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Organs of Propaganda

Rhetorical Education and the Black Press

> Until this past year I was one among those who believed the condition of the masses gave large excuse for the humiliations and proscriptions under which we labored; that when wealth, education and character became more general among us, the cause being removed the effect would cease, and justice be accorded to all alike. I shared the general belief that good newspapers entering regularly the homes of our people in every state could do more to bring about this result than any agency. Preaching the doctrine of self-help, thrift and economy every week, they would be the teachers to those who had been deprived of school advantages, yet were making history every day—and train to think for themselves our mental children of a larger growth.
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> —Ida B. Wells, 1893

The first half of the nineteenth century in America has been characterized as "oratorical," in that the ideals of responsible citizenship were conveyed largely through the public speaker. The medium of print was employed in part to reproduce and comment on the oral performance. Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran observe that "the orator had a central cultural role: to articulate a public moral consensus and bring it to bear on particular issues through forms of discourse—spoken or written—that were more or less classical." They were classical in that they were based on the assumption that this discourse established a public, consensual moral authority. The authors explain that over the course of the century, this kind of oratorical culture was transformed into one based on the authority of the individual and then on the authority of the expert; they argue that oratory moved away from a deliberative to an epideictic

or entertainment purpose. Clark and Halloran recognize, nonetheless, that this early-century participatory democracy was limited primarily to white males. As I reiterate throughout this volume, African American rhetoric owes much—but not all—of its development to this exclusion, since as Clark and Halloran also point out, "rhetorics are always a response to 'cultural forces.'"[1] The challenges African Americans faced sustained deliberative rhetoric for much of the century, although we have in the pages of the black press references to performative rhetoric in the activities of the early literary societies, for example, the elocutionary recitations. But even these performances were often understood to serve a deliberative purpose, as, for example, in the case of Mary Webb's performance of *The Christian Slave*—Harriet Beecher Stowe's dramatization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—discussed later in this chapter. An advertisement for New York Central College placed special emphasis on the fact that in that "day of Public Speaking," the curriculum included a "rhetorical class with daily exercises in Extemporaneous Speaking."[2] People were accustomed to hearing lengthy speeches in religious, deliberative, and judicial spaces; they had, as a result, developed a critical ear for rhetoric that was effective and for rhetoric that failed. It is not surprising, then, that the pages of black periodicals are filled with references to lectures, rhetorical exercises, speeches, and eloquence in general.

The black press offered multiple opportunities for rhetorical education. For the editorial staff, agents, and correspondents, it provided on-the-job training in rhetoric, but the press also directly and indirectly educated readers in sound rhetorical principles. I use the term "black press" in this chapter to refer to periodical literature edited or published by African Americans, although the readership, backing, and distribution mechanisms varied. As journalist Ida B. Wells observed, along with disseminating information, journalists believed their role was to instruct readers and hearers in how to receive, interpret, and respond to that information.[3] Further, these periodicals carried much more than current events; they carried self-improvement advice and critiques of various kinds of rhetorical performances.

After considering some views on the function of newspapers from the perspectives of journalists Frederick Douglass and Wells, who represent over sixty years of newspaper work, I explore the extent to which the black press functioned as a site of rhetorical education. Principles from rhetorical theorist Hugh Blair's Lecture 34, "Means of Improving in Eloquence," provide a frame for identifying sites. As the five means, he lists (1) development of character or moral improvement; (2) accumulation of a storehouse of knowledge ("a Liberal education"); (3) continuous, habitual, diligent effort; (4) emulation of good models, not for "Slavish Imitation" but for enlightenment; and (5) consistent practice in

appropriate writing and speaking, regardless of the occasion. Elaborating upon this last item, Blair observes that literary or debating societies create ideal sites for such practice, if members select substantive topics and avoid ostentation. Blair's final advice is that the best rhetorical theorists to study are the ancients: Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian.[4] Guided by these five means, I first consider examples of rhetorical education as disseminated through direct instruction in or promotion of the principles of rhetoric, such as in essays on elocution or eloquence. These examples support Blair's advice to acquire specific rhetorical knowledge and broad general knowledge. In many articles, the information provided qualifies as invocation rather than instruction; the authors understood their role as advocates for rather than teachers of rhetorical skills. Thus, I classify these as instances of rhetorical education in that they promote it, even if they do not provide it. I then look at examples of rhetorical education indirectly enacted through sermons; abolitionist and proslavery advocates; lecturers at events sponsored by literary societies; and the critique of speakers as diverse as Louis Kossuth, William J. Watkins, William Lloyd Garrison, and Frances Harper. This category coincides with Blair's means of studying and emulating good models. Numerous articles encourage activities for moral and mental improvement, in keeping with Blair's first means, but this ubiquitous advice is woven into all other kinds of advice and is not addressed separately.

I have relied chiefly on biographies and autobiographies of newspaper editors, histories of the black press, and, of course, the publications themselves. Copies of many of the publications of the black press across the nineteenth century are no longer extant, as in the case of Wells's *Memphis Free Speech*. For others there are partial sets, especially of the antebellum papers, many of which are now more easily searched electronically, although doing so does not give one a sense of the whole of any one issue. I sampled articles in antebellum and postbellum papers; in papers edited by women and by men; in papers in the eastern cities and in those in other parts of the country; and in nondenominational papers and church-sponsored papers, although this may not be a useful distinction, since the latter generally carried a broad range of articles on morality, literature, and politics as well as on theology and religion. Being primarily interested in African Americans functioning as agents as well as recipients of rhetorical education, I chose to consider publications under their editorial control; thus, William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, for example, while having in 1834 more black subscribers than white, was sampled in most instances only to get a sense of what emphasis the abolitionist white press placed on an issue or on a rhetorical performance.[5] Gamaliel Bailey's abolitionist paper, the *National Era*, published from 1847 to 1860, served the same purpose. Comparable to dipping a thimble into the ocean, this "sampling" makes no claim to representativeness. I

am less interested in the quantity of samples than in their authenticity as sites of rhetorical education. Where articles appear as reprints from other papers, I consider that the editors made the choice to include them and thus functioned as agents of any rhetorical education that such articles contained.

It is no accident that many prominent nineteenth-century race leaders and speakers were affiliated in some way with newspaper editing. Along with journalists like Douglass, Samuel E. Cornish, Henry Highland Garnet, and, later in the century, T. Thomas Fortune, we also must consider Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Mary Bibb, African American women who emigrated to Canada, and Ida Wells. The black press was active across the century and especially during the antebellum period. Also often overlooked is that a surprising number of antebellum journalists were formerly enslaved. These were individuals motivated by a desire to reach a wider audience than they had been able to before. After reciting a sizable list of black newspapers and newspaper editors, the author of an 1853 article in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* points to this statistic with some satisfaction: "It is not a little remarkable, that [of] the editors above named, not less than one third were fugitives from the 'house of bondage'; showing that the *vis* which bore them out of slavery carried them into the chair editorial: and it is a curious inference from the above names, that, taking into the account, the proportion of *fugitives* to the *free colored* in the free States, slavery has produced the greater number and the most talented among our editors. Had all this and kindred talent been penned up in the slave States, would not another kind of *mark* have been made in our history?"[6] Rhetorical education then occurred as a by-product of the social activism recorded in the pages of the nineteenth-century black press. Contributors, correspondents, and editors developed their own expertise in rhetoric for action; they encouraged subscribers to become critical readers of political discourse, and they called attention directly to nineteenth-century examples of engaging rhetoric.

The sites discussed here may be classified as primary sites and as secondary sites. I consider newspapers to be primary sites when they publish articles containing direct instruction in the art of rhetoric, the history of rhetoric, or critiques of speeches. They function as secondary sites when they publish the speeches themselves or when they report on rhetorical activities. Most of the information on the activities of literary societies comes from newspaper articles, since most societies left no recorded histories. To avoid unnecessary overlap, I do not consider their activities again here. In addition, the section below on pulpit eloquence as a holy skill will bring to mind the section on pulpit literacies of chapter 1. However, here I discuss the topic only as it is treated in the press. Still, it would be impossible and, in fact, undesirable to avoid all overlap. Overlap serves to reinforce these as credible sites. Many of the same people

who read papers also worshiped in churches, attended lectures, participated in literary clubs, and often wrote about their experiences in diaries. This last chapter attempts to capture other kinds of educational rhetorical activities found in the pages of those papers.

Producing a Paper as Rhetorical Education

In this section, examining firsthand accounts of journalistic rhetorical education, I focus on the careers of Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells. Douglass's life and his work as a black newspaper editor of four newspapers are emblematic of the ways in which the press can serve rhetorical education. The choice of Douglass is complicated by the fact that Douglass, whom Frances Foster acknowledges is "the most famous African-American journalist of all time"—even as she calls for more attention to others not as well known—was assisted in his initial publishing endeavor by a goodly number of white fund-raisers, printers, financial backers, and subscribers. Martin Delany was co-editor of his first newspaper, the *North Star*, for a brief period but spent most of his time traveling in Ohio, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania advertising and selling subscriptions to the paper.[7] Yet white backers notwithstanding, Douglass conceived the *North Star* as a black newspaper and understood its function as such. This point of view is articulated clearly in a January 7, 1848, article titled "Colored Newspapers," in which he alludes to William Whipper and the American Moral Reform Society's opposition to any form of racial identification—that is, "colored," "people of color," or "African"—in the names of organizations. Douglass writes: "We confess to no such feelings; we are in no wise sensitive on this point. Facts are facts; white is not black, and black is not white. There is neither good sense, nor common honesty, in trying to forget this distinction. So far from the truth is the notion that colored newspapers are serving to keep up that cruel distinction [racial discrimination], the want of them is the main cause of its continuance." Fortunately, some volumes of all of his papers are available electronically or on microfilm, and he wrote about his editorial experiences in his books *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Although publication of his final newspaper venture, the *New National Era*, ended in 1874, Douglass continued to contribute items to other newspapers until his death in 1895. By that time he had met Wells and they had collaborated in the 1893 publication of *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*.

Wells is also an exceptional embodiment of the ways in which a rhetorical education can be acquired and put to good use in newspaper work. She edited her own paper for three years and went on to have her pieces published in a variety of periodicals, including the *New York Age*, the *Detroit Plaindealer*, the

AME Church Review, the *American Baptist*, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Cleveland Gazette*, *Our Day*, and the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*. Wells reported findings of her journalistic investigations in pamphlets with detailed titles like *Lynch Law in Georgia, with the report of Louis P. Le Vin, The Chicago Detective Sent to Investigate the Burning of Samuel Hose, The Torture and Hanging of Elijah Strickland, The Colored Preacher*, and *The Lynching of Nine Men for Alleged Arson*. Wells also wrote of her journalistic ambitions in her diaries and, like Douglass, in her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*. In this section, I consider some of the ways in which these two journalists understood their editorial roles as an engagement with rhetorical education. The firsthand accounts of the circumstances that motivated and constrained Douglass and Wells as they entered into journalism demonstrate that their desire to reach a wide reading and listening public with urgent arguments against slavery and mob violence created an exigence that accelerated their own preparation for journalism.

The following passage from *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* describes the reaction of many New England abolitionists, including Garrison, to Douglass's decision to publish the *North Star* and registers his own initial self-doubt, if we read past his irony:

> I can easily pardon those who saw in my persistence an unwarrantable ambition and presumption. I was but nine years from slavery. In many phases of mental experience I was but nine years old. That one under such circumstances should aspire to establish a printing press, surrounded by an educated people, might well be considered unpractical if not ambitious. My American friends looked at me with astonishment. "A wood-sawyer" offering himself to the public as an editor! A slave, brought up in the depths of ignorance, assuming to instruct the highly civilized people of the north in the principles of liberty, justice, and humanity! The thing looked absurd. Nevertheless I persevered. I felt that the want of education, great as it was, could be overcome by study, and that wisdom would come by experience; and further (which was perhaps the most controlling consideration) I thought that an intelligent public, knowing my early history, would easily pardon the many deficiencies which I well knew that my paper must exhibit.[8]

Douglass recalls the skepticism he faced about his qualifications to edit a paper in the artful manner with which he handles understatement. The reactions he received were among the many expressions of doubt in the intellectual ability of blacks, expressions that black writers and speakers spent an enormous amount of time and energy countering. Douglass understood the task before him—what he needed to learn about journalistic writing. But engaging the

modesty topos, he has understated his credentials. Twenty-nine years old in 1847 when undertaking this new enterprise, he already had available to him a considerable storehouse of previous rhetorical activities on which to draw. In 1839, his remarks denouncing colonization were published in the *Liberator;* in 1841, he became a lecturer for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and secured subscriptions to the *Liberator* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard;* in 1845, Douglass published his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written By Himself;* and by 1847, he had lectured in Scotland, England, Wales, and Ireland. Still, narrating his journalistic decision some ten years later, when he first wrote about it in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), he would recall some doubts about the venture. Douglass edited four papers over the next twenty-seven years: *North Star* (1847–51), *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1851–60), *Douglass' Monthly* (1859–63), and the *New National Era* (1870–74).

Here in another passage from *Life and Times,* Douglass recalls some specific aspects of his writing process and sense of audience:

> There were times when I almost thought my Boston friends were right in dissuading me from my newspaper project. But looking back to those nights and days of toil and though, compelled often to do work for which I had no educational preparation, I have come to think that, under the circumstances, it was the best school possible for me. It obliged me to think and read, it taught me to express my thoughts clearly, and was perhaps better than any other course I could have adopted. Besides, it made it necessary for me to lean upon myself, and not upon the heads of our antislavery church—to be a principal, and not an agent. I had an audience to speak to every week, and must say something worth their hearing or cease to speak altogether. There is nothing like the lash and sting of necessity to make a man work, and my paper furnished this motive power.[9]

Douglass confirms the strong influence of audience and timing, his "lash and sting of necessity," on the composing process.

Wells began her career in journalism near the end of the century and on the other side of slavery. She never liked teaching and was anxious to find another vehicle for expression of her race concerns. The following passage from her autobiography describes her entry into newspaper work:

> The editor, who had held a position in the city of Washington for a number of years, was a brilliant man. In the course of time, he got his job back and returned to Washington, leaving the *Evening Star* without an editor. To my great surprise, I was elected to fill the vacancy. I tried to make my offering as acceptable as his had been, and before long I found that I liked the work. The lyceum attendance was increased by people who said they

> came to hear the *Evening Star* read. Among them one Friday evening was Rev. R. N. Countee, pastor of one of the leading Baptist churches, who also published a weekly called the *Living Way.* He gave us a very nice notice in his paper the next week, copying some of my matter, and invited me to do some writing for his paper.
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> All of this, although gratifying, surprised me very much, for I had had no training except what the work on the *Evening Star* had given me, and no literary gifts and graces. But I had observed and thought much about conditions as I had seen them in the country schools and churches. I had an instinctive feeling that the people who had little or no school training should have something coming into their homes weekly which dealt with their problems in a simple, helpful way. So in weekly letters to the *Living Way,* I wrote in a plain, common-sense way on the things which concerned our people. Knowing that their education was limited, I never used a word of two syllables where one would serve the purpose. I signed these articles "Iola."[10]

Wells's statement that she had "no training" except that acquired as editor of the *Evening Star* but that she did have a cause and people she wanted to reach speaks to the motivational force of audience, exigence, and purpose. Wells, focused on the message, reveals here especial concern for reaching readers at all levels of proficiency by writing in a "plain, common-sense way."

Wells's best known journalistic piece is, of course, the May 1892 editorial published in the *Free Speech,* a response to the violent racial climate depicted with such venom in the white Memphis press. It was primarily this direct statement of affairs that led to the destruction of the *Free Speech* office and to her permanent relocation.[11] The significance of this series of events often causes us to overlook her earlier formative journalistic work. Her first articles, based on accounts of her lawsuit against the Chesapeake & Ohio & Southwestern Railroad Company, were the 1884 "weekly letters to the *Living Way,*" mentioned above. By 1885, T. Thomas Fortune began to reprint her *Living Way* articles in his paper, the *New York Freeman* (later the *New York Age*), and other national black papers followed. As has been pointed out, the years between 1884 and 1887 were "crucial to her formation as a journalist," a period during which she edited the Memphis literary society's *Evening Star,* read widely, kept a notebook of ideas, wrote to the local and national press, participated in organizations of journalists, and worked as a correspondent.[12] The rhetorical education acquired through such activities laid the foundation for the journalistic activism that would follow. This training in newspaper work was fueled by Wells's own determination to express her opinions on any matter deemed worthy of verbal response. As one of only a few black women in journalism during this period,

Wells did not escape the limiting gender labels and insinuations associated with women in spaces men were reluctant to share. She was labeled "princess of the press," described to be as good a writer as any man, was often told that her forthrightness would prevent her from ever getting a husband, and was accused of questionable liaisons with men. What Wells probably began to understand very early in her journalistic career was that if she was going to fight racism and sexual discrimination effectively with words, she would need to acquire the best possible rhetorical skills to wage an effective battle.

I chose Wells and Douglass as male and female examples of journalists during the first half and near the end of the nineteenth century who, with little formal training in writing, developed journalistic skills in the process of producing their papers and articles. They were motivated by the pressing race and gender issues all African Americans faced in the nineteenth century. But they were obviously also different kinds of rhetors. In a frequently quoted exchange between the two, Wells draws a useful distinction. While they were waiting for a meeting to begin, Douglass asked her whether she was ever as nervous as he before a public appearance. She replied no, explaining, "That is because you are an orator, Mr. Douglass, and naturally you are concerned as to the presentation of your address. With me it is different. I am only a mouthpiece through which to tell the story of lynching and I have told it so often that I know it by heart. I do not have to embellish; it makes its own way."[13]

Reporting on Public Meetings as Sites of Rhetorical Exchanges

In *Democratic Eloquence*, Kenneth Cmiel describes a period following the invention of the printing press when increases in literacy rates among the white upper classes enabled an independent "public" and promoted a variety of publications, coffeehouses, salons, and other spaces where ideas were exchanged in a "'free zone' where opinion could be formed independent of the state."[14] Where might such "free zones" have existed for African Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century, places where they exchanged ideas and expressed opinions independent of dominant culture? It would be misleading to suggest that the conditions Cmiel describes were those of most African Americans during this period. One setting where citizens gathered to discuss matters in a space separate from official governmental sites was the literal space of the public meeting. Mary P. Ryan observes that the public meeting was the "sacred civic act" of antebellum democracy, that by 1835 the city pages of New York papers were filled with calls to meetings, and that the participants in these meetings were all white and male.[15] But African Americans developed argumentative skills as they discussed race issues in other black-controlled public meetings. Articles from the *Colored American* (New York City), the *Provincial Freeman* (Canada West), *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Rochester), and the *Palladium of Liberty* (Columbus, Ohio) report on public meetings held between 1840 and 1855. I discuss this site of rhetorical education under the broader heading of the black press not simply because reports on these meetings appeared in black newspapers but because the newspapers actually facilitated the proceedings in several ways. Announcements of these meetings were placed in the papers. Minutes and follow-up activities were published in subsequent issues as a way of involving those who did not attend. Further, as in the examples described below, the press frequently was questioned for its role in reproducing the proceedings of a meeting or served as the medium for communicating with the opponents who could not be reached through other means. Thus, it could be argued that the press itself was a crucial participant in these public gatherings.

These meetings, also referred to as public discussions, mass meetings, and, less frequently, "grand demonstrations," were most often held in churches and were called to consider specific topics. At a Brooklyn mass meeting, a petition to repeal a state law requiring blacks to own a certain amount of property in order to vote was discussed. The issue had been addressed the previous month at a "Great Mass Meeting" at a Baptist church on Anthony Street, with speeches and resolutions presented by a cast of prominent black men.[16] An article titled "Mass Meeting at Chatham" reported that the "colored citizens" of Canada West held a meeting to show support for England in the struggle against Russia and included a resolution of thanks to the "Editress of the *Provincial Freeman*" for her political work.[17] *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (hereafter *FDP*) described a public meeting of "colored people" in a New York church where James McCune Smith raised $100 to purchase a new suit of type for the paper.[18] A public meeting of condolence, chaired by Martin Delany, was held in Pittsburgh's Wylie Street Church to organize the community's response to the 1854 death of John B. Vashon, a prominent abolitionist and leader of Pittsburgh's black community.[19] The editor of the *Palladium of Liberty* responded to complaints that he improperly published the proceedings of a public meeting held in Hamilton, Ohio, asking, "Whoever heard of such nonsense as this—no right to publish the proceedings of a public meeting, when at the same time we do not claim that the citizens did pass any thing at the meeting?"[20]

This next example is emblematic of the ways in which these public meetings facilitated timely response to and engagement with mainstream discourse and served as a venue to disseminate information to various publics. In this instance, *FDP* reprinted an article from the *New Bedford Standard* titled "Meeting of Colored Citizens." The October 11, 1852, meeting was convened to hear the report of a committee charged with composing a reply to a letter that Massachusetts congressman Horace Mann had sent to African Americans attending

a Cincinnati convention. The letter stated that since "Africans" were inferior in intellect and that "the Caucasian race" was inferior in "sentiment and affection," their coexistence could be mutually beneficial. When asked in a follow-up letter whether his views had subsequently changed, Mann answered that they had not and went on to elaborate the view that each race had distinct characteristics and were ideally suited to live in distinct geographic regions, which some interpreted as an endorsement of colonization. After hearing Mann's second letter, participants in the public meeting had an "animated discussion"; speeches were given, and objections were put forward. The outcome was a resolution, unanimously adopted, which expressed "deep regret that Hon. Horace Mann ha[d] expressed sentiments inimical to our much oppressed and down trodden race."[21] A report of this meeting also appeared in the *Liberator* on the same date as the reprint in *FDP*. Subsequently, others who did not attend the public meeting weighed in on the matter, including Professor William Allen of Central College and Theodore Parker, clerical activist from Massachusetts, who both felt that the New Bedford citizens had overreacted to Mann's remarks, and Daniel Ricketson, a New Bedford native and Quaker intellectual, who felt that the black community was justified in its reaction.[22] The point here is not that antebellum African Americans held public meetings, common events during this era; rather, the relevance to rhetorical education is that these meetings took place in separate spaces, occupied primarily by African Americans, where they could use their rhetorical skills to develop strategies for change and to counter what they understood to be racist discourse. These meeting spaces were their discursive "free zones," one manifestation of what Michael C. Dawson and others have called a black counterpublic.[23] They also understood the function of the press in enabling cross-cultural conversations. The resolution that came out of that October 11 meeting concluded with the provision that the proceedings be published in the local papers as well as in the *Liberator* and *FDP*.

Praising Rhetoric and Direct Instruction in Rhetoric

In this section, I analyze articles from black newspapers across the century that offer direct rhetorical instruction, usually detached from any particular rhetorical performance. In these articles, the writer speaks directly to the reader about ways to improve abilities in public speaking, preaching, writing, or critical reading. Essays on eloquence, elocution, the merits of female orators, and how to read certain documents critically fall into this category as well.

In evaluating the educational intent of such pieces, sociologist Timothy Shortell's work on antebellum newspapers is useful. He conducted a content analysis of five black newspapers published between 1827 and 1860 in antebellum New York.[24] According to the coding system employed, the themes of

"brotherhood," "liberty," "America," "colored," and "slavery" occurred most frequently across all papers, with "brotherhood" emerging as a theme in more paragraphs than any other term.[25] The prominence of this theme suggests a heightened consciousness of the need to construct rhetorically an imagined community of politically astute readers.[26] While the editors were conscious of a wider audience, they were clearly focused on reaching black readers, challenging them to critical engagement with the civic discourse of the time. Shortell also coded selected paragraphs for three rhetorical dimensions—tone, or the use of emotion; basis, or the use of comparison; and mode. The dimension "mode" bears special relevance to journalism as a site of rhetorical education. Shortell's modes, based in part on Geoffrey Leech's theory of pragmatics, are the illocutions or performative utterances of asserting, explaining, and evaluating.[27] These modes are similar to the stases, often employed as a way of sorting arguments. Asserting operates in the stasis of fact; the intent is to establish some understanding about the topic under discussion. Explaining is closely aligned with the stasis of cause or definition; and judging or evaluating, the stasis of quality.[28] Shortell's results, based on four of the five papers in his study, showed a high percentage of the paragraphs (40 percent) to be in the explanatory mode, the illocution most often employed when the purpose is to educate, in that the "arguments make connections that reflect a didactic point of view."[29] At the risk of overgeneralizing from a study of five antebellum papers in one state, the finding that across these papers, the most prevalent theme is brotherhood and the most common illocution is explaining or arguing does provide tentative support for the claim that these editors were especially concerned, from a rhetorical perspective, about creating a community through language and about helping African Americans scattered across the Northern states begin to understand themselves as members of a discourse community, educating themselves for full participation in citizenship.

A critical question associated with fitness for participation in public rhetoric was whether one needed certain rhetorical credentials to speak. There was, on the one hand, the conviction that those who represented African Americans in public discourse needed to be fully articulate and able to defend their positions cogently; on the other hand, there was a sense that anyone who felt wronged had a right to address those wrongs using whatever linguistic abilities were available to her or him. In an article contentiously titled "Why Do Ignorant Colored Men So Often Speak in Public?," correspondent to the *Colored American* E. P. R. (Elymas Payson Rogers) opposes attempts to "speak in public on the part of those who are not duly qualified" in the belief that they do their cause more harm than good.[30] But Rogers understood the circumstances that compelled and entitled oppressed people to voice their opinions and paraphrased a

portion of Daniel Webster's 1826 speech on the occasion of the deaths of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson in support of this view: "When great interests are at stake, rhetoric is vain."[31] Rogers's point and Webster's passage highlight a discursive dilemma unresolved to this day; it resonates in Gayatri Spivak's celebrated question "Can the subaltern speak?," inquiring into the advantages and disadvantages of discursive representations of marginalized groups.[32] The editor of the *Colored American* appended the response that he was sympathetic to the need to speak but counsels, "Nothing is more detrimental to us than bringing ignorant, illiterate colored men into comparison with educated, talented white men. Such a course is food to our enemies and bane to our cause. Therefore, while we agree with our correspondent that colored men have the right, and should both speak and act, yet we hold that they should know when and where to speak, and how and where to act."[33] We have, then, a newspaper editor and a religious leader discussing the need for rhetorically skilled speakers to represent the concerns of an oppressed race to "educated, talented white men." Partially in the service of the presumption that those who represented the race in public discourse should be properly trained, articles in the black press included advice on public speaking, elocution, oratory, preaching, and other rhetorical skills. But such articles also reflect a general interest in rhetoric and expressive self-improvement, mentioned previously, which were evident in the private learner, discussed in chapter 2.

The demand for rhetoric manuals, accommodated to popular training in composition, oratory, reading, and elocution, increased from midcentury to the 1920s. Many of the popular rhetoric texts during this period contained varying amounts of theory followed by selected works for practice. For example, Caleb Bingham's *Columbian Orator* opens with a thirty-page introduction titled "General Directions for Speaking," with advice on pronunciation and gesture, followed by 270 pages of speeches, poems, dialogues, and other selections for study and practice.[34] Of these rhetorical skills, elocution attracted the greatest interest. Nan Johnson writes, "Interest in oratory and elocution was especially intense, encouraged by numerous and varied occasions for oratory and elocutionary performances serving a variety of political, cultural, and social functions."[35] Audiences held high standards for speakers, as indicated in the pages of the newspapers, where whole speeches or excerpts were frequently reprinted and were almost always accompanied by critical commentary. A good deal of attention was paid to elocutionary elements of an oration, even when its primary purpose was not performative. In this section, I discuss references in the black press to elocution generally and in the context of specific performances. These performances varied from political speeches on social reform to elocution in the strict sense of a dramatic reading or recitation of the work of others.

The January 23, 1841, *Colored American* announced that a Professor Bronson was in New York to offer a course of lectures on oratory and music.[36] The article calls for the "brethren" to organize a class. Bronson is also listed as one of the speakers in a series of lectures sponsored by the New York Phoenixonian Literary Society on the topic "Oratory—Interspersed with Recitations."[37] The *Christian Recorder*, as the official organ of the AME Church, carried numerous essays on elocution and its impact on the art of preaching. The October 27, 1866, "Essay on Elocution" was submitted by frequent *Recorder* correspondent the Reverend Thomas Strother of Terre Haute, Indiana. The essay contains detailed information on the manner of speaking and the rules governing elocution, which Strother defines as "the uttering of words in such a manner, in reading and speaking as most fully expresses the meaning of them; and to do this successfully, requires a knowledge, first of the organs, and then of the muscles which act upon them." The essay proceeds to provide in brief form just this knowledge, beginning with the proper body positions, the complement of vocal organs, and advice on breathing.[38] An earlier article is more general in its advocacy for elocution, admonishing that its study is essential for those who would be public speakers, especially ministers. The article, a reprint from the *Christian Instructor*, a weekly religious paper published in Philadelphia, laments the fact that so many good sermons go unheeded due to poor delivery and closes with lines on the power of eloquence from English poet Samuel Daniel.[39] "Practical Elocution" is the title of an article in the *North Star* in which W. C. N. (William C. Nell) reports on a performance by D. V. Gates of "recitations and imitations of distinguished orators and delineations of tragic and comic characters." Nell asked that the speaker be encouraged in "his self-taught exertions" and closed with an excerpt from William Ellery Channing's 1837 "Address on Temperance," in which he highlights the value of elocutionary recitation: "Were this art cultivated and encouraged, great numbers, now insensible to the most beautiful compositions, might be waked up to their excellence and power."[40]

An extended essay on rhetoric titled "American Eloquence" appeared in an 1852 issue of *FDP*. The piece was written by Wilbur M. Hayward, occasional contributor to the paper and the Rochester book agent who published a collection of Daniel Webster's speeches in 1853. John Ernest observes that the piece bears several resemblances to William Allen's "Orators and Oratory," published in *FDP* over a month later, in terms of the historical trajectory of the examples, the topics associated with the rise of eloquence, and the names of accomplished orators.[41] Such similarities suggest the existence of a genre associated with praise of various abstract concepts. For example, in the case of eloquence, almost any mention of its merits will include reference to Demosthenes, as in the case of an 1851 article in *FDP*, a reprint from *Bentley's Miscellany*, titled

simply "Demosthenes." The article reminds readers that although Demosthenes is best known for his oratorical abilities, he cultivated eloquence only to improve his political influence. He was not a "mere rhetorician" but a man of action.[42] While both Hayward's and Allen's texts serve a didactic purpose, Hayward's is more clearly focused on praise of eloquence in general. He had no other agenda. Allen, in the tradition of Demosthenes, conveyed a specific concern as to whether one used eloquence for good or for harm.

Benjamin Tucker Tanner's essays in the *Christian Recorder* present an interesting variation on the essay of direct instruction in rhetoric. Tanner discusses Cyprian, a native of Carthage, who, like Augustine, spent his early life teaching and practicing rhetoric prior to his conversion to Christianity, then applied rhetorical principles to the service of spreading Christianity.[43] Over a period of at least nine months, from January to September 1863, Tanner, then twenty-eight years old, published a series of articles on Cyprian. Tanner, an AME minister, was pastor of the Georgetown, D.C., church at the time and in 1878 began a sixteen-year tenure as editor of the *Christian Recorder*. As part of ongoing arguments to support black intellectual and moral equality, and in some cases superiority, Tanner may have chosen Cyprian because he was known as the first African bishop, who organized the Catholic Church in Africa.[44] Certainly many of the black churches and lodges in the nineteenth century carried his name, identifying with his continent of origin.

Prior to his conversion to Christianity, St. Cyprian was an orator and teacher of rhetoric influenced by the classical culture that would have given him a solid grounding in rhetoric. Spread out over eighteen articles, the six chapters of Tanner's essay that I have been able to retrieve include a history of Cyprian's early life in Carthage, with a description of Carthaginian pagan society and of Cyprian's early instruction according to the principles advocated by Quintilian, "cradled in Paganism, [and] educated in all that pertained to ancient scholasticism."[45] Tanner's third chapter, "Cyprian the Rhetorician," shows how rhetoric shaped his young adulthood as a teacher and pleader and influenced his life as a church official. The remaining three chapters cover his postconversion life as a bishop and martyr. Having reviewed Cyprian's early education, Tanner, in chapter 2, begins a brief history of rhetoric with Cyprian the teacher of rhetoric in the background. He advances the conventional claim that rhetoric originates in the heart rather than in the head and engages the figure *erotema* to invoke the oratory of Frederick Douglass: "Is not the genius of oppression a master rhetorician?" and "Who so eloquent upon the rights of man, as the black sage of Rochester?"[46] It is the only reference in the series of lectures to one of Tanner's peers, an uncontestable reference all readers of the *Christian Recorder* would affirm. All other persons referenced are figures from classical and medieval

periods, including Demosthenes and Tertullian. The history that he traces had been well rehearsed by 1883, but what makes it interesting is its placement here in the *Christian Recorder*. Tanner could very well have decided to submit the information in the context of a defense of Cyprian, African bishop. Primarily written in the mode Shortell refers to as explaining, rather than asserting or evaluating, the essays are informational, not directive. The description of Cyprian's conversion from "pagan rhetorician" to Christian documents the spread of the religion during the first forty years of the third century. Tanner does not quote from or refer to specific texts by Cyprian but holds him up as a rhetoric teacher who converted to Christianity and lived a life "with signal honor to himself, benefit to the church, and glory to God."[47]

On the benefits of reading widely, a *Colored American* article claims that it develops character and independence of thought and enables one to become "conversant with the world, and prepared to lend an influence."[48] Two years later, the same paper carried an article arguing against a "fatal error in the literary studies and pursuits of the female," referring to the "passionate and excessive devotion to fictitious writing, which is the reigning idolatry of the sex." The writer complains that fiction constitutes 75 percent of women's reading, while they ignore biographies of great men, adding further that novel reading does nothing to improve oratorical abilities.[49]

An article in *FDP* titled "The Lecturer" comments on traveling speakers' educational value in the community, due to the "modern invention" of the mass lecture reaching a large number of people efficiently. The article then critiques the rhetorical performances of three persons who had recently lectured in Rochester, pointing out variations in their distinctive styles. Henry Giles, Unitarian minister and Shakespeare scholar, received praise for the "generous humane nature" of his lecture. Wendell Phillips, whom the writer calls "Boston's best rhetorician and finest speaker," presented a lecture described as "happily delivered, admirably arranged and comprehensive, simple, and beautiful." The third lecturer, Theodore Parker, gave a talk on human progress, which the writer believed "was in all the elements of a lecture, vastly superior to many of its predecessors this season." The writer preferred Parker over Phillips for his optimism, observing that Phillips presents a picture of civilization as "rising, falling, advancing, and retreating alternately," while Parker's is an ever-advancing construction of history.[50] Comments on Phillips's rhetorical style also appear the following year in a report on the New England Anti-Slavery Society's convention. *FDP*'s Boston correspondent digresses to discuss the effectiveness of various convention speakers, including Stephen Foster, Charles Sumner, and Phillips. Observing that Foster was an "uncommonly shrewd and able debater," the correspondent contrasts Phillips, the prepared

but extemporaneous orator, who speaks with a fire "aimed to destroy an evil," to Sumner, the careful, studied orator, who commits his speeches to memory and delivers them with the force of a "tempest . . . to bear down, over power, and put [the opposing argument] 'on its back.'" One correspondent expressed dismay "more from curiosity than anything else" that Sojourner Truth did not have an opportunity to speak on that same occasion. These interspersed comments on rhetorical performance were quite common, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century when rhetoric was still, as Nan Johnson points out, a public art. Papers frequently carried examples of eloquence accompanied by framing comments. In the *Liberator,* a newspaper subscribed to by many African Americans, one can find articles titled "Eloquence," "Indian Eloquence," "Native Eloquence," "Shameful Eloquence," and "Colored Talent and Eloquence," accompanied by speech excerpts in each instance.[51] Similar articles on eloquence appeared in the black press and helped to shape readers' attitudes towards rhetoric, oratory, and eloquence.

The eloquence of a Fourth of July speech by E. D. Barber is noted in a July 1839 *Colored American* article reprinted from the *Pennsylvania Freeman.* The article, titled "Eloquence," includes introductory remarks and an excerpt from the conclusion of the speech delivered before the Addison County Anti-Slavery Society in 1836. It is not clear whether the framing commentary was written by the editor of the *Colored American* or by the editor or the *Freeman.*[52] Regardless of affiliation, the writer heaps praise upon the excerpt for the ways in which it conveys "moral firmness and inflexible love of liberty," for its "prophetic vision" and for its "rich and beautiful" language, comparing it to Daniel Webster's peroration in his reply to Robert Hayne. Readers of the *Colored American* were being offered a piece of occasional rhetoric from three years earlier for appreciation of its spirit and the power of its language. In the excerpt, Barber, clerk of the Vermont House of Representatives and a popular speaker dedicated to reform, creates a utopic vision of freedom rising, as public opinion against slavery increased, and of a "chorus of millions of voices . . . swelling upon the calm, still air, hymning praises and Thanksgivings."[53]

From the beginning, the editors of these newspapers seemed to have understood their educational function. *Freedom's Journal* in 1827 published a statement on the advantage of newspapers as a teaching resource, including the facts that the cost of books is reduced, students are introduced to new, current material every week, and, at the same time, they learn world history and geography.[54] Two months later, *Freedom's Journal,* through a column by "Mr. Observer," advanced a direct endorsement of rhetorical training in which the writer stresses "the importance of forming a Debating Society, among our brethren of this city [New York]. No one at the present day, will presume to

dispute the extensive influence which Eloquence exerts upon mankind." The column holds up St. Paul, Demosthenes, Richard Sheridan, Edmund Burke, and those who argued against the slave trade as exemplars, pointing out that while it is not guaranteed to make all participants Sheridans, a debating club "will enlarge our powers of reasoning by teaching us to express our thoughts as brief as possible, and to the best advantage. It will also enable us to detect at a glance, whatever sophistry is contained in the arguments of an opponent."[55]

FDP presents a history of the first newspaper, expressing surprise that "a means of instruction and amusement so apparent should not have been established until nearly two hundred years after the discovery of printing."[56] The *Provincial Freeman,* in an article titled "Newspapers by Colored People in the United States," laments the fact that although several new papers had come into existence, they were advocating, as did their predecessors, the position that blacks must stay in the United States to "make the white American give to them equal political and social privileges," even though whites themselves immigrated to America to escape European despotism.[57] *FDP* reprinted an article from the *Ogdensburg (N.Y.) Sentinel,* listing the benefits to children of having access to newspapers in the home: they become better readers, spellers, and grammarians; they write better compositions; as they mature, they tend to take the lead in debating societies, with newspapers serving as a source of invention.[58] In a *North Star* article titled "Colored Newspapers," Douglass criticizes a passage from the short-lived paper the *Delevan Union,* published by James Gloucester, for its sloppy editing and the *Northern Star and Freeman's Advocate,* published by Stephen Meyers, for its competitive intent. He calls for more cooperative and carefully produced efforts among black newspaper publishers.[59]

While most of the articles on eloquence, rhetoric, or elocution discuss the merits of a particular rhetorical performance, the value of eloquence, or methods for improving one's speaking ability, portions of some articles call attention to the importance of developing the frequently neglected rhetorical skill of critical reading. One of the best examples of an article with this emphasis was submitted to the *Colored American* by Amos Gerry Beman. Beman, a politically active New Haven Congregational minister and a classmate of Alexander Crummell's at the Oneida Institute, submitted a series of at least seventeen articles on mental and moral improvement of the race to the paper. In one, "Thoughts, No. IX," Beman lays out what he calls those abilities that are "strictly mental" and "do not necessarily influence the heart or moral character of the individual." In this amoral category of study, he includes reading, grammar, and the principles of composition, defining reading not as a basic skill but as "the ability and habit of mind which enables one to read with diligence and attention the best standard authors in the English language, in poetry and prose. To be able to appreciate and

measure the depth of an argument, whether advanced from the profound mind of a Webster or arrayed in the sparkling brilliance of a Burke . . . to be able to detect the vein of sophistry and chicanery, though robed in the brightest drapery of genius, or found amid the meretricious flowers of eloquence. . . . We should have such a knowledge of figures as will effectually shield us from the cunning of those base minds which are ever ready to take advantage of the ignorant, who are not qualified to demonstrate with facility any problem that may occur in the business of life."[60] Beman here is calling for, rather than providing, instruction in the kind of close critical reading needed to interpret the discourse that during the 1840s was continuing to oppress African Americans, not only through institutionalized slavery but through isolated acts of discrimination like the one Beman himself experienced in his efforts to receive an education in Connecticut. He calls for the development of critical skills to detect what rhetoric often hides as well as what it reveals. In this same article, Beman states that the rules of grammar and composition are needed most among those who have most to say, adding, "Who ought to thunder in all that is solemn and sublime—all that is powerful in arguments based upon the Rock of Truth—the rights of human nature—in all that is persuasive in eloquence for themselves, and their 'brethren in bonds, as bound with them,' if not colored men?"[61]

After the Civil War, newspaper editors felt a stronger need to educate the larger population of subscribers who now had access to their publications. The first issue of the *New National Era* carries a dialogue between "Objector" and "Progressive" in which the two characters debate the advantages of and objections to black newspapers. "Objector" remarks that "no colored newspaper enterprise has ever yet succeeded," and "Progressive" counters that there are more readers both North and South and a heightened urgency for the kinds of self-improvement that newspapers help to foster.[62] This dialogue anticipates James Weldon Johnson's *New York Age* editorial "Do You Read Negro Papers?" in which he answers the complaint from a potential black subscriber that he "cannot find any news in the Negro newspapers." Johnson observes that it is not the role of the Negro newspaper to disseminate "mere news," adding that "they are race papers. They are organs of propaganda. Their chief business is to stimulate thought among Negroes about the things that vitally concern them."[63] Given these circumstances, one might expect to find more examples of direct instruction in rhetorical education in postbellum papers, except of course that to some extent, oratorical culture itself was changing, and much public rhetoric moved indoors, as Nan Johnson outlined. With emancipation came Reconstruction and more private and government-sponsored educational initiatives that would have incorporated various forms of rhetorical education into the formal curriculum and into the extracurricular. Pages of the *Indianapolis Freeman*, for

example, describe the activities of college-based literary associations, many of them meeting in regional as well as campus settings. Reports on their activities would appear more frequently in the black press as the society movement spread to other black campuses.[64]

On Women and Rhetoric in the Black Press

Given the constraints against women speaking publicly in the nineteenth century, eloquence and rhetorical education were generally understood to apply differently to females.[65] Articles from the predominantly male-edited black newspapers reflect this difference. Even the most forward-thinking articles on the subject of women and rhetoric insist upon limited participation in the public sphere lest it "unfit them for the holier duties assigned them in the order of creation," this caution from an 1848 piece in the *North Star* defending abolitionist Abby Kelley's right to lecture. The article, observing that when Kelly spoke in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, some were more curious about her housekeeping skills than her views on the slavery question, recommends that women should develop the "mental culture" associated with eloquence along with their womanly influence.[66]

The superiority of woman's influence comes through in the "Varieties" section of one of the first issues of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827. Under the heading "Female Temper," women are advised to control their tempers to ensure domestic tranquillity and to dissent without the passion associated with males. It is recommended that women receive a different kind of rhetorical education that will not destroy their natural tenderness.[67] But, as Jacqueline Bacon points out in her study of *Freedom's Journal*, the editors of that newspaper also demonstrated the belief that women should be included in public discussions, especially about their own welfare, in publishing a letter signed by "Matilda," who at least assumed the persona of a woman. In her letter, she first requests that they "allow a female to offer a few remarks upon a subject that [they] must allow to be all-important."[68] This subject is the need for educated women who can not only pass their knowledge on to children but possess it as something not to be taken from them. By submitting her argument for public scrutiny, the writer employed her own rhetorical abilities. In Bacon's words, "She used her literary skills to take male leaders . . . to task in a public forum on an issue that was vital to the community's future."[69]

FDP reprinted Ohio abolitionist Sarah Otis Ernst's letter to the *Christian Press* in which Ernst laments the absence of a "competent female speaker" on the program at the 1853 Cincinnati Anti-Slavery Convention, having observed this deficiency on the antislavery lecture circuit over the previous three years.[70] In a reprint from the *New York Independent*, Harriet Beecher Stowe comments

on the stir caused by the sermons and public lectures of Antoinette Brown, who had been "troubling the waters" for many traditionalists but apparently had not performed in an unwomanly manner. Stowe, while supporting Brown's right to speak ("Can one tell us why it should be right and proper for Jenny Lind to sing to two thousand people 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and improper for Antoinette Brown to say it?"), concludes that most women will have little interest in public speaking: "It would now appear to be a safe course to allow the experiment which is now being made on the sphere of womanhood, to run itself out to its final results without opposition."[71]

Women, cautioned against direct use of eloquence, were instructed to employ "the soft persuasiveness of [their] embraces, or the more melting eloquence of [their] tears."[72] The *Colored American* noted in its November 17, 1838, issue that much of it was devoted to "remarks on female character, influence, and eloquence" because not enough attention had been paid to the part women played in developing human character and because "colored females, from education, are more especially deficient." The issue includes articles on "Woman's Kindness," "Moral Influence of the Wife on the Husband," and, the one of interest to this discussion, "Woman's Eloquence." This article considers the proper spaces where women should practice "unostentatious" eloquence—in her home and in various interactions with acquaintances through "mere conversation." The writer adds that the cultivation of the powers of conversation could take place through direct "intercourse with polished and intelligent society," formal instruction in conversational etiquette, and practice at home during early childhood. Woman is left with conversation into which she can incorporate entertainment or instruction for the benefit of others.[73] A piece in the *North Star* specifically on conversation advises women, especially as they grow older, to refine their conversational skills through wide reading, for "a large heart, and an eloquent tongue, are among the most precious of human things."[74]

A more general argument for the education of women is advanced in the female-edited *Provincial Freeman* article "Female Education." The argument goes that women first need the advantage of a well-rounded education so that they can become "free, independent, accountable, and intelligent," with the same opportunity for self-development as men. The argument then goes to republican motherhood, the idea that those who have primary responsibility for the rearing of children should be well-informed. The article concludes, "It is not half so important that our legislations be wise as that our mothers be so. . . . Strengthen the woman['s] heart, and you strengthen the world. . . . Cultivate the woman['s] mind if you would cultivate the race."[75]

Pages of the postbellum black press carried more material by and about women that would promote rhetorical education beyond "woman's sphere." The

December 8, 1894, issue of the *Indianapolis Freeman* carried a speech made on the opening night of the Bethel Literary Circle given by Mrs. James T. V. Hill, the wife of the first African American lawyer in Indianapolis.[76] In the article, she constructs an argument based on equity, claiming first that women have no desire to "unsex" themselves; they just want equity in the enjoyment of all the "rights, privileges and immunities accorded unto man."[77] In her column "Our Woman's Department," Gertrude Bustill Mossell modeled the ways in which women could function as advocates for their own participation in public discourse. Mossell, whose writing appeared in the *New York Freeman*, the *Indianapolis Freeman*, the *AME Church Review*, the *Woman's Era*, and many other periodicals, used her column to defend higher education for women, to provide advice on the kinds of rhetorical training needed to survive as a newspaper reporter, and to provide instruction specifically to women interested in journalism. This article, aptly titled "Women as Journalists," even outlines a daily routine based on her own experiences: "Writing of compositions . . . of dialogues, accounts of visits to interesting places, we found of great benefit. Take a picture that impresses you and write out a story from it. If you have talents for versification write in that style, endeavoring to conform to rules, and yet retain some originality. Write a little every day. Read and study the best literature, rejoice in candid criticism, even if given in an unfriendly spirit. . . . Write on what you know something about. Use your own style; imitate no one. 'Despise not the day of small things.' Says one, 'Why do you write only on doings of the colored people or women?' There is no nobler work than to make known the good deeds of our ancestors, and to build up a pure womanhood for the race."[78] The last piece of advice indicates Mossell's sensitivity to her times and the extent to which her advice needed to resonate within the discourse of racial uplift and the gradual emergence of women from the domestic. In keeping with convention, her articles for the "Woman's Department," outspoken assertions of a woman's right to equality, were nonetheless all under the name "Mrs. N[athan] F[rancis] Mossell." Using one's husband's name was, of course, standard practice in the nineteenth century among married women, as in Mrs. James T. V. Hill's argument in support of woman's suffrage. For Mossell, rather than diluting her independence, it helped to avoid the appearance of impropriety and to demonstrate that marital respectability could serve as a source of ethical appeal.

As if in response to Mossell's advice, black women launched their own paper, the *Woman's Era*, in 1894. During the last decade of the century, the *Era* served a vital function in community-building among black clubwomen as the first newspaper published by and for African American women. The Boston publication, started in 1894 under the editorship of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin,

continued for several years as the organ of the Woman's Era Club. Black women's organizations across the country, led by women who believed they could solve the problems of the race through intensive self-help activities, contributed to the *Era*. Along with advertisements for Mossell's book *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* and for the Emerson College of Oratory (now Emerson College) were reports on such activities and commentary on the eloquence of various speakers, submitted from correspondents across the country.[79] They appear in the pages of the *Woman's Era* as evidence of enacted rhetorical education. For example, in the first issue, Medora Gould, the editor of the "Literature" column, encourages women to take advantage of a table reserved in the Magazine Room, Lower Hall of the Boston Public Library, for the use of women.[80] In the May 1895 issue, correspondent Dora J. Cole of Pennsylvania remarks on the eloquence of Fanny Jackson Coppin's memorial tribute to Frederick Douglass. Cole observes that Jackson used the thundering approval of the audience "as a weapon against them and charged all who applauded her sentiments to be responsible for carrying them out," adding that her eloquence provided "a grand object lesson for the detractors of woman's ability."[81] One such detractor, writing some ten years earlier, was the Reverend James H. A. Johnson, former student of William Watkins. In his argument against women preaching, Johnson marshals the standard passages from scripture used to conclude that the "bolstering up of female preachers can but enervate the ministry and damage the church."[82] I now turn to some of the rhetorical advice on preaching put forward in the nineteenth-century black press.

On Pulpit Rhetoric, the Holy Skill

"The Eloquence of the Pulpit," Lecture 29 of Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, sketches in broad strokes the principles of effective preaching. Blair observes that pulpit rhetoric has the advantages of its dignity and importance. Preachers speak to large assemblies rather than a few judges and are not interrupted or obliged to reply to extemporaneous responses. They have time to select the subjects of their sermons and prepare for their delivery. The disadvantages are the potential for boredom, since the subjects are not new. Preachers have to make tried and true information appear to have some novelty, primarily through delivery, and deal with abstract concepts that need to be illustrated with concrete applications and examples. In response to those who claim that since the truths of religion stand on their own, preaching should not require rhetorical training, Blair answers that this claim would be valid only if eloquence were an ostentatious and deceitful art calculated solely to please. "True Eloquence," he explains, "is the art of placing truth in the most advantageous light for conviction and persuasion." Blair observes that every sermon

has the purpose of persuading others to goodness, but the persuasion should be based on the preacher's and the audience's conviction. Pulpit eloquence must be popular eloquence, accommodated to the people, not over their heads. The effective preacher must be a good person, speaking a personal language of conviction, not a language for display or in imitation of vogue trends in preaching. To avoid digressions, the preacher should employ a combination of notes and memory. In the last section of the lecture, Blair observes that given the many duties of preachers, "there is more reason to wonder that we hear so many instructive, and even eloquent Sermons, than that we hear so few."[83] This is all advice that one might expect preachers out to win souls would naturally consider. Practicing his own advice, Blair has just brought together some of these commonsensical principles in accessible format.[84] The rhetorical wisdom on preaching from the pages of the black press were inspired by these same principles—substantive content developed to persuade people to become good, practical applications and examples, strong conviction, and sincere delivery.

As the organ of the AME Church, the *Christian Recorder* is rich with various kinds of advice on ways to enhance preaching. These articles address the preacher's moral, emotional, and mental state as well as formal rhetorical skills. A good bit of the commentary on preaching is reprinted from other denominational periodicals like the *Watchman of the South*, the *National Baptist*, the *American Presbyterian*, and the *Christian Advocate;* from the writing of religious scholars like professor of systematic theology Enoch Pond, Lutheran pastor W. H. Luckenbach, English divine Frederick W. Robertson, or John Bunyan; and from authoritative theological sources like *Bibliotheca Sacra*. One *Recorder* article goes back two centuries to quote English Puritan preachers William Bates (1625–99) and his contemporary Richard Baxter (1651–91). An article in the December 6, 1862, *Recorder* includes a portion of Baxter's advice to preachers that anticipates much of Blair's: "To preach a sermon, I think, is not the hardest part, and yet what skill is necessary to make the path plain; to convince the hearers; to let irresistible light into their consciences, and keep it there, and drive it home; to screw the truth into their minds, and work Christ into their affections; to meet every objection, and clearly resolve it; to drive sinners to a stand, and make them see that there is no hope, but that they must unavoidably be either converted or condemned; and do all this in respect of language and manner, as becomes our work, and yet as most suitable to the capacities of our hearers. This, and a great deal more that should be done in every sermon, must surely be done with a great deal of holy skill."[85]

The respected preachers Bates and Baxter are frequently invoked as exemplars of pulpit eloquence in the *Colored American*, *FDP*, and the *North Star*, as well. The *Colored American* carried a reprint from the *Watchman of the South*,

a moderate Presbyterian publication originating in Richmond, describing with some amazement the rhetorical abilities of an "African preacher," brought to Virginia as a slave, who learned to read the Bible, had committed extended passages to memory, and had converted many whites in the area. The explanation, in some places, borrows from the "fortunate fall" argument that slavery, for all its disruption, brought the benefits of Christianity and literacy:

> [I]t is important to state that "Uncle Jack," (for so he is universally called,) understands and speaks the English language with much more correctness and purity than any native of Africa I have ever known. His pronunciation is not only distinct and accurate but his style is at once chaste and forcible. And yet he has never been made acquainted with the first principles of Grammar or Rhetoric. I have no doubt his superiority in this respect is to be ascribed to the following causes—First, to his having left his native land at so early an age. Next, to the freedom with which he has been permitted and encouraged to mingle in the best society the country affords. Then to the native vigor of his intellect and above all to this intimate acquaintance with the phraseology of the Bible. The reader will, therefore, be guarded against disappointment at seeing nothing, in what we quote from his own lips of the jargon, so peculiar to the African race. No one ever heard the good old preacher say, *massa* for *master*, or *me* for *I*.[86]

This passage is also interesting for what it reveals about attitudes toward African American dialects of English and the Bible as a source of literacy. The writer wants to ascribe the preacher's rhetorical ability to his exposure to Western culture, "having left his native land at so early an age," and later "encouraged to mingle in the best society." The author of the series of sketches on "Uncle Jack," William Spotswood White, was pastor of a Presbyterian church in Lexington, Virginia, and an apologist for slavery, who would have found this link plausible. Although "Uncle Jack" was enslaved throughout his life, the fact that he apparently was not heard preaching an abolitionist sermon but rather seemed to have offered personal spiritual ministry, isolated from larger social conditions, made him the ideal example of the apparent benefits of slavery. The editor of the *Colored American* includes no framing remarks for any of the three extracts from the *Watchman*, causing one to wonder how the reader might have been expected to read these pieces.

A number of articles express the belief that preachers need to preach a social gospel, especially one calling for the abolition of slavery. The article "What Is the Business of the Church!" addresses Blair's principle of meaningful content in that it challenges preachers to speak out specifically against slavery, such

that the current "peace" in the church "will be like the stillness before a terrible earthquake," overturning slavery.[87] Another expresses wonder that some see slavery as a "semi-political question" not suitable for sermons, as if the "purchase and sale of God's image, in the vestments of human flesh, and blood, and bones," was not a moral issue.[88] An article in the October 13, 1855, issue of the *Provincial Freeman* insists that preachers should advocate purging church rolls of "manstealers." In a reprint drawing on the advice of William Bates, another *Colored American* article addresses the principle that the preacher ought to be a good person, cautioning against allowing the flattery of the auditors to cause preachers to "bespangle their discourse with light ornaments, to please the ear," rather than preach in a style designed to "save the soul."[89] The Washington correspondent to the *Colored American* compares the preaching styles of the chaplain to the Senate and the chaplain to the House, with high praise for the eloquence of the former and the wish that all "clergymen would throw all their sermons into the fire, and then go to preaching instead of reading." The correspondent would have the preacher study and compare passages of scripture, seeking the illumination to speak without a prepared text.[90] Late in the century, the *New York Age* carries an article on what the writer considers the "Harm Done by Incompetent Preachers and Teachers." The concern here is with content rather than style or delivery as the author criticizes the sermon of a Charlottesville, Virginia, preacher in which he encourages his parishioners to worry less about voting and acquiring their "social rights" and to concentrate on laboring to supply the needs of the superior white race.[91]

In line with Blair's lecture on pulpit rhetoric, these articles from the black press refer to the importance of effective delivery and the ethos of the speaker and place emphasis on the need to apply the abstractions of religion to important contemporary social issues. I close this section with a discussion of "Deborah and Jael," a sermon by Reverdy C. Ransom, a prominent turn-of-the-nineteenth-century social gospeler, who served as editor of the *AME Church Review* from 1912 to 1924. The sermon was delivered in 1897 at Chicago's Bethel AME Church to members of the Ida B. Wells Woman's Club, along with the regular worshipers. This sermon seemed especially relevant as an example of pulpit eloquence with specific social activist leanings, though this tendency is embodied more fully in the speaker himself than in this sermon. The occasion was perhaps an annual event during which members of service clubs worshiped together at some member's church. The choice of Bethel AME, the church to which Wells belonged, added to the significance of the occasion. Ransom had helped the club establish a neighborhood kindergarten at Bethel and later became involved in settlement house work. Further, the AME pastor and Wells had collaborated on several other projects, including a protest against temperance leader Frances

Willard's remarks on lynching, and together would later lead an investigation into the Sam Hose lynching in Georgia, mentioned above.

Yet the speech itself may disappoint readers hoping for radical departure from prescribed gender roles and Western imperialism. It opens with the biblical stories of Deborah and Jael, two Jewish women who performed courageous acts in defense of the Israelites. These narratives serve as ancient examples of the social gospel Ransom would have the parishioners enact. Next, Ransom claims that Christianity produces a "higher type of man" than Confucianism, Buddhism, or Mohammedism, and that of the Christian nations, America produces "the brainiest man on the face of the earth, and it produces the happiest man on the face of the earth: because the foundation principles of our government rest upon manhood and not upon race, not upon creed, not upon blood: but the manhood of our race has suffered in this land—has been dwarfed in this land." Thus, this superlative ranking has been denied to blacks, and especially to black women. He blames slavery for the suffering of black women and looks forward to the day when the black woman will have only one "lord" and "king," her husband, whom she will then be in a better position to encourage to noble deeds and to provide with needed moral support. But he also recognizes the separate leadership roles of many black women, describing at length the accomplishments of Ida Wells, of course, who was probably there in the audience, and also lifting up the names of other female educators, artists, and performers. He calls on the men to show women traditional respect, protection, and support, reminding them that "our womanhood can never shine in all the beauty and dignity and glory which is in store for it until it has our protection; until our women become our queens at whose feet we lay the richest trophies and highest honors we can win in the field of high endeavor." Ransom was clearly a product of his time, with its discourse of middle-class manliness, but, at the same time, he was one of the leading advocates for the rights of women.

He ends the sermon with an excerpt from a poem by one of his former teachers at Wilberforce and wife of the president during his time there, Mary E. Ashe Lee, whose poems were frequently published in the *Christian Recorder*. The poem, for which Ransom does not provide a title, is "Afmerica." It alludes to a subject few talked about publicly at the turn of the century, amalgamation or race mixing, a process that produced what Paula Bennett refers to as "America's amalgamated national identity."[92] The excerpt Ransom quotes speaks more about the future of this blended woman "of every hue, of every shade," and the way in which she should be honored and protected by "her brothers, husbands, and friends."[93] This example of late-nineteenth-century pulpit rhetoric centers on the accomplishments of black women, who are encouraged to take inspiration from two women of the Bible; the sermon quickly takes off from its biblical

underpinnings and becomes a message on the tradition of black women as social activists, a tradition the Ida B. Wells Woman's Club continued.

Instructing through Critical Commentary on Rhetorical Performances

Commentary on Performances of Elocutionists

By the 1840s, black women expanded the professional roles available to them by making a living as elocutionary performers through established institutions, such as lyceums, at no loss of the respectability often jeopardized by women in public spaces. Especially in the Northern states, the lyceum became a popular evening entertainment, and elocution had become the most appealing of the popularized components of rhetoric. This specialization in the study of pronunciation or action included the first large-scale, systematic effort to teach reading aloud. Elocutionists named their study for the third office of rhetoric, *elocutio* or style, partly because elocution, as a distinct performative art, referred to the embellished expression of previously composed material, and both men and women were trained in it. Articles in the pages of nineteenth-century black newspapers were filled with observations on elocutionary performances. For example, in a correspondence from "Hannible" to the *Christian Recorder*, February 10, 1866, the writer comments on the performance of Avery College (Allegheny, Pennsylvania) students: "In elocution, the students evince good taste, but it was the subject matter of the various essays and orations, which attracted my attention." Hannible then goes on to name several women who had performed commendably, focusing on one in particular who "contented herself with portraying a scene of every day life, and so vividly was it presented in all its details, that one felt irresistibly drawn along in opposition with the ideal, picturing to the mind the gorgeous reality, and as the reader concluded, amidst a burst of applause, we involuntarily sighed and wished for more."[94] The emphasis here is on performance and visual presentation by what the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* calls "ocular demonstration," so that what is pictured seems to pass in front of the auditor.[95]

This performance training was fueled in part by the opportunity it offered for performances outside of structured dramatic productions. These events often consisted of lectures and solo readings of literature, and they drew broad popular support, as programs of literary societies also indicate. Dwight Conquergood, in his essay "Rethinking Elocution," provides some useful observations on the impact of elocutionary performances in the nineteenth century. He claims that for those aspiring to the mainstream or for those engaged in linguistic gatekeeping, elocution served as an attempt to discipline speech, "to recuperate the vitality of the spoken word from rural and rough working-class contexts by regulating and refining" it.[96] We generally think of rhetorical education—or any form of

education—as a means of leveling the field of available opportunities, especially to African Americans in the nineteenth century. But, considering elocution from the perspective of those "against whom it erected its protocols of taste, civility, and gentility," Conquergood also notes that these oral performances provided access, in some instances, to written texts for those who could not read, using Sojourner Truth's appreciation for Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* which she had heard read at an elocutionary event, as one frequently cited example. According to the story, after hearing a portion of *Leaves of Grass,* Truth asked who wrote it, interjecting, "Never mind the man's name—it was God who wrote it, he chose the man—to give his message."[97]

The dramatic readings originating within the lyceum setting evolved into separate elocutionary events. Elocutionists migrated from literary societies to establish themselves on the professional stage through performing poetry, short sketches, and dramatic readings for a paying audience. Black women elocutionists, whom I am also calling rhetorical educators, reached black audiences not only through their performances but indirectly through accounts of them in the black and white press.

Two women, Mary Webb and Louise de Mortie, provide important examples of public readers whose elocutionary performances served an educational purpose. Elocutionist Webb was best known for her enactment of scenes from *The Christian Slave,* Harriet Beecher Stowe's dramatized version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* These scenes functioned dually as a curious argument against black inferiority and as a recycling of literacy through the oral. Webb was the daughter of an escaped enslaved woman and a wealthy Spaniard, who allegedly had attempted to purchase her mother's freedom. A pioneer among black performers, Webb lived in Philadelphia with her husband, author Frank Webb, when she began her career at the age of twenty-seven. Described as exhibiting a "genius for dramatic reading," Webb's success led her to tour in New England, where she met Stowe, and she subsequently became the solo performer of *The Christian Slave,* expressly written for her. In converting her novel to a dramatic performance, Stowe created speaking parts for more women and black male characters than for white men, and Webb performed all of those parts. Thus, as Susan Clark writes, "the persona of Mary Webb visually and vocally reinforced the gender and/or racial characteristics of 22 of *The Christian Slave*'s 27 characters."[98] The inclusion of more female and African American speaking parts no doubt helped to make her performance more credible, better to serve the cause of abolition.

In her 1855 diary, Charlotte Forten Grimké entered this negative review of Webb, after seeing her perform selections from Shakespeare: "I wish coloured persons would not attempt to do anything of the kind unless they can compare

favourably with others."[99] Grimké's response, softened in the next sentence with the hope that "if she has talent, it may be cultivated, and that she may succeed in her vocation," reflects the pervasive concern among African Americans, mentioned throughout this text, that only the "best" members of the race become objects of the white gaze. Nonetheless, Webb came to be called the Black Siddons, after the British actress Sarah Siddons. Her readings of *The Christian Slave* carried her to England. The July 29, 1856, edition of the *London Daily News* and the August 2, 1856, edition of the *Illustrated London News* carried the same article on her performances in front of a small but apparently appreciative audience. The writer regretted that most people were out of the city for the summer, adding, "[W]e trust that there will be enough friends of the dark races left in London" to ensure a successful tour.[100]

It is not clear whether Webb's performances of *The Christian Slave* reached a wide audience of African Americans. Charlotte Grimké could not be considered typical of the African Americans who might have acquired any form of rhetorical education from direct experience of her performances. Yet they did read about them in the black press, even though most accounts were reprints from the white press. For example, a telling review of her debut performance as a dramatic reader, reprinted in the *Provincial Freeman,* was published in the *Woman's Advocate,* a Philadelphia-based, all-female-managed newspaper, founded in 1855 by Anna McDowell.[101] The review points out that many in the audience were of the "histrionic profession and some of the best teachers and critics of elocution." It comments on Webb's good fortune to have imperceptible "African" features ("Anglo-Saxon predominates"). Although the review found her delivery of the Gothic poem "The Maniac" by Matthew Gregory Lewis lacking,[102] the performance as a whole was deemed favorable, especially her rendering of "Negro Eccentricities," pieces written in "Negro" dialect. The *Portland Transcript* observed that the "Negro dialect was rendered to the life."[103] *FDP* included reviews reprinted from the *Boston Post,* the *Boston Atlas,* the *Boston Courier,* and the *Evening Telegraph.* An 1855 review in the *Liberator* noted that she had performed to a standing-room-only crowd in Boston's Tremont Temple and to an audience of 1,300 in Worcester.[104] Members of these audiences were primarily whites, many of whom had read Stowe's novel and were curious about how the narrative was represented in *The Christian Slave.*

Rather than serving an educational purpose chiefly among African Americans, it seems more likely that Webb's elocution performed the work of abolition and of "persuading" white audiences in the North and in England of the abilities and humanity of blacks, a project that received much attention during this period of heightened antislavery activism. As Susan Clark notes in reference to *The Christian Slave,* "The combination of powerful literary quality and fervent

emotion, voiced by a reader who represented the most oppressed members of the slavery system, became a powerful weapon in the fight to convert public opinion to the anti-slavery cause."[105] Webb and her elocutionary skills might be better known today had her career not been cut short by her death in 1859 at thirty-one.

Louise de Mortie, who also performed readings in Boston, presents another case. Monroe A. Majors in *Noted Negro Women* describes her elocution as "wonderful and puzzling."[106] From the December 27, 1862, edition of the *Christian Recorder* comes this description of de Mortie's performance. Not a reprint, this commentary was addressed to Elisha Weaver, then editor of the *Recorder*, and was apparently originally written for the benefit of its readers:

> New York has been favored with something novel and interesting in the debut of Madam Louise de Mortie of Boston "Reading the classics" to a colored audience. It is truly refreshing to have such occurrences to relieve the mind and drive away the ennui consequent upon a continual round of Concerts, Promenades, Mental Feasts, and Prizes, for "the best-looking colored gentlemen and ladies in the room." To have true genius, learning, study, research, and thought, brought out and encouraged; to listen to true eloquence from the lips of [a] high-toned woman, to have every cord touched with delicate fingers—tuned in symphony with the higher, the immortal life is surely exhilarating. How pleasant to ascend in thought, from the low, the grovelling, the mere animal of life, to revel in a world of ideas. To catch the inspiration of the Poets, and with them, far from the influence of terrestrial things, hie on in pursuit of the good, the gentle, and the lovely. Madam Mortie is a good reader, makes a fine appearance, very commanding in manner, and gave general satisfaction to her audience. She will doubtless be heard from again.[107]

Of particular interest here is the fact that the reading was performed before "a colored audience" and that it represented a change from the usual social amusements, of which the correspondent apparently disapproved.

This reading practice can be understood as another instance of the communal literacy, discussed earlier, allowing for broader participation in the pleasures of the printed text by those who did not read.[108] As a form of what Brewer refers to as "intensive reading," it represents a nineteenth-century African American site of public rhetorical education where orality and literacy merge and where scarce reading materials are made available to those without access or the ability to enjoy them.[109] For example, Ida Wells wrote about her own recognition that this practice enabled her newspaper to reach more people. A correspondent to the *Douglass Monthly*—more than likely Rochester abolitionist Lucy N. Coleman—reports on a dramatic reading de Mortie gave in Boston, in 1862, praising her performance and "cheerfully recommend[ing] her to the patronage of the public."[110] All accounts of Louise de Mortie's activities during her short life of thirty-four years suggest that she was committed to educating members of the black community. The fame of de Mortie—a Virginia native—as a reader reached as far south as Maryland. The *Liberator* reports on her participation in a public meeting of "colored citizens" to celebrate the abolition of slavery in Maryland, held at the city hall in Cambridge where she read two poems on freedom.[111] Jane Donawerth reminds us that elocution "helped give nineteenth-century women a voice" and that, while they were not performing original texts, they selected them and delivered "the words of others" to new audiences in more interactive and instructive ways.[112]

Many of those who were denied literacy acquired access to written material as a result of the practice of reading aloud in domestic spaces as well. Conquergood points out, for example, that Sojourner Truth engaged in "insurgent eavesdropping" when slaveholders read confidential material aloud around her.[113] A fictional example of this kind of eavesdropping comes from the opening scene of Frances Harper's novel *Iola Leroy*, where those denied literacy overheard the conversations around newspaper reports on the progress of the Civil War and developed a code for sharing the news, embedded in such expressions as "How's butter dis mornin'?" and "Did you see de fish in de market dis mornin'? Oh, but dey war splendid, jis' as fresh, as fresh kin be."[114] Such narratives suggest how marginalized groups subverted the exclusionary purposes of some rhetorical acts, turning them into sites of rhetorical education.

Commentary on Political Speeches

Past political speeches were often held up as models in the pages of the press. For example, the *Provincial Freeman* carried a comparison of the two English statesmen William Pitt and Charles Fox. The piece is an extract from Henry Stanton's 1849 book *Reforms and Reformers of England*, which includes extended passages on the two orators; however, the editor of the *Freeman* chose for her readers one passage that specifically addressed their different rhetorical styles. The section draws a sharp contrast between Pitt's austere, studied manner, with "round, smooth periods," often "pompous and sonorous," and Fox's burly and jovial style, "every word pregnant with meaning." The extract concludes succinctly that Pitt "displayed the most rhetoric" while Fox "displayed the most argument," constructing an interesting distinction here between rhetoric and argument and suggesting that the former is less sincere and more contrived, or as Stanton writes, "Pitt had art; Fox nature."[115] In addition to highlighting excerpts from past oratory, the black press carried comments on and extracts from

current speech texts as well, including those of young literary society members, the highly praised Hungarian activist Louis Kossuth, members of the William Watkins family, and Chicagoan Fannie Barrier Williams.

Reporters were generally encouraging in their critiques of the rhetorical activities of young people, many speaking publicly for the first time. The early black press functioned not only as a source of rhetorical education specifically targeting black youth—for example, the *Rights of All* included a literary column for youth—but also as a medium for showcasing their rhetorical performances for the benefit of black and white readers skeptical about their abilities.[116] The two examples that follow both took place in Canada West. Miss L. Gilcrease's speech, printed in the *Provincial Freeman*, predictably articulates the benefits of emigration. The speech puts forth all the standard arguments in support of emigration, comparing the cost of living, recommending occupations to pursue, and comparing the migration of Africans to Canada to the migration of other oppressed peoples around the world. The correspondent benevolently observes that her delivery was "remarkable . . . firm and outspoken never exhibiting the slightest degree of timidity although in the presence of some three hundred hearers."[117] The performance took place at a meeting of the Dumas Literary Association, and the number of attendees is indeed impressive. The Dumas was a mixed-sex group, which the *Freeman* had criticized two weeks earlier as being more social than literary.[118] Perhaps this occasion, drawing three hundred people, offered some of both kinds of activities. The second performance took place at an exhibition in the British Methodist Episcopal Victoria Chapel in the presence of four hundred. There, several musical selections, dramatic pieces, and an address delivered by Miss Mary Ann Sanders, visiting Canada West from Nashville, Tennessee, were given in 1865. Sanders's speech, "Moral Improvement of the Mind of the Young People, and the Spirit of Freedom," opens with ingratiation: "[B]eing a stranger in your midst, and unacquainted with your manners and customs, I feel incapable to address you with your education and elocution." She continues, nonetheless, in grand style, contrasting their existence in a free nation with hers as a former slave and encourages them to take full advantage of their privilege as she intends to do with the end of the Civil War in sight.[119] The *New York Age* much later in the century reports on the performance of another young elocutionist performer, Julia C. Wormley, who, according to the article, was "developing as a public reader." Subsequent references to her popularity confirm the *Age*'s prediction.[120]

Louis Kossuth, leader of the Hungarian independence movement, continued to attract the attention of the American press throughout his 1851–52 visit to the United States, and consistently, it was his oratory that drew the highest commendations. Even William Allen in his speech "Orators and Oratory" praised

his eloquence highly, even though he objected to Kossuth's refusal to speak out against American slavery. One typical example of such a critique appears in *FDP*, submitted by "J. T."[121] The article reports on Kossuth's visit to Congress; he apparently tamed both Daniel Webster and Henry Clay with his eloquence, leaving the author to conclude hyperbolically that "within eighteen hundred years no man has so gloriously moved such immense masses of mankind in the right direction."[122]

William J. Watkins served as assistant editor of *FDP* for several years and lectured against slavery throughout his adult life. Watkins grew up under the strict tutelage of his father, the Reverend William Watkins Sr., who headed the Watkins Academy in Baltimore, where Frances Watkins Harper, his niece, also received her early education. A word about this influential educator is in order here. The Reverend William Watkins was a founder of the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society, also referred to as a "school of oratory, literature and debate," and later became head of the Watkins Academy, where he demonstrated "that rare acquisition, a mastery of the English language."[123] One former student described his pedagogy thus: "As a grammarian according to Kirkham's—the best book ever used—he was so signally precise that every example in etymology, syntax and prosody had to be given as correctly as a sound upon a key-board. In parsing, every rule had to be repeated and accurately applied—every peculiarity of declension, mood and tense readily borne in mind. His pupils were compelled to be correct both in speaking and writing. He was strict from the first letter in the alphabet down to the last paragraph in the highest reader."[124]

Watkins maintained a reputation as a persuasive and eloquent public speaker. He was a frequent contributor to the newspapers, and his speeches were published in a number of abolitionist newspapers, including the *Pine and Palm*, the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, the *Philanthropist*, and, of course, *FDP*, which published two of his speeches, delivered at successive August 1 celebrations of the West India Emancipation in 1854 and 1855. They are epideictic speeches accommodated to an audience of African Americans on a day of contemplation and celebration for African Americans, delivered by an African American. They were subsequently published in the black press for wider circulation. The 1854 speech delivered in Columbus, Ohio, includes a passage on the efficacy of oratory as an agent of change. It considers the limits and possibilities of rhetoric, isolated from action, and deserves quoting at length:

> There is no rhetoric in the slave code of this practically atheistic nation. It is a living, breathing, burning reality. When it can restrain the baseness and treachery of the degenerate sons and grand sons of the pilgrims, by a mere flourish of the magic wand of rhetoric; when we can, by a rigid

> adherence to the rules of syntax, or of logic, persuade white men into a practical recognition of our manhood, and dissuade colored men from worshipping the foul demon of discord and disunion, who lies but to scatter, tear, and slay, then we shall, probably, endeavor so to model our words and phrases to disarm criticism of its remorseless sting; until we shall be convinced that rounded periods are absolutely necessary as the forerunner of the period when the black wing of slavery shall be broken, and the monster die and be buried, we shall not esteem them quite so highly as the Fourth of July orators of slaveholding America, who take especial pains to blaspheme God by the polished diabolisms of their hypocritical hallelujahs. We as a people, love oratory, but we love Freedom more.[125]

Watkins here is questioning the value of rhetoric in situations where action is called for. He is not disparaging rhetoric but those who understand rhetoric as a style-focused, superficial activity rather than a form of action itself, leading to and spurring on other kinds of action. Watkins himself is modeling the way he would have the audience understand the function of rhetoric. Watkins has the crowd reflect on the limits of oratory and celebration in the ongoing context of slavery. He proposes that the true orators on such an occasion should be the "millions of America's bleeding bondmen," including fugitive slaves Anthony Burns and Stephen Pembroke, whom, using the figure *sermocinatio*, he allows to express their own despair.[126] He discounts the significance of the occasion as an opportunity for oratory in the opening of his 1855 Jefferson County, New York, address, observing, "We trust that no one has mingled in this vast assembly, merely to gratify a vain and morbid curiosity, simply to listen, with a critic's ear, to the words that shall fall from the lips of one half buried in the sepulcher of American Despotism."[127]

In both speeches, Watkins applauds the history of British advancement toward emancipation, asserting the progress that the newly emancipated have made in the British colonies, recalling the hypocrisy of celebrating the Fourth of July, in much the same manner as Douglass in his July 5, 1852, address in Rochester, and calling on African Americans to work tirelessly for abolition in the United States. Watkins's speech provides no direct instruction, nor is it accompanied by critical commentary. The educational value for those who heard the speeches and who read them in *FDP* some weeks later lay in the eloquence they modeled and in the comments on rhetoric they incorporated.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was easily the most sought after and critiqued African American woman speaker and writer of the nineteenth century. The spectacle of an articulate black woman in the mid-nineteenth century speaking confidently on a range of controversial topics drew the admiration and curiosity of newspaper correspondents. Pages of the black press are filled with

uniform praise for her numerous rhetorical performances, much of it in articles reprinted from white newspapers. Most articles open with general acclaim for her oratory, followed by extracts left to speak for themselves. Sampling these commentaries gives a sense of the extent to which they served a rhetorical purpose. Harper was a poet as well as an orator who often incorporated verses into her speeches; in fact, it is her poetry that first appears in the black press. William Still, Philadelphia leader of the Underground Railroad and a staunch supporter and friend, sent to Mary Ann Shadd Cary two examples of Harper's rhetorical ability for publication in the September 1854 issue of the *Freeman*, assuring her that they both provided evidence of "high intellectual culture, and much merit in the adaptation of her thoughts and faculties to subjects of vital importance." The first piece was "Christianity," an essay in which the subject is personified as a woman to whom all the enlightenment branches of knowledge—philosophy, history, and literature—pay homage and are subordinate. The *Norristown (Penn.) Republican* reporter at first felt that her "style partook too much of the recitative" but came to the conclusion that she "rose to a dignity of style as a public speaker, surpassed by no woman who has been in our midst; it was really beautiful in parts."[128] A report from the Indianapolis correspondent to the *Recorder* includes an extract from a local white paper in which her speech on the war was characterized as "instructive," reflecting "close investigation, extensive reading, and withal a comprehension of liberty and Republicanism remarkable in any woman, no matter what her color."[129] The reviewer's observations begin to move away from focus on her physical presence and toward the logos of her arguments. In the early years of her activism, Harper was frequently referred to as the "Colored Anna Dickinson," but during her later years, her younger contemporaries were being compared to her, as in the case of "Miss F. M. Jackson" (Fanny Miriam Jackson Coppin) after giving a speech at Israel Metropolitan Church in Washington, D.C.[130] In the same issue of the *Recorder*, Harper is compared to Douglass: "We have heard Frederick Douglass, and hesitate not to say that for beauty of expression, richness of illustrations, and, in a word, rhetorical finish, she is his superior."[131]

Reactions to Anna Dickinson were in many respects quite similar, as in this account of a lecture she gave in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1862: "If to have an audience remain quiet, attentive and sympathizing, during the delivery of a long lecture, is any indication of the ability, tact and success of the speaker, we think it may be claimed for Miss Dickinson, that she is a compeer worthy to be admitted as a particular star in the large and brilliant constellation of genius and talent, now endeavoring to direct the country to the goal of negro emancipation."[132] Harper herself could have been considered another star in that constellation. Further, it does seem that some of the later reviews pay more attention to what

she has to say and not to the fact that Harper is saying it. Since many of the early responses printed in the black press were extracts from the white press, one wonders how the editors intended those extracts to be "read."

The critique of a speech by Fannie Barrier Williams in 1894 resonates at a different pitch. The review, reprinted in the *Indianapolis Freeman* from the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, includes excerpts from the speech interspersed with commentary. Williams delivered the speech at the white Chicago All Souls Church before one of the city's "intellectually recherché gatherings." At the time of this performance, Williams was a well-known race representative and advocate for black women who had given one of the major addresses a year earlier at the 1893 Women's Congress of the World's Columbian Exposition, where Harper had also spoken. This speech reads like a version of that earlier speech and was no doubt part of her repertoire of addresses on the state of black women at the end of the century. She points out that in all instances where they have had opportunity, black women have accomplished at a level equal to white women. What makes this critique interesting are the reviewer's comments about the substance, noting that Williams moderated her use of pathetic appeal and "treated her auditors to a restful departure from the traditional and somewhat ancient methods employed generally by race advocates." The writer is pleased that Williams does not dwell on the specific horrors of slavery and that her references served "not as an irritant, but as a guide and light"; they "interested without offending." Williams's ethical appeal allowed these auditors to experience not pity but "mingled shame and resentment" that they too were connected to those who could be charged with "such shameful truths."[133] Here in the 1890s, the reviewer is paying attention to the propriety of the message for this audience and not to the fact that a black woman was performing a speech, a response quite different from those initial responses to Harper, for example. In this article, the *Freeman* reinforced the importance of accommodating message to audience. Editors and readers of the black press both understood the importance of knowing how to adapt their messages to a variety of audiences and how to read and read through the texts of dominant culture that were shaping their own lives.

Purpose and Pleasure: Some Final Observations

I began this survey of the rhetorical activities that African Americans pursued across the nineteenth century in order to identify their educational aspects, how people learned rhetoric as they lived their lives—worshiped, read newspapers and other types of literature, wrote in diaries, participated in political and social gatherings, fought for their freedom, and earned a living. Whether

considering early forms of rhetorical education in slave hush harbor spaces or more structured formalized manifestations in late-century college literary societies, I recognized a common urgency—their need to communicate with one another in a shared language and to respond to society's attempts to deny their humanness. The black Union soldiers, reading, writing, and publishing newspapers as they fought for their right to exist freely, stand out as the most salient example of this urgency in chapter 1. What better image of highly motivated rhetorical education under adverse circumstances can be invoked than that of the black Civil War soldier, not initially allowed to enlist, crawling into a battlefield trench with speller in hand? Further, the encampment of soldiers with varying levels of literacy under these circumstances models communal rhetorical education at its best.

In writing the chapter on self-education, I came to understand that all serious educational pursuits are to some extent self-motivated. This chapter was helpful in understanding individual motivation in the absence of a community of learners, whether that isolation was self-imposed or the consequence of situation. The findings of this chapter, especially in the diaries of Ida B. Wells, Mary Virginia Montgomery, and Charles Chesnutt, suggested that pleasure in the pursuit was a critical characteristic of this site of rhetorical education, regardless of other causal elements. The analysis of literary societies revealed the extent to which these associations were socially and politically as well as educationally advantageous. In the topics of discussion, the locations of meetings, the publications often associated with the societies, the connectional relationships across various groups, and the personal motivations for participating, this site served as a point of convergence for the private learner and the black press. The private learner often sought out the literary society, given that rhetoric generally requires an interlocutor. The press preserved the histories of these societies, carrying in its pages the announcements and minutes of meetings and excerpts from speeches delivered there. The newspaper editors were also involved in the other sites of rhetorical activities. They were deeply invested in the communities about which they wrote, making no claim to distanced objectivity.

Fruitful research into how African Americans developed rhetorical skills in what Anne Gere has called the "extracurriculum of composition" remains in sites not fully explored here.[134] The activities associated with the National Negro Convention movement starting in the 1830s and the women's club movement in the 1890s are two that come to mind. Some of the best-known black speeches, manifestations of rhetorical education, were delivered at meetings associated with these movements. In addition, the sites I do examine here could be explored further. All of the examples of free-floating literacy in chapter 1 represent just the outer layers of the cumulative activities resulting in direct or

indirect education in rhetoric. Other nineteenth-century African Americans recorded their language practices in various forms that can tell us more about the private learner. We need to know more about what took place in those meetings of literary societies that specifically promoted language skills, including how recitations were selected and rehearsed. Further, my concentration on antebellum newspapers in the Northern states leaves the rhetorical training enacted in others underexamined.

I do not intend to fast-forward into the twenty-first century in search of claims about the implications this study might have for current teaching practices. The times are quite different. I will, however, return to the question that started me on this project, "Where did they learn to speak so effectively?" I answer with the observation that the most effective rhetorical education seemed to occur in sites when the exigence created a heightened need to communicate, when there was collective effort among a broad range of people, and when there was an element of pleasure or gratification in the process. This observation, it seems to me, is transportable. A 2007 *Washington Post Magazine* article documents an exciting example of liberating language in the twenty-first century. It's a site in which exigence, collective effort, and pleasure converge. The location is the Urban Debate Team in Baltimore, where students gather after school to master formal debate techniques as well as tactics that draw on emotional appeal, frequently mixing in their own unconventional practices. They compete with students from across the country. During one competition, a team member shifted the terms of the debate to a discussion of the incarceration of African American men. Ignacio Evans and Jermol Jupiter, the two debaters featured in the article, both have relatives in jail. Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and Paulo Freire provide support for the assertions of another member. These same two students helped to organize a march on the school board to protest the removal of a popular principal. That they find this rhetorical activity rewarding is evident in one team member's comment about the protest: "Now I can just go out and say, 'This is wrong. What they're doing—or not doing, really—in our schools is wrong' and people listen, because I'm a debater. It's like a qualification, like you're somebody, like you've got ideas and your proof . . . and what you say matters. . . . You can persuade people to fix things."[135]