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Jacqueline Bacon and Glen McClish

## REINVENTING THE MASTER'S TOOLS: NINETEENTH-CENTURY AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERARY SOCIETIES OF PHILADELPHIA AND RHETORICAL EDUCATION

*Abstract: Antebellum African-American literary societies in Philadelphia promoted rhetorical education and gave members the opportunity to craft powerful arguments. This study investigates the presence of the Anglo-American rhetorical tradition—particularly eighteenth-century Scots principles of Blair, Smith, and Campbell—in six representative speeches delivered at literary society meetings. Our analysis focuses on two major issues: 1) the influence of traditional principles of nineteenth-century university rhetorical education on theory and practice in these societies; and 2) the ways in which traditional principles were infused with new purposes; deployed for radical ends; and appropriated, reshaped, and reinvented in ways that transform and redefine nineteenth-century rhetorical practice.*

In his 1893 autobiography, Frederick Douglass recounts a defining moment in his life as a slave that occurred when he was twelve. After overhearing some white boys saying they “were going to learn some pieces” from Caleb Bingham’s *Columbian Orator*, Douglass purchased a copy of this text for fifty cents. “[E]very opportunity afforded me was spent in diligently perusing it,” Douglass relates, remarking particularly on two excerpts—a dialogue in which a recaptured runaway slave gains his freedom by refuting his master’s proslavery arguments and a speech for Catholic emancipation (532-33). Douglass asserts that from these selections, he gained a sense of the “mighty power and heart-searching directness of truth penetrating the heart of a slaveholder,” “a bold and powerful denunciation of oppression and a most brilliant vindication of the rights of man” (533). Douglass’s testimony, then, suggests that he was inspired by the principles outlined in the reader, although the precise extent to which his rhetoric was shaped by the *Columbian Orator* is the subject of an invigorating debate.<sup>1</sup>

The following study extends the discussion of the use, appropriation, and adaptation of the Anglo-American rhetorical tradition by antebellum African-American rhetors to less well-known—but equally revealing—texts produced by members of nineteenth-century African-American literary societies in Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup> These organizations, which were important fora for education, civic issues, and mutual aid, have recently attracted significant scholarly interest. In particular, archival studies have uncovered their history, and scholars have

explored their connection to literacy and activism.<sup>3</sup> We consider a related, but largely unexamined, function of these organizations: rhetorical education. Discussions of rhetorical principles appear in the addresses, constitutions, minutes, and other surviving texts of societies such as Philadelphia's Augustine Society, a literary organization established in 1817, and the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia for Mental Improvement, founded in 1828, groups that counted prominent African-American leaders among their members.<sup>4</sup> These documents also suggest how theory influenced practice within these organizations.

We begin with remarks about methodology and a brief historical overview of the African-American literary societies of Philadelphia, followed by a review of relevant elements of the rhetorical education that dominated white universities in the antebellum period. We then examine six texts—William Whipper's 1828 *Address Delivered in Wesley Church, on the Evening of June 12, Before the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia, for Mental Improvement*; an 1818 speech given by Prince Saunders to Philadelphia's Augustine Society; and four orations delivered in 1832 in Philadelphia to African-American women's literary organizations by Sarah Douglass and three anonymous women, all of which were published in the "Ladies' Department" column of the *Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison's antislavery newspaper.<sup>5</sup> Our analyses of these speeches focus on two major issues: (1) the influence of traditional principles of nineteenth-century university rhetorical education on theory and practice in these societies; and (2) the ways in which—in the particular context of these organizations—traditional principles were infused with new purposes; deployed for radical ends; and appropriated, reshaped, and reinvented in ways that transform and redefine nineteenth-century rhetorical practice. Our conclusion speculates about the larger significance of the rhetoric of these organizations.

### METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Tracing connections between Anglo-American rhetoric and the discourse of African-American literary societies is complicated by the fact that very little is known about the texts read in African-American schools or in literary organizations, or about the education of the rhetors we feature. Furthermore, as the controversy over the sources of Frederick Douglass's eloquence illustrates, any study that attempts to examine the inherently complex phenomena related to influence must be speculative and self-critical. This is particularly true when analyzing African-American texts, which scholars have often tried to fit too neatly into categories that do not fully account for their persuasive power. Although significant parallels exist between the rhetorical education prevalent in nineteenth-century American universities and the practice of Philadelphia African-American literary society members, and although these soci-

eties often explicitly promote proficiency with the rhetoric of white America, it would be hasty to conclude that their discourse was largely derivative of white culture.<sup>6</sup>

Even when marginalized rhetors employ the forms of the dominant class, their rhetoric does not necessarily conform to prevailing societal norms. Acts of appropriation should not be seen merely as “borrowing” but as reinvention and transformation. A variety of scholars, most notably Henry Louis Gates and bell hooks, have explored the appropriation and revision of white American discourse by African-American rhetors.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between traditional American forms and African-American reinventions of those forms is described by Gates as a “doubling” process in which discourse is repeated not in reductive but transformational ways (*Figures in Black* 57; *Signifying Monkey* xxii-xxv). Susan Jarratt’s work on the classical curriculum at historically African-American colleges and universities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demonstrates that traditional pedagogical models can be transmuted in ways that have profound implications for African Americans, redefining concepts of citizenship, selfhood, and history.

We refer to African Americans’ *appropriation* and *reinvention* of the dominant discourse of their society not to imply that these acts were illegitimate or that they constituted encroachments into territory not properly or naturally theirs. Rather, following hooks, who argues that “language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries” (167), we wish to stress the radical agency of those who effect such disruption. Pondering African slaves’ first encounters with English, hooks reflects, “I imagine them hearing spoken English as the oppressor’s language, yet I imagine them also realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance . . . seized and spoken by the tongues of the colonized . . . re-hear[d] . . . as a potential site of resistance” (169-70). In this sense, literacy and freedom for African Americans are paradoxically linked because language, used by whites to enslave them, is also ironically a key to resisting bondage.<sup>8</sup> The terms appropriation and reinvention, then, help to emphasize that when a group gains power through mastery of the oppressor’s discourse, language use itself—originally one of the master’s tools—becomes a weapon with which to fight oppression.

### PHILADELPHIA AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERARY SOCIETIES

African-American literary societies developed in Philadelphia, as in other cities, in the late 1820s and early 1830s from the mutual aid societies that free African Americans began organizing in the late eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Unwelcome in white literary organizations and faced with restricted educational opportunities, African Americans sought venues in which they could gain exposure to various subjects through societies’ libraries and reading rooms, as

well as present their writing and oratory to critical audiences. Some societies set up schools for African-American children, such as the seminary established by the Augustine Society, or provided libraries for youth and adults, as did the Colored Reading Society.

A few examples illustrate the role of literacy and rhetorical education in these organizations. The goals of Philadelphia's Colored Reading Society included using the group's funds to buy "useful books" in the areas of "Ancient[,] Modern and Ecclesiastical History" and "the Laws of Pennsylvania," which a librarian would lend to members, and to subscribe to the African-American newspaper *Freedom's Journal* and the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, an antislavery periodical (Whipper, "Address"; Whipper, *Address* 107-08). The group proposed to "meet once a week to return and receive books, to read, and express whatever sentiments [members] may have conceived if they think proper" (Whipper, *Address* 108). Similarly, Philadelphia's Female Literary Association (FLA), organized in 1831, subscribed to periodicals, circulated a library of books, and encouraged members to write anonymous essays that would be "criticised by a committee" ("Female" [1831]; "Female" [1832]).<sup>10</sup> These and other Philadelphia African-American literary societies are particularly important because they helped develop the rhetoric of several generations of prominent African Americans, including William Whipper and Sarah Douglass.

Some of the Philadelphia literary societies' constitutions and oratorical performances were published as pamphlets. In other cases, these texts appeared in African-American newspapers such as *Freedom's Journal*; in antislavery newspapers such as William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*; and in other published documents, such as the minutes of conventions or conferences. The "Ladies' Department" column of the *Liberator* is a particularly rich source. The six addresses featured below were selected from the dozen or so we were able to locate. Although the extant texts from these literary societies are scarce and often fragmentary, when they are examined as a whole, a revealing picture of practices and agendas emerges.

#### NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN RHETORICAL EDUCATION

Philadelphia's African-American literary societies seem to have drawn from the tradition of nineteenth-century American university education that was heavily indebted to Scottish faculty psychology of the previous century.<sup>11</sup> Central to this educational framework was a highly influential rhetorical pedagogy. As Nan Johnson argues, this tradition of training in eloquence built on fundamental principles set forth by Scots George Campbell, Hugh Blair, Lord Kames, and—indirectly—Adam Smith,<sup>12</sup> including the presupposition that the mind works according to natural and universal laws.<sup>13</sup> Mental faculties,

Blair asserts, are improved through “exercise”; and, in particular, “[a]ll that regards the study of eloquence and composition . . . is intimately connected with the improvement of our intellectual powers” (1: 19, 1: 6).<sup>14</sup> Taste, a cornerstone of rhetorical education, was for Blair fundamentally connected to “[r]eason and good sense” (1: 21). A “most improveable faculty” (1: 19), taste could be refined by studying “proper models for imitation” (1: 6)—which included the best authors from the classical period to contemporary times—and learning principles of criticism (1: 6, 1: 15-24, 2: 235-36).<sup>15</sup> From the ancient world, particular emphasis was placed on Demosthenes and Cicero; contemporary examples of excellent rhetoric were drawn from literary figures such as Swift, Addison, and Shaftesbury. Notably, taste’s utility extends beyond the art of eloquence; as Johnson remarks, it “is synonymous with the development of intellectual virtue and moral character” (61).

Closely related to the concept of taste is genius, which for Blair “consists . . . in the power of executing” (1: 41). Genius is a higher faculty than taste, Blair argues, because it “always imports something inventive or creative; which does not rest in mere sensibility to beauty where it is perceived, but which can, moreover, produce new beauties, and exhibit them in such a manner as strongly to impress the minds of others” (1: 41). Taste is sufficient to create a good critic, but genius is necessary to form the orator or poet (1: 41).

The principle of sympathy constitutes a fundamental element of the rhetorical theory of the era.<sup>16</sup> Most explicitly discussed in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, this concept builds on the premise that eloquence depends upon the rhetor’s presentation of vivid emotion. If the emotion is rendered with sufficient vivacity, the audience inevitably experiences the providentially placed correspondence between their feelings and those described by the rhetor—they exist as one. The product of this sympathetic bond is persuasion. Smith discusses the audience’s sympathetic response to the successfully rendered emotions of historical characters in the following terms: “We enter into their misfortunes, grieve when they grieve, rejoice when they rejoice, and in a word feel for them in some respects as if we ourselves were in the same condition” (*Lectures* 85). Campbell advises that sympathy can be effectively invoked by stressing audience members’ concerns: “Of all relations, personal relation, by bringing the object very near, most enlivens that sympathy which attacheth us to the concerns of others; interest in the effects brings the object . . . into contact with us, and makes the mind cling to it as a concern of its own” (89).<sup>17</sup> The product of faculty psychology, this approach to *pathos* depends on the essential commonality of our psychological apparatus. Kames asserts, “The natural signs of emotions, voluntary and involuntary, being nearly the same in all men, form an universal language, which no distance in tribe, no diversity of tongue, can darken or render doubtful” (2: 127).

As their sustained interest in sympathy demonstrates, the Scots placed great emphasis on the role of the emotions in persuasion. Although logical argumentation is discussed in the treatises of Blair, Campbell, and Smith, all three theorists teach that successful eloquence ignites the passions in order to move the will. Blair, for example, asserts that “in order to persuade,” an orator “must address himself to the passions; he must paint to the fancy, and touch the heart . . .” (2: 4). Campbell concurs: “So far therefore it is from being an unfair method of persuasion to move the passions, that there is no persuasion without moving them” (77). Rhetors are encouraged to engage the emotions of the audience and thus inspire action by marshaling what in Ciceronian terms might be called the grand style. Campbell writes, “From [fancy’s] exuberant stores most of those tropes and figures are extracted, which, when properly employed, have such a marvellous efficacy in rousing the passions, and by some secret, sudden, and inexplicable association, awakening all the tenderest emotions of the heart” (4).

The Scots rhetorical theorists of the eighteenth century viewed rhetorical education primarily as a means of assimilating affluent Scots youth into British society and preparing them for positions of social privilege, thus reinforcing the existing class structure.<sup>18</sup> Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran remark that eloquence was conceived publicly by these eighteenth-century theorists, and their conception of taste relied to a certain extent on public wisdom and thus had communal underpinnings. Yet the primacy of taste in these rhetorics, which was essentially “an inward response,” made the domain of criticism essentially private (15-16).

#### **WILLIAM WHIPPER’S ADDRESS BEFORE THE COLORED READING SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA**

William Whipper (ca. 1804-1876), a free-born Pennsylvania businessman and intellectual, was one of the founding members of Philadelphia’s Colored Reading Society (“Address”). Probably born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Whipper had moved to Philadelphia by 1828 and become involved in the intellectual life of the city’s African-American community. That he was well educated is clear, although particulars are unknown. Philadelphia abolitionist William Still described him as “self-made, and well read on the subject of the reforms of the day” (735).<sup>19</sup>

In his 1828 *Address Before the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia*, Whipper explicitly underscores his affinity for eighteenth-century Scottish theory. “It is with the greatest of pleasure we observe that the philosophy of the mind has lately assumed a new aspect,” he remarks. “The ‘sublime fog’ which formerly enveloped this subject, has been dispelled by the light of Scotch philosophy; and science, strictly so called, has been established, not on mere

hypothesis, but on fixed principles and matters of fact" (111).

More specifically, he establishes links to the faculty psychology model and the rhetorical theory it inspired:

The first object of education is to exercise, and by exercising to improve the faculties of the mind. Every faculty we possess is improveable by exercise. This is a law of nature. The acquisition of knowledge is not the only design of a liberal education; its primary design is to discipline the mind itself, to strengthen and enlarge its powers. . . . Without this preparatory exercise, our ideas will be superficial and obscure, and all the knowledge we acquire will be but a confused mass . . . incapable of useful application. (110)

In the preceding passage, Whipper employs the language of the eighteenth-century Scots to reiterate the fundamental principle that the faculties of the mind are improved through practice and use.<sup>20</sup> Just as Blair argues that "rules and instruction . . . cannot inspire genius, but they can direct and assist it" (1: 6), Whipper reminds his audience that "[e]ducation cannot create; its province is to elicit and direct the faculties of the mind" (112).

Given his appreciation for Scottish philosophy, it is not surprising that Whipper emphasizes the faculty of taste. He remarks that the study of eloquence is far more than the acquisition of "useless ornaments" (113). Declaring taste "the gift of God," Whipper outlines its importance:

The cultivation of taste . . . whether we consider it as a simple faculty, or as a combination, embraces in its range a great variety of objects, is to us a source of refined enjoyments, and like other faculties admits of improvement by cultivation. Learning must furnish the material, taste must give the polish, and in many cases the capacity of useful application. It is therefore not without good reason that in a system of education so much attention is required to the study of belles lettres, to criticism, to composition, pronunciation, style, and to everything included in the name of eloquence. (112-13)

Students of Scottish rhetoric will note the close similarity between Whipper's preceding characterization of the relationship between "learning" and "taste" and Blair's discussion of the complementary roles of "knowledge and science" and "rhetoric." The former, Whipper's eighteenth-century predecessor asserts, "must furnish the *material* that form the body and substance of any valuable composition. Rhetoric serves to add the *polish* . . ." (1: 4; emphasis added). Although Whipper substitutes "taste" for "rhetoric," it is clear from the rest of the passage that his central argument about the symbiotic roles of knowledge and



eloquence aligns with his eighteenth-century predecessor's. As Thomas Lessl asserts, "If any teacher of rhetoric left a mark on Whipper, one would have to speculate that this would be Blair . . ." (377).

As he excoriates whites who hypocritically celebrate the spirit of '76 and support slavery, Whipper's rhetorical practice demonstrates the Scots emphasis on passionate eloquence:

Yet these wise men, who hate the very idea, form, and name of slavery as respects themselves, are holding and dooming an innocent posterity (connected to themselves in all the sublime qualities of man . . .) to slavery in their own country—on their own farms—and at their own firesides, in a bondage ten times as severe as the one already mentioned, that their fathers denounced as being too ignominious to be borne by man. . . . Oh! horrible spectacle! Oh! for an asylum to hide from the knowledge of such barbarity and injustice. (114)

Whipper backs his appeals to *pathos* with stylistic pyrotechnics, effecting lofty prose to galvanize his audience against the institution of slavery. Through expanded sentence structure, elevated diction, vivid metaphors, strategies such as anaphora, apostrophe and gradatio, and a deliberate loosening of control, he compels his audience to endorse abolitionist sentiments that then support his pitch for the educational advancement of African Americans.

Whipper's discussion of the methods of cultivating taste calls to mind the eighteenth-century emphasis on belles lettres and the study of exemplary classical texts. "[T]he taste," he argues, "is greatly improved by conversing with the best models; the imagination is enriched by the fine scenery with which the classics abound; and an acquaintance is formed with human nature, together with the history, customs and manners of antiquity" (111). Unlike the eighteenth-century Scots theorists, who provided detailed accounts of "the best models" and "the fine scenery with which the classics abound," Whipper does not outline a specific course of literary study, but a surviving account of the library of Philadelphia's Banneker Society (a literary and debating society) includes David Hume's *History of England*, Milton's *Poetical Works*, six volumes of Pliny, a Greek and English dictionary, antislavery texts such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and works of particular relevance to members such as the *History of the New-York African Free-Schools*.<sup>21</sup>

It would be shortsighted, though, to view Whipper's rhetoric as merely imitative of Scots theory or complacent about current inequities in discursive power. Particularly when placed in its political context, his speech to the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia reveals subversive aims alien to his eighteenth-century Scots predecessors. Because, as noted above, there is a

fundamental but paradoxical connection between literacy and liberty for African Americans, the endorsement of traditional rhetorical education can have radical implications. Given the legal context of the late 1820s and early 1830s, the goals of gaining literacy in general and proficiency in the rhetorical foundations of nineteenth-century university education in specific both constituted acts of resistance. After a series of slave insurrection plots and revolts, Southern legislatures instituted restrictive laws banning literacy for slaves (Cornelius 12, 30-33; Foner 154-55). Whipper alludes to one such law in his address. Having discussed the hypocrisy of white Americans who support slavery even though their fathers revolted against British oppression (see above), he ironically praises the “wise and patriotic legislature of South Carolina,” who, “at their last convention,” passed a law punishing “any white or black teaching a man of colour how to read or write” with a “fine and disgraceful stripes” (113). Facility with written language, Whipper reminds his audience, is a powerful tool of resistance that white America wishes to withhold from African Americans.

Whipper suggests that rhetorical proficiency leads to further empowerment. He cautions Colored Reading Society members that their efforts at educational improvement may threaten white America and may even draw opposition from some African Americans. Noting that they will likely meet with “calumny and opposition,” he boldly asserts, “Indeed we would rather count than shun the contest, as the very sparks which may be elicited by the clashing of our weapons will in some measure tend to dissipate the surrounding darkness, and thus facilitate the progress of those who are in search of the reality of our sentiments” (108). Whipper’s martial metaphor is significant—rhetoric is a “weapon” in a contest that will improve the plight of the righteous by illuminating their cause. Whereas, as noted above, Scots rhetorical pedagogy was conservative and assimilationist, Whipper’s version of enlightenment is inspired by an agonistic eloquence of social justice and dramatic cultural change.

Whipper’s treatment of the Scots concept of genius carries special meaning for his fellow members of the Colored Reading Society:

[W]e are not . . . to consider those alone worthy of education who possess transcendent genius. Genius is a rare article. . . . Where there is a moderate capacity it may be cultivated with advantage, and after all has been said about genius, intellect, talent, brains, &c. the fact is that men do not differ so much from each other by original distinctions of genius as by their success in improving what they have. Men of moderate capacity have risen to eminence and respectability by industry and perseverance. . . . (112)

While demonstrating an appreciation for this primary eighteenth-century *topos*, Whipper shifts the emphasis to self-improvement, thus encouraging those currently outside the Anglo-American elite to pursue rhetoric as a means of civic power. Asserting “that men do not differ so much from each other by original distinctions of genius,” he appropriates the concept of the uniformity of mental powers, a premise of eighteenth-century Scottish faculty psychology, to support a nineteenth-century argument for racial equality and further democratization of American civic rhetoric.

A similar argument is set forth in the opening moments of the speech, in which Whipper decries the contemporary conception of taste in rhetoric while praising an older, less artificial standard of discourse: “I am well aware that the age in which we live is fastidious in its taste. It demands eloquence, figure, rhetoric, and pathos; plain, honest, common sense is no longer attracting. No: the orator must display the pomp of words, the magnificence of the tropes and figures, or he will be considered unfit for the duties of his profession” (107). At first glance, this pronouncement resembles the late seventeenth-century antirhetorical stance championed by the likes of Bishop Sprat of the Royal Society and John Locke.<sup>22</sup> As Whipper continues, however, it becomes clear that his ostensible attack on rhetoric is more probably a means of simultaneously laying claim to the spirit of the Scots rhetoric of the previous century (“plain, honest, common sense”) and of supporting a self-acquired, democratic eloquence particular to radical antebellum discourse.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, his assertion that “Truth should always be exhibited in such a dress as may be best suited to the state of the audience, accompanied with every principle of science and reason” (107) suggests Scots premises about the proper management of discourse that can be appropriated by Whipper’s African-American audience.<sup>24</sup> In this way, Whipper transforms the belletrists’ notion of taste into a democratic principle that empowers previously marginalized African Americans to participate in the civic sphere.

As earlier demonstrated, Whipper follows the Scots dictum that eloquence marshals *pathos* to affect the will, and he dutifully evokes the high style in an effort to persuade his audience to embrace the educational goals of the society. One of the most significant features of his *Address Before the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia*, though, is his identification of a specific state of mind or passion as the key motivator of humankind. “Ambition,” Whipper asserts, “takes in everything to which our thoughts can be extended, and is the very thing that will exert us to action” (116). Explicitly appealing to ambition, which is not a component of Scots rhetorical theory, he urges his audience to pursue education as a means of self-advancement that will bring liberation from oppression: “Fame, Ambition, rise! proclaim! and tear us from the chains of slavery! Be alert, be free; and then forever rest” (117). Like Blair (2: 4) and Campbell (72), who—following Aristotle—defend eloquence

from the charge that it can be used for evil by arguing that the same is true of all productive arts, Whipper creates a similar justification for his driving mechanism for persuasion, ambition: "It has to be sure, a bad side, but like knowledge, like water, and like fire, when properly made use of, it is of immense benefit" (118).<sup>25</sup>

As a reader of Blair, Whipper surprises no one with the emotion he infuses in his praise for the positive power of ambition. "Oh! Parent of virtue," he apostrophizes, "great origin of religious ambition, which can level mountains, tear the very hills from their foundations, and make rivers flow through dry land" (117). Yet his effort to establish—and act upon—an alternative theory of rhetorical motivation moves beyond his Scots predecessors. No doubt Whipper's decision to center on ambition as the primary motivator of human action is artfully prescriptive, as well as aptly descriptive. For a people who struggle to survive amidst a dominant culture that continuously undermines their basic human rights and attempts to thwart every effort at progress, ambition is arguably the salient ingredient for survival and success.

**PRINCE SAUNDERS'S ADDRESS BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA AUGUSTINE SOCIETY**

Prince Saunders (ca. 1775-1839) grew up in the home of a prominent Vermont lawyer; was educated at Moor's Charity School; and taught in the African school of Colchester, Connecticut, and in Boston's African School. Well connected with leading intellectuals in Boston, he was a founder of the Belles Lettres Society and a secretary of the African Masonic Lodge.<sup>26</sup> In 1818, he spoke at the founding of Philadelphia's Augustine Society, arguing for the benefits of a broad-based, liberal education. Saunders's central theme is that "the means of acquiring knowledge sufficient to read and understand the sacred Scriptures, and to manage with propriety the ordinary concerns of domestic and social life" should be "within the reach of every individual" (89). This goal, he maintains, will be furthered when people realize that they are "bound together by the indissoluble links of that golden chain of charity and kind affection with which Christianity invariably connects its sincere votaries," and, as a result, they "become co-workers and fellow-labourers in the illumination, the improvement, and the ultimate felicity" of all of God's followers (90).

As Saunders continues, his concept of Christian charity aligns closely with the Enlightenment notion of sympathy:

[I]n the true spirit of the religion of that beneficent Parent . . . many persons of different regions and various nations have been led to the contemplation of the interesting relations in which the human race

stand to each other. They have seen that man, as a solitary individual, is a very wretched being. . . . We are formed by nature to unite; we are impelled towards each other by the benevolent instincts in our frames; we are linked by a thousand connexions, founded on common wants. (90)

Saunders's emphasis on universal, God-given common feelings reiterates the principle popularized by Smith and his Scots contemporaries. Claiming that "the genuine kind affections" and "elevated sensibilities of Christianity" are designed to resonate with "the best sentiments, feelings and dispositions of the human heart" (91), Saunders articulates a psychological explanation of the instinctive impulse underlying his faith tradition. Like Whipper, Saunders marshals the grand style to provide an emotional base for his pitch for education. As he praises classical figures, he presents elaborate imagery to tout their willingness to come together "to aid the progress of those who were aspiring to taste the Castilian spring, while ascending the towering heights of Parnassus, that there they might behold the magnificent temple of the Ruler of the Muses, and hear his venerated oracle" (89).

Although Saunders relies on traditional eighteenth-century principles of faculty psychology and eloquence, his endorsement of rhetorical education has radical implications. Just as Whipper references the connection between literacy and liberty, so Saunders links traditional training in eloquence to struggles for freedom, even through force or insurrection. He illustrates the value of education for his audience by noting the attainments of various ancient figures, including rhetorical theorists Aristotle, Cicero, and one Antonius Gripho, an "accomplished and eloquent youth" who "taught rhetoric and poetry at the house of Julius Caesar, when a mere boy" (89). Shifting to the present, he notes that many are now "awakened to a sense of the importance of a universal dissemination of the blessings of instruction . . . in the northern and eastern sections of our country, in some portions of Europe, and in the island of Hayti" (89). The latter example is particularly significant. The successful slave rebellion in Saint Domingue in the 1790s, which led to the creation of the independent black republic of Haiti, inspired many African Americans (and created anxiety among many proslavery white Americans).<sup>27</sup> By connecting a successful armed struggle for freedom with the search for knowledge that drove the ancients, Saunders suggests the potentially militant power of education in general and rhetoric in specific.

### **SARAH DOUGLASS'S ADDRESS TO A "MENTAL FEAST"**

Sarah Douglass (1806-1882) was the daughter of abolitionists Robert and Grace Bustil Douglass. An educator and abolitionist, she was active in Philadelphia's FLA, helped found the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, and wrote many

articles for the *Liberator's* "Ladies' Department" and "Juvenile Department" (often under the pseudonym "Zillah"). Although specific information about Sarah Douglass's early education is unfortunately unavailable, C. Peter Ripley et al. note that "[s]he received extensive tutoring as a child" (117).<sup>28</sup>

In an 1832 address given in Philadelphia at a "mental feast" (presumably a meeting of an African-American women's literary society), Douglass both relies on and transforms the traditional Enlightenment formulation of sympathy. She relates, "An English writer has said, 'We must feel deeply before we can act rightly; from that absorbing, heart-rending compassion for ourselves springs a deeper sympathy for others, and from a sense of our weakness and our own upbraidings arises a disposition to be indulgent, to forbear, to forgive'" (114). Douglass demonstrates the vital link between the sympathetic response and action, a connection emphasized by all the Scots rhetoricians, including Blair, who claims that when we are drawn into the emotions of the speaker, "we love, we detest, we resent, according as he inspires us: and are prompted to resolve, or to act, with vigour and warmth" (2: 6). In her introduction, Douglass seeks to establish the necessary emotional bond between her audience and her subjects—slaves—by exhorting her listeners "to excite each other to deeds of mercy, words of peace; to stir up in the bosom of each, gratitude to God for his increasing goodness, and feeling of deep sympathy for our brethren and sisters, who are in this land of christian light and liberty held in bondage the most cruel and degrading—to make their cause our own!" (114). In particular, the specific vicarious commitment required by Douglass—"to make their cause our own!"—requires the audience to build the kind of sympathetic bond described by Smith and his colleagues.

The establishment of bonds of sympathy is particularly important for antebellum African Americans, whose claim to citizenship rests upon common sentiments that transcend race. In addition, for free African Americans living in the North, especially the relatively prosperous members of literary societies, sympathy becomes a means of conceptualizing one's relationship to a country in which slavery persists—and to slaves themselves. Explaining to audience members how she became motivated to fight slavery, Sarah Douglass infuses the traditional principle of sympathy with special significance:

One short year ago, how different were my feelings on the subject of slavery! It is true, the wail of the captive sometimes came to my ear in the midst of my happiness, and caused my heart to bleed for his wrongs; but . . . I had formed a little world of my own, and cared not to move beyond its precincts. But how was the scene changed when I beheld the oppressor lurking on the border of my own peaceful home! I saw his iron hand stretched forth to seize me as his prey, and the cause of the slave became my own. I started up . . . and deter-

mined, by the help of the Almighty, to use every exertion in my power to elevate the character of my wronged and neglected race. (114)

Douglass likely refers to the very real threat of kidnappers who preyed upon both fugitive slaves and free African Americans, whom they attempted to sell into slavery.<sup>29</sup> On one level, then, as Campbell advises, she appeals to her audience's personal interests, asking the other women, "Has not this been your experience, my sisters? Have you not felt as I have felt upon this thrilling subject? My heart assures me some of you have" (114).

Yet Douglass's appeal also reinvents the notion of sympathy for antebellum African Americans. Highlighting the very real connection between slaves and free African Americans, Douglass enriches sympathy with the spirit of communality, the notion that the personal and the communal are always inextricably linked for African Americans.<sup>30</sup> Douglass reminds her audience that there is no absolute boundary between slavery and freedom, and she appeals to bonds of community that unite free and slave and transcend geography and circumstance. As Shirley Logan demonstrates, the communal traditions that resonate in antebellum African-American rhetoric have precursors in African culture ("*We Are Coming*" 23-27). Douglass's invocation of sympathy affirms Logan's point that "African and Western discursive practices" can be used "syncretically" by African-American rhetors ("*We Are Coming*" 43). Douglass bolsters her plea for emotional identification with the enslaved by suggesting that the principle of sympathy activates even the divine. Calling upon her audience to place their trust in God, she extols His willingness to provide succor: "Come to Him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not; bring your wrongs and fears to Him, as you would to a tender parent—He will sympathise with you" (114). If the Almighty establishes a sympathetic bond with "poor, weak, finite creatures as we are" (114), then surely members of the audience are obliged to connect with their enslaved brothers and sisters. Although she does not explicitly state this argument *a fortiori*, it provides the implicit foundation of her speech. In this way, Douglass makes the principle of sympathy her own.

#### ADDRESS TO THE FEMALE LITERARY ASSOCIATION

Also in 1832, an FLA member delivered an address to the organization, published anonymously in the *Liberator's* "Ladies' Department," which similarly references and redefines traditional Enlightenment rhetorical theory. She asserts, "My object at present is to call your attention to the necessity of improving the mental faculties, of exalting the moral powers, and of elevating yourselves to the station of rational, intelligent beings" (A1). Arguing that women should have "a liberal, a classical education," the orator underscores the eighteenth-century connection of literary study to morality and virtue. "I

have long and ardently desired your intellectual advancement," she remarks, "upon which the progress of morality must mainly depend. . . . I do not consider that [education] usually bestowed on [women] efficient; on the contrary, it tends to debase the moral powers. . . ." Only when women are given "the proper education," she argues, will "the female character be raised to a just stand" (A1). Drawing on what Nan Johnson calls "belletristic idealism"—the notion that "the study of rhetoric and the practice of criticism confer rhetorical expertise as well as moral and intellectual virtue" (79)—this rhetor suggests that her fellow FLA members' literary and oratorical efforts will improve their moral character.

The tradition of faculty psychology and belletristic idealism, though, serves a decidedly progressive end. Setting forth the foundation on which women's education should be based, the FLA member argues, "I am aware that . . . many speculations have been set afloat respecting [women's] capacity of receiving a liberal, a classical education; and I am also aware that an opinion too generally prevails, that superficial learning is all that is requisite, and to this cause, may in a great measure be attributed the pravity, the embasement of society" (A1). Even though she supports her endorsement of women's education with traditional antebellum notions of gender—that women must be educated because they have a great "influence" on "the young mind" and need to appropriately fill "the stations allotted them" (A1)<sup>31</sup>—her claim about the power of a liberal and classical education for women is significant. We can infer from the oratorical exercises of the FLA that she endorses not only writing and reading but public address as part of the appropriate training for women. Robert Connors notes that as white women began to enter universities beginning in the late 1830s, they were often restricted from oratorical training, encouraged instead to focus solely on written composition (54-57). The example of this FLA member suggests that perhaps African-American women, although often restricted by similar expectations that they refrain from public speaking, found ways to challenge these limitations.

The FLA member also adapts the practice of imitation, entreating her sisters, "If any one imagines that her talents are less brilliant than others, let her not disdain to contrast their superior attainments with her own; suffer not a feeling (shall I say of envy?) to enter [your hearts], but rather strive to imitate their virtues. . . ." (A1). With this admonishment, she argues that studying models of eloquence should include the work of other African-American women. Transforming the approach of the Scots theorists, who privilege canonical models, she democratizes the principle of imitation while bestowing agency upon African-American women within an organization that they direct and control. Whereas for Blair and his contemporaries, imitation of great models of eloquence brings glory to the individual rhetor, in this context the practice of emulating superior rhetoric is designed to raise the overall standards of the community of



African-American women. The FLA member's reinvention of imitation also has a practical component—those members of African-American literary organizations who may not have access to a wide variety of literary models can draw on community members' expertise to gain facility in language and rhetoric.

#### ADDRESS TO THE FEMALE LITERARY ASSOCIATION ON ITS FIRST ANNIVERSARY

In an address given later in 1832 on the occasion of FLA's first anniversary and again published anonymously in the *Liberator's* "Ladies' Department," a fellow member argues for the importance of the organization's educational agenda and, more particularly, for the need for African Americans to persevere in their study of rhetoric despite obstacles. She specifically connects the goals of the FLA to the antislavery cause. Quoting and elaborating on a remark of an unnamed abolitionist, she maintains that free African Americans' efforts to gain education are directly connected to the slaves' welfare:

[I]f there is one here so skeptical, I would repeat to her a remark made by our unflinching advocate—Every effort you make in this way, said he, helps to unbind the fetters of the slave; and if she still doubts, I would tell her that as the free people of color become virtuous and intelligent, the character and condition of the slave will also improve. I would bid her, if she wishes the enfranchisement of her sisters, to sympathise in their woes, to rehearse their wrongs to her friends on every occasion, always remembering that our interests are one, that we rise or fall together, and that we can never be elevated to our proper standing while they are in bondage. (A2)

The rhetor features two central themes in this excerpt. She entreats her audience to feel the slave's cause as their own—an argument with connections to the traditional Enlightenment conception of sympathy as a spur to action. Notably, too, she suggests that sympathy leads to more effective persuasion, telling her audience that their emotions should spur them to advocate the slaves' cause. Her conclusion reiterates her appeal to sympathy: "Think of the groans, the tears of your enslaved sisters . . . and again go forward in the path of duty and improvement. . . . [E]vince, by your attendance here, that you love literature, that you love your people, and that nothing shall be wanting on your part to elevate them" (A2).

Yet there is a second aspect to this rhetor's connection between slave and free. Just as Sarah Douglass's conception of sympathy resonates with the traditional African emphasis on communality, so does this FLA member suggest that her audience's link to slaves is more than simply interpersonal or emotional—the bondage of any one person is shared by all. Indeed, this speaker specifically couples FLA members' acquisition of literacy with the freedom

of the slaves, a connection with potentially radical implications. To understand this association between literacy among free African Americans and the antislavery cause, it is necessary to review the relationship between self-help and abolition for antebellum African Americans.

Previous scholarship has demonstrated that self-help rhetoric among African-American abolitionists was fundamental to their antislavery agenda.<sup>32</sup> As noted above, African Americans believed that slave and free were connected by communal bonds, and thus the actions of any one person had implications for others. Individual moral and educational advancement was seen as a significant part of the antislavery crusade for two reasons. First, African-American abolitionists believed that self-improvement efforts would provide concrete counterexamples to refute proslavery claims about people of color. Yet there was also a more radical strain of self-help rhetoric that incorporates the power of literacy. Building on the connection of literacy and liberty explored above, African-American abolitionists perceived education as a potentially militant act against slavery. As the radical abolitionist David Walker argues in his 1829 *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, “[F]or coloured people to acquire learning in this country, makes tyrants quake and tremble. . . . The bare name of educating the coloured people, scares our cruel oppressors almost to death” (31-32). Literacy among free African Americans not only empowers the individual but also strikes at the foundation of slavery. Notably, when Walker specifies the type of education that will grant agency to African Americans, he emphasizes rhetorical expertise, such as “the ability to write a neat piece of composition” and knowledge of “the width and depth of English Grammar” (31).

Suggesting this connection, the FLA member demonstrates the radical potential of literacy and exhorts her audience to avail themselves of this influence. Their efforts at rhetorical education, she suggests, directly affect the slaves as they empower themselves. Although she implies that their acquisition of rhetorical skill will help dispel societal prejudices, she clearly asserts that African Americans should not try to emulate whites or defer to their judgment:

Too long has it been the policy of our enemies to persuade us that we [free people of color] are a superior race to the slaves, and that our superiority is owing to a mixture with the whites. Away with this idea, cast it from you with the indignation it deserves, and dare to assert that the black man is equal by nature with the white, and that slavery and not his color has debased him. Yet dare to tell our enemies, that with the powerful weapons of religion and education, we will do battle with the host of prejudice which surround us, satisfied

that in the end we shall be more than conquerors. (A2)

Through martial imagery reminiscent of Whipper's speech, this woman argues that rhetorical education is not an exclusive enterprise—a spirit of elitism, in fact, divides African Americans, thus serving the agenda of their “enemies.” Given the opportunity, all can attain the education she advocates, and, through the FLA's work, she and her sisters are striving to give others that chance.

Later in her address, this FLA member evokes a key oratorical forebear to reiterate the radical implications of rhetorical prowess. Her description of Demosthenes underscores her point that in the “battle” against “the host of prejudice,” training in rhetoric is a necessary weapon:

By perseverance the great Demosthenes was enabled to overcome a natural defect in his pronunciation, so great, that on his first attempt to speak in public, he was hissed: to rid himself of it, he built a vault where he might practice without disturbance. His efforts were crowned with the most brilliant success, he became the first orator of the age, and his eloquence was more dreaded by Philip than all the fleets and armies of Athens. (A2)

Just as Blair (2: 19-23), Campbell (108), and Smith (*Lectures* 29, 179-184) remark on Demosthenes' exemplary persuasion, the FLA member claims the ancient Athenian orator as an important model. For her, though, Demosthenes' example has particular resonance. His development as a rhetor illustrates the awesome authority that can be acquired by those who persist in spite of obstacles—even in the face of public rejection or scorn. She reminds the African-American female audience that gaining a literary education is an act of self-assertion and resistance, that great influence accrues to those who use rhetoric to resist restrictions. As noted above, although white women at this time were often discouraged from pursuing oratorical training, African-American female literary society members often claimed the power of oratory.

#### ADDRESS TO A “MENTAL FEAST”

In an address read at a “mental feast” in Philadelphia in December 1832, an unnamed speaker also connects literacy to the goals of resistance to oppression and racial unity. She advises her audience to develop “a love of literature and religion, that they should remove that spirit of indifference, of pride, of prejudice, which (I grieve to say) exists amongst us, and to unite us as a band of sisters in the great work of improvement” (A3). Yet they will never be able to achieve this unity, she argues, without sympathy—particularly sympathy with slaves. Referring to a gruesome narrative from John

Rankin's *Letters on American Slavery*, she illustrates the power of sympathy to establish bonds between slave and free:

Is there one present, whose heart was not sad, and whose cheek wore not the glow of indignation, on reading the account of the inhuman treatment of a poor slave boy, contained in Mr. Rankin's eighth letter? Did not fancy bring before you the hut—the blazing fire? Saw you not his brethren assembled by tyranny to witness his punishment, and yet forbade to express their sympathy in his pangs[?]. . . . Do you not, even now, see the master with the malignant aspect of a demon, binding his victim? The axe is raised—for a moment it is suspended in the air—it falls—his feet are severed and thrown quivering and reeking into the flames. . . . Shrieks piercing enough to melt a heart of stone, burst from the sufferer. . . . We . . . will draw a veil over this appalling picture, and ask, what shall we do effectually to serve our race? I answer, be united. . . . (A3)

The anonymous rhetor's vivid description, which enlivens the scene through present-tense narration, a clear focus on the emotional states of the participants, and a kind of slow-motion rendering of the atrocity, fulfills eighteenth-century mandates about managing the emotional response of the audience. In fact, her use of the terms "fancy" and "sympathy," drawn directly from the rhetorical theory of the previous era, demonstrates an understanding of the cooperative relationship among the faculties. Her series of increasingly graphic rhetorical questions, along with the antitheses that characterize the responses of the victim, the perpetrator, and the unwilling witnesses to the violence, suggests the grand style that persuades by moving the passions to affect the will.

Yet these traditional strategies combine with appeals to radical goals, particularly to the power of literacy to counter oppression. The association between the cultivation of "a love of literature" and antislavery agitation that would bring about an end to the horrors such as those described in Rankin's *Letters on American Slavery* depends upon the notion, described above, that self-help among free African Americans could further the cause of abolition. As previously noted, literacy could be a powerful tool of resistance. The speaker may not directly invoke these militant implications, but by stressing the relationship of literacy to unity and to the fight against slavery, she evokes the radical potential of the educational platform of her literary society. The consequences of her connection between educational advancement and freedom are implicit in the structure of her argument. Relating the gruesome scene of the slave's punishment, she emphasizes the indifference of the heartless master, who "pauses to lecture upon the folly of disobeying his orders" and is unmoved by the slave's cries of agony (A3). "[A]las!" she laments,

“the heart of the slaveholder is harder than the nether millstone. . .” (A3). After narrating this horrible incident, one might expect her to call her audience to arms. Instead she implicitly offers them an alternative course of action to fight oppression such as that which she has related. She turns to the indifference of another group—those African Americans who reject the search for educational and moral advancement: “I have been wounded to see those, who profess to be followers of Christ, treat [mental cultivation and religion] with coldness . . .” (A3). Constructing an implicit parallel between those who are complacent about the value of mental pursuits and a murderer, she calls them to take an action that, in the context of fighting the terrible oppression of slavery, is inherently radical. The passionate response she evokes by creating sympathy with oppressed slaves leads to an outcome beyond the traditional emotional boundaries of Enlightenment thought, suggesting that sympathy can be a force for granting agency to the oppressed.

In another sense, as well, the study of literature and rhetoric play a central role in this speaker’s vision. Drawing upon Scots principles—Blair’s recommendations in particular—to endorse literary pursuits for her fellow members, she puts these ideals in service of a goal specific to the plight of oppressed African Americans. She advises,

My sisters . . . let us seek mental cultivation; it is of inestimable value; it not only beautifies and renders life a blessing, but it will irradiate the gloomy vale of death. “In a mind absolutely vacant,” says Dr. Blair, “tranquillity is seldom found. The vacancy too often will be filled up by bad desires and passions; whereas the mind of a wise man is a kingdom to itself. In his lonely or melancholy hours, he finds always resources within himself, to which he can turn for relief.” (A3)

Although we have been unable to identify definitively the source of this quote, her rendering of Blair’s position on “mental cultivation” resembles his advice about the “cultivation of taste”:

[Life] will frequently languish even in the hands of the busy, if they have not some employment subsidiary to that which forms their main pursuit. How then shall these vacant spaces . . . be filled up? How can we contrive to dispose of them in any way that shall be more agreeable . . . than in the entertainments of taste, and the study of polite literature? He who is so happy as to have acquired a relish for these, has always at hand an innocent and irreproachable amusement for his leisure hours, to save him from the danger of many a pernicious passion. (1: 11)

The similarities between the two passages suggest that this speaker embraces the “belletristic idealism” of Blair and his contemporaries, and believes that her audience’s endeavors to cultivate what Blair calls taste will improve their lives in moral, even spiritual ways.

Yet the differences between the two passages are striking. Whereas the passage from the *Lectures* focuses on “entertainment” and “amusement,” the text quoted by the anonymous rhetor uses the same kind of language to emphasize solace in the face of great hardship. The comfort element of “mental cultivation” is particularly apparent when one considers the first section of the speech, which provides graphic details of the torture and abuse of fellow African Americans. Eighteenth-century Scots principles, originally formulated as part of an assimilationist pedagogy, become for this rhetor a form of resistance for the oppressed. In addition, the principles of taste and mental cultivation further communal goals. As noted above, taste was conceived by Blair and other eighteenth-century Scots theorists in private terms, making criticism an individual act. In her argument for racial solidarity, though, this anonymous female rhetor of color describes taste or mental cultivation in civic, rather than private, terms.

## CONCLUSION

Our analysis demonstrates that rhetorical pedagogy was central to the agenda of the antebellum African-American literary societies of Philadelphia. This finding casts light on the possible courses of study followed by many African-American rhetors whose education may otherwise be unknown. In addition to those whose rhetoric is explored above, many other leaders of the Philadelphia African-American community were members of literary societies. Although the specific details of their education are often unavailable, their association with literary societies helps illuminate potential aspects of their training in rhetoric. The fact that the works of Blair are cited by both Whipper and an FLA member, for example, suggests that Scots rhetorical theory was studied in various African-American groups.

This study also furthers our understanding of nineteenth-century American rhetorical theory and practice. Beyond the privileged sphere of the university classroom, Philadelphia African Americans studied classical and Enlightenment rhetoric—but also transformed them and made them their own. The study and practice of oratory by female members of Philadelphia’s African-American literary societies expand our view of women’s rhetoric in antebellum America. It is gratifying to discover ways in which African-American women, who were doubly oppressed, shaped conventional rhetorical principles in ways that were particularly empowering.

The richness of the texts we consider reaffirms Linda Ferreira-Buckley’s call for increased archival scholarship by historians of rhetoric and suggests

numerous avenues for research that will further expand and invigorate our field. Additional studies could feature the texts of literary society members in other cities such as New York and Boston, the ways in which the training in literary societies influenced discourse in other African-American organizations such as antislavery societies, and other sources of rhetorical training such as the curriculum offered in African-American schools. Our incorporation of recent scholarship by historians, literary critics, and African Americanists demonstrates that work done in various disciplines can contribute to the study of the history of rhetoric.

Finally, our exploration demonstrates that the search for discourse that illuminates rhetorical theory and practice must push beyond well-known texts. Frederick Douglass's discussion of the impact of the *Columbian Orator* on his development as a rhetor has led to productive research, but the work of rhetors less familiar to contemporary scholars—even those whose texts were published anonymously—leads to new understanding of marginalized rhetoric. Scholars such as Shirley Logan, Susan Jarratt, and Jacqueline Jones Royster have combined archival research and rhetorical analysis to explore new texts, thereby expanding the field of the history of African-American rhetoric. As more sources of nineteenth-century African-American rhetoric are studied, the important speeches and writings of Douglass need not be examined in isolation but as part of a larger landscape of African-American texts.

This is hardly a new idea. Even in his own time, contemporaries of Frederick Douglass suggested that an appreciation of his persuasion required the context of other African-American rhetors. In 1852, William G. Allen, one of three African-American professors at New York Central College in McGrawville, addressed the predominantly white institution's Dialectic Society on orators and oratory. Allen discusses the oratory of Douglass, as well as the contributions of African-American abolitionists Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, and Charles Lenox Remond. Of African-American orators in general, he remarks, "Already have they done something to achieve a place among those who have written their names in large letters upon the pages of the orator's history . . ." (242). It remains for us to open these pages, to read these names.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the potential influence of the *Columbian Orator* on Douglass's development as a rhetor, see Lampe ix, 1-6, 9-13, 33-58; Andrews 592; Fanuzzi; Fishkin

and Peterson 190-92; Blassingame xxii-xxiii, xlvi; Logan, "Influence"; Stephens.

<sup>2</sup> We focus on Philadelphia because it has been identified as the leader in the creation of African-American literary societies (Porter, "Organized Activities" 558-64; Perkins, "Black Women" 325; Winch 101). Linda Perkins states, "In 1849, over half of the black population belonged to one of the 106 literary organizations of the city" ("Black Women" 327). Not surprisingly, most of the extant texts from antebellum African-American literary societies we have been able to locate are from Philadelphia.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Sterling 110-13; Winch; McHenry, "Dreaded Eloquence"; McHenry, "Rereading"; McHenry, "Forgotten Readers"; McHenry and Heath; Lindhorst; Moon. For early work in this area, see Porter, "Organized Activities."

<sup>4</sup> On the Augustine Society, see Nash 219, 270.

<sup>5</sup> Although we believe it is likely that all four orations were delivered before Philadelphia's Female Literary Association, the precise identification of the group or groups addressed in two—Sarah Douglass's "Address" and the anonymously published "Address Read at a Mental Feast"—has not been established (Lindhorst 264). To avoid ambiguity, we cite the three anonymous 1832 addresses with the following abbreviations: A1 is the "Address to the Female Literary Association of Philadelphia," published in the *Liberator* 9 June 1832; A2 is the "Address to the Female Literary Association of Philadelphia, on Their First Anniversary: By a Member," published in the *Liberator* 13 Oct. 1832; and A3 is the "Address Read at a Mental Feast," published in the *Liberator* 8 December 1832. Sarah Douglass's "Address" and the third of the anonymous sources were likely given to the same society—both are identified as Philadelphia organizations that hold "mental feasts" monthly, and both speakers note that the groups were formed as a result of the suggestion of white Philadelphia abolitionist Simeon S. Jocelyn.

<sup>6</sup> As Shirley Logan and Carla Peterson have argued, African traditions of literacy and forms of rhetoric inspired the discourse of antebellum African Americans. Both note that it is difficult, however, to determine African roots for specific African-American rhetorical practices. See Logan, "*We Are Coming*" 24-27; Peterson 22, 242.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Gates, *Figures in Black*; Gates, *Signifying Monkey*; hooks 167-75; Logan, "*We Are Coming*" 23-43; Bacon, "Do You Understand"; Bacon, "Taking Liberty"; Condit and Lucaites; Lucaites; Jasinski; Jarratt; Fishkin and Peterson.

<sup>8</sup> See also Gates, *Figures in Black* 11-13, 108; Cornelius 2-3, 17, 61; Bacon, "Taking Liberty" 272-73; McHenry, "Forgotten Readers" 151; Warren 121-27.

<sup>9</sup> Our historical overview is informed by the following sources: Porter, "Organized Activities"; Porter, *Early Negro Writing* 79-166; McHenry, "Dreaded Eloquence"; McHenry, "Forgotten Readers"; McHenry and Heath; Foner 245-48; Whipper, "Address."

<sup>10</sup> For further reading on the FLA, see Winch 104-09, 112-14; Lindhorst.

<sup>11</sup> By the late eighteenth century, the influence of faculty psychology had extended beyond the university to various aspects of American intellectual life (see Farrell; Howe).

<sup>12</sup> Adam Smith's lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres, which were not published until 1963, were unknown in nineteenth-century America. Because his work is highly representative of Scots rhetorical theory, however, and because rhetoricians such as Blair were heavily influenced by him, we have included references to his



lectures here.

<sup>13</sup> See also Kitzhaber 1-4; Adams 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> See also Campbell lxxiii.

<sup>15</sup> The influence of the belletristic conception of taste and the emphasis on canonical authors as models are illustrated by the popular lectures of Harvard professor Edward T. Channing (see, for example, 154-56, 164, 228).

<sup>16</sup> See Bator; Spence; Burks.

<sup>17</sup> See also Campbell 96; Blair 2: 217.

<sup>18</sup> See Miller, "Rhetoric"; Miller, *Formation*; Warnick; Conley 216-23.

<sup>19</sup> On Whipper, see also McCormick; Ripley et al. 129-30; Lessl.

<sup>20</sup> Whipper's interest in faculty psychology and the rhetoric of Campbell and Blair has been documented by Lessl (376-77).

<sup>21</sup> American Negro Historical Society Papers, box 5G: folder 7, box 5G: folder 10, box 5G: folder 17.

<sup>22</sup> On the antirhetorical stance of the Royal Society and Locke, see Potkay 51-60; Conley 168-70, 191-92; Shapiro; Patton; Weedon. For a contrasting view of the Royal Society's stance toward rhetoric, see Vickers.

<sup>23</sup> It is not entirely coincidental that Blair includes a similar claim in the first chapter of his treatise: "I will not deny that the love of minute elegance, and attention to inferior ornaments of composition, may at present have engrossed too great a degree of the public regard. It is indeed my opinion, that we lean to this extreme; often more careful of polishing style, than of storing it with thought" (1: 7). Surely Blair is less the democrat than Whipper, but his expressed distrust of a studied ornateness aligns with Whipper's argument in ways that benefit the case of the abolitionist. On the rise of a form of democratic eloquence in antebellum America, see Cmiel.

<sup>24</sup> Blair, for example, argues that although "rhetoric and criticism have sometimes been so managed as to tend to the corruption . . . of good taste and true eloquence . . . it is equally possible to apply the principles of reason and good sense to this art . . ." (1: 3). In his chapter entitled "Of the Consideration which the Speaker ought to have of the Hearers, as men in general," Campbell argues that oratory is ethical "if we give reason herself that influence which is certainly her due" (71). The motions of rhetoric, he continues, "are not the supplanters of reason," but "her handmaids, by whose ministry she is enabled to usher truth into the heart, and procure it there a favorable reception" (72).

<sup>25</sup> Establishing a theory of rhetorical motivation based on the audience's dominant passion, Lord Chesterfield proposes ambition as one of the primary means of persuasion (see McClish). Whereas for Chesterfield the strength of the appeal to ambition is a sort of dirty secret or unfortunate consequence of human weakness, though, for Whipper the motivational force of ambition is ennobling.

<sup>26</sup> For more complete biographical information on Saunders, see White.

<sup>27</sup> On the response in antebellum America to the revolution in Haiti, see Hunt.

<sup>28</sup> For further reading on Douglass, see Sterling 110-111, 126-33; Lindhorst 263-64.

<sup>29</sup> This danger was enhanced by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, which denied due process to abducted African Americans said to be runaways. Marie Lindhorst (266-68) and Dorothy Sterling (126) provide an alternative source for Douglass's anxi-

ety, namely the restrictive legislation proposed (but not passed) in Pennsylvania in 1831-32 in the wake of the Nat Turner insurrection.

<sup>30</sup> On this connection, see Lincoln and Mamiya 5; Logan, "We Are Coming" 24-27, 55.

<sup>31</sup> On this traditional antebellum perspective of women's education, see Welter 15, 35. On the ways this view influenced African-American women and was at the same time redefined and challenged by African-American women's experiences, see Loewenberg and Bogin 21; Terborg-Penn 30; Perkins, "Black Women"; Perkins, "Impact" 17-21.

<sup>32</sup> See Quarles; Hinks; Horton; Horton and Horton; Bacon, "Rethinking."

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