt Stowe’s intention to cast George’s speech as conforming to the acoustic whiteness of republican elocution, we might note the standard English orthography, and lack of dialect, that defines his utterance. Understanding that sounded vowels are nothing more than a vocal timbre, the standard orthography of George’s speech does not merely signal his proper grammar and pronunciation, but his unmarked accent and perceptibly white vocal quality. Following the moral logic of the sonic-color line, wherein Stowe casts “voice…as metonym for character,” George’s expressive, fiery, and acoustically white tone clearly place him on the side of good, in opposition to the melodramatic evils strains of Legree, Haley, or Sambo. And finally, the sense of George’s speech, which so clearly mimics that of the founding fathers, harkens readers (at both beginning and end) to the nostalgic space of innocence represented by those iconic rhythms, patterns of intonation, and patriotic tonal colors that characterize the Declaration and the nation’s sentimental attachment to the hope and promise of America’s origin story. What’s more, in its framing by Stowe with the preamble of the Declaration, George’s racialized declaration is to register not only a nostalgic American home, but, in its capacity as a replay or re-recording of the

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25 This footnote is marked with a †at the bottom of page 100.
26 Ibid. Herein lies another reason for George’s multi-racial identity: his white, American blood demands the promise of the revolution, and the failure of civil society to provide George protection from the tyranny of slavery renders the American public that negligent patriarch that is (thanks to Stowe’s citation) the conflated image of the British Monarch, George, and George Harris’ own, slave-holding father.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 102.
Declaration, an American home untainted by paternal crimes—an America, re-cited, and with a difference.

The sonic difference, of course, is the melodramatic pathos of George’s speech, the “tears, and flashing eyes, and despairing gesture,” not present in the original Declaration, and here meant to index the orator’s undeniably “black” suffering. It is necessary to note, therefore, that while George is described as a passing mulatto and cast as Spanish Creole, Stowe takes great pains to underscore, or “out” his blackness. Thus, while George’s creole masquerade permits Stowe to critique the Manichean racial logic of slavery, his “blackening up” for the role—a blackening up in true allegiance with his mother’s African blood—ultimately allows Stowe to discursively contain the very “power in the tongue” dramaturged in the racially mixed acoustics of George’s passing.

To understand how Stowe played the sonic blackness of George’s speech, we must return again to the site of George’s lashed and branded body. The marks on George’s skin not only identify him as the fugitive slave of Harris’ advertisement, but also function to reassure Stowe’s readership of his blackness despite his performance to the contrary. This phantasmagoric blackness, though represented in Stowe’s theatrical scene as visually obscured through the “blackening up” and costuming of George’s Spanish masquerade is nonetheless scored to sound through the “authentic” testimony to slavery given by George’s scars. Nearly 40 years before the disciplining “police work” of phonographic race records, George’s scars were a recording that gave witness to the ontological blackness his passing skin (dis)simulated.31

In a groundbreaking work, Disability and Difference in Global Contexts, Nirmala Erevelles argues persuasively that the violence of slavery co-articulates what she terms becoming black and becoming disabled as mutually constitutive, historic and material events, produced under conditions of economic exploitation, and for the appropriation of financial gain. In a brilliant re-reading of Hortense Spillers’ 1987 “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Erevelles illustrates how both discursive and material attributions of impairment historically defined the black body, drove it into circuits of exchange, and propagated its profitability in a transnational capitalist economy of enslavement.32 Here, the scars that produce George as black and disabled are profitable for Stowe in that they link him to an essentialized biology, and one that is inherently sympathetic and moral. This is an evocative example of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argument that Stowe used disability as a rhetorical mechanism for generating sympathetic identification with slaves in her novel and for harnessing the political force of benevolent maternalism.33 George’s scars, as evidence of his immutable race and disability, make him the suffering victim necessary to the affective and political

31 In Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines, Lisa Gitelman argues that in the 1890’s, just as Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) ruled that race signaled blood as opposed to skin color, early recordings and music rolls meant that “sounding “black” went colorblind.” Gitelman, Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 154. Centralizing a similar argument in his own Disturbing the Peace, Bryan Wagner has argued that white-constructed-sonic-blackness was a technology and mode of policing black bodies. Here I am arguing that the technology of antebellum literacy figured the body as a vocal and reliable narrator, and that such a sonic technology was similarly deployed to police and oppress blacks. In this perversion, the commodity that squeals (the black object that “can and do[as] resist,” to quote Fred Moten) is neatly enfolded into the sonic logic of white supremacy. See Bryan Wagner, Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Fred Moten, In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.
33 Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies, 81-2.
economy of melodrama. And specifically, the antebellum trope of talking wounds insured that George’s body would evoke sympathy in the sonic as well as the visual register.

This figuration of speaking wounds or talking scars was prevalent in the popular imagination of Stowe’s day. Quoting anti-slavery agent John Collins, Conquergood notes the antebellum American public had “itching ears to hear a colored man speak,” and he locates this desire in white fantasy that black speech was the playback of slave experience as recorded in the grooves of the traumatized and marked black body:

This is the same John Collins who immediately recruited the fugitive Frederick Douglass to the abolitionist lecture circuit after hearing him speak spontaneously at the first antislavery convention he attended, barely three years after his escape from slavery. Douglass (1855/1969) recalled how Collins would introduce him on the circuit as a “graduate” from “the peculiar institution” of slavery, “with my diploma written on my back!”

This figural substitution of the body as a speaking document, the corpo-realization of the talking book, was also deployed by Douglass himself, who in The Narrative famously wrote that “[m]y feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.”

Carefully parsing Douglass’ “hermeneutics of the circle,” Ronald Radano argues that writing for the famous author was “a mark of civilization and a symbol of civilization’s violence.”

Thus, Douglass’ writerly interpretation of black sound (including slave song and speech) is both a mediation of black sonic reality by text, a mediation Douglass himself is Subject of and subject to, and a performance of that violent process of mediation through which text dissimulates the incoherence of black sound through the surrogation, in its place, of “authentic” and coherent sonic origin, one that itself dissimates the technology of its textual production.

Taking my cue from Radano, who finds that Douglass stages the hermeneutics wherein “vernacular truth develops from the ground of textual artifice,” I argue that antebellum textualization of the body, whether on the page, podium or in the lyrics of a sad minstrel home song, produced a society primed to hear the black body as a record of originary and ontological, or inherited suffering. The pathos of sonic blackness therefore is the realism that Stowe borrows from as she composes the melos and drama of George’s speech. Stowe heightens the relief of this audible sonic blackness through repeated reference to George’s invisible, but voluble, branded hand. First appearing in Harris’ advertisement, the specter of blackness is again raised in the exchange between the Spanish gentleman and his bondsman:

“Jim,” he said to his man, “seems to me we met a boy something like this, up at Bernan’s, didn’t we?”

“Yes, Mas’r” said Jim, “only I an’t sure about the hand.”

“Well, I didn’t look, of course,” said the stranger, with a careless yawn. Then, walking up to the landlord, he desired him to furnish him with a private apartment, as he had some writing to do immediately.

In this passage, the textuality of a scarred hand tantalizingly escapes the mind’s eye of Stowe’s readers, but its citation cues and haunts the sonic imagination with a blackness that comes screaming to the surface in the moment of Mr. Wilson’s recognition of his former employee: “George!”

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34 Conquergood, “Rethinking Elocution,” 150.
36 Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (NY: Penguin, 1982, 72.
37 Radano, Lying Up, 50-1.
38 Ibid., 51.
39 Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, 97.
40 Ibid., 98.
moment is remarkable in that Wilson’s recognition occurs in the absence of George’s speech. In the silence the two share in private quarters, fully face to face, the sonic action of George’s white vocal culture quiets just long enough for Wilson to “read” aloud and render audible the textual blackness of George’s marked, “talking book,” body. Thus, just as Stowe cites Jefferson’s Declaration to frame the sonic whiteness of George’s speech, his scars similarly serve as a racialized intertext that scores the pathos of his speech as sonically black.

At the climax of George’s declaration, a spectacular climax of both sonically white action and sonically black pathos, “I’ll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe. You say your father’s did it; it it was right for them, it is right for me!” Mr. Wilson is overcome with a revised sense of justice, one transposed to a register consonant with George’s bid for freedom. This sense of transformative power, a new mediation of the historic acoustics of freedom, was both forged in and enacted by melodramatic tones. “Mopping up his face with great energy,” and “breaking out” in support of George’s bid for freedom, Wilson recognizes the performative force of George’s final cadence and is the conferring witness to the new regime of an acoustics of passing. In contrast to the melodramatic mode that Williams outlines however, wherein black suffering grants civil legibility, Stowe’s melodramatic acoustics of passing hinges on the sound of a voice that is both white and black, a voice that not only exhibits inter-racial sympathy, but an inter-racial erotics: the sound of vocal miscegenation.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Vocal Miscegenation**

Vocal miscegenation is a critical term I adapt from Roshanak Kheshti, who, in “Musical Miscegenation and the Logic of Rock and Roll,” traces the homoerotic and racial genealogy of music critic Sasha Frere-Jones’ public nostalgia for a properly “miscegenated” rock and roll. I apply Kheshti’s queer of color critique of Frere-Jones’ desire here to similarly highlight the reproductive and racialized logic of white supremacy that Stowe deployed in dramaturging a vocal, antebellum acoustics of passing. Kheshti begins her argument by establishing Frere-Jones’ desire for “hearing good miscegenation,” a desire for blurred sonic lines he associates with an anti-racist position: Frere-Jones makes an interesting and worthwhile, albeit poorly supported, observation: that blackness is no longer audible in rock music, that it is no longer even a “miscegenated” form. What Frere-Jones sets up is a logic that places the reader in an over-determined position in which she must, as he does, feel nostalgia for “miscegenated” music. His argument rhetorically hinges on a double negative: the reader cannot not want miscegenation in rock music even though this is tied, like colonialism, to a history of sexual violence, fetishism, and appropriation. And not wanting it would presume a desire for racial and ethnic purity and, in this case, musical white supremacy.

Similar mechanics are at work in the vocal miscegenation that Stowe composes: to accept the mixed sense of George’s speech is to buy into a revitalized understanding of the originary promise of

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41 Ibid., 102.
42 Kheshti, “Musical Miscegenation.” Though Kheshti’s analysis considers 21st century rock and roll, it is important to note that scholars such as Eric Lott and Daphne Brooks have done painstaking work to highlight the 19th century histories of blackface and “sonic blue(s)face” that underpin contemporary sound and sonic desire. See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Daphne Brooks, “‘This voice which is not one’: Amy Winehouse sings the ballad of sonic blue(s)face culture” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 20, no. 1 (2010): 37-60.
American freedom. To continue to uphold the acoustics of freedom set out by the nation’s forefathers would be, according to Stowe, to perpetuate the crimes of negligent paternity George’s own father is guilty of. In generating such an overdetermined rationale, Stowe aligns progressive white sympathy and nostalgia with the distinct sounds of inter-racial suffering, and positions any mode of hearing contrary to this social position as morally repugnant, pro-slavery, and detrimental to the future of the Union.

Yet, as Kheshti illustrates, musical miscegenation ultimately fuels the hetero-normative politics of white supremacy. Kheshti analyzes white male musicians’ desire for miscegenated rock n’ roll as a desire to reproduce blackness, “a desire that cites the productive capacity of female reproduction through the racialized motif of miscegenation.” Similarly, because Stowe’s acoustics hinged on a sonically mixed sound, the author reproduced blackness in her text through the citation of black female sexuality and forced conception. The process of producing racially miscegenated music relies on black female sexuality, Kheshti contends, following the Derridean logic of invagination.

Derrida remarks that the “law of genre” both insists upon an obedience to generic purity, thus producing a boundary that contains that pure form, while it also depends upon impurity through generic mixing in order to demarcate the boundary of the pure. “Invagination” spatially locates the impure within the pure rather than being neatly bounded at the margins of or on the outside of the pure. That “invagination” has at its roots “vagina” signifies a feminized form of contamination. It can be imagined as a feminized movement or formation contained within that to which the invaginated does not belong.”

In Frere-Jones’s idealized miscegenated music, race is invaginated in the homosocial sphere of white male rock music in the form of a racialized presence within a white musician. Invaginated within this homosocial white space, racialization is necessarily sexualized; this feminized/racialized sexuality takes the form of black sonic signification.

In Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Stowe casts George’s slave mother as the “authentic” record of the impure black body, and George’s white father stands in for the revolutionary tradition of New Rhetoric. George, the mixed race, or miscegenated product of this forced coupling, possesses a remarkable “power in the tongue” precisely because his very biology (read: voice) is the performatively efficacious result of Stowe’s act of invagination – the narrative folding of a feminized and sexual blackness (George’s mother) within a white, masculine soundscape of American freedom. Crucially, Stowe’s act of invagination is predicated forced conception, as George’s fictive mother was enslaved and, the narrative suggests, raped by George’s father and master. Much like Frere-Jones’ discourse surrounding miscegenated rock n’ roll, the patriarchal and supremacist violence that Stowe performs through the sonic logic of George’s speech is naturalized and dissimulated by the “progressive” performatively force the author attributes to vocal miscegenation. What’s more, the violence perpetrated by Stowe’s textual acoustics is reproduced through the consumption of the text: George’s miscegenated voice was not only recorded in Stowe’s novel, but, following the elocutionary mores of the day, read aloud and thus replayed in households across America until the supremacist and patriarchal mode of hearing propagated by Stowe’s acoustics was performatively “consummated in the [reader-cum-] listener’s ear.” This is what Kheshti describes as the ability of miscegenated sound to invaginate the sonic ear, conceiving in an audience a desire for racially mixed sound, and defining such sound as meaningful, natural, and (black) American.

44 Ibid., 1041.
46 Ibid., 1045.
47 Ibid., 1048.
both produced in her readerly audience a desire for the melodrama of miscegenated vocality, and also naturalized such vocality as both inherently other and inherently American.

While Stowe’s complex, socio-political dramaturgy in this tavern scene was indeed revolutionary, the promise of liberty proffered in a new, inter-racial acoustics of passing would prove a more complex phenomenon. A regime of the sensible, Stowe’s acoustics were composed to register force, but a force that would serve the author’s own agenda, one that clung to a politics of white female respectability. In this politics, once liberated, mixed raced individuals were a particular threat, raising the specter of miscegenation. For this reason Stowe supported the colonization society in her daily life. And, in her work of fiction, once George’s elocution has helped him pass into freedom, Stowe displaces the racial ‘problem’ of mixed race individuals back to Africa, where, you can almost hear her say, they belong. Stowe’s message here is clear, George Harris’s political voice may be the paradigmatic example of civil American society, but it is nonetheless separate from, and not equal to that society. The acoustics of passing were therefore designed less to serve the ends of black liberation, than to enable Stowe to seize a political power and a public voice as a woman without violating the circumscribed place of women in antebellum America.

Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, Mary Webb & the Acoustics of Passing

While the popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ensured that Stowe’s acoustics were recited and rehearsed in American homes across the nation, the rhetorical force of the novel’s anti-slavery message came under attack when the book was hijacked by politically moderate and pro-slavery stage adaptations called Tom shows. Under such circumstances, Stowe resolved that her antislavery platform—heretofore circumscribed to the private sphere of the home -- needed to go public. Yet
Stowe was still unwilling to sacrifice her white female respectability in public speech against slavery. George Harris and the text of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had been Stowe’s solution to the problem of public female speech. By crafting a rhetorically persuasive and racially mixed male character, Stowe ensured that her own political voice would literally ring out from hearth to hearth as families read aloud to one another from the text. In taking *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* from domestic space to the public forum, Stowe was in search of living embodiments of her talking book, public voices that would be as performatively efficacious as that Stowe had crafted for George Harris himself. Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Mary Webb furnished just such voices.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was drawn to Greenfield and Webb for two predominant reasons. First, both performers were women of color who shockingly and tantalizingly defied the gendered and racial mores of the day, performing not only on public stages to racially integrated houses, but crucially, performing vocal repertoire widely regarded as white. Second, both women were mixed race. For Stowe, who subscribed to the racial logic of the sonic body, this meant she heard Greenfield and Webb’s voices as simultaneously white and black. In other words, Stowe perceived Greenfield and Webb as the living embodiments of the miscegenated vocality she had composed in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. By patronizing and carefully staging each woman’s public performances as displays of racially mixed aesthetics, Stowe amplified the melodrama of sonic action and pathos audible in each woman’s voice.

**Action: the aesthetics of sonic whiteness**

When Stowe met Greenfield during the latter’s self-arranged tour of London in 1853, Greenfield had been giving public concerts in the American west and eastern seaboard for two years, performing technical programs chock full of Bel Canto arias, oratorio, and art song—classical vocal repertoire generally only performed by white singers like Greenfield’s contemporary Jenny Lind. Similarly, when Webb kicked off her American tour as a dramatic reader in April of 1855, she moved through Philadelphia, Boston, Salem, Newport, Portland, Bangor and New York predominantly performing white characters in works by white authors from the Anglo theatrical canon: Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Henry V*, and Sheridan’s *School for Scandal*, amongst others. Greenfield and Webb’s talents for repertoire racially coded as white was important

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49 Program printed in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, December 11, 1851.
50 *The Liberator*, November 30, 1855.
to Stowe in so far as it evidenced their potential for cultivation – an implicit set of performance standards that, for black subjects, signaled the ability to move beyond or be lifted out of the physically, psychologically, and ontologically degrading conditions of servitude.

Writing on cultivation, musicologist Thomas Riis describes this nineteenth-century buzz-word as a concept and social trend that placed high value and esteem on Art (music and elocution) “for its edification, its moral, spiritual, or aesthetic values.”\(^{51}\) Julia J. Chybowski, glossing James Trotter’s 1881 tome, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, clarifies that, following the antebellum ideology wherein personal discipline and improvement lead to social advance, the “cultivation of art music” was aligned with “progress of civilization.”\(^{52}\) Such discourses of improvement and progress, however, where little more than supremacist racial projects that measured individual and civil advancement as a march towards white respectability. Dwight Conquergood, for example, argues persuasively that elocution was a set of performance guidelines for the performativity of whiteness.\(^{53}\) This admixture of racist ideology and aesthetics meant that Greenfield and Webb’s performances of white repertoire were powerfully tied to the questions and politics surrounding the issue of slavery. For example, one contributor to the *Liberator* opined “[t]he most effective argument against slavery is the appearance of a colored man, competing on equal terms with the white, in pursuits which require cultivation of mind and force of purpose.”\(^{54}\) This form of uplift rhetoric deployed cultivation as a rebuttal against proslavery claims that blacks were lesser order, fungible beasts, but nevertheless relied upon a distinctly racial logic wherein black life was unworthy of liberation unless performing as white. Indeed, for many, cultivation became a code word for an ideology that racialized freedom itself as white. For example, the preeminent music critic of the day, John Dwight Sullivan, maintained that freedom, the “cornerstone of Civilization,” was equated with the cultivated arts. Following this logic, the cultivated arts narrated the ontological transformation from bondage to freedom, lifting African Americans from a “semi-barbarous” condition to a civilized one.\(^{55}\) Cultivation thus hinged on an aesthetics of whiteness conceptually linked with a melodramatic narrative of action.

This white, sonic aesthetic furnished the dramatic action of Stowe’s acoustics of passing, and Greenfield and Webb’s voices supplied it readily. Greenfield, with her flawless and pointed execution of European Bel Canto technique, vocal coloratura, and Italianate style, and Webb with her textbook elocution, consciously and adamantly provided ample evidence of cultivation. Their triumphs mobilized the white press to describe Greenfield’s supporters as “musical emancipationists,” and to annouce Webb’s “elevation to a position of equality in the scale of human brotherhood.”\(^{56}\) Indeed, as one commentator from the *Liberator* put it, each woman’s performance “furnished evidence that [African Americans] [w]ere fit for something besides slavery… vindicating [African American] right[s] to freedom.”\(^{57}\) The black press too understood Greenfield and Webb’s acts in these performative terms, endowing their voices with the ability to

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\(^{53}\) Conquergood, “Rethinking Elocution,” 149.

\(^{54}\) *The Liberator*, “A New Competitor in the Field,” May 4, 1855


\(^{57}\) *Liberator*, May 4, 1855, emphasis added.
unmark, or “remov[e] from their class and sex the stigma of natural inferiority.” However, while cultivation attempted to whitewash black cultural production, it also always emphasized the blackness of African Americans like Greenfield and Webb. Despite the promise of the cultivated arts to “remove the stigma” of blackness, performance was not designed to “remove” blackness, quite the opposite. Cultivation was in fact predicated on black failure: it could remain a white aesthetic because African Americans were imagined to be able to mimic, but never actually enact racial whiteness. Stowe herself parroted this racist ideology in a review of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s performance published in her travel memoir, *Sunny Memories in Foreign Lands*: “[her voice] was the more touching from occasional rusticities and artistic defects, which showed she had received no culture from art.” The perceived aesthetic failures of performers like Greenfield and Webb reified them as failed subjects, or more accurately, as non-subjects – a position reserved for black Americans. Thus, though cultivation masqueraded as an aesthetic regime out to prove the “African race” as free from “natural defect,” cultivation ultimately recapitulated racist notions of essentialized black inferiority in basing foundational concepts like freedom and perfectibility on the performance of white aesthetics.

**Pathos: the aesthetics of sonic blackness**

“Miss Greenfield's turn for signing now came, and there was profound attention. Her voice, with its keen, searching fire, its penetrating vibrant quality, its "timbre," as the French have it, cut its way like a Damascus blade to the heart. It was was the more touching from occasional rusticities and artistic defects, which showed she had received no culture from art.”

In the above quote, Stowe emphasizes Greenfield’s vocal “rusticities” and “defects” to indicate the singer performs something both similar to and other than whiteness. By emphasizing Greenfield’s lack of culture (read: her lack of whiteness), Stowe defines this mysterious something other – she grasps for the exotic word ‘timbre’ – as sonic blackness. In the same movement, Stowe aligns this sonic blackness with tremendous force, and specifically with the ability to evoke poignant sentiment: sonic blackness cuts straight to the heart and moves a listener. Although contemporary scholars like Nina Eidsheim and Daphne Brooks have written respectively on the social construction and performative nature of sonic blackness, refuting persistent misconceptions about the audibility of race, in the nineteenth-century, Stowe believed that she could hear Greenfield and Webb’s racial makeup. As she wrote to Longfellow of Mary Webb, “the traits of her character partake of both races which are combined in her.” Both women, Stowe reasoned, had white parentage and therefore excelled in music and elocution. Their white inheritance made them capable of refinement and advancement, and made them sensible to an aesthetic tradition of vocal cultivation associated with revolutionary action. But both women also had black parentage, and this too, Stowe believed was audible in their remarkable ability to perform racialized vocal material. For example, Webb’s

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60 *The Era*, August 3, 1856.
61 Stowe, *Sunny Memories in Foreign Lands*, 104.
62 Eidsheim, *Voice as a Technology of Selfhood* and Brooks, “‘This voice which is not one’: Amy Winehouse sings the ballad of sonic blue(s)face culture,” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 20, no. 1 (2010): 37-60.
63 Stowe to Longfellow, August 5 1855, Kirkham Collection, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center
Though scholars like Alex Black and Tavia Nyong'o point to both women's facility with white and black repertoire as evidence of the performativity of race, commentators of the day believed that Webb didn't even have to act when presenting slave characters because "the dark hue of her delicately formed countenance gave a characteristic tone to the performance." As it turns out, that "characteristic tone" was also the product of essentialized listening. Just as Stowe linked George’s scars to the pathos of his blackness and therefore sonically black speech, Stowe understood Greenfield and Webb's personal histories as feminized and essentialized tragedies of race.

Taylor Greenfield was born into slavery in Natchez, Mississippi in either 1808 or 1809 to parents that, by all accounts, were of African, white, and Native heritage. While the history of Greenfield's father is unknown, she became the official ward of her owner, a Mrs. Elizabeth Greenfield, when the later resettled Taylor Greenfield's mother, Anna, in Liberia in 1831. While Greenfield's story of slavery and maternal alienation struck a sympathetic chord with Stowe, Webb’s background was more sensational. Born to a Spanish father and a fugitive slave mother who escaped to freedom while pregnant, Webb was born free in the north and raised in Cuba, later returning to the United States. Her mother, Stowe claims, died of apoplexy upon the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Webb additionally contracted tuberculosis as an adult, a disease that she was quite advanced by the time she met Stowe in 1855.

What I want to emphasize here is Stowe perceived each woman as disabled, whether or not they identified as such. Though Greenfield was not physically disabled, she spent a significant portion of her life as a slave, a social position that Erevelles describes as activating a “becoming black” that is discursively and often materially articulated with a “becoming disabled” (page). Greenfield’s history of bondage therefore evoked the same outpouring of white pity and charity frequently reserved for disabled individuals. This was amplified in Greenfield’s occasion for meeting Stowe in London where, “the individual with whom she had drawn up the contract for this musical

Liberator, November 30, 1855.
London Times, July 29, 1856, quoted in Liberator, August 15, 1856. There are two levels of racist thought evident in this quote. First, there is the assumption that Webb sounds black because her skin is black. This is the ideology of the sonic body at work. Second, listeners assumed that because Webb looked and sounded black, she wasn’t acting when presenting the enslaved characters of The Christian Slave, but rather “being.” Webb, however, had been born free in New England and had no personal experience of slavery.
Obituaries bolster Riis' assessment: both the NY Clipper, April 8, 1876, and the Fairport NY Herald, April 14, 1876, place Greenfield at 68 years old at her death. Many scholars such as Daphne Brooks and Rosalyn Story date her birth some twenty years later, a common confusion, music scholar Thomas L. Riis contends, the result of historically racist paternalism directed at Greenfield and the singer’s small stature. Chybowski dates her birth to between 1817 and 1826. See Riis, “Concert Singers,” 53, and Julia J. Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan’ in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s Early Life and Debut Concert Tour,” Journal of the American Musicological Society 67, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 129.
See NY Clipper April 8, 1876; Fairport NY Herald April 14, 1876; and The Black Swan at Home and Abroad; A Biographical Sketch of Miss Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the American Vocalist (Philadelphia, WM. S. Young, 1855), 3.
Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan,’” 130.
Recall that Stowe was for colonization, and in Uncle Tom’s Cabin wrote the mixed-race Harris family off to that same African nation in search of narrative closure to the problem of black integration. One wonders how Stowe’s support for colonization and Greenfield’s personal experience of it may have inflected their relationship.
Stowe to Elizabeth Georgiana Campbell, Duchess of Argyll—2 April-June 1858, Kirkham Collection, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center.
tour was unfaithful to his promises, and [Greenfield] found herself abandoned, without money and without friends, in a strange country."  

As Greenfield’s biography, *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad* frames the two women’s encounter, Greenfield came into Stowe’s patronage when that later rescued what she perceived as a suffering and incompetent black singer from near tragedy. For Webb, who was living with a terminal disease when she met Stowe, the elocutionist’s disability furnished the author with a pretense for patronage: “Her health was in a strange exceptional condition and both of them ignorant of the very simplest principles of hygiene—I got an idea then—a practical one I think—what it is to try and help these strange mixed races.”  

What is remarkable in this quote is that Stowe seems to attribute Webb’s disability to her race; Webb contracted tuberculosis, Stowe implies, because she is a “strange mixed race” woman with an unfortunate conception of health and “hygiene.” For Stowe, race and disability therefore intersected in fortuitous was in both Greenfield and Webb. Both women’s racial heritage and disabling experiences or conditions infused their voices with the pathos of black suffering that was integral to Stowe’s acoustics. Moreover, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has argued that black disabled women in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “activate their [white] rescuers, but they also authorize the benevolent woman’s passage from the confining home to the public realm…while remaining within the maternal role.”  

The same dynamic Stowe scripted in her novel, I contend, was one she acted out though Greenfield and Webb. As mixed raced women, Greenfield and Webb furnished Stowe her novel’s soundtrack; as disabled women they authorized Stowe’s public patronage and underwrote her passage from domestic to popular anti-slavery agitation.  

However, there was a problem with the “mixed” aesthetics both Greenfield and Webb performed. While Stowe was interested in both women’s ability to perform white and black vocal repertoire, she was invested in these abilities in so far as they framed both women as racially white and black. What Stowe didn’t anticipate was that Greenfield and Webb’s oral performances threw their race into question. Reviews that figured Greenfield to be “Jenny Lind blacked up” and Webb a “white black woman” provoked suspicion that such vocal culture was in fact issuing from respectable white women in burnt cork. Reactions included astonishment, as someone was quoted in the *Springfield Daily Post* exclaiming, “Why, we see the face of a black woman, but we hear the voice of an angel: what does it mean?”  

Alex Black, in his essay “Abolitionism’s Resonant Bodies,” reads this confusion as a calculated effect of Greenfield and Webb’s agency. Understanding that their voices and bodies would be imagistically realized in print reviews, each woman made pointed vocal choices that “managed, not denied the materiality of her body. And by positioning their resonant bodies and voices in such a way, they influenced how their audiences perceived, and thus, represented them,” Black contends. With vocal acts that challenged, denaturalized, and signified on antebellum racial categories of white and black particularity, Greenfield and Webb, Black argues, purposely unsettled their audiences, forcing auditors to “wonder what [their] eyes [w]ere hearing.”  

This agency and racial ambivalence was a problem for Stowe, whose novel called for a mixed-race aesthetic that did not equivocate. Additionally, while Stowe was interested in mixed

71 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, 40.  
72 Stowe to Elizabeth Georgiana Campbell, Duchess of Argyll—2 April–June 1858, Kirkham Collection, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center.  
73 Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 89.  
74 *Farmer’s Cabinet* 50, Issue 34, April 1, 1852; *Daily Ohio Stateman* (Columbus Ohio) 1, Issue 294, May 4, 1855, 2.  
75 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, 24, quoted from the *Springfield Daily Post*, February 26, 1852.  
77 Ibid., 635.
voices that would speak for an anti-slavery platform and inter-racial amity, she was not interested in supporting equality or independent agency for Greenfield and Webb, who she continued to see as racial Others. Perforce, Stowe’s goals in patronizing Greenfield and Webb was to support them and direct their talents towards her own political ends while containing their political agency. Thus, while she worked to increase each woman’s aura of white female respectability – giving them notes on proper dress and etiquette, paying for new clothing or education, introducing them to refined circles of well to do white patrons, etc. – she also worked to remind audiences of the indelibility of each woman’s blackness.

**Putting the “ink!” in the acoustics of passing**

Just as the racial logic of blackface minstrelsy relied on white performers citing black performativity in order to reaffirm their whiteness, Stowe’s novel and political stance on slavery and equality demanded that Greenfield and Webb cite the performativity of whiteness while reaffirming their blackness. Neither Greenfield nor Webb, however, had taken pains in their independent performances to reiterate their skin color. Indeed, as Black has argued, both women worked hard to manage and critique essentialized perceptions of race as part of their own political work. Therefore, because the felicity of Stowe’s talking book required Greenfield and Webb to be audible as black as well as white, she took pains to blacken both women up herself. In doing so, Stowe retrenched racist antebellum ideology underpinning American slavery. What’s more, in framing Greenfield and Webb as black and therefore sonically black, she also appropriated an African American aesthetic of resistance that relied on sonic blackness in performances of liberation.

Dwight Conquergood elaborates on this radical aesthetic in his essay “Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book and Other Figures of Speech.” There, he emphasizes elocution as a highly racialized culture of performance designed to police literacy and textuality – practices that were designated as and policed by whites. While slave codes made it illegal to teach slaves to read and write in many states (thereby restricting access of slaves to literary material), elocution was an oral mode of performance that slaves could overhear and filch unnoticed. By mastering elocutionary practices, slaves could re-citing the whiteness of textuality. To illustrate this argument, Conquergood critically reads Bartley Townsley’s slave biography. In a sketch Conquergood quotes at length, Townsley’s newly acquired literacy is challenged when, engaged in the practice of orally spelling and sounding out words, he encounters a phonetic combination he is unable to pronounce: I-n-k. His conundrum is resolved in the transformative moment when, calling out the word’s letters to an older and semi-literate slave, Uncle Jesse, the old man replies in darkness, “ink!”78 This moment, according to Conquergood, is one in which performative action is catalyzed by the meaning of the word that is articulated in the word’s **sound**: I-n-k performatively coalesced into “ink!” through transcription from the visual medium of the white pages to the auditory register of Uncle Jesse’s black voice. Through the synesthesia of recalling printed letters to vocality, first through his oral spelling, i-n-k, and then Uncle Jesse’s robust calling, “hallooing out,” [Townsley] was able to hear/see the blackness that was inextricable from the material substance of printed letters. “Ink!” became the signifyin(g) password that liberated literacy…and set it loose on the open road in the form of counterfeit freedom passes…79

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Conquergood uses the story of Townsley and “ink!” as an allegory to show a disavowed but “distinctive black presence” in white controlled practices of textuality and literacy. The sonic, for Conquergood becomes a fugitive space for blacks to steal away white technologies of textuality and literacy, ultimately enabling Townsley to write his own pass to freedom. In this narrative, Conquergood reveals that the soundscape of white supremacy was always “mixed” — after all, texts are nothing more than black ink on white paper. However, Conquergood also depicts whites as generally unaware of the hybridity of the talking book. This unawareness is key, in Conquergood’s figuration, to enabling Townsley to use sonic blackness to pass out of white control and enslavement. I’d like to hold Conquergood’s important points close, while also pointing to how Stowe recognized the radical potential of sonic blackness and appropriated it to publicize the politics of her own talking book.

Stowe, who misunderstood the performativity of sonic blackness, taking it instead as a direct index of biological race, nevertheless used her patronage of Greenfield and Webb to stage both women as sonically black. She did this, importantly, in two ways. First, she blackened up Greenfield and Webb’s simply by associating publicly with them. Appearing with the authoress in Britain (as did Greenfield) or on the New England Abolitionist Lecture circuit (as did Webb), the two women were read by audiences as walking, talking, and singing characters from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: Greenfield was cast as Eliza, and Webb as Cassy. For example, as early as October 1851, Greenfield was already identified by the popular press as “Eliza” Greenfield, and Chybowski has uncovered “a sheet music advertisement for *The Slave’s Escape*, dedicated to the Duchess of Sutherland, claim[ing] that the dramatic vocal roles enacting a female slave’s attempted escape and recapture had been sung by the ‘Black Swan.’”

Second, Stowe reinforced these associations by framing both performers through her writing, namely her private correspondence, the text of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the theatrical adaptation of it she penned herself, *The Christian Slave*. For example, in numerous personal letters to the elites of the American and British Antislavery cause, Stowe distinctly emphasize the parallels between Webb’s creolized heritage, absent father, exotic convent education, tragic personal circumstances, and the fictive Cassy’s biography, ultimately confessing to Associate Editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Oliver Johnson, that the very idea of dramatizing The Christian Slave “was suggested by Mrs. Webb’s peculiar faculty of rendering the negro character and intonation which she has had abundant opportunities of studying—while her power in the tongue give a peculiar power to the character of Cassy.”

Though both Greenfield and Webb were free, Webb having even been born free in New England, Stowe worked assiduously to link both women to the experiences of slavery. She arranged a dramatization of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* expressly for Webb, who scrapped her previous repertoire to exclusively perform the piece, titled *The Christian Slave*. *The Christian Slave* condensed the well known novel’s major plot points, and largely consolidated the narrative action in black and female slave characters like Tom, Cassy, Eliza, Aunt Chloe, Dinah, and Topsy. Featuring racialized dialect,

81 Harriet Beech Stowe to Oliver Johnson, 7 October 1855, Kirkham Collection of annotated Harriet Beecher Stowe letters, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center. In writing to secure European patronage for Webb, Stowe detailed the reader’s biography as if it were a melodrama of her own creation. See Stowe to Elizabeth Georgina Campbell, Duchess of Argyll, 17 June 1856. UVA Alderman Library, Kirkham Collection, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center. 7 October 1855, Kirkham Collection, Stowe Center.
the play also followed the lead of popular stage productions, and interpolated hymns, popular songs, and foreign language numbers such as the sentimental minstrel hit “Old Folks at Home,” as sung by Webb portraying Tom. Audiences keyed into and heard the sonic blackness Stowe attempted to framing in Webb’s voice, explicitly noting the racialized timbre of her song, and commenting on its “peculiar negro intonation.” Stowe also exacted repertoire shifts from Greenfield, who, after winning Stowe’s patronage eliminated operatic arias from her material, and added minstrel inflected material from the melodramatic stage that emphasized her blackness, such as “Weep not for Eva” and “Old Folks at Home.”

Greenfield’s entextualization by Stowe, however, is almost allegorically gestured to in a public vignette that took place during both women’s tour of Britain in June of 1853. In a story covering one congregation’s recognition of Stowe’s authorial accomplishments and antislavery work, the *Illustrated London News* recounts:

A very interesting meeting was lately held in the school-room adjoining Surrey Chapel…for the purpose of presenting to Mrs. Stowe a magnificent Silver inkstand…In the centre, a female figure (intended to represent Mrs. Stowe) presents a Bible to a slave, who, in a devotional attitude, welcomes the gift as the source and character of his liberty: while another figure, in a stooping posture, is knocking off his fetters.

The Rev. Charles Beecher read the thanks of his sister: after which, Miss Greenfield, the colored vocalist, sang with deep feeling and pathos “Weep not for Eva.” Then came a procession of beautiful children: being grouped around Mrs. Stowe…[t]hey then presented her with a gold pen.

One of only two people of color present at a ceremony attended by over 400 people, Greenfield is the “singing slave” of this event, and her song the literal, embodied extension of Stowe’s authorial

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voice, as represented by the inkwell and pen. In this scenario, Greenfield’s voice literally furnishes the authentic “black presence,” or “Ink!” necessary to realize the live reproduction of the acoustics and emancipation Stowe figured in her talking book. What’s more, Greenfield’s mixed vocal acoustics embody and replay the scene of emancipation represented by the inkwell, though it is crucial to note that the liberation carried out in the Church is merely symbolic: as with all melodrama, Stowe’s acoustics purported to deliver freedom but merely represented it. The pen and inkstand also represent how Stowe’s patronage contained and curtailed Greenfield’s agency. The metaphoric “ink!” of the scene at Surrey Chapel, Greenfield’s sonic blackness does not perform her own liberation, but rather the beneficence and elevation of Stowe, who deploys Greenfield’s voice like a tool, or as Mitchell and Snyder would have it, as a narrative prosthesis upon which the authored leaned for the representational power of black sonic pathos.

Stowe’s witterly acoustics of passing, and her staged reproductions of this acoustics wielded incredible performative power in the national soundscape, throwing into question long held beliefs on the nature of man, Art, civilization, and the hierarchy of races. And, as Stowe intended, readers and auditors alike were forced to confront and re-conceptualize what it was that made them American. However, while Stowe clearly wanted to define an American ear culture as sympathetic to the sounds of inter-racial struggle, she was adamant about reserving this acoustics of passing as a privilege of white supremacy. Thus, Stowe firmly managed both Webb and Greenfield and their socio-political aspirations and actively worked to prevent their passing into any semblance of American-ness. Stowe ultimately arranged for the Webbs to be removed to the West Indies in much the same way as the entire Harris family was removed to Liberia in her novel. This move was justified as in the best interests of the Webbs, but ultimately served white American interests by removing the “negro problem” and the threat of racial miscegenation the Webbs represented out of the American nation. The author also aggressively dissuading Greenfield from trying to move a tightly circumscribed racial station, pointedly advising the singer: “In your manners be just as simple as you always have been—Don’t put on anything—don’t try to pass for anything but what you really are, and you will keep the friends that you have made.”

While Stowe’s acoustics purported to facilitate the path to black freedom, it ultimately relied on essentialized understandings of race, leveraging these understandings with discourses and practices of ableism in order to control black creative resistance and political agitation. Yet, while Stowe attempted to use Greenfield and Webb to reproduce her own white supremacist anti-slavery politics, Greenfield I argue, deployed her voice to contest both slavery and white abolitionist control, articulating along the way, a new sound for black liberation.

87 In regards to how Stowe deployed Webb as the “ink!” of her talking book, note that Webb’s auditors were always encouraged to follow along with the text—a perfect example of the myth of acoustic modes of freedom and how they dissimulate the production of an independent textual practice—one ultimately invested in disenfranchising certain rhetorical claims.
88 Stowe to Greenfield, quoted in The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, 47. Emphasis added.
Chapter 4: Crip Voice and Fugitive Song: Two Black Swans

In the preceding chapter I argued that the popular hearing and reception of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Mary E. Webb’s voices was strongly influenced by Harriet Beecher Stowe—in both her actions as a patron to Greenfield and Webb, and, prior to that, in the way her novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, framed public, black vocality. Stowe’s acoustics of passing, I contend, categorized Greenfield and Webb’s vocal sound as “mixed” and upheld this sonic aesthetic as emancipatory. Importantly, the logic of miscegenation behind Stowe’s acoustics was also designed to control and contain the radical politics of Greenfield and Webb’s voices, thereby managing the threat of black liberation within the confines of a “freedom” imagined *for blacks by whites*. As is clear in Stowe’s own writing in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and her personal correspondence regarding the black artists she patronized that the freedom she imagined for black Americans was no American freedom at all, rather a displacement or relocation of the problem of blackness beyond America’s borders. For example, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, George Harris and his family are relocated to Canada and France, and finally Liberia. And although both Webb and her husband, the author Frank J. Webb, were free-born American blacks, Stowe ultimately had a hand in relocating them to Jamaica, a locale she thought fitting for a pair of exotic, “tropical birds”—a demeaning racial epithet that captures exactly how out of place Stowe felt a pair of educated, free black artists were in the United States.¹

Might there exist, however, a vocal space of freedom for performers like Greenfield and Webb outside white ideology? The archive suggests so. For example, reviews of Greenfield’s vocal performances fall into generally two camps: those that painted Greenfield’s voice as the sound of racial uplift, and those scathing, racist critiques that reflect the inability of some audiences to hear Greenfield’s voice outside the sonic contours of blackface minstrelsy and human curiosity. Framing Greenfield through the discourse of minstrelsy, for example, the *Pittsfield Sun* referred to her as a “lubly Dinah,” likened her voice to “hollern,” and reprinted a *Providence Post* review that described the singer as a “cullud possum.”² Or, the *Cleveland Evening Herald* positioned Greenfield as a dime museum automaton, describing her as an “ebony music box,” with “any amount of music in her lungs, but little in her soul.”³ What unites these negative reviews is a desire to degrade the emancipatory potential of Greenfield’s voice—in effect, to render it infelicitous—by characterizing it’s sound as racially grotesque and questionably human.

Greenfield’s positive reviews are unique in that they represent the racial dichotomy in antebellum anti-slavery ideology. Reviews penned by white anti-slavery agitators were favorable but tempered, rarely discussed the relationship between Greenfield’s performance and black liberation, and never failed to mention her perceived lack of training. The following review, excerpted from the *Liberator*, is remarkable only in capturing the standard point of view of a white, anti-slavery listener:

> Miss Greenfield made her *debut* at the Melodeon, in this city, on Tuesday evening last, before a large and highly respectable audience, and was received in the most flattering manner. Her voice is of immense volume and sweetness, and needs only careful training to place her in the front rank of her profession with Jenny Lind and Catharine Hayne.⁵

Greenfield was formally trained (largely, by herself), and Julia Chybowski emphasizes that whites attributed a lack of cultivation to her voice because they were invested in the ideology of romantic

¹Harriet Beecher Stowe to Elizabeth Georgiana Campbell, Duchess of Argyll—2 April-June 1858. Kirkham Collection, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center.
²*Pittsfield Sun*, February 9, 1852.
³*Providence Post*, November 27, 1851.
⁴*Cleveland Evening Herald*, May 1, 1855.
⁵*Liberator*, February 6, 1852.
racialism that ensured their own superiority while casting Greenfield's voice as the natural and authentic instrument of the singing slave. In line with the supremacist politics of Stowe's acoustics, such reviews ostensibly espoused anti-slavery sentiment while actually working against black freedom.

On the other hand, positive reviews from the black press emphasize the performative force Greenfield's voice brought to the cause of black liberation. A writer for the *Frederick Douglass Papers* described Greenfield's voice as “remov[ing] from their class and sex the stigma of natural inferiority,” and a second review touted a nascent black pride, claiming Greenfield's voice could “dispute the palm with the fairest and most gifted in song, of the Anglo-Saxon race.” Black listeners heard Greenfield's voice as remaking blackness and black womanhood as sources of dignity and accomplishment, free from the chains of stigmatized racialization, and this lent Greenfield's voice a downright revolutionary thrust. In his 1855 review of Greenfield's New York Tabernacle performance, James McCune Smith heard in Greenfield's notes the Abolitionist strains of “‘AM I NOT A WOMAN AND A SISTER?’” and compared the Swan's voice to the *firearms* employed by escaped slaves defending their hard won freedom against the Fugitive Slave Act in the Christiana Riot of 1850. As Alex Black argues, Smith's figural valuation of Greenfield's voice and person as “the pistol” and “the great soul who fired it off” emphasizes the explicitly emancipatory dimensions of Greenfield's voice. Figured as a freedom fighter, Greenfield sounded evidence for the black community that “the good time that we heard of so long is coming.”

It is important that the discourse of racial uplift originating from Greenfield's reviews in the black press not be confused with her positive reviews by white abolitionists. Such a move would, first, erase the insidious racism behind Stowe's acoustics and Greenfield's reception by white anti-slavery agitators. Second, to equate these two sets of positive reviews would be to align black writers with the supremacist ideology of “freedom” scored by Stowe. To emphasize the difference between the false freedom upheld by white abolitionists, and the armed revolution/biblical salvation ringing in the ears of Greenfield’s black audiences is to insist that racialized forms of listening produce different hearings. Nina Eidsheim makes just such an argument in her article “Marian Anderson and ‘Sonic Blackness’ in American Opera.” Working with Mendi Obadike’s theory of “acousmatic blackness,” Eidsheim resignifies the concept to describe the phenomenon of “the perceived presence of the black body in a voice that otherwise meets all of the standards of a professional classical voice.” In her discussion of Greenfield, Eidsheim claims that, while the singer's programs evidenced her facility with challenging classical repertoire that demanded, above all, perfection in the performativity of vocal whiteness, white audiences could not help but perceive a black body in Greenfield's white vocal sound: “[e]ven with superb reviews and calls for listening beyond racial difference, Greenfield was [not] able to shed the acousmatic blackness that [her] audiences heard over and above [her] otherwise celebrated renditions.” Acousmatic blackness, in Eidsheim's reading, is an essentialized and fantasized sonic blackness, one produced in white imagination by subsuming the racial prejudice of the eye through the ear; in short, Eidsheim defines acousmatic

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7 *Frederick Douglass Papers*, April 17, 1855.
8 *Frederick Douglass Papers*, December 11, 1851.
9 *Frederick Douglass Papers*, March 9, 1855.
10 Black, "Abolitionism’s Resonant Bodies," 627.
12 Nina Sun Eidsheim, “Marian Anderson and ‘Sonic Blackness’ in American Opera,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011), 647.
13 Ibid., 655.
blackness as a racist mechanism for keeping black bodies out of opera, and other “white” musical idioms.

Eidsheim’s formulation of acousmatic blackness elegantly captures the performativity of sonic blackness, emphasizing how sonic blackness may be produced merely through cued framing of the singing black body. Vision, in particular, is the framing apparatus Eidsheim is most interested in, and her essay pays careful attention to how racist discourse surrounding Greenfield’s appearance in concert produced a hearing of acousmatic blackness on the part of her audiences. I further contend that Greenfield’s acousmatic blackness was generated by the contextualizing, discursive framework of slavery put in place by Uncle Tom’s Cabin and by Stowe herself on the occasions where she accompanied the performances of her patron. In these instances, acousmatic blackness was an effect produced through Stowe’s staging of Greenfield’s body in relation to her own authorial body, and to her melodramatic text. The advantages of such a reading of Greenfield’s voice must be remarked upon here. Eidsheim’s formulation of acousmatic blackness serves to rescue Greenfield and her voice from the historical margins, and to recognize the institutional and perceptual racism that discredited Greenfield’s artistic achievements. And while my own reading provides a powerful analysis of Stowe’s insidious stage management, both readings frame Greenfield as a passive recipient of stage direction: the direction/interpretation of a racist American hearing, and the direction of recuperative historiography.

There is, however, another way to read the disparity between white and black, anti-slavery hearings of Greenfield’s voice: to assume that Greenfield herself produced this discrepancy. This thesis is invested in Greenfield’s own agency, and argues that, just as Stowe dramaturged Greenfield’s performance to produce acousmatic blackness, Greenfield herself traded in the sonic signifier of blackness, but to her own ends. Such an argument would figure Greenfield as working against anti-black racism with the tools of such racism: essentialized sonic blackness. Such a thesis also risks attributing her acousmatic blackness not to racist listening practices of the day, but to her own performative intentions. In the chapter that follows, however, I will show how this reading clarifies much of the Greenfield performance archive that otherwise appears anomalous. For example, Greenfield did not simply perform classical vocal repertoire. She also performed minstrel standards. While Eidsheim notes that such repertoire would not necessitate a timbral shift away from sonic whiteness (and that in fact, much minstrel repertoire was sung with a timbral profile quite similar to that of classical music), it is possible that Greenfield self-selected such material in order to stage the acousmatic blackness of her voice herself. Though minstrel tunes may not have been sung by Greenfield with any technical difference, the heavily framed racial context of minstrelsy would have necessarily “colored” the perception of such songs. Additionally, when singing Stephen Glover’s “I Am Free,” Greenfield portrayed both a white, male slave master, and a black female slave. Remnant reviews of Greenfield’s performance of this song make clear that she differentiated male and female genders in this song by singing across bass and soprano registration. While it is possible that Greenfield also used timbral shifts to highlight the racial differences between the slave owner and bondswoman, she may also have used the framing mechanism of the song’s emancipatory discourse to produce acousmatic blackness. Either way, Greenfield’s performance of Glover’s song clearly shows that far from shying away from sonic blackness, Greenfield actively embraced it, revealing, I ultimately argue, the constructed nature of hearing and singing “black” and “white” vocality.

What could be have been Greenfield’s end purpose in using the master’s tools, in evoking acousmatic blackness? If she did indeed stage such sonic blackness, she certainly embedded such a performance furtively within the hegemonic conventions that sought to circumscribe her voice. This is to say that the archive attests to no discernible difference in the song programs Greenfield sang for whites only or integrated houses. And whatever Greenfield’s performative intentions, she certainly passed them off as being compliant with those belonging to her patron, Stowe. In what
follows, I offer a close reading of Greenfield’s performance of “I Am Free” to argue that while singing Stowe’s acoustics, Greenfield manipulated the signs of sonic blackness and sonic disability to surreptitiously give voice to her own account of freedom, warping and twisting white intent in service of black liberation. Such a performance tactic could simultaneously play to white expectations for black voice, while sending a resonant message of emancipation to black audiences. This chapter draws on Daphne Brooks’ theory of fugitivity, and Robert McRuer’s theory of queer and disabled, or crip performance, to illustrate how Greenfield purposefully manipulated the racial, heterosexist, and ableist biases of white listeners to encode a message of black freedom that would be imperceptible to, and also offer a critique of white listening.

My alternative reading of the racial difference in the perception of Greenfield’s voice by white and black anti-slavery agitators aims to furnish a hearing of Greenfield’s voice outside of a white, sonic ideology. Such an ideology limits Greenfield’s voice to the false dichotomy upheld by speech act theory: the dichotomy that understands the emancipatory dimensions of Greenfield’s voice as either felicitous or failed. In this chapter, I highlight the third realm of Greenfield’s own reception, the racial discrepancy heard by anti-slavery whites who positioned Greenfield’s voice as neither felicitous nor failed, to indicate that the performative magic of the speech act is both predicated on and limited to white raciality, a racialization that requires the construction and deployment of a sonic blackness. In other words, Greenfield’s voice reveals the anti-blackness and white supremacy of the emancipatory speech act in American performance and socio-political history. In this, Greenfield’s performance of “I Am Free” offers a glimpse into a radical black politics of emancipation, and the key to reading this performance in that tradition comes in the swan song of one of Greenfield’s contemporaries: Thomas Dilworth.

Two Black Swans: Disability, Escapology, and Disability

On September 16th, 1861, the Black Swan stepped on stage at New York’s Mechanic’s Hall.14 We might imagine her clad in the outfit that Harriet Beecher Stowe had gifted her during her 1853 tour of London: “a black velvet head-dress, and white cornelian ear-rings, a black moiré antique silk, made high in the neck, with white lace falling sleeves, and white gloves,” and, as one commentator from The Carpet Bag in Boston quoted in 1852, “her hair, jet black, with the natural wiry curl, arranged a la Jenny Lind.”15 Yet the Black Swan performing with Bryant’s Minstrels that evening was not the genuine cantatrice, one Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, but rather a comic impersonator, Japanese Tommy, born Thomas Dilworth, an illiterate, African American little person whose blackface songs and antics made him a “chief attraction” in the whites-only minstrel circuit from the late 1850s until his death in 1887.16

15 Stowe, Sunny Memories in Foreign Lands, 205; The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, 22.
16 Notices, Daily State Gazette, December 6, 1972, 3. In the United States Census of 1850, Kings County, Gravesend Township, a Thomas Dillworth, 13, male, black, is checked as both “persons over 20 yr’s of age who cannot read & write” and “whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.” These checks—highlighting Dilworth’s illiteracy and disability—in conjunction with the race and age of the listed individual, lead me to believe that the ‘Dillworth’ of the census is the same individual behind Japanese Tommy. See United States Census of 1850, p. 26.
By most historical accounts, Dilworth (also appearing in the archive as Dilward, Dilverd, Dilverel, Durand, Dillworth or Dilsworth) was born free in Brooklyn, most likely Gravesend, in 1837 or 1839.\footnote{United States Census of 1850, p.26, Kings County, Gravesend Township. While most scholars refer to him as 'Thomas Dilward' (noting at the same time the multiple other last names on record), this census suggests that Japanese Tommy's birth name was actually 'Dilworth.'} After William Henry Lane, the celebrated black dancer known professionally as Master Juba, Dilworth was only the second African America to perform with whites before the Civil War. He was certainly the only African American little person to grace the public stage, and his notoriety generated copycat routines and spurred the ensuing popularity of the white minstrel and little person, Little Mac, who joined the Bryant's Minstrel's after Dilworth exited the troupe.\footnote{“Drop Curtain Monographs,” \textit{New York Times}, July 17, 1887. “A better known ‘Japanese Tommy’ is the ponderous John Hart. It was for many years a specialty of his to be carried on to the stage in the arms of a helper. He mimicked the other ‘Japanese Tommy.’ To hide his size until his real voice should proclaim his identity, Hart was dressed in skirts.”} In press reviews and advertisements, Dilworth was described as “a natural wonder” and “the greatest curiosity living.”\footnote{Unsigned review of Raynor's Minstrels, \textit{Daily Constitutional Union}, December 18, 1865, 2; \textit{New York Herald}, October 3, 1861.} His performance repertoire included the singing roles of Uncle Snow and the Raw Recruit, minstrel songs that caricatured the reconstruction south and Union Zouave regiments, respectively, and impersonations of Barnum’s American Museum attractions.\footnote{This first piece was especially attributed to Japanese Tommy and published in the \textit{Japanese Tommy's Songster containing a selection of the most popular melodies of the day} (Portland: Tucker, Printer, 1871).} Dilworth was most famous, however, for his “clear, soprano” voice\footnote{\textit{NY Clipper}, January 1, 1884.} and his burlesques of popular operatic Prima Donnas. Though he was called Japanese Tommy, the archive furnishes evidence of only one occasion (late in his career) where Dilworth performed a stereotypical Asian character; in 1884 he performed alongside George W. Harding in an after-piece sketch he helped write, “The Chinese Laundry.”\footnote{The \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, March 3, 1862.} Earlier news clippings from the 1860s suggest that Dilworth earned his stage name because, like the Japanese Ambassador “Tommy” who visited the United States in 1860, Dilworth was considered attractive and a particular hit with ladies.\footnote{\textit{Brooklyn Eagle}, August 7, 1877.} However, as I will later discuss, the sobriquet “Japanese Tommy” might best be understood as indexing the racial phantasmagoria that Dilworth, as a little person of color—and, by at least one historic source, a mixed race, Native and African American little person—evoked for audiences.

Between 1859 and 1887, Dilworth performed with many of the most famous American minstrel troupes including Christy’s, Bryant’s, Wood’s, Morris Brother’s, Leon’s,\footnote{\textit{Brooklyn Eagle}, August 7, 1877.} Skiff & Gaylord’s,\footnote{\textit{Trenton State Gazette}, published as \textit{Daily State Gazette}, December 6, 1872.} Raynor’s,\footnote{The \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, December 19, 1865.} Pell and Trowbridge, Emerson’s and Criterion’s.\footnote{Excerpt from Edward LeRoy Rice, \textit{Monarchs of Minstrelsy, from “Daddy” Rice to Date} (New York: Kenny Publishing Company, 1911).} He performed stateside until 1866, at which time he travelled to England with Sam Hague’s “Original Slave Troupe of Georgia Minstrels,” a group comprised of African American performers.\footnote{Japanese Tommy, MS Thr 556 (98), Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library / American minstrel show collection, 1823-1947, Harvard University.} There, the \textit{Boston Daily Advertiser} claims “he sang “Dixie” before Queen Victoria till her eyes were dimmed with tears.”\footnote{\textit{Boston Daily Advertiser}, July 14, 1887.} Dilworth returned to the states in 1871, departing thereafter for a tour of Australia and New Zealand with Kelly and...
Leon's Minstrels in 1878. In the final decade of his career, Dilworth performed frequently as a curiosity in dime museums along the east coast, appearing at Boston’s Austin and Stone’s Museum, Washington’s New Dime Museum, New York’s Bunnell’s Museum, and the Great Dime Museum. Advertisements from these engagements suggest that he performed his stock repertoire of Prima Donna impersonations, though he also appeared alongside “freak” attractions such as wax figures of “the Chinese giant,” and living curiosities like the “leopard boy,” the “what is it,” and the “fat boy.” Dilworth’s obituaries also consistently cite his past employment with Barnum, though I have yet to authenticate this claim with an archival finding. Such an alliance seems likely, as Dilworth, more than any other performer of his day, brought the spectacle of the freak show to the minstrel stage, the black fun of minstrelsy to the dime museum.

Both the racial carnivalesque and the freak show spectacle were on display in Dilworth’s Black Swan burlesque. The burlesque, appearing as early as 1857 (although certainly appearing before that) and persisting through at least 1880, was a stock bit of repertoire for minstrel companies. Program remnants, news clippings, and printed minstrel sketches make clear that the punchline of the sketch was that the Greenfield impersonator, though dressed to the hilt in the trappings of celebrity — “evening dress, much shirt-bosom and more diamond stud” — sang “very bad.” Audiences were invited to laugh at the ridiculous pretensions to respectability and equality voiced by the Black Swan, who, the skit revealed, could little more sing than squawk. But Dilworth’s Black Swan burlesque added something extra to this usual minstrel fare: he was both black and a little person. These factors would have necessarily influenced how white audiences read his send up of Greenfield.

Within the frame of blackface minstrelsy, Dilworth’s enfreaked corporeality cast Greenfield and her most famous sung claim “I am Free” as a political face, and a travesty of speech act. The joke of Dilworth’s impersonation was that, of the two Swan songs, his explicitly disabled performance was the most “natural” in that it attested to innate black debility. The Black Swan burlesque was comical in making salient the similarities between the ways in which Greenfield and Dilworth’s self-displays were legible. To begin, though Greenfield possessed an extraordinary vocal range, commentators attributed the strength of her lower registers to gender abnormality. One New York Tribune critic stated: “The idea of a woman’s voice is a feminine tone; anything below that is disgusting. It is as bad as a bride with a beard on her chin and an oath in her mouth. We hear a great deal about woman’s sphere. That sphere exists in music and it is the soprano region of the voice.” As Eidsheim observes, “by defying the boundaries of the music monopolized by whites, Greenfield was…perceived (and castigated) as a gender deviation.” In this example, Greenfield’s performance of a white, classical musical idiom racialized her, and her becoming black was simultaneously read as a becoming gender deviant (a freak) and a becoming disabled: Greenfield, the critic leveled, was either a bearded lady, or, perhaps, a man masquerading as a woman, as in fact, Japanese Tommy, with his “soft, clear soprano voice,” was.

29 Brooklyn Eagle, April 30, 1882; Brooklyn Eagle, November 22, 1881; The Washington Post, April 1, 1883.
30 NY Clipper, November 7, 1874; A.J. Leavitt and H.W. Egan, The Academy of Stars: An Ethiopian Sketch (New York: Samuel French, 1880), 7. In this minstrel sketch, the gag is that Juliana Cornstarch, or the Black Swan (portrayed by male-blackface-actor-in-drag, Dan Collins), “sings very bad.” As this sketch succeeded Japanese Tommy’s performance as the Black Swan, and as original minstrel repertoire was widely copied and emulated, we might safely conjecture that the Black Swan stunt generally retained the same punchline between Tommy’s performance in 1861 and the publication of this sketch in 1880, when newspaper sources confirm, Japanese Tommy was still actively performing.
31 New York Tribune, April 2, 1853.
32 Eidsheim, Voice as a Technology of Selfhood , 71.
33 “Japanese Tommy’s Funeral,” New York Sun, July 13, 1887, 2.
Second, the reified blackface mask of the minstrel genre, combined with the explicitness of Dilworth’s “authentic” blackness in performance, worked to attribute the source of the parodied Black Swan’s bad singing to her own inexpugnable blackness. However, Dilworth’s purposely sour notes did more than simply externalize, or telegraph the acousmatic blackness white audiences thought they heard when listening to Greenfield. The burlesque’s key move was to skewer Greenfield’s perceived attempt to pass out of a symbolic slavery and into freedom through the sung performance of whiteness. By equating bad vocality to black vocality, Dilworth’s burlesque marked black speech acts, and in particular, Greenfield’s sung claim to freedom, as infelicitous because of its sonic blackness, and the debility or impairment attributed to such acousmatic blackness. Dilworth’s squawking therefore foreclosed Greenfield’s vocal runs at freedom by besmirching her performance of a white, classical vocal idiom, painting her song with the essentialized sonic markers of slavery (blackness and debility). Here, the same mechanism Stowe deployed in her so-called anti-slavery acoustics of freedom was deployed by blackface minstrelsy to contain black liberation and secure white supremacy. Ultimately, though Greenfield used classical voice performance to remove the stigma attached to blackness, Dilworth’s burlesque ostensibly functioned to reassert Greenfield’s debased slave origins—congealing her “becoming black” and “becoming disabled” through failed song.

Interestingly, Dilworth’s Black Swan burlesque served just the supremacist, carnivalesque function inherent to blackface minstrelsy: it gleefully inverted Frederick Douglass’ call to hear black humanity through song, reappropriating black vocality as justification of black inferiority and white ascendancy. Dilworth’s sketch therefore ultimately enacted the inverse performative transformation plotted by Greenfield: instead of enacting Greenfield’s humanity, the skit transformed her into a lower order beast, from Black Swan to “African Crow.”34

The carnivalesque inversions staged by Dilworth’s burlesque were the engine of its comedy. The sketch staged the capitulation between two seemingly antagonistic forms: the minstrel show, a lowbrow form of entertainment that entrenched racial thinking, and the classical concert, a highbrow diversion wedded in Greenfield’s case to discourses of racial uplift. By the conclusion of the sketch, Greenfield’s uplift had been deflated to the level of grotesquerie, while Dilworth’s bawdy performance was elevated to the status of self-evident truth. The gag of the burlesque was that, despite these inversions, both performances were of debilitated, black speech. For Greenfield, who performed alongside Frederick Douglass’s lecture on “Equality Before the Law” and who frequently added Stephen Glover’s “I Am Free” to her programs, Dilworth’s burlesque poignantly demonstrated that any promise of “becoming free” held out by vocal culture was equally and oppositely a promise of becoming black and becoming disabled.

This reading of “Japanese Tommy’s” burlesque is historically hegemonic in that it captures the overdetermined meaning of the sketch within the socially and politically conservative frame of blackface minstrelsy, and parses how white audiences likely responded to Dilworth’s minstrel burlesque. But such a reading also makes Dilworth the agent of violence against black folks, and in particular black women. This reading also aligns Dilworth with an explicitly ableist ideology; one, his performance reveals, that is imbricated in white supremacy. Yet it is also the case that such a hegemonic reading simply doesn’t “square” with what the archive tells us about Dilworth, his character, and his political allegiances. For example, it seems that Dilworth was a staunch advocate for black equality, rights, and protection under the law. In June of 1863 he registered for the Civil War draft, and until 1860 he was a servant of David A. Bokee, a prominent Whig (who was,

nonetheless a “compromise man”). In 1882 Dilworth brought a suit for $5,000 in damages against one William Engeman, a Manhattan restaurant proprietor who refused Dilworth service on account of the performer’s race. Dilworth, who had entered Engeman’s establishment with a white colleague (who was served), sued the establishment under the Civil Rights Law. And while the political notion of “disability rights” or “disability pride” did not emerge until the contemporary era, Dilworth may have dabbled in a late nineteenth century versions of such ideology, headlining in 1873 a program of entertainment at Hooley’s Brooklyn Opera House subversively titled, “Don’t Fail to See the Little Man.”

These archival traces open questions about how Dilworth’s performance circulates outside a logic of ableist anti-blackness, and, along with other racial and sexual “others” who were performing during the same time period as him, was in in solidarity with the future for black and disabled subjects that Greenfield herself performed into being. Considering such a reading demands analyzing anew the essentialized performances of blackness and debility Dilworth put forth in his Black Swan burlesque. Understanding these essentialized performances as tools for black and disabled liberation, we might then re-read Greenfield’s performance of “I Am Free” for a mode of agency operating outside white control. Taken together, Greenfield and Dilworth’s swan songs each furnish the “key” for reading the other, and provide new insight on the historiography of black performance and black performative tactics.

Dilworth’s performance explicitly articulates the connections made by black performers between minstrelsy and freakery, where I understand enfreakment as a tactic deployed by black performers to assist them in navigating their way toward and/or negotiating their free status. Pointing to explicit public performances of blackness and debility by Dilworth, Ellen Crafts, Henry Box Brown, and ultimately, Greenfield, I argue that performing disability was a common tactic among free and captive blacks, and worked to facilitate black liberation by providing actors with a paradoxical refuge from white persecution within the abject space of exception reserved for black and disabled subjects. Moreover, in the process of engaging in disability masquerade, these individuals rendered explicit the ways in which ableist and supremacist discourses of disability and blackness enabled the exploitation of the black and disabled bodied. In adopting the performance aesthetics of essentialized debility and blackness, these performers stole away from such forms of exploitation by hiding within them, and in plain sight.

Importantly, describing these black (fugitive) performers as engaging in disability masquerade is not to suggest that their performances of debility were not authentic, or that their impairments faked. Questions of real/dissembled bodily difference are ultimately immaterial, since as Tobin Siebers highlights, many disabled individuals are invisibly disabled and ostensibly “pass” as ablebodied. Masquerades of passing as either disabled or ablebodied, he argues, ultimately highlight the constructed and performative nature of disabled (read: not impaired) identity (citation). I use “disability masquerade” to emphasize how these black, (fugitive) performers publicly staged their bodies as legibly disabled—performances that themselves had a longer history in slavery’s plantation economy. What I want to highlight in this discussion is how essentialized signifiers of race and disability are the tools of radical resistance deployed by black artists to flee white mastery and forge the possibility for black emancipation. In this, Dea H. Boster emphasizes how disability was not merely a figurative, but a material resource for captive resistance. In “I Made Up My Mind to Act Both Deaf and Dumb,” Boster details how slaves engaged in performances of disability, termed

36 Brooklyn Eagle, March 3, 1882; Brenham Weekly Banner, March 16, 1882.
37 Brooklyn Eagle, May 22, 1873.
Relying on the cultural practice of ignoring or invisibilizing the disabled, slaves deployed feigned and/or exaggerated disability to abscond from surveillance and discipline. Thus, by feigning chronic impairment, infertility, or advanced age, a slave might have been able to secure a lighter workload, early retirement, or exception from punishment and sale. Additionally, disability lowered slave value. By feigning impairment slaves may have been able to thwart the economic system that forcibly extracted value from their captive bodies. What’s more, I would emphasize that, because disabled slaves were categorized as “useless” within a plantation economy, they rendered their bodies incoherent with the set of socio-economic and political meanings slavery sought to assign to black bodies. These disabled bodies were able to slip through and out of white surveillance precisely because the ableism of slavery rendered explicitly disabled bodies incomprehensible within its values system. In other words, the ableism of slavery forcibly placed disabled black bodies in a space of abjection paradoxically, though only tenuously removed from the larger place of exception represented by the plantation.

Although feigned disability does conform to ideologies of health, wellness and ability, Boster emphasizes that disability masquerade contests the normative dichotomy of abled/disabled by enabling slaves to maneuver and redefine the value their bodies were supposed to represent. Disability masquerade thus offered a potential right to refusal of the slave economy and black subjugation, and granted African Americans some potential degree agency over their bodies. I emphasize the modifier “potential” because, of course, performances of disability could also backfire, and make a slave more susceptible to abjection. Boster, in her essay “‘Useless’: Disability, Slave Labor, and Contradiction on Antebellum Southern Plantations,” claims that disabled slaves, because they devalued by the slave system, risked being perceived as “lazy” and were frequently punished for their limitations. This is not because disabled slaves did not labor, but may have been assigned to duties perceived to be less arduous, such as tending children, cooking, or doing laundry. Until late in the antebellum era, severely disabled slaves were sometimes manumitted, but were just as frequently abandoned or neglected by slave owners who didn’t see the economic gain in keeping and sustaining “useless” or “worthless” property. Boster also references several historical cases wherein disabled slaves were murdered to solve the problem of their “uselessness.” Further, Ellen J. Samuels, in her essay on the African American female performers and conjoined twins, Millie and Christine McKoy, argues that the sisters’ race in combination with their disabled difference kept them under the control of white showmen (and women) long after their legal emancipation. While Millie and Christine were liberated under the emancipation proclamation, Samuels contests, the particular intersection of their raced and disabled difference placed (and for historians, places) their individual agency and “freedom” in question.


Ibid., 77.

Ibid., 74-5.

An explicitly paradoxical label according to Boster, who’s research uncovers the many uses to which disabled, captive bodies were put in the slave economy.

Boster, “‘I Made Up My Mind,’” 73.


Useful in thinking about performers like Dilworth, Boster’s and Brooks’ research shares a common interest in research subjects who actively stage and produce their own unintelligibility, illegibility, and resultantly, white oversight, by publicly performing black debility. Playing with essentialized signs of difference, free and captive African Americans redefined becoming black and becoming disabled and the mechanics of slavery that placed African Americans, even free blacks, beyond the human. For Ellen Crafts, for example, who escaped to freedom dressed as a disabled white man, disability masquerade meant placing her arm in a sling to simulate a broken arm. This feigned physical impairment masked her illiteracy and excused her inability to sign her name. Without such a performance of debility, Crafts’ illiteracy would have revealed her racial masquerade as a ruse; in this instance, disability masquerade granted Crafts exception from the scrutiny and surveillance deployed by whites to “out” passing, fugitive slaves as legible property-on-the-run.45

Henry Box Brown also engaged in disability masquerade, purposefully scorching his flesh to the bone with sulfuric acid to exempt himself from the surveillance and forced labor of the plantation. In Box Brown’s case, this performance actually materialized his body as impaired, but it also produced a time and place of exception he then used to steal away from slavery by enclosing himself in a cargo box and shipping himself to freedom. Disabled aesthetics also appear later in Box Brown’s performance career, and will be addressed below.

For Dilworth, disability masquerade meant explicitly framing his short stature as spectacle through performance repertoire that co-articulated with both blackface minstrelsy and American sideshow. For example, Dilworth used the minstrel format to portray some of Barnum’s most popular sideshow attractions. With Christy’s Minstrels, Dilworth embodied the “African Tom Thumb,” and with Bryant’s minstrels he masqueraded as the “What is it?” (cite original archival research).46 The “African Tom Thumb” was Dilworth’s “blacked up” parody of Charles Sherwood Stratton, a white little person who gained international fame as a popular performer and curiosity, General Tom Thumb, under P.T Barnum’s management. At first consideration, Dilworth’s satirical take on the General is yet another example of the Japanese Tommy persona serving up disability and blackness for popular derision. However, Thumb himself was a noted blackface performer. Though he never toured with minstrel groups, Stratton interpolated blackface tropes into his Thumb repertoire. A case in point, Stratton, in character as Tom Thumb, portrayed a blackfaced Tom Tit in Barnum’s presentation of H.J Conway’s minstrelized adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s fugitive slave novel, “Dred.”47 Under such circumstances, Dilworth’s performance as the “African Tom Thumb” is less a blackface burlesque of a notable antebellum celebrity than a fierce and strategic deployment of Dilworth’s own “authentic” and essentialized body in order to bring the signs of racial and disabled difference under black control. Such a parody also critiques white appropriation of black and disabled difference by comedically implying, in a radical politics of inversion, that Thumb was the counterfeit of Dilworth, the “original” African Tom Thumb. This critique however, was carefully costumed in the low-brow fun of the minstrel format—which hid away Dilworth’s subversive potential within the overarching supremacist politics of the minstrel show.

Dilworth’s “What is it?” parody was a take on William Henry Johnson, an African American performer with a purported disability who, in 1860, dressed in an ape suit and exhibited himself in Barnum’s American Museum as the “missing link.”48 In playing Johnson, Dilworth “crippled up” as

46 Christy’s Minstrel’s Broadside, November 15, 1860.
47 Houghton Broadside, November 2, 1856.
48 As in the case of Joice Heth, it appeared that though Lane was born free, Barnum “bought” the rights to exhibit the performer. The elision between buying “rights” to exhibition and buying Lane-the-person-as-
a being beyond speech and sociality, and confirmed his audiences’ ascendancy while positioning his
own, hyper visible blackness and disability beyond the limits of the human, the modern, and the
American. Yet again however, Dilworth’s parody must also be read against the grain. Though Lane
was perceived as an individual with microcephaly, the archive also bears rumors that his performance
of cognitive disability was a ruse—an essentialist humbug he deployed strategically to increase the
value of his performance of blackness. Whether or not Johnson was disabled is beside the point.
Disability masquerade is, as Siebers has it, historically true and certain to the extent that the spectacle
of disability is not “natural” but a constructed performance of debility.

In “Surely he cannot be flesh and blood: The early Victorian Anatomical Museum and the
Blackface Minstrel,” Stephen Johnson uses the life and death of antebellum performer William
Henry Lane to draw a connection between the anatomical museum and blackface minstrelsy. Johnson’s essay is perhaps the only one of its kind to position these two popular nineteenth-century entertainments as crucially linked. Early on, these genres were divided by class: minstrelsy was regarded as lowbrow entertainment, while the (not quite) highbrow anatomical or dime museum was considered respectable and catered to mixed male and female audiences from the emerging bourgeois middle class. While these class distinctions eventually collapsed as the nineteenth-century wore on and minstrelsy became standard family fare, scholarship, and in particular scholarship on blackface minstrelsy, has tended to overlook the articulations between these two genres. This is all the more puzzling given the centrality of the racial grotesque and disability lore to blackface minstrelsy. For example, scholars such Daphne Brooks, Eric Lott, Dale Cockrell, and Susan Schweik point to Jim Crow as a legendary disabled figure that prosthetically animates both a repertoire of black performance and “the compulsory crippling and enfeeblement of entire ‘colored’ populations” subsumed by the stigma of a debilitated blackness. W. T Lhamon Jr. goes as far as to disavow disability gestures in the shaping of blackface lore and American cultural production, claiming that “the conventional stories [of a crippled black hostler jumping Jim Crow] tell nothing about the early meanings blackface had within its early public.” He continues, claiming that such stories were merely racist concoctions deployed by a bourgeois elite to contain the transgressive potentialities of minstrelsy, and the class and race based solidarity the form promoted. Disability for Lhamon is a historic diversion, and “it would be a mistake to make too much of this diversion.”

Johnson’s essay however traces the meanings behind Lane’s minstrel stage dancing and the
display of his body post-mortem in an anatomical museum. As early as the 1850s, he claims, “both venues explored common themes by different means: a derogatory depiction of race, the exhibition of the grotesque, and the presentation of the exotic and (so-called) authentic.” Though limited to an examination of how Lane’s body circulated within these popular spaces, Johnson’s essay goes a

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50 Schweik, The Ugly Laws, 186.
52 Ibid., 153.
53 Johnson, “Surely he cannot be flesh and blood,” 62.
long way to defining these sites as connected by a spectacular politics of display, a politics that staged and enacted the performativity of black abnormality. Far from lore, Johnson's essay provides concrete and key historical evidence that power, and the control of the black and (dis)abled body was at stake in both popular forms.

Ultimately, Johnson's comparison of Juba's performing body in both contexts forwards an argument about the subversive potential of Lane's minstrel dance, and the corralling of this radical potentiality by whites through the post-mortem display of his skeleton. Johnson's argument concurs with those made by freak studies scholars and scholars of the racial grotesque, notably Rosemarie Garland Thomson and Yvette Abrahams, who write on the post-mortem display of the racialized and pathologized bodies of women-of-color and human-exhibit-performers Juliana Pastrana and Sarah Bartman, respectively (citations). By leveraging disability masquerade to transform his own black body into a commodity (one he ostensibly profited from), Lane cheated whites of the profit to be exacted by sole economic control over, and exploitation of black bodies. Ironically, in debasing his performance of blackness through disability masquerade, Lane raised the economic worth of his blackness while furnishing himself a space of exception in which he could operate with a degree of freedom uncommon to even free blacks. This reading enables us to interpret the opacity of the historical record surrounding Johnson as of his own making, and for his own protection. In this light (or lack thereof), Dilworth's performance reads as a tribute, or a show of solidarity with the radical politics of disability embraced by “free,” black performers who, of necessity, tirelessly negotiated the precarity of freedom before and after the Civil War.

On Fugitivity

Writing about Henry Box Brown's 1848 escape to freedom in a shipping crate, and his subsequent black abolitionist performance aesthetics in *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*, Daphne Brooks clarifies the liminal state of freedom for blacks in the antebellum era. The advent of the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act meant that “even the most high-profile fugitives such as Brown [were] highly vulnerable” to capture and return to slavery. Bonds—persons who had been manumitted, as Greenfield, or black Americans born free such as Dilworth, were equally vulnerable to capture and enslavement, as Solomon Northup's slave narrative testified. Northup was a free African American and a traveling musician who, while gigging in Washington D.C., slavery territory, was abducted into captivity. His narrative testified to the precarity of black life, and black “freedom” in a nation where black liberty was little more than a liminal space outside of slavery.

In a reading of Brown's first slave narrative, *The Narrative of Henry Box Brown*, Brooks contends that Brown's amanuensis, Charles Stearns, used textual form to constrain black narrative agency. Brooks' argument resonates strongly with the previous chapter's discussion of Greenfield's relationship to Harriet Beecher Stowe, who used public and private writing to circumscribe and manage black, female bodies for her own socio-political ends that didn't map precisely onto black emancipation. Policed even by supposed white anti-slavery allies, and always at a tenuous remove from captivity, Dilworth and Greenfield may not have been fugitive slaves, but were always, I argue, chasing a freedom “on the run.”

I therefore want to consider Greenfield and Dilworth as “fugitive escape artists” and as practitioners of “escapology,” Brooks' terms to describe Henry Box Brown and the set of aesthetic and performance tactics he deployed to forge a radical and covert black liberty. Crucially, Brooks’ conception of escapology is not a teleology for the “freedom” peddled by white abolitionists like

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54 Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 66.
55 Ibid., 69.
Stowe. Rather, escapology describes the performative practices of aesthetic and ideological fugitives: the moves black performers make and take to flee from white supremacist control from within the confines of white power structures. Like Houdini, Brooks suggests, escapology is what fugitives deploy in order to seemingly vanish from circuits of white power “while still moving through them.” Escapology, in materializing the necessary conditions of fugitivity, furthers black liberation in so far as “the act of fleeing is an act of self creation.”

Brooks reveals the distinctly black aesthetics of fugitive escapology in her discussion of Box Brown’s abolitionist moving panorama performance, *The Mirror of Slavery*. Box Brown’s panorama, Brooks argues, “demands that its audiences step into a ‘third representational space’ where the complex subjectivities of the fugitive escape artist are made manifest.” Additionally, this “third representational space” not only offered Brown the space, place, time, and aesthetic freedom to engage in a radical politics of black self-making, but also critiqued the politics of surveillance and transparency that underpin the panoptic schema of the slave state and the white abolitionist politics that delimited black bodies and black freedom. Box Brown produced this third space in his moving panorama through the imagery of the Great Dismal Swamp. Referencing the geographic swampland between Virginia and North Carolina that harbored maroon populations, and most famously, the slave rebel Nat Turner, Box Brown’s moving image signaled black insurrection and radical resistance. The image of the swamp was also a narrative non-sequitur for panorama audiences, who were accustomed to moving images that played out a linear, coherent, and whitewashed narrative of American progress and civilization, such as John Banvard’s moving panorama of a Mississippi River journey that scrubbed from its representational schema any reference to the waterway as a conveyor of human property and American horror. Box Brown’s panorama, on the other hand, jumped across time and geographical milieu, and was narratively organized by images forming a thematic triptych: those representing a prelapsarian African and Caribbean past, those representing enslavement, the middle passage, and the slave trade, and those representing fugitive slaves and hard won freedom. Brooks reads the image of the swamp as representative of the liminal space of fugitivity between captivity and emancipation. This injection of a liminal and undefined space within Box Brown’s panorama narrative both indexes something fundamental about black antebellum ontology, and also serves as the aesthetic figure that performatively enacts Box Brown’s own, ongoing fugitive escape.

The performative felicity of the Dismal Swamp towards fugitive liberation lies, Brooks contends, in its “threateningly perilous opacity.” Overgrown with abundant vegetation, sunlight must fight and frequently fails to penetrate the swamp, which is, above all, a place of darkness. This darkness is on one hand dangerous. But on the other, the swamp’s potential danger—its resistance to surveillance, penetration and mastery—outfits it as a space of refuge for the fugitive slave who might find and redefine being and liberty within a somber space, place, and practice. Brooks understands the experience of inhabiting the liminal space of the swamp as “fugitivity.” Fugitivity is a practice of living and an ontological subject position-on-the-run defined as “the artful escape of objectification, whether said objectification occurs through racialized aesthetic framing [or]

56 Ibid., 67.
59 Ibid., 105.
60 Ibid., 80-1.
61 Ibid., 106.
commodification….” Escapology are the set of aesthetic and performance innovations that produce and maintain the cultural and political “work” of the swamp, where the swamp broadly signifies the (im)possibilities of fugitivity.

The narrative anomaly of the Dismal Swamp in The Mirror of Slavery therefore enacts Box Brown’s fugitive escape act by generating “a distinct readerly opacity,” one that forced spectators to confront their own limitations or “blind spot[s]” when interpreting black aesthetic meaning. A dark and unintelligible image, the literal and figurative opacity of the swamp demanded audience members make a “radical shift in vision” and episteme in order to glean black consciousness, conceptions and experiences of freedom. Such shifts moved audience members out of socio-political and aesthetic structures that related to and parsed blackness through the lens of white supremacy. Under such schemas, whites power positioned blackness as transparent and legible, and therefore as knowable and controllable. The aesthetics of escapology, in contrast, resist transparency, intelligibility, and legibility by taking refuge in figures of essentialized blackness: “the hidden escape route of the fugitive slave is paradoxically exposed as a dark and impenetrable zone of illumination and elusion for the escape artist.”

Ironically, fugitive aesthetics stem from an embrace of that which whites mobilize to enslave African Americans: blackness. Box Brown’s use of opacity therefore turns the degraded surfeit of blackness, that which whites identify as needing to bring under control and into meaning through white control, into black empowerment. Box Brown’s opaque swamp forced white audiences to plunge in to the unknown, resituating performance from Box Brown’s dark perspective, and became a sign of power for the black abolitionist “who might manipulate darkness as a trope of narrative insurgency, discursive survival, and epistemological resistance.”

In Brooks’ formulation, escapology is performance/performative techniques that rely on dark optics, a set of visual and conceptual aesthetics that reveal and exploit the “blind spots” in white vision, thought, and socio-political regimes. Here I want to work out Brooks’ figurative use of the term “blind spot” to shed light on the relationship between darkness and disability in fugitive aesthetics. In deploying the term “blind spots,” Brooks implicitly highlights how the embrace of darkness and opacity by black abolitionists (at both the level of the literal/material, and figurative) produces a visual impairment, blindness, that is a loophole in white power. Black radicals can then exploit this disability towards liberatory ends, stealing their bodies and selves away from white control right under the master’s eyes. Moreover, in doing so, black fugitivity ironically makes impairment and ableism visible as an operative mechanism of white supremacy, turning the tables, however, so that impairment becomes recognizable not as a fact of blackness, but as laminated to a whiteness that is refigured as insufficient.

Here I want to pardon Brooks’ faux pas in using the term “blind spots” to highlight the flaws of white spectatorial politics. Despite this negative and metaphoric deployment of disability (one that disability studies and disability activists take a firm stand against), Brooks’ figure brings to the fore a critical observation about how the socially constructed categories of disability and race work together to survey and subjugate difference. Stated another way, Brooks’ figure brings to light how disability is discursively, ideologically, and materially constructed as fundamental to the space of

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63 Brooks, Bodies in Dissent, 107.
64 Ibid., 107, 109.
65 Ibid., 111.
66 Ibid., 110.
67 Ibid., 108.
exception it shares and co-articulates with blackness. Box Brown creates his audience’s “blind spots” by placing his viewers in the literal and figurative dark of black aesthetics—a liminal space/symbol racialized surplus traditionally instrumentalized by whites to keep blacks in bondage and subservience. But Box Brown’s narrative in the Mirror of Slavery is also represented as disabled by his reviewers: it is incoherent. Figured in the motif of the swamp, Box Brown’s panorama broke with narrative tradition and challenged its audiences with a dark and seemingly impenetrable visual and narrative logic. As Box Brown’s Herald reviewer attests, while Box Brown positioned his work as an “eloquent and poetical address,” the dark optics of the work rendered it a “jumbled mass of contradictions” to some white viewers. The Herald reviewer further positions Box Brown’s incoherence as provoking “disgust” and analogizes the panorama’s garbled message to that of a blackface performance. In this review, the Herald writer sets up the aesthetics of white, transparent, and therefore able-bodied narrative as diametrically opposed to the dark, opaque, and therefore debilitated narrative of Box Brown’s panorama.

This, Brooks argues, was just Box Brown’s authorial point. The Mirror of Slavery sought to deconstruct white fantasies of ability and mastery by flipping the balance of power in favor of a dark optics, what Brooks calls “reorder[ing] spectatorial dynamics.” I argue that in the Mirror of Slavery, Box Brown also reordered the politics of disability that animate white spectatorship and hearing. By placing his audience “in the dark,” Box Brown displaces the putative incoherence and irrationality of African Americans onto his white audience members. This inversion and displacement of essentialized markers of difference both enabled Box Brown to temporarily flee the oppression enacted through such markers, and also to make manifest the ways in which both essentialized blackness and disability animate the socio-political economy of whiteness. In a reversal of the politics of becoming observed by Erevelles, Brooks’ treatise on escapology ultimately depicts how the fugitive slave embraces and remixes becoming black and becoming disabled to crip the ableism of white supremacy.

Thomas Dilworth’s enfreaked performances therefore drew on a black performativity that was fundamentally predicated on a radical crip aesthetic. I want to assert the primacy of this black, crip aesthetic to a politics of fugitivity and to free and captive strategies for achieving black liberation. In what follows, I unpack how this performance legacy enables a black, and crip reading of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s famous performance piece “I Am Free.” Re-reading Greenfield’s performance, I theorize her crip voice as fugitive song, and articulate how her explicit performances of an enfreaked blackness enabled her to simultaneously crip and signify on white abolitionist use of black and disabled bodies.

**Black Holes: performances of race, gender, and sexuality on the archival record**

Even without an understanding of how Thomas Dilworth’s performance repertoire cited and drew upon a radical and fugitive black and crip aesthetic, his Black Swan burlesque provides a key to reading Greenfield’s song within this tradition of resistance because the parody makes salient the unremittingly black and enfreaked aesthetics of Greenfield’s performances. These aesthetic elements have largely been overlooked by scholars who take archival mention of such descriptions as indexical of deeply racist and misogynist antebellum listening practices set on discounting Greenfield’s artistry (Chybowski, Eidsheim, Story). Undoubtedly, white bias impacted Greenfield’s public reception. But dismissing Greenfield’s detractors through theoretical models of racist and

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68 “Panorama of Slavery,” Wolverhampton & Staffordshire Herald, March 24, 1852, quoted in Brooks, Bodies in Dissent, 90.
69 Brooks, Bodies in Dissent, 111.
gendered listening do nothing to dismantle normative ideas about voice. Such models ultimately though unintentionally position Greenfield’s voice as a victim—struggling to articulate a radical anti-slavery message and fighting to be heard by white ears that simply could not hear beyond her gender and skin color. While Brooks does point to the “transgressive” resistance of Greenfield’s performances, she describes Greenfield’s incredible vocal range and practice of performing across traditionally “male” and “female” vocal registers as evidence of Greenfield’s radical black and feminist politic, implicitly sanitizing the enfreaked and non-conforming valences of Greenfield’s song.70 Brooks notes that Greenfield’s performances “threatened to “masculinize” her already under-siege black female body,” but doesn’t entertain the possibility that Greenfield’s vocal performances challenged the sexual, ablebodied, or even the highbrow norms of classical music. In Brooks’ cultural genealogy, Greenfield inaugurates a legacy of black female artists who “all were clearly intent on rescripting their status as “non-being” through a rigorous engagement with classical forms.”71

While it is undoubtedly true that Greenfield’s “cultural play within classical music forms” enabled her trailblazing career and opened the door for black female musicianship, Brooks’ gloss on Greenfield overlooks rich archival traces that complicate historically “straight” interpretations of work and legacy. Brooks’ treatment however, follows a well worn path of recuperative writing about Greenfield. For example, LaBrew, Southern, Story, Chybowski and Eidsheim similarly want to uphold Greenfield as a “serious” musician and high artist. I want to affirm these scholars’ excellent work and trenchant points. And I want also to honor Greenfield’s incredible artistry, and potentially extend our appreciation of her cultural work and agency by daring to consider archival threads that might threaten to unseat her accomplishments within the sphere of the cultural highbrow. I understand the danger of treading in these traces, just as I understand the danger in reifying Greenfield’s legacy by ignoring them.

In her own study of Millie and Christine McKoy, black female conjoined twins who performed as a human exhibition and drawing room novelty before and after emancipation, Ellen Samuels warns of the perils in reading black, disabled, female self-exhibition as agency. These free, black women, Samuels warns, can not be interpreted outside the highly oppressive frameworks of enfreakment and the (after)life of slavery, which fashioned the McKoy sisters’ former master as their manager before and after emancipation. We may look for signs of black women’s agency, Samuels suggests, but we must search for it in “otherwise” places, in the “black holes” that warp and distort “an archive sedimented by complex and intersecting power relations.”72 Working from Evelynn Hammonds, Samuels prescribes a research methodology that use[s]..sensitive detectors of energy and distortion. In the case of black female sexualities, this implies that we need to develop reading strategies that allow us to make visible the distorting and productive effects these sexualities produce in relation to more visible sexualities.73

I read Hammonds and Samuels’ adoption of the “black hole” as an important, and racially aware rejoinder to McRuer’s crip theory, and as sex-conscious compliment to Brooks’ method of seeking the radical potential of fugitivity in the dark and opaque tropes of escapist aesthetics. This is to say that a fugitive and crip performance aesthetic may not be directly observable, but deforms the

70 Ibid., 312.
71 Ibid., 313.
73 Ibid., 310, quoted in Samuels, “Examining Millie,” 54.
archive around it. Thus, the “productive distortion” I sense in Greenfield’s archive is signaled by Dilworth’s enfreaked performance of black particularity. Dilworth’s kinky, dark, and twisted burlesque sends shock waves through how I perceive Greenfield’s reviews, professional history, and performance practice, and invites me to consider the crip and fugitive facets of Greenfield’s own vocal stylings. Therefore, in what follows, I delve into the dark, kinky, and twisted aesthetics of Greenfield’s performance history. Departing from Brooks, however, I consider Greenfield’s transgressive potential in the way she warps the ear, and not the eye, as she performs a radically resistant black, and crip vision of African American liberation.

I turn now to the points of distortion in Greenfield’s archive, focusing in particular on the reviews that question or enfreak her gender, sexuality, or human-ness, and implicitly align her with the abnormal or exotic specimens of the dime museum and/or the excess of the minstrel show. The carefully drawn boundaries between popular genres blend and bend in these reviews, just as they twist and turn from racist insult to gender aspersions. I also re-emphasize some of the buried facts of Greenfield’s performance history—her choice of management, audience, and performance style—before segueing into a close reading of her vocal duet, “I Am Free.

One of the most commonly remarked upon features of Greenfield’s voice was her tremendous vocal range, frequently described as a full three octaves. Remarkably, she could sing as nimbly in the high soprano tessitura as she could in the baritone register. And, as little (if any) solo vocal music is scored to exhibit such an extensive range, Greenfield purposely showcased her unique instrument by singing alternating verses of selected repertoire in the baritone and soprano registers. The shocking effect upon the audience was that both a man and a woman’s voice seemed to emanate from one body. A reviewer from Frederick Douglass’ paper describes their reaction as follows:

We could, for a time, scarcely believe that those deep bass sounds proceeded from the lips of a woman, so completely did she imitate the masculine roar. This singular performance must have shocked…those nervous and exceedingly timid old gentlemen, who, about these times of woman’s conventions, are quite alarmed lest woman should usurp dominion over man. The sensation would have been momentary, for the remarkable songstress quickly assumed that sweet, clear, silvery, shrill tone which none of our rough bearded tribe can successfully counterfeit.

What’s remarkable about this review is not simply that it describes Greenfield as singing relatively low notes. Rather, the reviewer notes that Greenfield reproduced the “masculine roar,” indicating that she sang such notes with a technique and timbre naturalized to male vocal production. This difference is key. For example, many men have the ability to sing in what is coded as a “female” vocal register, but they do so in falsetto (imagine Justin Timberlake, Michael Jackson, or any male pop icon). This gives their voices a timbral quality also coded as “male” vocal production as opposed to “female” vocal production. Suzanne Cusick in her article “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,” works from Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity to argue that “male” and “female” registers and timbres are socially constructed and naturalized to seemingly index cis-male and female bodies. Framing vocalization in conversation with performativity, then, we can understand Greenfield did more than merely sing in the male register; she simulated and produced a “male” sound and therefore materialized a “male” body in front of audiences. A Boston paper proclaimed, “no male voice could have given utterance to sounds more clearly and strikingly masculine, and people gazed in wonder, as though dubious of the sex of the performer.”

74 Frederick Douglass’ Paper, December 18, 1851.
76 The Carpetbag, February 14, 1852, quoted in Chybowski, “Becoming the “Black Swan,” 146.
Greenfield's performance style was a historic precursor to Cusick's article, and her performances, vacillating back and forth between male and female voice parts, entirely muddled and therefore deconstructed normative notions of what male and female bodies could do and sound like.

Simultaneously, by singing in the baritone register, Greenfield transgressed normative sociocultural spheres for men and women—spheres here linked to notes on a scale and to gendered timbral patterns. As a New York Tribune reviewer made clear the correlation between feminine sound and feminine space: “We hear a great deal about woman’s sphere. That sphere exists in music and it is the soprano region of the voice.” Therefore, in venturing into the public sphere usually reserved for men, and doing so through song that further claimed male vocal territory for herself, Greenfield titillated audiences with a display of abnormal behavior and ability. Indeed, her bombast in “usurp[ing] dominion over man” refigured her, along with suffragettes, as no longer properly female, but as “a female monster.” And finally, in conjuring both male and female bodies, Greenfield forced audiences to debate her gender and sexual identity. For example, even though the Douglass Paper’s reviewer felt confident that Greenfield was a woman conjuring a man, other reviewers were not so certain. The Utica Daily Observer noted that Greenfield’s voice “excite[d] belief that the male biped was usurping her prerogative,” and the same reviewer from Tribune opined: “the idea of a woman’s voice is a feminine tone; anything below that is disgusting. It is as bad as a bride with a beard on her chin and an oath in her mouth.” Together these two reviews excite speculation that Greenfield’s gender is other than what it seems. The first review speculates that Greenfield is perhaps a male vocalist in drag, as her famed minstrel impersonator, Japanese Tommy, was. Although the reviewer from the Frederick Douglass Papers espouses belief that “none of our rough bearded tribe can successfully counterfeit” a woman’s soprano vocality, in fact, many did and do: they are called countertenors, and sing in a traditionally “female” tessitura, as did Thomas Dilworth. The second review raise the possibility that Greenfield was a bearded lady or an intersex individual—someone whose unnatural voice could only be mapped to an equally unnaturally sexed and gendered body.

The freakish and tantalizing concept that one body could contain both male and female sex and gender characteristics would lead Barnum, in 1860, to stage the popular exhibition of Dora Dawron, the “Double Voiced singer”:

The wonderful and extraordinary DOUBLE-VOICED SINGER, who produces with equal ease and perfection a Deep and Powerful Tenor and a Sweet and Delicate Soprano, dressed in a singular and unique costume, one half as a Lady, the other half as a Gentleman, a real musical Ella Zoyara, will appear at each performance in a popular Duet, PERSONATING BOTH MALE AND FEMALE, in dress, voice, gesture, &c., &c. She has been received with great favor, and is is regarded as the most MUSICAL PHENOMENON OF THE AGE.

77 New York Tribune, April 2, 1853.
78 Cmiel, Democratic Eloquence, 70.
Barnum was certainly aware of Greenfield’s talent and remarkable ability to sing across gendered registration when he launched his “double-voiced singer” exhibit. Having managed the 1850 American tour of soprano Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale whose tour overlapped with Greenfield’s by seven months, he was quick to make a play to manage Greenfield. With a high tessitura frequently compared favorably to Lind’s, and a range surpassing her European counterpart, Greenfield, whose “Black Swan” moniker was calculated to evoke comparison to Lind, represented an American rebuttal to the Nightingale’s tour de force. Greenfield’s unmistakable novelty was not lost on Barnum, and he was eager to form a contract with a performer who could lucratively walk the line between highbrow and lowbrow entertainment; in 1852, with Greenfield newly signed with dime museum operator Colonel Wood, papers reported widely that Barnum offered Wood $1,500 for Greenfield’s first New York recital. Greenfield did not oblige, and Barnum later extrapolated the most evocative aspects of her performance practice in staging his own “Double Voiced Singer.” For example, though Greenfield evoked both male and female embodiment, she certainly did not dress or present as male. However, she appears to have originated the practice of singing “Duetts” with herself, portraying alternatively male and female characters singing to and with one another, as happened in “‘I Am Free,’ Sung in the Soprano and Baritone Voices, composed for Miss Greenfield by Stephen Glover of London.”

As the program from a concert at Philadelphia’s Keystone Hall on September 22, 1856 indicates, though Greenfield’s “Duet” routine originated in London, she took it on tour in the United States, where Barnum surely couldn’t have missed such a provocative act. The reference to “Ella Zoyara” in Barnum’s above advertisement cites a popular circus rider who presented as female throughout her entire career. Zoyara was a renowned beauty and rumored to take male lovers, but later in life she was “revealed” to be a man: one Omar Kingsley. The reference to trans performer Zoyara in the Dawron review functions to attract and thrill audiences with a spectacle of illicit gender and sexuality, and promises that viewers of the “double-voiced singer” will have the stimulating opportunity to puzzle out the “secret” of Dawron’s sex during her concert. Such an arousing proposition is proffered in the sentence describing how Dawron “personat[es] both male and female, in dress, voice, gesture, &c., &c.” Here, the “&c.” invites audience members to imagine what, if any other secret parts of Dawron’s embodiment are real or illusion: what could be under her dichotomous costume, and what desires housed in her bi-gendered breast? Such questions, though

80 Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan,’” 145.
81 Importantly, Greenfield’s sobriquet not only likened her to Lind, but also emphasized Greenfield’s abnormal femininity. If Lind “...had become mainstream America’s vision of idealized feminine musicality,” Greenfield represented this femininity gone awry. After all, swans were to be white, not black. Ibid., 144.
82 Cleveland Daily Herald, February 5, 1852.
amplified and explicitly sensationalized by Barnum’s theatrical machinery, originated in Greenfield’s own gender-bending duets.

The Darwon performance, like the Japanese Tommy burlesque, are just two of the “black holes” of the archive surrounding Greenfield’s performances. Thus, though programs, images, and ephemera from Greenfield’s concerts emphasized the formality of her public events, and though Greenfield herself cultivated and projected an air of feminine respectability, the distorting “black holes” of Darwon and Dilworth’s more visible plays with sex, gender, race, disability, and sexuality signal other ways of reading Greenfield’s own performances. Together, the counterfeit Black Swan and the Double-Voiced Singer make audible how Greenfield used her voice to toy with the genre markers of blackface minstrelsy, sideshow, and classical music while reworking the racialized signifiers of monstrosity, enfreakment, and sexual license that were attached to her body because she was a black woman singing in public.\[83\]

Ellen Samuels clearly lays out the costs of being a black woman in public in her essay “Examining Millie and Christine McKoy.” Though Samuels critiques scholarship on racialized enfreakment, and specifically, scholarship on Sarah Bartmann, the “Hottentot Venus,” for its failure to connect with disability studies’ contribution to freak studies, she emphasizes that studies of Bartmann highlight the “pathologization of black female sexuality.”\[84\] Further, Carla Peterson, in *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*, argues that because slavery rendered black women’s bodies available for public sexual display, pleasure, and labor, black women in the North were rendered as “unruly, grotesque, carnivalesque” and abject sexual objects just by appearing in public. Peterson also channels Elaine Scarry to emphatically link the black female body to debility and “the body in pain.”\[85\] Finally, as Chybowski argues, Greenfield was legible as a “mulatto” not only because of rumors of her mixed parentage, but due to her ability to sing across white and black cultural forms.\[86\] Thus, just as Stowe had banked on, Greenfield’s body raised the titillating specter of miscegenation or cross-racial sexual encounter. Greenfield was seen as both inherently sexual, inherently aberrant, and inherently impaired simply because she was a black woman with a public life. She was therefore always performing against larger socio-political frames that interpellated her body as the sign of racial, gendered, sexual, and abnormal excess. Such over-arching interpretive frameworks were reflected in reviews like that given by the *New York Times*, when the paper denigrated Greenfield’s performance by implying her audience appeal stemmed not from talent but from her freak-show oddity: “The attraction, we imagine, was the novelty of the exhibition rather than the talent which might be exhibited in the singing.”\[87\]

Finally, one of the key elements of performing respectability and uplift demanded that Greenfield under-emphasize her blackness and her femininity. As Story, Chybowski, and Eidsheim highlight, she was therefore frequently advised by white, female patrons to dress and comport herself in an austere manner—in alignment with the white, feminine decorum of the day—so as not to draw attention to the natural “excess” of her stigmatized embodiment.

I have a few suggestions to make regarding your dress. You were dressed with great modesty and with much simplicity; still there are some things it would be well for you to lay

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83 Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan,’” 150. Chybowski highlights how Greenfield’s performances evoked both the minstrel and the dime museum inversion.
86 Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan,’” 152.
87 *New York Times*, April 1, 1853.
aside...I rejoice in the dignity of your deportment and in the good hours you keep. I have said this much in relation to your dress, because I know how important it is that, in the midst of all the prejudice against those of your colour, that your appearance should be strikingly genteel.

Stowe proscribed similar advice, exhorting that “in your manners be just as simple as you always have been—Don’t put on anything—don’t try to pass for anything but what you really are, and you will keep the friends that you have made.” In the author’s esteem, Greenfield needed to continue to performatively contain her blackness in order to maintain white abolitionist goodwill, and her precarious position amongst such charitably circles.

Yet Greenfield did not always heed such careful advice. Aware that she was always heard through the filter of an acousmatic blackness, and indeed, that part of her alternatively sympathetic and electrifying audience appeal hinged upon her performativity of vocal blackness in addition to her performativity of vocal whiteness, Greenfield literally gave audiences what they wanted to hear: a singing slave. Thus, on multiple occasions Greenfield literally “black’d up” her voice, taking on the narrative perspective of the slave. On at least two occasions during her UK tour, Greenfield performed Stephen Foster’s “Old Folks at Home.” “Old Folks” was a sentimental ballad, written for and made famous by Christy’s Minstrels. Published and widely circulated, the song’s sheet music made the number a hit amongst white, bourgeois women singing at parlor pianos across America.

By the time Greenfield’s star was rising, the song had been interpolated into stage adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and in fact was a number sung by Uncle Tom himself. Importantly, the song is from an elderly slave’s point of view—he sings nostalgically about “de old plantation” and longs for the black kin and white family at the “home” he ostensibly has left behind. Infused with romantic racialization and paternalist ideology, the ballad traded in the black “Uncle Tom” stereotype and actively served white supremacist fantasies about blacks as highly sentimental, feeling, and innately Christian creatures. Although the song voiced an “Uncle Tom” perspective, it wouldn’t have been out of the ordinary for Greenfield to sing it in the soprano register. Such a performance was key to white female notions of the “tender sex” and would have cited Greenfield’s performativity of respectable womanhood. However, on both occasions Greenfield repeated the song twice: singing first as a soprano, followed by a tenor and/or baritone version of the piece. In this second version, Greenfield emphasized her blackness by violating gender norms, and singing the song as white male performers would have. Crucially, white men performing “Old Folks” did so in blackface. Thus, by using her voice to evoke the male body of the Uncle Tom minstrel caricature, Greenfield made her race highly visible and scandalous. It is even possible that Stowe conceived of writing an “Old Folks” solo for Mary Webb’s into the text of The Christian Slave based on Greenfield’s implied performance of the role in her earlier UK tour.

Greenfield adopted the Uncle Tom persona a third time at the Surrey Chapel event honoring Harriet Beecher Stowe. At this event Greenfield sang “Weep Not for Eva.” From the July 1, 1853 report of the Anti-Slavery Reporter, it seems that “Weep Not for Eva” was a song fashioned by Greenfield herself. The song borrowed the melody of Sir John Stevenson’s “Weep Not for Those,” itself a setting of Sir Thomas Moore’s verse. Greenfield fitted the lyrics “weep not for eva” to this tune—an idea inspired by Stowe’s use of Stevenson’s verse as the epigraph for chapter 26 of Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Eva’s death scene. In this chapter, Stowe depicts Tom as the singing slave, and as the pillar of Christian strength supporting St. Claire through his daughter’s death. Thus, in “Weep Not

88 Qtd. in Story, And So I Sing, 25.
89 Harriet Beecher Stowe to Greenfield, quoted in The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, 47. Emphasis added.
for Eva,” Greenfield again channeled the “Tom” character in a musical vehicle of her own fashioning.

Finally, Julia Chybowski has found evidence that during her British tour Greenfield also debuted the role of a slave—a female one this time—in *The Slave’s Escape*, a piece of vocal music dramatizing a fugitive’s flight and capture by her master’s dogs. While no sheet music is extant for “Weep Not for Eva,” “The Slave’s Escape,” or even Stephen Glover’s “I Am Free,” Foster’s “Old Folks” provides a central clue as to how the slave characters might have been sounded in such sentimental numbers: it is written in black vernacular English, or dialect. While dialect can signal a shift in pronunciation or articulation, it also signals a shift in timbre, which is why dialects in general are sonically distinguishable from one another. Thus, even sentimental vocal music for home or parlor performance included an element of racial masquerade; such blacking up, however, occurred sonically as opposed to visually. In singing these slave roles, therefore, we might imagine Greenfield literally “blackening up” her voice by adopting racially essentialized timbres and inflections, performatively evoking the “black” vocality and singing slave. What’s more, far from imagining such a practice as against Greenfield’s will, we might read such an engagement with sonic blackface as the singer’s way of signifying on the acousmatic blackness her white audiences fantasized, and in fact, desired to hear.

Greenfield’s moves with this repertoire that she brought back to and toured with in the States are certainly outside the strictly circumscribed limits of female respectability. In fact, they play with the very precarious balancing act Greenfield established between a visual aesthetic of refined, black abolitionist uplift, and a vocal aesthetic that toyed with the melodrama of suffering black masculinity and the tragic mulatta. And while this sung aesthetic enabled Greenfield’s resistance to sound out from the cover of a body dissembling discipline and obedience to white power, it also placed her in a precarious position by always threatening to tip her self-representation towards the excessive, scandalous, abnormal, and obscene.

Obscene is a fitting term for Greenfield’s performance aesthetic. From the Greek *ob skene,* it literally refers to dramatic action taking place “off scene”: that which plays out backstage, in the dark, unseen. If Greenfield’s performance of black uplift and respectability was the carefully calculated, classical “act” that took center stage in the eyes of critics and most historians, I contend that her play across gender, genre, sexuality, and normalcy/abnormalcy was her obscene/unseen act—literally “off scene” in that this drama played out through the invisible, sonic space of her voice. This is the dark and fugitive element of the “Black Swan” act—the part that hides in plain sight, but was perceived by her reviewer for the *Frederick Douglass Papers* back in 1851:

> She has small black eyes, which the general complexion so completely shades, as to permit them to elude a first glance: once seen, however, they become matter of study, as they disclose, somewhat, the secret of her extraordinary proficiency in the musical art. They are the very index of quickness, aptitude, discrimination, and a sort of flinty shrewdness. We could trust her with a hundred Barnums.

The reviewer here notes that Greenfield’s eyes are covertly hid away or “shaded” by her blackness—a blackness, her “Black Swan” sobriquet suggests, that she embraces as an aesthetic figure. Cloaking herself in blackness performed, Greenfield thwarts and “eludes” the viewer’s gaze, and in doing so speaks to her fugitive agency: she can be trusted with “one hundred Barnums” the reviewer suggests, because she can out-show, out-perform, out-maneuver, and out-humbug the King of Humbug himself. The secret of Greenfield’s mastery is her facility at the art of escape, which, as Brooks reminds us, is a facility for self-making and self-reinvention; as an escape artist, Greenfield

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92 Chybowski, “The ‘Black Swan’ in England,” 14
93 *Frederick Douglass’ Papers*, December 18, 1851.
was adept at hiding in plain sight, in presenting herself as something other than what she was, seemed, or was playing at. They key to parsing Greenfield’s “secret” and the aesthetics of her performance, therefore, is to read her voice as cripped and her song as fugitive: to read the black swan as both escaping the white power represented by Barnum and Stowe, and simultaneously making visible how this power attempts to capture disabled, gendered, and black bodies.

Thus while Greenfield was not visibly impaired, she was interpreted and received publicly in much the same way as women of color who did explicitly perform in freak show settings. Chybowski goes as far as to claim that Greenfield’s manager, Colonel Wood “played to the very market that he and P.T. Barnum created for exhibitions of seemingly contradictory racial, gender, and class markers” when promoting Greenfield.94 Interestingly, I argue that her legibility as a freak specimen was enhanced because she sang. Singing was actually a skill exhibited by several women of color freak performers. For example, Juliana Pastrana’s freak “act” included song, and Millie and Christine McKoy were singers frequently described (in an unmistakable reference to Jenny Lind) as the “two headed nightingale.”95 Pastrana was a hirsute indigenous Mexican woman who, performing between 1854 and her death in 1860, was touted as the link between man and ape.96 Like Millie and Christine’s own performances, Pastrana’s singing was meant to evoke the “ordinary,” American feminine norm: the domesticated woman accomplished in the gentle arts.97 In these freak exhibitions, singing signaled the norm of white female womanhood and was therefore designed to amplify the racialized, female monstriosity of individuals like Pastrana, and Mille and Christine. Thus, while Greenfield’s repertoire of popular music sung on stage and in the home enabled her to enter the public sphere under the pretense of female respectability and modesty, it also necessarily framed and highlighted the spectacle of her body’s pathologized difference.98

The comparison of Greenfield to Pastrana is also notable in that it highlights how the spectacle of public, black femininity provoked a host of inhuman comparisons. While Pastrana was described as a living intermediary between man and animal, Greenfield was labeled a “biped hippopotamus,”99 or, in the specter of Joice Heth’s exhibition that I explored in chapter one, was described as more machine than man:

this miss Greenfield is so black that charcoal will make a white mark on her. The music of a swan, as we understand it, is a cross between the quacking of a duck and the hissing of a goose, but this black swan can pour out musical sounds like an ebony musical box—and with just as much genius or soul. Her form is of the squat order, and her mien of the waddle style…100

In this final review, inversions between human and machine and human and animal are evoked by the economy of blackness and the illicit spectacle that Greenfield’s race and gender set into play.

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94 Chybowski, "Becoming the 'Black Swan,'” 149.
95 Library Company of Philadelphia Biographical Sketch of Millie-Christine. The inter-textual resonance of this sobriquet is rich and multi-valent. The twins were displayed publicly from the age of two years old (1853), and were also briefly in London with their kidnapper. This places the trajectory of their public career in roughly the same time frame as that of Greenfield, and comparisons between all three singers and Lind must have also evoked a necessary third correspondence and echo between Greenfield and Millie and Christine’s performances.
96 Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies, 52.
97 Ibid., 55.
98 Chybowski “Becoming the 'Black Swan,'” 125.
99 NY Herald, April 1, 1853.
100 Cleveland Evening Herald May 1, 1855.
**I Am Free: Crip Voice & Fugitive Song**

In her article “Becoming the ‘Black Swan’ in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” Julia J. Chybowski sketches Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s reception during her American tour of 1851-1853. Detailing Greenfield’s early life and professional debut, and sketching broadly the interpretive frameworks of minstrelsy and dime museum novelty evident in Greenfield’s reviews, Chybowski concludes that “the “Black Swan” act was a product not only of Greenfield’s own making, but also of patronage, management, and audience expectations.” Here, and in the preceding chapter my work dialogues with Chybowski’s, giving a richer portrait of Greenfield’s relationship with abolitionist patron, Stowe, and unpacking the stakes of her public performance as a black woman. However, I must diverge from Chybowski’s claim that “much about [Greenfield’s] marketed image and reception was out of [her] control.”

Even during the early days of her professional career, Greenfield could not have been ignorant of the myriad socio-political ideologies that would have “colored” and “distorted” her performance goals and performative intentions. To restate, I believe it is naive to assume that Greenfield set out to perform “respectability, morality, taste, and high social class, here conflated with a serious (rather than comic) and emotive singing style.” If financial security and a cultural home amongst the anti-slavery elite was what Greenfield truly sought, she could have secured long-term charitable relationships with white patrons by giving semi-public and respectable, drawing room style concerts on the abolitionist lecture circuit in the style of Mary Webb.

Greenfield however was invested in a different vision for her future. She never married or had children, and she sought financial independence through her public performance. Her affiliation with black political radicals like Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Francis Watkins Harper upon her return to the states in 1854 indicates that she worked tirelessly to orchestrate a life largely outside the “freedom” offered by the paternalist structures of white abolitionism. Respectability could only have gotten her so far towards such goals. Thus, I contend that Greenfield performed respectability only to play to the sympathies of the white anti-slavery audience, whom she relied upon to broker her entree into the world of public performance. In a break from scholars who understand attributions of racial, sexual, gender, and class inversion to Greenfield’s performances to be bigoted aspersions by the popular press, I read these assaults as identifying Greenfield’s performative intention. To clarify, I argue that Greenfield purposely manipulated cultural signs of genre and identity, playing with essentialized, sonic markers of gender, race, and ability in order to gain representational control over her body. Doing so within a clear, visual performance of respectability (an aesthetic nearly all scholars agree upon) would have allowed Greenfield to secret away or conceal the radical elements of her genre and boundary defying vocal performance. This is evident in her performance of the song “I Am Free,” where Greenfield used her voice to radically refigure the material circumstances of her lived existence, while surreptitiously crippling and signifying on white pro- and anti-slavery efforts to delimit black life.

Evidence of this contention above and beyond her intentional performance of male vocality abounds. For example, Greenfield hired Colonel Wood to manage her career, understanding full well how such a business alliance would restrict her own power and shift her public reception. In fact, Greenfield first fired two African American male managers she had retained in order to sign with

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101 Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan,’” 156.
102 Ibid., 156.
103 Ibid., 140.
Wood. Later, Greenfield undertook a command performance before Queen Victoria. Many have commented on this performance to cite evidence of Greenfield’s respectability, but such claims overlook the fact that performing for the monarch was a privilege reserved for the most sensational curiosities: Tom Thumb went before the queen during his UK tour with Barnum in 1844, and Thomas Dilworth similarly performed for Victoria during his British sojourn, sometime between 1866 and 1871. Importantly, though Stowe took responsibility for arranging the majority of Greenfield’s performances and social networks in England, facilitating for example Greenfield’s connection to the prominent anti-slavery advocate, the Duchess of Sutherland, Stowe did not orchestrate (and tellingly, never writes about) Greenfield’s performance before the Queen. We might therefore surmise that Sutherland brokered the introduction. However, she pointedly did not do so for Mary Webb during her tour of the UK just a few years later. Greenfield’s royal performance is therefore a telling anomaly: one that plays to white desire for carnivalesque inversion under the pretense of cultivated entertainment. Such a calculated move is in keeping with Greenfield’s personal performance aesthetic.

“I Am Free” was written by Stephen Glover, a British composer who gained significant “drawing room popularity” between 1840 and 1860 by writing popular ballads and duets. Because the press contains no mention of his composition for Greenfield during her series of public and semi-public concerts in London in June and July of 1853, it appears that Glover composed “I am Free” for her between these engagements, and her 12 concert series that kicked off in Dublin on August 9th.

Greenfield debuted Glover’s composition on her opening night in Dublin, and the below excerpted review of this performance from the *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* provides new and pivotal insight into the piece, and her performance of it. The review is typical in that it espouses a racially biased judgments about Greenfield’s natural vocal talent despite her lack of vocal culture or professionalism. The reviewer bogusly remarks that Greenfield’s voice betrays “traces of incontrolability.” The review also tows the cultural line in remarking positively about Greenfield’s vocal range, and in noting how her performance plays simultaneously to the aesthetics of high-class respectability and lowbrow curiosity. However, what is remarkable about this review is the detail it provides about the narrative content of Glover’s composition, how Greenfield interpreted the piece, and how the audience responded to her interpretation:

The first entrance of Miss Greenfield was hailed with a burst of cordial and welcoming applause. Her appearance, partaking as it does of the peculiar characteristics of her race, was yet pleasing, and her deportment was remarkable for a retenu and quietude of manner which seemed to challenge respect…There is a peculiar depth and richness in her tone, dashed occasionally with traces of incontrolability, yet evidencing (in the mezzo notes particularly) a degree of sweetness we have seldom heard excelled. But the most extraordinary peculiarity of all in the voice of Miss Greenfield is comprised in the depth, power, and fullness of her lower notes which are of veritable contra-basso quality. In the duet, “I am Free,” written expressly for her, she sustained alternately the parts of master and female slave—in one stanza sounding the lowest tones of bass music, and in the next modulating the high notes

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107 *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Dublin, Ireland, August 10, 1853.
of a sweet soprano… The audience seemed truly suspended between surprise and pleasure at hearing each of her songs, in all of which she was rapturously encored.\textsuperscript{108} While scholar Alex Black has noted Greenfield's performance of Glover's duet, and observes that she sang the piece across male and female registers,\textsuperscript{109} this review clarifies the vocal roles that Greenfield bodied forth and placed into dialogue during her rendition of the song. In “I am Free,” Greenfield sang in the bass clef to personate a white, male slave owner, shifting in the song's following verse to sing from the perspective of an African American female slave.

Through meticulous reconstruction of Greenfield's performance archive, and specifically her performances of “Old Folks at Home” and “Weep Not for Eva,” we can speculate that, in addition to shifting registers, Greenfield embodied the characters of master and slave by playing with essentialized understandings of racialized timbre. This could have been done explicitly, as through the use of dialect. While Greenfield's performance repertoire prior to “I am Free” (e.g. “Old Folks”) certainly included personating male and female slaves, singing across gendered registers, and also performatively enacting whiteness, “I am Free” was unique and extraordinary in that it offered Greenfield her first and only opportunity to embody an explicitly white masculinity. Further, the song placed this master in dialogic exchanged with his black female slave, resulting, we may gather from the song's title, in the slave's ultimate freedom.

The nature of the bondswoman's freedom however, is unclear in the review quoted above. Glover may have written an anti-slavery standard with a theme of manumission or, following Stowe's model in \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin}, the female slave might have, à la Uncle Tom, obtained everlasting freedom in a Christian death at the hands of a Simon Legree-like master. Whatever the case, either version of white-conjured “freedom” was irrelevant and immaterial to Greenfield. In addition to its unique master-slave dynamic, Greenfield's performance of “I am Free” is interesting in that it appears to operate somewhat outside the spheres of white abolitionist influence that characterized her professional appearances in London. This is to say that while Greenfield undoubtedly met and/or was introduced to Glover during her sojourn among London's anti-slavery elite, none of these influential figures lay discursive claim or authority over Glover's composition or Greenfield's performance of it. “I am Free” appears to have been “free” to travel with Greenfield, who took the piece throughout the UK and later performed it stateside. In that “I am Free” escaped the circuits of white control, thwarting both Wood's aims to de-politicize Greenfield's singing before and after her UK tour, and white abolitionist efforts to deploy Greenfield's talent in alignment with white-anti slavery messaging, becoming an ideal case study to analyze how Greenfield called up a specifically black space of liberation.\textsuperscript{110}

Greenfield's performance of “I am Free” evoked two salient emotions her audience reportedly experienced: surprise and pleasure. While reports of audience surprise might seem like redundant and empty rhetoric habitually used to describe Greenfield's Black Swan act, I want to emphasize the remarkableness of this description. By the time Greenfield performed in Dublin, the language of exotic, dime museum novelty was well worn in news clippings covering her concerts. For example, a review from the \textit{London Standard} published just 15 days before Greenfield's Dublin debut advised potential audience members that “[a]t present the exhibition is agreeable only from a curious point of view.”\textsuperscript{111} Audience members thus attended Greenfield's concerts expecting to take in a spectacle of difference. What's more, highbrow rules of decorum dictated that they would view such an exhibition of the curious from a cool remove, from the imperturbable vantage point of one

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Black, “Abolitionism’s Resonant Bodies,” 628.
\textsuperscript{110} See Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan,’” 150.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{London Standard}, July 25, 1853.
gazing from the panopticon’s seat of power. The fact that audience members were surprised by Greenfield’s performance indicates the degree to which she disrupted and agitated the relations of power audience members presumed to have with her.

In “I Am Free” Greenfield takes control of the histories and discourses of gendered and sexual violence imbricated in slavery and US settler-colonialism that targeted both her body and performance practice. The rhetoric of racial mixing followed Greenfield throughout the entirety of her career, and rumor about her racial origins swirled in abolitionist newsprint where her mother was described as Seminole, in Stowe’s identifications of Greenfield as a “dark mulatress,” and in her own biographical sketch that characterized her father as “a full African; white and Indian blood flowed in her mother’s veins” (3). By singing across race and gender, Greenfield personates both a white male slave owner and a female slave, who though clearly non-white, is as racially ambiguous as Greenfield herself. Moreover, in addition to raising the simultaneously titillating and grotesque image of inter-racial sexual promiscuity, Greenfield’s hazy biographical details added to the air of sexual mystery surrounding her; her practice of singing both male and female vocal parts already tempted audience members to speculate on the degraded mystery of black female gender and sexuality. By explicitly mingling these two characters of slave and slave master within the unified space of her body, Greenfield provocatively and tantalizingly used her voice to play out white fears and fantasies of miscegenation.

At the same time, Greenfield flipped the script on this amalgamation scene, as this racial mixing is one that she conceives of and controls. Contrary to the historical power dynamics of slavery and settler-colonialism, in “I Am Free,” Greenfield is not the object of, but orchestrator of the sexualized contact between white masculinity and a femininity of color; she herself determines and deploys how a white, male body can operate within and amongst her own female body of color. If anything, “I Am Free” plays out the gendered and sexual mastery of the woman of color over the white male, since, by virtue of her race and gender, Greenfield herself was indisputably aligned with the slave character. By being in control of the sexualized space of contact, Greenfield turns “I Am Free” into a display of sexual agency for women of color. However, unlike the public and pathologized myth of black female gender and sexuality that fueled slavery and the white supremacist ideology behind Stowe’s acoustics that I discussed in the previous chapter, Greenfield’s obscene display of sexual mastery plays out in the invisible space of her voice. Greenfield’s racial mixing is both discursive, happening in the figurative space of the sonic, and material, unfolding in the embodied (but secreted away) space of Greenfield’s vocal folds. Thus, though embodied, Greenfield’s racial, sexual, and gender inversion is enacted “ob skene”: in the invisible and private space of a sonic phenomenon taking place literally “behind the scene” within the dark recesses of her larynx and body. Voice is thus a space of fugitivity for Greenfield in “I Am Free.” A dark space of obscurity, Greenfield’s vocal act flees and resists (both discursively and materially) the objectification of black and Native gender and sexual identity under slavery and settler colonialism. Unlike the vulnerability of female genitalia on the auction block or under removal, the voice can wield and display its power without subjection to the degradation of surveillance and penetration.

By inverting the power dynamics of race, gender, and the structuration of sex under slavery and settler colonialism, Greenfield’s performance of “I Am Free” ultimately distorts white, antebellum masculinity while revealing both whiteness and masculinity to be artificial and non-

112 Stowe, *Sunny Memories*, vol. 1, 320.
113 *Taunton (Massachusetts) Daily Gazette*, February 12, 1852.
114 Note that Greenfield’s performance of “I Am Free” took place one year before Manuel Garcia, the franco-spanish baritone, invented the laryngoscope—making possible the sighting of the singing voice in situ.
biological social positions constructed vis-à-vis the non-biological position of a compulsorily, debilitated black femininity and sexuality. It should be added that Greenfield’s performance also thwarts the logic of miscegenation, since the sexual contact brought about through voice happens automatically; this is to say that Greenfield crip[s] the logic of miscegenation in that she reproduces a male-female union without a sexual partner: in “I am Free,” Greenfield uses her androgynous voice and the androgy nous body it materializes to enact her own coupling. Here, Greenfield harnesses the hermaphroditic framing of her voice and body by white audiences to explicitly denature the gender and sexual violence and enfreakment of women of color that underpins the forced conception of miscegenation. In that the antebellum, black female body and black female sexuality were always read both as enfreaked, as against the white, feminine norm, and as pathologized, the objectified black female body was rendered particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Greenfield performs this objectification in “I am Free” by manipulating essentialized sounds of race and gender to inaugurate her body and voice as a spectacle of racial, gender, and sexual deviance. Singing across race and gender, and doing so through an illicit sexual politics, Greenfield makes visible and strange the enfreaked object-position of black womanhood, and the economy of capital and meaning enacted by whites forcibly trading in this currency; i.e. Greenfield denaturalizes the racial, gender, and sexual politics underpinning the white institution of slavery, and the white abolition movement. This making strange and twisted reveals Greenfield’s performance of “I am Free” as crip[ping] slavery, abolition, and the politics of listening and spectatorship that implicated her predominantly white audiences in the oppression of women of color.

In so doing, Greenfield’s song also crip[s] white, performative notions of “freedom.” In so far as the performative felicity of the “freedoms” penned by Stowe and Jefferson relied upon racialized and ableist soundscapes that were nonetheless controlled through white systems of authorship, the crip soundscape of “I am Free” signifies on white modalities of freedom, forging a radical, black space of liberation in the obscene/ob skene space of the sonic voice. Stowe and Jefferson’s texts each deployed voice figuratively, and relied on live, embodied, vocal performances to enact the performative politics they authored. Greenfield similarly played with the split between embodied voice and what it can signify in her performance of “I am Free.” As she played with essentialized markers of race and gender, Greenfield denaturalized her audience’s biological-type expectations of what a woman of color’s voice should sound like, producing a perceptible split between her body and the voice(s) it produced. This split between material embodiment and the sign of voice is the same that masterful rhetors Jefferson and Stowe used. Though not playing within the medium of text, Greenfield likewise toyed with optics and acoustics, the material and immaterial, thereby seizing voice as a space for authoring her vision of black freedom, and new interpretive schemas for how black, female bodies should signify.

Importantly, the same play on the performative tensions between textuality/the sign of the voice and embodiment that underpin the crip aesthetics of Greenfield’s performance also enact the fugitive potential of “I am Free.” In “Puzzling the Interval,” Daphne Brooks argues that the sonic fugitivity of Blind Tom’s piano compositions enable them to resist the oppressive power dynamics of the written slave narrative. The fugitive aesthetics of “I am Free” empowered Greenfield to resist the supremacist logic of the acoustics of passing that Stowe deployed through Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and the way in which this text framed her patronage of Greenfield. In Lying up a Nation, Ronald Radano argues that white, literary culture, in gaining the ability, through Frederick Douglass’ 1845 Narrative, to textually analyze and find meaning in slave song, necessarily “mediates” and

“reinvents” the meanings of black sonic culture. What Radano, citing Douglass, describes as the writerly “hermeneutics of the circle,” produces a hearing of sonic blackness that “leaves forgotten the experience of slavery’s sonic incoherence.”116 Thus, to be able to think sonic blackness from beyond the interpretive standpoint of white writing, we must embrace, as Conquergood highlights, the dark, fugitive space of sonic blackness that flees white, textual hermeneutics. This space, Radano reminds us, can be located in the sonically incoherent.

Greenfield herself produced this sonic incoherence through her deployment of vocality across gender and race. Sonic incoherence is the space of crip voice because crip voice racializes and enfreaks the body that issues it, all the while disavowing and denaturalizing these essentialized categories. Thus, while Greenfield’s vocal performance in “I am Free” positioned her body in an object/abject state of socio-political exception, the inscrutability and instability of this position enabled Greenfield to disrupts the socio-political “work” Stowe intended for her body and voice. Thus, Greenfield placed “I am Free” outside the hermeneutic circle of writing; or, rather, Greenfield placed “I am Free” in what Nina Eidsheim has described as the acoustic shadow of writing: “an area in immediate proximity to the source of a loud sound. The sound is projected not to its immediate locale but rather reaches further. Ironically, the space most immediately close to the source is thereby in its acoustic shadow and the sound is not audible.”117 For Eidsheim, the acoustic shadow serves as an analogy for the sonic “blind spots” of certain analytic models of vocal music.

In the example I’ve provided, the acoustic shadow describes Greenfield’s vocal phenomena as sound that can’t be fully heard or scrutinized by those adhering to a writerly hermeneutics. This is to say that Greenfield used her voice to craft a performance that established the limits of white textuality and white listening. And while Greenfield produced this sonic space of exception by playing with the sonic markers of black, female, and enfreaked object-ion/abjection, the inscrutability of the sonic space enabled Greenfield to repurpose “I am Free” as a site of black liberation. For example, though audience members thought they were hearing the “incontrolability” in Greenfield’s voice, in fact, they were hearing the sonic sign of her brazen transgressions. As opposed to dark optics of Henry Box Brown’s fugitive space, the fugitive space of Greenfield’s song relies on the dark acoustics of the shadow. And it must be emphasized that Greenfield’s crip voice produces the fugitive space of song in the acoustic shadow. Restated, the acoustic shadow is replete with a performative aesthetic that is powerfully black and crip.

Together, Greenfield’s crip voice and fugitive song are obscene in that they go entirely off the script authored for black female voices by white authors. Further, by playing in the acoustic shadow, Greenfield’s crip voice and fugitive song were able to performatively re-cite the meanings and conditions of black freakery. What’s more, such a material reordering and expansion of the freedoms ascribed to black womanhood occurred covertly in plain sight, largely because Greenfield carried out her work — ob skene — in the inscrutable acoustic shadow of Stowe’s writerly practice: her voice.

116 Radano, Lying Up a Nation, 50.
117 Eidsheim, Voice as a Technology of Selfhood, 117.
Conclusion: Crippling the Archive

As this dissertation turns towards its conclusion, I want to return to the performances of Japanese Tommy, the stage persona of Thomas Dilworth. In the previous chapter, I used Dilworth’s Black Swan burlesque as a “black (w)hole” through which to argue for and analyze the radical black crip aesthetics and politics of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s vocal performances. I arrived at this analysis by reading Dilworth’s performance against the grain, contending that his burlesque was not a critique of but rather a tribute to Greenfield, and a celebration of subversive black agency. I thus open these concluding thoughts by proposing that our newfound insights into Greenfield’s repertoire might just as well enable us to read Dilworth’s performance legacy as crip voice and fugitive song. I specifically draw on theories of stuttering by disability studies philosopher Joshua St. Pierre to contend that Dilworth stutters through the archive. Here, I do not speak metaphorically, but consider Dilworth’s personal and performance history as speech that narrates the archive dysfluently. In other words, while Dilworth’s artistic career at times fluently articulates historical master narratives, his acts and actions also produce prolongations, repetitions, and blocks on the archival record, and therefore resist the institutionalized forces of white supremacy and ablebodiedness that underlie the impulse to produce straight (white-male) accounts of history (Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire 19).¹ In solidarity with St. Pierre, who seeks to destigmatize stuttering and theorize speech and communication from the embodied and epistemological point of view of stutterers, I find the stutters of the archive positive and productive means of entering into scholarly conversation with the sonic subaltern of the past.

This conclusion, and the work of this dissertation, then, is an attempt to address the problem that the archive presents to the sonic subaltern whose performances petition for history’s hearing. A crip archival method first registers the vocal acts – acts that may sound like meaningless breaks or skips in the record – and models a methodology that can account for performative meanings that materialize outside the totalizing narratives of history. To arrive at such a reading of Dilworth’s performance, in what follows I first address the problem that the archive presents to an historian of the sonic subaltern. I then forward a crip method for archival theater and performance research that registers the vocal acts of disabled performers of color, particularly mixed-race performers. To crip the archive, I argue, means modeling historical methodology on the crip modality subaltern figures perform in the archive.

Historical grounds: off the street and into the sewer

I begin with an appraisal of the argument I would like to make: that Dilworth subversively deployed crip voice and fugitive song as an African American blackface minstrel performer. By all accounts, to forward this argument is to position myself on shaky evidentiary and historical ground. Indeed, I want to reflect on the history of Thomas Dilworth that I’m missing -- the history that, in absentia, thins my argument. To date, despite extensive archival research, I’ve only been able to reconstruct a skeleton of Dilworth’s life and professional career. I have collected evidence that sheds light on his birth, the material circumstances of his early life, and death. I know roughly what repertoire he performed, where, when, and with whom. I know, and have articulated, that he bounced between the minstrel olio and freak show format. I know that he was a highly popular entertainer, and that his talents took him all over the US, UK, and even to New Zealand. I have a sense of his political leanings.

What I don’t know, however, is what many of his performances (aside from his prima donna burlesques) may have looked like. Extant sheet music and sheet music illustrations of minstrel standards offer partial insight on the narrative content, melodic contour, and visual aesthetics of some of Dilworth’s repertoire, but these mass marketed materials also present narratives about the meanings of Dilworth’s performance that are overdetermined by the blackface mask, and therefore reinforce the conservative, white supremacist function of minstrelsy. News clippings with rich description of Dilworth’s performances are, for the most part, lacking. To date, with the exception of the *Academy of Stars* brochure discussed in chapter 4, I have not discovered additional published minstrel skits reflecting Dilworth’s repertoire. And finally, aside from one short column on Dilworth in a nineteenth-century newspaper and a brief entry in LeRoy Rice’s *Monarchs of Minstrelsy* (1911), no biographical sketches of the artist are extant. Generally written by a white amanuensis, nineteenth-century biographical sketches of black performers provide historical insights that are both crucial and suspect.

What I want to emphasize here is that despite having constructed an archive on Thomas Dilworth, my knowledge of his life and career is partial. While knowledge of the past is always incomplete, Dilworth’s particular social location—his illiteracy, his disability, his race, his employ in a low class entertainment genre untethered to networks and practices of textuality and/or respectability—renders archival knowledge about his performances particularly contingent and precarious. Resultantly, and with awareness of the risks of overburdening slim evidence with wishful interpretation and skewed analysis, it becomes necessary to construct historic arguments about the sonic subaltern on ephemera from the archival margins. I did so in the proceeding chapter, which was based on a single, previously undiscovered review in Dublin’s *Freeman’s Journal* detailing how Greenfield personated both a male slave owner and female slave in “I am Free.” This archival discovery was fortuitous and also entirely by chance, as no surviving press clippings, letters, or secondary scholarship had noted Greenfield’s tour of Ireland. Stated otherwise, Greenfield’s personation of a male slave-owner is an historical fact I could never have intuited or imagined, it being so far outside of nineteenth-century standards of propriety and respectability for a free woman of color. Additionally, I had no reason to search for news articles about Greenfield’s Dublin tour; the discovery was simply the happy result of a rigorous if routine turning over of stray and far-flung archival “stones” in my review of news clippings from Greenfield’s UK tour.

The *Freeman’s Journal* example represents how research into or on the artistic lives of the sonic subaltern is always precarious ly positioned vis à vis dominant Histories: subaltern history is recorded in a stray review here, or in a lost letter there, in the spaces and places far removed from the well-tread “ground” of the archive. In fact, as is the case of Dilworth’s archive, the ground of the archive is shaky, unstable, and decisively “sub.” An obituary published for Dilworth in the *New York Times* claims that the performer’s age at time of death was unknown. In lieu of an exact date of birth, the newspaper sites Dilworth’s memories as a means to date his life. Dilworth, the paper claims, “could remember the Astor-place riots and going through Canal-street in a boat with his

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2 Japanese Tommy, MS Thr 556 (98), Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library / American minstrel show collection, 1823-1947, Harvard University.

3 For example, I believe that extant writing by Mary Webb exists. The Harvard Theater Collection, for example, contains a letter from an M. Webb to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, asking for letters of introduction in London. The dates of the letter correspond to the time period of Webb’s departure for London, and Webb, who was the first to perform Longfellow’s “Hiawatha,” had a strong relationship with the poet. This extant letter, unremarked upon in any scholarship on Webb, is a testament to her brilliance, agency, social cunning, and (immaterial or not), her exquisite penmanship.
The reference to the Astor-riots, an 1849 street brawl that was proxy to the rivalry between American actor Edwin Forrest and British actor William Macready, is not particularly interesting. The mention of Canal Street, however, sinks us into the subaltern archive in a provocative and potentially subversive way. As late as the early nineteenth-century, Manhattan was partitioned into two halves by a large body of water, known as the Collect Pond and its two outlets. One of these outlets drained into the East River, and one drained into the Hudson River. The pond was filled due to industrial over pollution between 1803 and 1811, and the fill site was first developed with housing for the wealthy. However, constant environmental problems rapidly rendered the area undesirable. The ground reeked of methane gas from the buried carcasses of animals that had been disposed of by nearby tanneries.

Due to persistent and poorly drained underground springs, the land was unstable and frequently subsided, as it continues to do in present-day Chinatown. Collet Pond soon produced America’s first slum, the Five Points neighborhood. There, white immigrants and free blacks (fully emancipated in the state of New York as of 1827) lived shoulder to shoulder in squalor. In an attempt to drain the fill site, the city trenches the former western outlet of Collect Pond between 1805 and 1807, producing a 40-foot wide, 8 foot deep canal. With poor flow speed, and underlying pollution, the canal quickly became a “stinking, open sewer.” Later, in 1819, the canal was covered in a move to control its stench. Canal Street was constructed between 1820 and 1821 above the former site of the canal, which by all accounts continued to flow and reek.

Born well after the Canal Street canal was closed over, Dilworth’s obituary suggests that what the performer navigated with his father was actually an underground sewer. There is something powerful in this suggestion. The idea that a subterranean passage was a mode of conveyance for freemen feels resonant with a history of black fugitivity and fugitive performance in antebellum America, particularly an America where black slaves in New York were only legally manumitted in 1827. I tell this story of Dilworth and the Canal Street sewer to highlight how subaltern history is never on solid ground. Instead, the history of performers like Dilworth is located on shaky ground, such as the shaky ground of Five Points, where the minstrel tradition, and Dilworth’s avocation, was born. And in many cases, history is on no ground at all—shaky or otherwise. In the case of the Thomas Dilworth, who slips in and out of the archive with recorded last names as different as Dilverd (the name on his death certificate), Dilverel (the name recorded on his burial record), Durand, Dilward, Dilsworth, and Dillworth, history is underground, “in the dark,” fugitive space represented by the buried canal. In this black space—an underground space, a space blacks literally moved through, a space that, in its remove from hegemonic narratives of history poses challenges for historical interpretation and “insight”—new methodologies and heuristics are needed. In my own research, the opacity of Dilworth’s history invites me to turn to my ears as a path towards historical insight.

**History in the dark: listening to the stutters in the archival record**

I turn the phrase “history in the dark” to riff on Daphne Brooks’ discussion of fugitivity—how black social actors and activists deployed aesthetic tropes of darkness to resist capture and objectification. “History in the dark” expresses how these same aesthetics also enabled black social actors to elude capture and objectification in the archival record. The absence (or, spotty presence)

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of figures like Dilworth on the historical record is generally attributed to the power of the archive to overwrite or overlook performance repertoires attributed to the sonic subaltern. While these power dynamics are absolutely at play vis-à-vis Dilworth’s career, I also want to entertain the supposition that Dilworth and others deployed a radical repertoire in an intentional and resistant counterpoint with the written historical record. Dilworth, for example, disappears from the US census after 1850, most likely because his career of choice as a touring, black artist (an anomaly at the time) kept him in a semi-permanent state of flight.

Resultantly, historians of theater and performance may find themselves researching figures like Dilworth “in the dark,” without a clear idea of exactly what they are searching for, or how to orient themselves to the performance archive. In these circumstance, “history in the dark” also suggests that researchers may benefit from shifting the sensory modality with which they approach the historical record. Playing with the trope of low vision, “history in the dark” encourages historians to listen to the archive, and to orient themselves to the past by tuning into the irregularities or dysfluencies in extant narratives about the past.

By “dysfluent” I apply to the archive terms less familiar to history than to speech language pathology. Dysfluency is a co-creation of scholars, activists and stutterers Zach Richter, Erin Schich, and Joshua St. Pierre, who founded the blog Did I Stutter. For these three scholars, dysfluency departs from a diagnosis of abnormal, disfluent speech to resignify stuttering as a radical political act and aesthetic. Because Joshua St. Pierre clearly lays out the radical formulations of fluency vs. dysfluency, I reproduce these definitions here at length:

*dis*- is originally a Latin prefix that means “lack of” or “not.” It is used as a fairly simple negation (as in the instances of “dislike” and “disavow”), removal (as in “dismember”), or reversal (as in “disassociate”) (OED).

The term “disfluency” is similarly used to indicate a type of speech that is merely not fluent. It is a sterile and clinical term that turns our wild forms of speech variation into a simple lack or failure judged against the presumed normalcy and desirability of smooth speech. ‘Disfluent’ hides its values behind an apparent objectivity.

*Dys-* is originally a Greek prefix indicating “bad, difficult” or “destroying the good sense of a word, or increasing its bad sense” (OED). Unlike *dis-*, *dys-* is not a simple negation, but marks a transgression: something has gone wrong, particularly in a moral sense.

We accordingly take “dysfluency” to be a far more honest term than ‘disfluency.’ While ‘disfluent’ feigns at being objective and sterile, “dysfluent” recognizes that when we stutter we are not simply performing a lack, but we are transgressing the entire moral code of how society expects us to speak. To stutter is to disobey, to overstep the narrow boundaries of able-bodied speech.

St. Pierre’s essay, “Distending Straight-Masculine Time: A Phenomenology of the Disabled Speaking Body” constructs a bridge between a theory of dysfluency and my own conception of the archive that stutters. In this work St. Pierre breaks from dominant theoretical models in disability studies that argue for built environments as constructing the disabled body. For the disabled speaker, St. Pierre contends, exclusion is not a function of space or place, but a function of time (53). According to St. Pierre, who builds on queer theorist Lee Edelman and queer crip feminist Alison

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7 http://www.didistutter.org/.
Kafer, straight-masculine time is a “firm delineation between past/present/future” and “a future-directed linearity” produced by the normalized pace and choreographies of speech. Since, in the western metaphysical tradition, the straight-masculine time of normalized speech is also tied to reason, signification, and subjectivity, St. Pierre emphasizes that disabled speakers who cannot or will not keep pace with straight-masculine time risk falling outside meaning altogether; risk become objects as opposed to subjects. In contrast to the disabled speaker, those who can “keep time” with the rhythms and performance standards of straight-masculine time are ushered into the position of the “universal speaker.”

This universalized position abstracts and negates the body and its dysfluencies, and orchestrates the disembodiment and objectivity of straight-masculine time/speech. When institutionalized as a disciplinary force, straight-masculine time becomes what St. Pierre refers to as “clock time.”

I want to highlight that St. Pierre describes straight-masculine and clock time as akin to traveling on a highway. St. Pierre engages this metaphor to describe how the hegemonic force of straight-masculine clock time produces a naturalized feeling of seamless continuity, linearity, and rational meaning that becomes conspicuous and strange only when a stutterer’s dysfluencies—analogs as “accelerations” and “decelerations”—enable one to feel the driving and compulsory momentum underlying normalized, fluent speech. St. Pierre’s metaphoric use of the highway fits well with my own understanding of post-canal Canal street as the hegemonic ground of the archive. I propose understanding archival time as the past extension of St. Pierre’s straight-masculine clock time. Restated, the history narrated in the archive has been disciplined by the normalizing forces of white supremacy, compulsory heterosexuality, and ablebodiedness such that history appears as a natural, fluent, and meaningful story about the past: history under the force of the archive appears not as the shaky ground of Five Points, or the underground space of the sewer, but as the direct thoroughfare of Canal street—the highway that disavows and absents the subterranean conduits it covers over, conduits that were themselves the product of violent, straight-white male incursions into the ground of history.

But St. Pierre is ultimately not interested in the fluency of straight-masculine time, and I am ultimately uninterested in the fluency of the archival record. Rather, St. Pierre, like myself, is interested in the time of the stutterer, in the time of dysfluency. Time for a stutterer cannot proceed apace of straight-masculine time. Stutterers may produce “prolongations—“aaaapple”—or repetitions—“p-p-p-p-potato” or “speech blocks including facial grimaces, tension or freezing.” These dysfluencies produce alterations or rents in the fabric of straight-masculine time.

Two Tommies, Two Black Swans, Two of Everything: Thomas Dilworth’s Archival Stutters

Similar to the way in which a stutterer distends straight-masculine time, Dilworth’s life and career produce dysfluencies in the straight-masculine history narrated by the archive. Specifically, Dilworth produces repetitions in the archive. Throughout his stage career, Dilworth deployed black, gender, and queer disabled difference to recite ablebodied, white supremacist, and heterosexist deployments of his body. Such repetitions are evident not only in his Black Swan burlesque (a parody of Greenfield that I described in chapter 4), but also in his “African Tom Thumb.”

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10 Ibid., 54, 50.
11 Ibid., 56.
12 Ibid., 56.
13 Ibid., 57.
resignification of Tom Stratton’s blackface repertoire, and in his recitation of Barnum’s “What is it?” Even Dilworth’s stage name is a repetition. “Japanese Tommy” was a nickname the American public first bestowed on Tateishi Onojo Noriyuki, the teenage nephew of an interpreter traveling with the Japanese ambassador on his first diplomatic visit to the States in 1860. Noriyuki was a “fashionable novelty” and piqued the public’s interest in the exotic other. The original “Japanese Tommy” was also a particular favorite of the ladies, and his fame was publicly noted as being attached to a rabid, white female sexuality. In taking the stage name, “Japanese Tommy,” Dilworth discursively replayed America’s fascination with Noriyuki, and crystallized and critiqued a national obsession with grotesque racial, gender, bodily, and sexual otherness through the spectacle of his own ambiguous body.

In The Japan of Pure Invention, Josephine Lee reads an extant political cartoon from 1860, “Natural Mistakes,” to argue that the racial fun of Dilworth’s “Japanese Tommy” minstrel-stage name stemmed from the fact that a black man masquerading as Japanese enabled white audiences to laugh at both races. At the time of his visit, Noriyuki was compared favorably with whites and Lee reads Dilworth’s masquerade as evidence of a black man using cross-racial impersonation to distance himself from, or “pass out” of the stigma of blackness through an elevated (if symbolic) yellowness. Dilworth’s stage name, she implies, both lampooned this black aesthetic strategy and the semblance of Japanese racial power. Dilworth’s personation of a “Japanese Tommy” staged a racial capitulation between Noriyuki and an African American that made fun of both by skewering “the colored man who seeks to move beyond his station.” Thus, while Lee understands that African Americans who deployed Japanese racial masquerade did so “to gain some measure of expressive freedom” and move beyond the socio-economic and aesthetic restrictions placed on black artists, she argues that Dilworth’s racial masquerade ultimately also intensified his legibility and stigmatization as a black man.

I want to both take up and depart from Lee’s assessments of Dilworth. I concur that the implication of Japanese masquerade in Dilworth’s stage name provided him with a degree of artistic freedom and racial “cover.” By referencing the Orient, Dilworth diverted attention from his blackness and towards an exotic racial category that highlighted the ambivalence of his own mixed-race origins. Yet I do not believe that Dilworth’s stage moniker ironically marked him as black. Lee has both overlooked archival evidence of public discussion and speculation of Dilworth’s mixed-race origins, and has also failed to fully analyze the role that disability and enfreakment played in Dilworth’s crip performance aesthetic. While blackface masquerade caricatured racial generality, Dilworth’s renown stemmed from his unique ability to satirize particularity. This is to say that while Dilworth, like most minstrels, portrayed stock characters, he also specialized in and was made famous by his comic impersonations. These impersonations were always of a figure of Otherness in the American public, such as Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (the Black Swan), Charles Stratton (Tom Thumb), William Henry Lane (the “What is it?”), or Tateishi Onojo Noriyuki (Japanese Tommy). With respect to these public figures, what Dilworth keyed into was the way their celebrity (or

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15 Josephine Lee, The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Mikado (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 98.
16 See the raunchy “Weak Wife’s Cradle-Song” in the Poughkeepsie Journal, July 14, 1860, 1. In this song, a wife notes that all wives are dosing their children with tincture of opium in order to sneak away to see Tommy, about whom they are all having sexualized dreams.
17 A brief note: Lee, like most other scholars, refers to Japanese Tommy’s given name as “Dilward.” For consistency and accuracy to my own archival research, I refer to him here at Dilworth.
18 Lee, The Japan of Pure Invention, 97.
19 Ibid., 86.
notoriety) stemmed from an American fascination with their difference. Dilworth intuited that by articulating national racial, sexual, ablebodied, and gendered fantasies and power through these othered public figures, America was in fact articulating itself.

I argue, therefore, that in repeating the performances of othered public figures, and in repeating them with a difference, Dilworth distended the straight-masculine time of American belonging. Dilworth, it should be noted, never simply gave a repeat performance of the Black Swan, or the “What is it”? Rather, Dilworth deployed the spectacle of his own body—one read publicly as grotesque due to it’s racial and disabled difference—to enfreak figures like Greenfield or Lane or Noriyuki. This enfreakment served as a doubling of the enfreakment these individuals experienced at the hands of white authors, managers, auteurs, and the white press. Dilworth’s doubled enfreakment highlighted how othered public figures were deployed in service of crafting a normative and fluent national narrative about a white, ablebodied, and heteronormative America. Restated, by replaying othered public figures through his own difference, Dilworth ultimately satirized how America constitutes itself through difference. Unlike traditional racial masquerade, where the racial subject is the butt of the joke, in Dilworth’s repetitions, America is. In all Dilworth’s historical repetitions his fugitive and crip aesthetics enable him to escape from the essentialized positions he feigns but also occupies, while also revealing and refusing the structural necessity of such positions to formations of American-ness. In repeating and distending how America articulates itself, Dilworth deployed his difference as national dysfluency, causing the nation to stutter as it attempts to speak its own name.

**Crippling the Archive**

There exists for historians a rather cliché master narrative about the irrecuperability of the past, and specifically, the past of the subaltern. Knowledge about these historic subjects is fractured or lost, or so the narrative goes. This is to some extent a truism: the archival record is by definition incomplete. But I am disturbed by the way in which historical subaltern subjects are cast as objects of pity—likened to irredeemable, broken stories that a good historian may revive, restore, or rehabilitate, but only partially. The good scholar here denotes both skill and ability, but also a particular breed of charity. And by extension, the historical subaltern subject becomes the disability case in need of saving by academia.

While it is true that Dilworth occupies a marginal place on the archival record, the significance of his life and career are only “lost” on history as narrated from a position of hegemonic normativity—narrated from the standpoint of straight-masculine archival time. This dissertation is however, like St. Pierre, interested in the queer and crip time of the stutterer who inhabits speech “grotesquely: controlling time that does not properly belong to him.” Dilworth, by producing radical dysfluencies in a narrative of American-ness, also produced a stutter in an archive of American performance: he may vanish between censuses and have gone by any number of last names, but Dilworth thrives in the archive as a stutter or radical repetition of American identity. Indeed, though Dilworth was rumored to have begun performing with Christy’s Minstrels in the early 1850s, he only comes forcefully into the archive after he takes up and repeats Noriyuki’s sobriquet: Japanese Tommy. It is my contention that these performative dysfluencies are Dilworth’s own way of bringing the archive and archival time under his control. By listening patiently to these dysfluencies, by attending to the meaning of Dilworth’s repetitions, the historian forgos any measure of scholarly “goodness” and eschews a recuperative method—choosing instead to enter into the archive through the distended time of the stutter. Listening to these archival stutters, I argue, reveals both an Other time and an Other story of history.

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