

Chapter I

Introduction

This dissertation seeks to understand the ways that being a captive permitted and prompted autobiographical writing by ex-captives, and the ways that their representations of confinement constituted them as unique and empowered American subjects. Based on my examination of captivity narratives published from 1816-1861, I argue that captivity has been the historical context, literal condition, and authoritative figure of expression for a wide range of American autobiographers.

By captivity narratives, I mean accounts that recount an experience of confinement by or bondage to members of a seemingly antagonistic or rival group, such as North American Indians, North African Arabs or even Anglo-American Southerners or agents of the state. Frequently, by captivity narratives, most scholars have only meant stories of white captivity by Northeastern and American Indians, not stories, for example, of African American slavery, North African captivity, or state imprisonment. Of course, for good reasons of disciplinary integrity and conceptual clarity (among others), these categories have been employed; as in reserving “prison narratives” for writings about state incarceration, for instance, and “slave narratives” for accounts of African American bondage in the South. But such strict regimentation occludes the ways that these accounts speak to and through each other, often employing similar tropes in their writing and emerging out of connected historical circumstances.

More importantly, even if critics maintain different names for these traditions, this should not mean a continued disavowal of their interconnectedness. Towards this end, I analyze four types of pre-Civil War captivity writing that are often read independently of each other: North African captivity narratives, Indian captivity narratives, slave narratives, and narratives of state imprisonment.¹

Considered as a whole, they flesh out the details and implications of bondage's relation to antebellum autobiography and American identity. In particular, I look at Mary Jemison's Indian captivity narrative, *Narrative of the Life Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824); Henry Bibb's slave narrative, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849); Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1859); Robert Adams's North African captivity narrative, *The Narrative of Robert Adams* (1816); and George Thompson's, Alanson Work's and James Burr's prison narrative, *Prison Life and Reflections* (1847). Along with suggesting a larger body of captivity writing, these accounts underscore the complex ways bondage has structured the terms and conditions of captives' authority.

Their power – simply defined as the ability to effect action – manifests itself in relation to texts, themselves, and other subjects in a number of interconnected ways. Firstly, captives' authority means their ability to produce and shape autobiographical writing. In the context of the African American slave narrative, Robert Stepto defines authority as the capacity of “begetting, beginning, continuing, and controlling a written text” (485). In *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography*, Thomas G. Couser contends that the source of this authority has been one of the enduring questions of American autobiographical studies. Couser asks, who owns it? where does it come from?

how does it circulate? where does it reside? (12) For a wide range of texts, I argue that these questions can be addressed, though not completely resolved, by reference to the author's experience and the narrator's remembering of captivity. Hence, having an experience of bondage makes one eligible to produce and control a written text of one's life. Furthermore, within the context of such begetting, one's captivity also lends one a claim about how to continue that text.

Within the notion of autobiographical authority, finer distinctions exist within the categories of authorship and autobiography. By authorship, I mean the capacity to influence the written production of a text, even if it is mediated by or done with others. Of the six specific texts I address here, two employ amanuensis editors, and one of those two accounts actually employs the biographical "he," denying any suggestion that the captive has written the narrative in a traditional sense. One narrative, *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, employs the autobiographical "I" but, is in fact, technically written by its editor, James Seaver. Furthermore, five of the six narratives are collaboratively written, either with other ex-captives (as is the case with *Prison Life*) or with outside editors. Hence, the majority of the narratives considered here, and, just as importantly, the larger body of narratives which they represent rely on non-captives for their writing. As a result, any credit for their autobiographical authorship must be distributed through this network of subjects, languages, and institutions.

By autobiographical authorship, I mean a kind of text in which the subject who informs the production of the narrative is the subject of that narration. Quite a range of represented subjects exist within this category. The subject may take center stage and reflect the "individual as a unique and original entity," as Stephen Carl Arch notes more

generally of early nineteenth-century autobiography (xi). Or, the narrated subject may be broadly drawn and be merely representative of others. In this sense, the life narrative would be a form of what Arch terms the “depersonalized” and “unselfed” form of “self-biography,” which is exemplified in conversion narratives, confessions, and memoirs (xi). Or to use James Cox’s language, these accounts are narratives by “naïve autobiographers,” those who find order and solace in the conventions of the autobiographic tradition, as opposed to those who self-consciously seek to rewrite them (127). But whether sitting at center stage or acting as the stage for others, the ex-captive’s life is the overwhelming focus of the narrative and is its fundamental claim to autobiographical status.

Within this context, all six of the ex-captives authored autobiographically. That is, they decisively informed the shaping of narratives largely about themselves. They did so by providing oral accounts that formed the basis or conditioned the production of written accounts; by making editorial decisions or having editorial input on the content and form of their written lives; and inserting actual words, phrases and literary figures within their accounts. While not as glorious as the Romantic-inspired picture of the author that was popular throughout much of the nineteenth century, this model reflects the ways that the autobiographical and authorship were dispersed through a number of subjects, relationships, and institutions. So, though often through and with intermediaries, ex-captives both “begot” and “controlled” their written texts.

Secondly, as an extension of the aforementioned authority of captives, by captives’ authority, I also mean their power within those narratives to render themselves and be rendered as rhetorically persuasive and culturally empowered in both personal and

political contexts. Mark Patterson explains in *Authority, Autonomy and Representation, 1776-1865* that “the problem for one seeking authority is to find the proper form of address and expression by which the subordinate will recognize the authority’s position and sympathize with his or her intention” (xxvii).² Patterson goes on to explain that there was a vacuum for literary and political authority in antebellum America that left readers “suspicious of both political and literary plots” and further “led some writers to find safety in conventional forms [. . .]” (xxiv). Slightly differently, I contend that in the American nineteenth century it is precisely by presenting one’s self as subordinate that one could obtain another subject’s sympathy. I understand captivity narratives as one of those “conventional forms” that spoke powerfully in the nineteenth century as a “proper form of address.”

As subjects who had been involuntarily and often violently removed from mainstream society, their addresses were often aimed at regaining or claiming social, cultural, and national status. And this is perhaps one of the most striking features of the captives’ authority within their texts. Those narratives frame affiliation with the national and other desirable identities not only against or despite the representation of their confinements, but through them. They deliberately intensify or, just as often, the conventions of their narratives rehearse the conditions of their captivity, lending them a social status that is sometimes equal to and even greater than their non-captive readers. In this sense, captives’ authority is about access to literary citizenship, one’s representation in writing as a worthy and vested national subject.

This membership is also local and personal. Their written captivities present them to their readers and themselves as worthy of a number of rights, a host of liberties in

relation to their more immediate and specific historical location, such as rights to positions within their families, particular communities, or local organizations. In other words, while the title of American citizen might have been important, in a local context the status of member of a benevolent society, for example, was just as if not more significant. What is more, captives' authority also meant access to identities that work outside of and even across national borders. To be sure, one could still be considered white without being American, and one could simultaneously be understood as "civilized" both as an American and European. So, although I frequently invoke the ex-captive's authority in an American national context, it might more specifically be considered, for example, in regional, racial, or gendered contexts.

Finally, captives' authority is their ability to index and even question received or extant renditions, for example, of America and its meanings through life writing. Of the significance of autobiography to things American, Robert F. Sayre has famously written: "Autobiographies, in all their bewildering number and variety, offer the student of in American studies a broader and more direct contact with American experience than any other kind of writing" (241). In telling of their selves, autobiographers often tell of the life of the American nation as well, elucidating a range of phenomena from the interiority of the subject to the dynamics of society. With much more attention on the role of bondage, confinement, and punishment in that experience, autobiographical writing by captives processes and elucidates national, transnational, and non-national experience as well. In this sense, captives' authority is the potential power to revise the literary scripts of freedom, nationality, and identity.

I employ the word authority to name these effects because it subtly encodes the necessary subjugation of the captive attendant to this kind of power. On the one hand, authority can mean the same as personal liberty, to have the power to affect one's will. It is power to act according to one's desire, or it is power over another. At the same time, as Michael Kammen asserts in *Spheres of Liberty*, authority has been historically read as the opposite of personal freedom, as that which limits individual desires and exertions and issues from the state, God, or other restricting and dominating forces. In this sense, authority is the opposite of liberty; it is the necessary and inescapable limit of individual independence. Quite purposely, I call the freedoms of ex-captives "authority" to retain this paradox; to underscore how their power derives from and is achieved through their submission to others or even to themselves. Indeed, their authorization is not achieved in spite of or against their restriction, but because of and through it.

Too, captives' authority is also a function of the mastery and dispossession of others. Captives' accounts often frame their self-possession through the dispossession of other groups and people, usually wardens, abductors, masters, or captors. As a consequence, the mastery of these accounts frequently threatens to reproduce, just with different players, the captor-captive paradigm that these tales write against. Additionally, captives also frame their authority in relation to the dispossession of other captives, suggesting their mastery over their circumstances through the denigration of fellow slaves, prisoners, or hostages. Finally, captives sometimes frame their authority against the perceived circumstances of other groups that are neither captives nor captors, simply because it is advantageous for their own representation. In so doing, their depictions of self-mastery are in tension with other groups' and subjects' demands for power and

efforts at favorable representation. Captives achieve authority and mastery, then, in the context of a competing field of captives, other captives, captors, and free subjects.

With these observations in mind, I would like to propose a new “master narrative” for autobiography and American self-making. Richard Helmstadter defines a master narrative as “a version of history that has gained sufficiently broad acceptance that it establishes with some authority the context and general outline of its subject” (2). Both the subjects of autobiography and American identity have been marked by histories that underestimate the significance of bondage or that ascribe to bondage a negative or non-productive function. Furthermore, these histories have often relinquished the agency of captives in the narrative scenes, places, and forms in which they are represented as captives. Hence, the most poignant expression of the represented subject’s power is understood as when he/she breaks from bondage. Lastly, the master narrative of antebellum captivity narratives in particular has held that captives’ accounts reflect the domination of one master or one type of mastery. In contrast, this project constitutes an alternative master narrative in that it rereads the voices of those who have been silenced and marginalized (both in history and in historiography) as one of power and authority. It tells a story of how abduction, marginalization, and oppression became opportunities for autobiographical expression and metaphors for American self-imagining. Furthermore, it illustrates how multiple forms of mastery operated in accounts of confinement and how they informed and endorsed each other. Ultimately, I contend, antebellum captivity narratives are about the mastery of writers over their written lives, lived lives, and the world around them through literal and literary submissions.

Interventions

My dissertation specifically extends and revises thinking about American autobiographical production, the reading and conceptualization of captivity narratives, and the representation and meaning of American identity. As I have argued earlier, these are interconnected projects, but for the sake of clarity I will be discussing them separately here.

Captivity is often recognized as the impetus for first person writing. But the extent to which captivity is the context, condition, and content of complex autobiographical writing has remained under appreciated. In his explication of the defining characteristics of autobiography, “The Autobiographical Process,” Jerome Bruner makes the claim that captivity forecloses the possibility of critically worthy and aesthetically complex life narration. Writing of German concentration camp survivor narratives, he notes that though they display the “harrowing immediacy of witness,” the circumstances of captivity “defeat radical reflection about the shapes that life can take.” “Suffering,” he concludes, “finally silences autobiography” (49-50).³ In more oblique ways, other critics such as Robert F. Sayre and Stephen Carl Arch make similar points.⁴ And surely, there is an inescapable way that the condition of captivity makes writing, autobiographical or otherwise, difficult.

My reading of captivity narratives uncovers, however, how suffering and captivity enabled “radical reflection about the shapes that life can take.” As my later comments will make clear, bondage is, in fact, the context in which “radical reflection” about personal identity and national character necessarily takes place. Contrary to Bruner’s argument that “autobiography” requires “distancing” for the “art of self-presentation” to

take place, distancing which cannot be found in the “immediacy” of captivity, my analysis reveals that the “immediacy” of bondage is what textures the complexity of self-presentation, that the “art of self-presentation” is informed by figures and tropes of captivity. This is especially the case in the American nineteenth century. Far from silencing autobiography, the story of the life arose from the condition of captivity and was shaped by the politics and thematics of such experience.

Hence, instead of foregrounding the importance of place or free will – as some other critics have done⁵ – this study underscores the significance of captivity to the production of life narratives. Strikingly, scholars have seemingly recognized the sheer amount of autobiographical captive writing in the nineteenth century U.S., but without much theorization of what that fact means. In his survey of American mid-nineteenth century autobiographical production, “The Autobiographical in the American Renaissance,” Lawrence Buell notes that three quarters of that production can be divided into two groups: religious narratives and topical narratives (48). In the latter group of topical narratives, by which he means slave narratives, Indian captivity narratives, criminal confessions, and other narratives of “extreme suffering,” at least 80 percent elaborated on bondage of some kind; and even in religious narratives there are often elements of captivity (for instance, female spiritual autobiographers were often domestic servants). Hence, at least 30 percent of the autobiographical production of nineteenth century America was related to captivity of some kind and to some degree.⁶ As Buell himself concludes, the text of Olaudah Equiano’s narrative of abduction and adventures was “closer to the antebellum norm than Franklin’s *Autobiography*” (48). This prolific

production of autobiographical narration in the context of varied forms of captivity demands sustained consideration.

If we do so, we see differently the tradition of American autobiographic production in more inclusive terms. In contrast to the white, male and privileged tradition of “auto-American-biography” that Sacvan Bercovitch establishes with William Bradford, Jonathan Edwards, and Benjamin Franklin, the fact of subjects’ captivity begets an alternate (but connected) tradition of variously classed, raced, and gendered autobiography. Beginning with Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), the earliest sustained autobiographical production by a woman and the earliest Indian captivity narrative published in North America, one could reconsider the autobiographical status of the writings of Hannah Dustan, Hannah Swarton, Briton Hammon, and Olaudah Equiano. But especially in the nineteenth century, a greater emphasis on the autobiographical bent of captivity accounts would enrich the discussion of narratives of North African captives, Indian captives, prisoners, and slaves.

To date, no full-length study explicitly treats the connection between a multifarious captivity and autobiographical writing, though some scholars acknowledge this link on the way to another position. For instance, in *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth Century America*, Ann Fabian argues (among other things) that the construction of truth often disavowed its own invention in personal writing. Her chapter organization points to the significance of captivity. Among the five main groups of writers of personal experience from 1800-1880, she considers prisoners, slaves, and Civil War POWs; the remaining groups included vagabonds and the poor (with whom captives certainly intersected). Clearly, Fabian’s work implicitly calls for a

consideration of the ways that captivity informed a notion of personal writing and the autobiographical. Of course, given her specific focus on the meanings and constructions of the truth, she can only hint at such concerns. In this work, I focus on them more fully.

Consequently, my project makes a major contribution to the conceptualization of captivity narratives inasmuch it reads familiar works against their generic grains.

Consider, for instance, Henry Bibb's *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849), which contains significant and sustained representations of the narrator as a prisoner in a Louisville jail, a servant to a Cherokee in Indian country and, of course, as a slave on a Kentucky plantation. To call it exclusively a slave narrative is to miss its multilayered representation of bondage.⁷ And while Bibb is the only slave narrator I know of who treats Indian captivity so elaborately, he was not the only slave to be a captive of Indians⁸ or the only slave narrator to write about multiple types of captivity. Solomon Northrop and Harriet Jacobs, just to name two writers, included multiple forms of captivity in their slave narratives. As a result, the neat divisions through which we have traditionally read narratives of confinement fail to account for the interconnected reality and representation of captivity in nineteenth-century America.

Lastly, I locate this work within a larger move in literary and cultural studies towards privileging those aspects of culture that have been read as marginal and aberrant. In studies like Phillip Deloria's *Playing Indian* and Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992), for example, both critics consider how Native Americans and "American Africanism," respectively, have been central to America, whiteness and other categories of privilege. Similarly, I use the notion of captivity – a concept that, I think, brings

together several conversations on displacement – to rethink the meaning and stakes of literary representation and production in and about America.

Morrison states, for instance: “Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery” (38). By this statement, she means that the maintenance of an order of people who were understood as racially different and fundamentally inferior (the basis of antebellum slavery) underscored and contributed to whites’ understanding of themselves as superior and free. Similarly, captives’ texts memorialize a mode of conceptualizing freedom through the vocabulary, tropes, images, and circumstances attendant to bondage, submission, and slavery. These stories demonstrate how slavery, captivity, and bondage organized the language and meaning of freedom in antebellum America.

From this point of departure, we begin to see that a central drama in literary production is not between narratives of American freedom and narratives of American bondage, but between narratives of bondage that represent freedom and narratives of bondage that encode captivity. The meanings of representing bondage dramatically shift. Put differently, the quest for freedom (rehearsed in national, gendered, racial, and economic languages) has not only been marked by an escape from bondage, but by the quest to be properly bound, to be confined in a way that is freeing and empowering. From this perspective, the forced submission of the prisoner in the state penitentiary is an extension of the citizen’s submission to American democratic ideals, inasmuch as the constitution of the citizen and prisoner is made possible by way of their surrender to the state. The prisoner’s submission, however, is typically understood as a failure of freedom while the citizen’s obedience is characterized as a model of independence. My study

suggests that there is a model of independence that issues from the subject position of the prisoner as well. In this sense, I am interested in tracing in secular and religious contexts what Pamela Lougheed calls a “negative liberty,” a freedom found in submission to another (304). And given the propensity for captives’ narratives to disparage captors, this study is also interested in a “negative liberty” in the sense that these texts imagine liberty through the negation of others.

By taking this approach, I hope to reread the antebellum past with a more sophisticated appreciation for what initially appears unimportant and unseemly and, thereby, draw a more accurate map of the complex interrelation between captivity and nineteenth-century American cultural production.

Con-texts

In order to appreciate the process by which living and writing about captivity could produce authority, it is necessary to provide a more detailed sketch of the historical context of these accounts, the period from 1816 to 1861. Despite the specificity of these dates, it should be clear that historical realities do not have a finite shelf life; they may exist before their explicit or widespread articulation, live in concert with other and sometimes contradictory phenomenon, and survive well beyond their supposed end. Nonetheless, these dates give us a concrete sense of a particular time when the reality and representation of captivity flourished in America.

This era has often been characterized as an era of consolidation, confidence, and progress, as manifested in the political advancements of Jacksonian democracy, the professionalization of several disciplines, the technological advancements in communications and transportation, and the cultural consummation of American belles-

lettres. But it was also what I would call an age of removal, an era in which an undecidability about who Americans were and what and where America was underwrote considerable individual movements, demographic expulsions and migrations, and geographic reorganizations. Such formations marked a degree of confidence in the republic; but they also indexed a profound anxiety.⁹ In such a climate, I submit, captivity had meaning and gained currency because it made explicit the movement, change, and constriction that was already implicit in nineteenth-century American life.

This search for national meaning is best epitomized in the events surrounding the year 1817, the date of the creation of the American Colonization Society. In order to alleviate the vexing presence of the disenfranchised population of free blacks, the ACS championed the colonization and Christian conversion of North Africa by America's free black population. Especially after the defeat and expulsion of the British at the conclusion of the War of 1812, a general sense of the need for national housecleaning permeated political life and discourse. By removing a class of restless and disenfranchised blacks, the logic held, America would be better able to manage enslaved blacks and, further, satisfy the economic and social needs of its increasing white population. Though ultimately denounced by most African Americans and considered a logistical failure for many reasons, the movement eventually established a successful colony, Liberia, and launched several other passages back to Africa. More to my point, the ACS demonstrates how the movement of bodies and the establishment of colonies necessitated a re-creation and a re-constitution of America and its subjects. Similarly, instances of literal and literary captivity in nineteenth century America established

colonies – spaces where America had to be transported, reproduced and redefined – that forced a reckoning between the practices of America and its ideals.

The founding of the ACS is suggestive of other removals and a more general conversation about national destiny and identity through movement. Only a decade and a half later, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which legislated forcible removal of all Native Americans living east of the Mississippi to the west. Eerily similar to the case of the free blacks, the idea was to expel an ambivalent population and make room for the exponentially increasing white population in states such as Georgia and Alabama. As reflected in the congressional debates about Indian removal (Satz 44), Indian displacement was indicative of an anxiety about who Americans were and what behavior would be acceptable for an allegedly American government.

The Indian Removal Act, moreover, was enabled by and in turn enabled land acquisition and the inclusion of new subjects within national borders. With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, in particular, the nation almost doubled in geographic size and, subsequently, had enough room to “relocate” Indians already living in the east. Furthermore, the Purchase added a new and hostile body of French and Indian subjects into the American polity, the latter of which would be famously stifled by Indian remover Andrew Jackson in the battle of Orleans. Such complex additions were merely emblematic of nineteenth century America’s constant addition of land and, consequently, redefinition of and anxiety about national identity. In 1846, the success of U.S. forces in the Mexican American War added yet another significant piece of real estate to America, northern Mexico; and as before, it came with more ambivalent subjects who were neither racially white nor English speaking. As Amy Kaplan notes in “Manifest Domesticity,”

such continued expansion meant that the location of an American “home” or center was under constant interrogation.

The voluntary circulation of persons within and out of the nation further added to the ever-shifting landscape of what and where America was and who and what Americans were. In the early 1800’s, David and Jeanne Hielder explain, to travel 25 miles on any given day would have been understood as a considerable distance (xxxv). By mid-century, however, the availability of steamboats and the completion of the national road made travel much more efficient (85). As Ronald Takaki notes of the first half of the nineteenth century, a well connected series of roads, canals, and railroads made it possible for goods and people to arrive at their destinations much more quickly as well as travel to places they had formerly not been able (78). Geographical movement thus came to characterize the existence of ordinary Americans.

Now, to be sure, only a set of number of Americans experienced the drastic movements and interrogations of captivity and bondage, but almost everyone was implicated in the more subtle and just as far reaching movements of the country. In miniature, then, captivity narratives rehearsed a national drama of movement and crisis that underwrote the most important events of the American nineteenth century. It was during this period - from African American removal to the beginning of the Civil War – that autobiographical captivity narratives were produced.

Captive I’s

In such an environment of constant encounter and conflict, narratives of confinement flourished. Robert Adams’s narrative, *Narrative of Robert Adams, A Sailor*,

who was wrecked on the Coast of Africa, in the year 1810, was detained three years in slavery by the Arabs of the Great Desert, and resided several months in the city of Timbuctoo (1816) provides insight into the prolific autobiographical production of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that emerged out of Barbary captivity. Well before the nineteenth century, what are known as the Barbary States – Morocco, Tunisia, Tripoli, and Algiers – demanded a tribute from European vessels to ensure their safe passage through foreign waters. Prior to the revolution, the American colonies had enjoyed safe passage by virtue of their subjection to the English crown, but upon independence they found themselves negotiating such freedoms for themselves. Partly unable and unwilling to render tributes to these states, the U.S. soon found itself under little or no protection. When over thirty American sailors were imprisoned due to lack of this protection, the Tripolitan War ensued (1801-1805), what Paul Baepler terms America’s “first post revolutionary war” (2). Continued captivities throughout the early nineteenth century highlighted how threats to American subjects from captivity prompted narratives of national recognition, pride and/or violation. Such accounts as *American Captives in Tripoli, or Dr. Cowdery’s Journal in Miniature. Kept during his late captivity in Tripoli* (1806); *History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, who was six years a slave in Algiers: two of which she was confined in a dark and dismal dungeon, loaded with irons* (1807); and James Riley’s 1817 account illustrate these points.

As exemplified in *The Narrative of Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824), a whole host of narratives told of Indian captivity. Perhaps more than any other form of subjection, Indian captivity was the constant fear of many a settler up until the nineteenth century, when it became much less likely in the Northeast. Not incidentally, it was also

at this time that the Indian captivity narratives, both fictional and non-fictional, achieved singular popularity as a way of both romanticizing and demonizing these “vanishing Americans.” Especially in the 1820’s, sensational and Romantic accounts of Indian captivity flourished in non-fictional and fictional works. They were often collected in such volumes as *A Selection of Some of the Most Interesting Narrative of Outrages committed by the Indians in their Wars with the White People* (1808-11) and *Indian Atrocities! Affecting and Thrilling Anecdotes Respecting the Hardships and Sufferings of our Brave and Venerable Forefathers* (1846).

Bibb’s account of Indian captivity and slavery in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849) speaks to how Indian captivity (sometimes in tandem with other captivity traditions) continued throughout the nineteenth century in the West as white, American settlement and Indian displacement continued. As made clear by the Indian captivities of the Oatmans in the 1850’s and Nat Love in the 1870’s, Indian captivity persisted to and even beyond mid-century.

As evidenced in narratives by George Thompson, Alanson Work and James Burr, a significant body of literature arose out of the penitentiary system. At mid century, there existed 36 penitentiaries in 31 states (*Census 1669*), but America’s first penitentiary was Walnut Street Prison in Philadelphia 1790. By the 1820’s, two systems dominated, the “separate” system of Pennsylvania, which advocated perpetual labor and silence of its inmates, and the “silent” systems of New York, which advocated aggregate labor in complete silence.¹⁰ Underwritten by an increasing sense of the infinite improvement of (mostly white, male) subjects, these systems and the penal policies that grew out of them hoped to reform wayward citizens and thereby improve society as a whole. In the context

of the penitentiary and reform movements a fertile literature of prison writing emerged, including George Thompson's abolitionist memoir, *Prison Life* (1853).

As an abolitionist manifesto, *Prison Life* – and many other ex-prisoners' accounts – benefited as much from the purchase of incarceration as from the most popular body of autobiographical writing about confinement in the pre-Civil War era, the slave narrative.¹¹ Numbering about 3.2 million in 1850 (*Compendium* 82), slaves had also been a significant part of the population well before the nineteenth century. However, the rise of abolitionism, beginning with the publication of William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* in 1831, marked the nationalization and legitimatization of slavery as probably the most identifiable discourse on captivity. Several texts, such as *The Narrative of Henry Box Brown*, *The Life of Henry Bibb*, and *The Life of Solomon Northup* come to us through this context. Coming at the end of the slave narrative's antebellum manifestation, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* (1861) is representative of the thematics of freedom found in earlier slave narratives, but with a particular eye towards the bondage of women.

Captives

As suggested by the previous section, the reality of "captivity" manifested itself quite differently throughout the antebellum U.S. For George Thompson, on the one hand, captivity meant physical confinement within an architectural structure, although he was often compelled to work outside the prison as well. For Mary Jemison, on the other hand, captivity meant frequent travel between distant locations in Western Pennsylvania and upstate New York, but virtually no contact with Anglo-American family members.

What definition or characterization of freedom, and conversely captivity, accounts for these disparate circumstances?

One of the most pervasive understandings of freedom was as a “function of possession,” the idea that the individual (often white and male) owned himself and the things around him.¹² Beginning in the late eighteenth century, C. B. Macpherson explains:

The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself. The relation of ownership, having become for more and more men the critically important relation determining their actual freedom and actual prospect of realizing their full potentialities, was read back into the nature of the individual. The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession. (3)

Inasmuch as they possessed their “capacities” (or wills), their “persons” (or bodies), and a measure of independence from the will of others, subjects could be said to be free.

Stephen Best makes a similar point in *The Fugitive’s Properties* when he contends that “the subjection of personhood to property” is the quintessential fact of nineteenth century America (16). In such a context, possession of the property in the self and other goods, services, and subjects became an identifiable way of marking independence, status, and freedom.

Captives, in contrast, did not possess themselves or the things around them. Their persons and capacities were in the possession of another. As a result, I define captivity as the forced loss, diminution, or encroachment of one will by another as manifested in the 1) loss or restriction of the activities of the body; 2) denial/restriction of open intercourse with a desired social world; and 3) the removal to or confinement in a physical space, structure or geographic location. The first condition is the ground of captivity; one’s will

must be compromised by another in order for one to be a captive; the captive must dissent. These subjects are captive because their will has been absorbed into the will of an(o)ther, and though never identical with it, cannot be extracted from it until freedom. That Other could be the state, the complexities of colonial warfare, the white plantation owner, the Arab in Morocco, or a wealthy half-Indian. Though this is the common thread that underlies these captivities, however, this loss is not sufficient to understanding captivity and its narrations. If one's will is compromised by another that is merely the definition of dependence or inferiority.

The manipulation of the "person and capacities" must be manifested in/on the body of the captive through activities such as labor, speech, dress, eating, or sleep. According to the rules of the silent system, for example, inmates had to remain silent while at work in common areas. Not so differently, Indian captives, explains Mary Jemison, could not use English in the presence of their captors. Slaves who worked in the field, according to Douglass's narrative, arose at dawn and worked till dusk. The status of the body is a crucial site for the conceptualization of the captive's status. Lastly, captivity comes about by removing and/or confining and/or holding the body within a geographic locale and/or physical structure (jail, the plantation, the Barbary state, the Indian). Bodily confinement or abuse is the most obvious and external sign of the captive's compromised will. Ultimately, submission, possession, and subjection mark the status of the captive.

Rituals, Captivity, and Authority

But, then, how could losing possession of one's self lead to autobiographical writing or even re-presentation as American? Why would America, autobiography, captivity, and authority go together? Indeed, how do we understand the process by which the lead of captivity turns into the gold of American autobiographical authority?

In order to answer these questions, I would like to suggest a more ambiguous and multifaceted model of what captivity could mean by situating it within what Cornelius Castoriadis terms the "social imaginary." In *World in Fragments*, Castoriadis defines the imaginary as that which "is not exhausted or even corresponds to the 'rational' and 'real'" (8). Writing against "physicalism," "logicalism" and other theories of "determination," Castoriadis argues that the society "institutes" the meanings of even apparently intransigent "things." Furthermore, he asserts that all societies create laws, "obligatory ways of perceiving and conceiving the social and 'physical' world and acting within it" (269). He explains,

The self-institution of society is the creation of a human world: of "things," "reality," language, norms, values, ways of life and death, objects for which we live and objects for which we die – and of course, first and foremost, the creation of the human individual in which the institution of society is massively embedded. ("The Greek Polis" 269)

Against the notion that the meanings of "things" or "subjects" are eternally given or fixed, Castoriadis contends that objects accrue meaning in the context of what he calls the "social-historical."

Similarly, but with a greater sense of the contending forces within the social imaginary that compete for the determination of the subject, Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan contend:

Within any given social and historical moment a variety of discourses exist and compete for control of subjectivity. The subject thus becomes the site of a discursive battle for the meaning of their [sic] identity; their

interpellation as subjects within any single discourse can never be final. Though most forms of discourse deny their own partiality by laying claim to the 'truth' of individual existence, the contradictions brought about by the plurality of discursive fields ensures that the individual is constantly subjected to a range of possible meanings, and is therefore an unstable site of constructions and reconstructions which often overlap. (emphasis added; 69)

Like Castoriadis, Easthope and McGowan foreground the multiple and contradictory sites of the subject's social and historical interpellation. But moreover, they suggest that the social institution of subjects creates "subject ranges" or "subject fields," domains where plural and contradictory meanings of a subject can reside. As a result, though the subject position of the captive is often read as abject, pained, and silent, the captive might also be enunciated according to meanings that are different from the ones just mentioned.

Indeed, inasmuch as they are constituted through contradictory ranges of meaning, the figure of the captive and the figure of the authoritative subject may well overlap. As a result, embedded within the figure of the captive are complex, contradictory, and powerful meanings that belie its status as self-evident and pejorative. The social facts that govern our understanding of captivity should be understood as a function of a range, not as an expression of a unified and singular truth.

With these observations in mind, I want to return briefly to the point made by Jerome Bruner in an earlier section, that "suffering finally silences autobiography," that its only power is to provoke the "immediacy of witness" and not to spur complex self-representations. It should be clear here that far from silencing "autobiography," or the complex rendering of the self, suffering might actually be a site of plural, contradictory, and contested meanings of the subject. If the "immediacy" of suffering plays any part in captivity (which it certainly must), it is not even or only to silence plural and contradictory meanings, but to intensify the contestation of meaning since that event is so

loaded. Furthermore, no temporal or spatial “distancing” is needed from captivity to provide fodder for complex self-presentations. Instead, such complexity is already embedded in the apparently self-evident experience, narration, and reading of suffering. If anything, captivity lends itself to the “art of self-presentation” inasmuch as such a category is hotly contested.

Likewise, the representation of bondage underwrites the categories of America, masculinity, and whiteness. The figurations that constitute U.S. identity depend on the literary representations that emerge from the reality of bondage. The social construction of the captive authors and reinscribes models of identity typical of U.S. subjects.

But, clearly, every captivity does not lead to autobiographical writing and every act of autobiographical writing does not result in the captive’s representation as powerful, American, or authoritative. Besides an appeal to the tangible differences between captives’ experiences, how does this theory account for those differences?

The answer to these questions, I think, can be found in understanding the experience and narration of captivity as a kind of ritual. According to Ruth Inge-Heinze, a ritual provides a “pattern of expression” that “organizes events into new meaning.”¹³ Inasmuch as the experience of captivity and the writing of captivity function as “events” within a ritual, they also have the capacity to produce “new meanings.” Of course, as Easthope and McGowan would remind us, these “patterns of expression” are not necessarily creating that which is “new,” but giving voice to the plural and contradictory meanings that have been denied or suppressed. They are revealing the fundamental instability, reconstruction, and overlap of subject positions. In other words, rituals open up the possibility for denied or authoritative meanings of captivity.

But how does one behave ritually in relation to the “events” of captive experience or narration? According to Catherine Bell,

Acting ritually is first and foremost a matter of nuanced contrasts and the evocation of strategic, value-laden distinctions [. . .]. That is, intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself – to various degrees and in various ways – from other ways of acting within any particular culture. (90)

Within these terms, the most important way that the experience and account of bondage differentiated themselves from “other ways of acting” is, strangely enough, by recognizing and/or treating captivity as familiar, useful, and even desirable. Since many narratives of captivity capitalized on the utter strangeness and abhorrence of bondage, one way to act ritually in the captivity narrative is to strike a pose of familiarity. To be clear, though, these nuanced and contrasting movements do not only distinguish them from other narratives’ ways of acting, but from their own ways of acting. Their wrenching out of, recognition of, or imputing of the familiar and desirable in their narratives is what lends those events “new meaning.” To locate those moments in the remembering of captivity that offer “nuanced contrasts” and “value-laden distinctions” is, in part, to find its ritual-like potential.

These distinctions and contrasts must also work according to a “pattern of expression.” When “value-laden” distinctions conjure plural and contradictory meanings it is because they adhere to a pattern of expression in which captivity is useful. Here, I understand expression as either quite literally a turn of phrase or more generally any demonstrated model. Thus, when Bell’s “acting differently” is added to Inge-Henize’s “pattern of expression,” we get a complete formula for the emergence of “new meaning” of an “event”: acting differently according to a distinct, value laden pattern of expression changes the meaning of an event. Now, here, we have reason to pause since, as Easthope

and McGowan make clear, the meaning of the subject is “never final” and always subject to “reconstruction” and “overlap.” Surely, even while securing a momentary respite from normative rules, rituals are not exempt from them. With a greater sense of the challenge, but not necessary triumph, that rituals pose to ordinary meaning making, we might submit: acting differently according to a distinct, value laden pattern of expression has the potential to challenge, contest, and even change the meaning of an event.

Specifically, for the historical captive, we might claim: understanding one’s experience differently according to a pattern of expression disputes the meaning of what is experienced. For the narrator, we might state: writing differently according to a pattern of expression opposes the meaning of what is written. And, even for the reader, one might aver: reading differently according to a value-laden pattern of expression interrogates the meaning of what is experienced. And, of course, the historical captive, ex-captive writer, and reader could potentially impinge on the other (as when the ex-captive literally reads her own narrative or reads her own experience). In this way, the living, writing, and reading of captivity had the potential to take on “new” and, more specifically, authoritative meanings.

Moving from this theoretical model, the next portion of this introduction considers nineteenth-century American patterns for acting differently in relation to the captive; it addresses how specific models of captivity and the range of meanings surrounding the captive signified as authoritative for ex-captives. To be sure, this discussion is not meant to be exhaustive, but merely suggestive of the ways that authority is implicated in and overlaps with captivity. More detailed explications of these processes will be articulated in individual chapters. I turn now to map the social, cultural,

and political conditions of possibility for the overlapping of captivity, autobiography and American identity.

Captivity and the Autobiographical

Notions of the autobiographical subject, the American, and the captive overlap in several important ways in the nineteenth century, a point that is illuminated by the entwined beginnings of both the penitentiary and the American “I” in the late eighteenth century. In 1790, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* was published (incompletely and unauthoritatively) and America’s first penitentiary, the Walnut Street Prison, was erected. Both in Philadelphia, the two events underscore the simultaneity and interconnectedness of the context and content of captivity to writing about the “I.” Though always with a tinge of irony, Franklin’s explicit focus on instruction – from everything to argumentation (14), inoculation (84), city regulation (86), and rehabilitation – confirms and rearticulates the discipline and reformation championed in the penitentiary. Thomas Couser notes of the conduct book Franklin reprints in his memoir that “the keeping of the book is a rudimentary form of self-life writing, a reduction ad absurdum of autobiography. Conversely, the autobiography is the conduct book writ large,” and thus both his Life and the conduct book transcribed in it constitute “personal panopticons” (45). However, Couser’s smart analysis omits the important ways that such discipline was not merely autobiographical, but a practical and logical extension of models of selfhood coming out of penal rehabilitation that would peak in Philadelphia. As the reputed starting point for American autobiography, the work’s content of figurative incarceration and context of literal incarceration index a model (pattern of expression) of

captivity as simultaneously autobiographical and uniquely American. The doubly autobiographical and American dimensions of captivity are the focus of the following discussion.

The rule of silence, the second virtue on Franklin's list, in the early American prison system suggests an important link between prisons and the fact and fictions of autobiography. Although eventually abandoned by nineteenth century prisons, the silent system was the single feature that characterized the early American penitentiary. In both the Western and Eastern Penitentiaries of Pennsylvania and the Auburn and Sing Sing Prisons of New York – two typically opposed penal systems – the ideal of complete silence among prisoners was endorsed. Although often difficult to maintain, David Rothman reveals, the silence of prisoners was meant to encourage thoughtfulness, penance, and thorough rehabilitation (xix). In this light, the silence of the prisoner was, in words Orlando Patterson might appreciate, the “constitutive characteristic” of early American imprisonment.

More to my point, the rule of silence was also the “constitutive characteristic” for the production of much biographical writing. As exemplified in the annual *Auburn State Prison Reports* (1829-1830) demanded by Congress, a one to two paragraph biographical sketch of each prisoner had to be scripted by prison authorities upon inmates' release. Aside from fulfilling the practical function of documentation, these mini-biographies suggest that the prisoner's silence in prison and seclusion from society made his written life desirable and meaningful. Hence, his release had to be accompanied by a version of his “life” that matched up with and broke the imposed silence of the life that he had been living in prison. As solicited documents often do, these mini-biographies fulfilled the

requirements of the institution and the officials who solicited them. They usually started in childhood curiosity and adolescent delinquency, and moved towards adult incarceration, rehabilitation, and release. Thus, these Lives constituted threadbare representations. Nonetheless, they index the ways that the silence and separation of prisoners presumed, encouraged, and demanded writing about the life of the prisoner, including events that took place well before incarceration.

More generally, the various realities of antebellum captivity – removal from specific locations, psychological suffering, and pained bodies – constituted an unofficial “silent system” that lent itself to the auto-biographical production by the captive. In slavery, for example, the ways that slave speech was preprogrammed, compelled, and curtailed generated a kind of “silence” about the interiority of the slave. In other words, there was a “silence” attendant to chattel slavery that encouraged slave testimony and that overlapped with nineteenth century imperatives to write about one’s self. In more literal ways, of course, literal silence was the condition of captivity under slavery. As made clear in the historical record of slavery, the slave was not allowed to speak on her own behalf in several contexts – especially to challenge or contradict the words or actions of a white subject. Compounded by the “silence” or ineffability that was blackness, African American slaves lived in their own silent system in relation to the gaze of whites. In turn, their silence underwrote an interest in their “actual” or “real” lives from their own perspectives, suggesting an inherent, if nominal, mandate for life writing made possible by others’ desire for slave speech or utterance.

In slightly different but no less important ways, Indian captivity narratives broke the silence in which captives of Indians existed. Long hidden from physical view and

removed from social intercourse, they inhabited a separation from the Anglo-American world that was intensified by the seeming mystery of Native American culture. Read as postcards from an ethnographic edge, Indian captivity narratives gave voice to the apparent void that Native American languages and cultures constituted and the experience of Anglo Americans among them. Through the traumatic and interested language of their captives, Native Americans, albeit problematically, spoke. In this way, the case of Indian captivity underscores the “common fields” of life writing and the silence of captivity.

Moreover, the captive’s pained body and changed language functioned as silences that incited the desire and need for autobiographical utterance. North African prisoners’ location outside of the country and hemisphere, in particular, invited an accounting by others and themselves of where they had been and what they had been doing. In hopes of perhaps addressing these concerns, Robert Adams’s tale offers a sustained physical description of the ex-captive wearing a mixture of western and North African clothing. Likewise, within the narrative, the text’s amanuensis is presented as mystified and intrigued by Adam’s transformed language after his release, a pidgin of “Arabic,” “Negro” and English languages. Spurred by such interest, captives were justified to write and speak autobiographically.

Hence, the “range of meanings” of the captive (owner of experience, a body that would not stop talking, individuated subject, penitent sinner, reformed citizen) overlapped with the form of the autobiographer (one who had a distinctive bios, one who could speak truly) in a way that made the autobiographical expression of captives’ lives logical. Given the similar ways that both of these fields were conceived, the

authorization of the autobiographical by captivity should not be read as idiosyncratic or unexpected, but a predictable effect of the particular way that captivity was imagined and socially instituted.

Captivity and American Identity

Though diametrically opposed in important ways, both the categories of the captive and the American shared a constellation of meanings and ideas that encouraged their dialogue. Typically, the myths associated with the empowered American subject deal with mobility, self-possession, independence, and individuality.¹⁴ Within this model, the captive has been read as the farthest thing from the American. But such a picture ignores the ways that more modest, if not abject, states have also characterized the empowered American, and, in turn, the way that captivity constitutes an alternate paradigm where powerlessness is powerful and important. It also overlooks the ways that the reality of bondage, manifested in both holding captives and in being a captive, was essential to American history and several forms of self-fashioning.

For instance, many of the first American “settlers” were actually prisoners. As Roger A. Ekirch notes, “Next to African slaves, [British prisoners] constituted the largest body of immigrants ever compelled to go to America” (2). Approximately 50,000 British subjects were punished by way of forced transportation to America during the eighteenth century (27). As a result, “Britain’s primary remedy for rising crime” (1) significantly shaped the population of eighteenth century colonial life and, presumably, the early nineteenth century population as well. Indeed, Mary Jemison and her parents, the scholarship of Sharon V. Salinger reveals, came to Pennsylvania at the same time as a

wave of Scot-Irish prisoners flooded the state (3). Her coming to America and eventually becoming American (both literally and literarily) was in the context of a wave of convict immigration. In this way, Americans were being literally made (both in the convicts' own experience and in the physical form of their children) out of the condition of British conviction, captivity, and transportation.

Of course, Jemison is a more obvious example of the way in which captivity framed colonists' encounter with America: Indian captivity. Henning Cohen and James Levernier assert that "Indian captivity was a massive historical reality. It helped to shape the national character, and it provided substance for the artistic imagination" and "defined basic issues in the white culture [. . .]" (15). Richard Slotkin adds that it was "the starting point of an American mythology" (97). And in perhaps the definitive survey of the genre of Indian captivity narratives, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, James Levernier and Kathryn Zabelle Stodola-Derounian explain that "in one form or other it touched the imagination and fears of virtually every one for whom it was a possibility" (1). Indeed, the language of the Indian captivity was the vocabulary by which early Americans understood themselves, outsiders, and the relation between the two.¹⁵

In the antebellum era, Indian captivity – and the figure of the captive – remained a powerful way to fashion American identity. The purchase of Indian captivity in crafting authentic tales of "American" bravery and masculinity is evident, for example, in the Indian-hating novels of Robert Montgomery Bird. In *Nick of the Woods*, the protagonist's main claim to reliability is dependent upon his propensity for deliberate and violent action against Native Americans while in Indian captivity. Both his American-ness and masculinity are proportional to the number of maimed and dead Indians who lay

in his path. In more romantic, but no less sensational, language, this staging of American character in the midst of Indian captivity was worked out in the novels of James Fennimore Cooper and countless anthologies.

But, of course, the preeminent figure of captivity's centrality to American identity was the African American slave, a figure that organized several and even contradictory relationships to American identity.¹⁶ The slave was what Karen Sanchez-Eppler terms a "paradigmatic body," a malleable form that could be read usefully across a number of interpretive systems (30). On the one hand, to own slaves, for instance, was crucial to many understandings of American membership. When Oregon threatened to enter the union as a free state, thus tipping the balance of congressional power from slave to free states, Senator John. C. Calhoun imagined the right to own African Americans as essential to his and other Southerners' American-ness. Conversely, Calhoun reasoned, to diminish the power of the South to hold slaves would be to "convert all the southern population into slaves" (15). This conceptualization of slaveholding as a distinctly American occupation is reflected in the Cherokee Indians' adoption of chattel slavery (as well as other western accoutrements) as a sign of their acceptance of American ideals (Perdue 49). However, one did not literally have to own slaves in order to couch one's eligibility for national enfranchisement. At mid century, female suffragists strategically appropriated the figure of the slave in order to underscore their lack of rights in relation to men and to sanction their claim to full citizenship along with the downtrodden slave.¹⁷

In less fantastic, but just as fundamental ways, the submission of citizens to the government was understood as a necessary part of American civic and political life. As one early nineteenth-century writer in a Boston newspaper quipped, "Real liberty is not

the power of doing what we please, but is a system of RESTRAINT, by which we are PREVENTED from injuring another in property or person [. . .]” (qtd. in Kammen 70). According to this formula, to be subject to the laws of the government is to be a good subject. Hence, American political subjectivity is a balance between protection and subjection. As Michael Kammen argues in *Spheres of Liberty*, the freedom to act willfully (liberty) and proper submission to the state’s authority (order) characterized the “golden mean” for much of the nineteenth century (74). In this sense, a certain level of submission and domination operated at the center of subjects’ relation to the American nation and its laws.¹⁸

However, one of the most prolific sources of an *imago* of the authoritative captive was the iconoclastic power of submission and suffering found in Christian cosmology. Suffering and displacement – equally salient terms in the vocabulary of Christians and captives – enabled membership and communion with ultimate reality according to a Christian worldview. In nineteenth century America, such ideas were widely spread and understood through what Perry Miller has famously characterized as the “invincible persistence” of revivalism, the setting up of camp meetings, informal gatherings, and the like in which non-believers were encouraged, en masse, to join the body of Christ (7). With its rugged, democratic, and anti-authoritarian character, the revival technique, in its own right, established one model of how the ordinary, lowly, and disenfranchised could assume power within particular worldviews. But more specifically, it continued the dissemination of a radical vision of power that lay at the center of Christian thought, that to be free in Christ was to be a servant to him, that submission to him was key to mastery over the self and world.

This point is fleshed out most clearly in the writings of black female spiritual autobiographers, who wrote within the context of and acted as agents for revivalism. As Elizabeth Elkin Grammer makes clear of female itinerant preachers, “their submissiveness [. . .] made it easier for them to assume the posture necessary to be filled with the Holy Spirit” (5). “Indeed, all these women,” she continues,

had a resource that secular autobiographers and rebels lacked: a way of making sense of their marginality. Christians had, in the example of their creed’s founder and the many prophets who preceded and disciples who followed him, an alternative geometry in which difference was not deviance, in which the margin *was* the center. Narrating the life as conflict was thus much more than a means by which women could create and preserve a certain individuality and force recognition from their culture; it was also an avenue into biblical typology, where they could gain a much-needed self-understanding. (104)

The black female spiritual autobiographer Jarena Lee, then, is typical when she characterizes each “trial” as “opportunity” (29). After narrating one particularly rough ordeal, Lee exalts, “Now I could adopt the very language of St. Paul” (38); in other words, she could speak in the voice of the hallowed apostle. As William Andrews concludes, “for the spiritual autobiographer, appropriating God’s word to his or her individual purposes constituted an especially bold form of self-authorization” (1). For believers, the connection to Christ was not simply important, but the height of earthly Christian experience.

Along these same lines, the displacement constitutive of itinerancy – and roughly rearticulated in many forms of captivity – constituted another source of power. Although female itinerants were often “homeless and alone,” Grammer maintains, such “mobility” “had given them a nearly unique access to both freedom and authority” (23). Practically, they were not soldered to specific domestic spaces or work, and such homelessness underscored their suitability to the sufferings and eternal rewards of discipleship.

Moving outside mainstream expectations and culture thus placed spiritual autobiographers exactly where they wanted to be, which was closer to suffering for God.

Paradoxically, moving outside of America, as captives literally and figuratively did, had the potential to move one to its “center.” In *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, Laurence Moore argues that as exemplified in the “deliberate strategies of differentiation” of the Mormons, being outside and separate from mainstream culture is what defined their American-ness. “Mormons followed a lesson,” Moore reasons, “[. . .] that one way of becoming American was to invent oneself out of a sense of opposition” (45). He explains, “In defining themselves as being apart from the mainstream, Mormons were in fact laying their claim to it. By declaring themselves outsiders, they were moving to the center” (45-46). In other words, difference and idiosyncrasy – two characteristics that appear fundamentally opposed to group building – have played a significant role in expressing American character.

Sometimes at the risk of disappearing from the cultural map, captives frequently moved outside of American culture. They came back dressed in clothes not typical of Anglo-American dress or saying words and even speaking languages that were not well known by American whites. But when coupled with a romantic interest in the colonial history of the nation, such a distinctive and othered experience (as it did in the case of Mary Jemison) could fulfill the requirement of difference and separateness suggested by the examples of the Mormons. As religious difference did for Mormons, captivity allowed other subjects to maintain a “carefully nurtured sense of separate identity” (xi), a sense that was so fundamental to imagining one’s self as American. Again, in captivity such “outsiderhood,” as Moore terms it, threatened to literally and literarily erase the

subject from America, but it also provided an inroad into a powerful and distinct sense of national belonging.

Connected to and working with revivalism, abolitionism was another source of the captive's status as empowered American. Especially as articulated in Garrisonian abolitionism, the revivalistic fervor of the camp meeting could often be heard in the speeches of the anti-slavery society. Consequently, abolitionists frequently extolled the moral superiority of the slave in contrast to the material power of the slaveholder. But within abolitionism, the captive was buttressed more generally by Romantic models of valorized suffering. As Dwight McBride observes, the dates of romanticism and abolitionism roughly span the same thirty year period in American literature from the 1830's to 1860's. This chronological coincidence underscores the central and authoritative place of the captive in both. "For the Romantics," McBride submits, "there was not a more definitive sign of the "authentic" or real than that of Nature," and "the slave represents a state of Nature." (6) In other words, as "uncultivated" and "rude" slaves, not as potentially free people, slaves fascinated and, to some extent, ordered the Romantic imagination. In a world that was becoming increasingly mechanized, the slave ideally existed as closest to "nature."¹⁹ It is this same "valorizing of the meek and lowly or the "natural man" (21), organized as a form in Romanticism, that is so effectively deployed by the abolitionists. Consequently, the "valorization" of the slave as a slave meant that captives could be more authoritative as captives than as free people.

Frederick Douglass provides a poignant case in point and is instructive of the ways Romanticism enabled the authoritative captives of the Indian captivity narrative and Barbary captivity as well. After Douglass purchased his freedom at mid century, anti-

slavery critics hailed him as complicit with the slave system and somehow less authoritative because he was technically no longer a captive (McFeely 144). His ironic circumstance underlines how a model of heightened American identity depended on the condition of captivity to sustain it and how being free was, strangely enough, a less authoritative subject position. This is the more subtle reading that is often missed in the various titling of slave narratives as “American slaves.” Their unique American-ness emerges not despite of their bondage, but because of it.

In a number of different ways then, the fact and fictions associated with captivity overlapped with and even structured the categories of the autobiographical and the empowered American. A combination of readers, editors, and ex-captives who were sensitive to the interconnections between captivity and authority assisted these linkages. Too, a historical context in which the reality of bondage, slavery, and imprisonment presented itself to many Americans also bolstered the connections between bondage and power. And, even failing the intentions of ex-captives and the exigencies of history, the language in which captivity narratives spoke was deeply implicated in and, thus, representative of a social imaginary where captivity also meant authority.

Chapter Organization and Content

Having suggested how social, cultural, and political conditions of possibility for the overlapping of captivity, autobiography and American identity might be understood in the first half of the nineteenth century, I look in the following chapters to how particular subjects, texts, and contexts worked to make such authority actual. It is to a brief sketch of the organization and content of these chapters that I finally turn.

Given the historical and theoretical importance of removal to my project, I have organized my dissertation into five removes that represent a different type of captivity: Seneca captivity, Cherokee slavery, North African captivity, chattel slavery, and state imprisonment. Each chapter establishes one form of captivity and captivity writing as well as anticipates another. Mary Jemison's representation of Indian captivity among the Seneca, *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824), sets up and contrasts with chapter two, Henry Bibb's *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849), an account (among other things) of Cherokee slavery. Chapter three discusses Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1859), representative of the African American slave narrative. Implicitly, it anticipates a consideration of the North African slavery recorded in Robert Adams's *The Narrative of Robert Adams* (1816). Lastly, chapter five transitions from the issues of slavery to those of imprisonment as rehearsed in George Thompson's *Prison Life* (1853), an abolitionist account of incarceration in the Missouri penitentiary. Each of these texts and their discussions represent how captivity narratives enabled and elaborated varied relationships to autobiography and empowered American identity.

My discussion of Mary Jemison and James Seaver's collaboration, *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824), demonstrates the ways Indian captivity narratives sanctioned a surrogate or substitute "I" in place of authentic Indian voices. They organized a conversation about white, American subjects who could claim chronological and cultural primacy over America's indigenous inhabitants. At the same time, these narratives also carried the potential to re-member Indians as the rightful and respected heirs to American identity. Coming both after the Indian removal act and the

birth of slavery on the national political scene in the 1830's, Henry Bibb's *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1849) suggests the ways the re-membering of Cherokee captivity mitigates the unreliability of the slave narrator. The text creates a masculine, and aggressive "I" out of captivity and authorizes Bibb's representation as a morally proper and materially propertied American. However, it does so through the construction of Cherokee Indians as uncivilized and illiterate, thereby rehearsing the denigration and displacement of American Indians found in Jemison and Seaver's collaboration.

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* suggests how seclusion within her grandmother's garret makes available an epistolary "I"/eye that confounds the written regime of slavery in addition to separating her from the surveillance of slave authority. The garret also serves as a symbol of her return to motherhood, sisterhood, and a community of reproducing women. This model of authority is supplemented by Robert Adams's *Adventures* (1816), where the Barbary captive fixes his ethnographic "I"/eye on the North African hinterland. His slavery among the Arabs, Moors, and indigenous Africans becomes the basis for his figuration as an imperial American, one whose knowledge of Other geographies makes him worthy to inhabit an American one. As a biracial figure, however, he inhabits his American identity in ways that trouble the whiteness and racial classifications that are usually attendant to it. And George Thompson, Alanson Work and James Burr's meditation on incarceration in a Missouri penitentiary, *Prison Life*, exhibits an apostolic "I" emerging out of a Pauline tradition of bondage that is redeployed in nineteenth-century evangelical movements. Thompson's text unpacks the varied and contradictory meaning of the prisoner's chain, creating links

to other captives and fashioning a penitential American subject, one who honorably suffers on the behalf of and in the name of other subjugated citizens.

Finally, the conclusion speculates on the ramifications of authorized models of the autobiographical and American identity emerging out of bondage. It thinks about how the authority of bondage compels us to rethink the possibility and meaning of resistance to submission. Moreover, it argues that the standard opposition of freedom and bondage ignores their mutual inclusiveness and, furthermore, prevents a discussion of the ways that captivity presents a powerful lens through which to reread, rewrite, and reconstruct literary history and production.

¹ Gordon Sayre's anthology, *American Captivity Narratives*, is one of the few collections I know of that uses "captivity" in a more inclusive sense. In that work, Sayre presents selections from writers and ex-captives as diverse as Mary Rowlandson, Olaudah Equiano, and Lucy Terry.

² Patterson frequently uses the language of "subordinate" to designate the figure that is acted upon or passive in the communicative exchange. However, this is the reading that I am attempting to resist. Autonomy and authority (which he nicely reconciles through the notion of representation) becomes (or has the potential to become) too polemical at points. What interests me more are the ways that captivity narratives constitute the "proper form of address" to exert influence.

³ This is a curious moment in the article for, only one paragraph later, he reads Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table* account of being a "slave chemist" as an exemplar of "literary autobiography." But he attributes the work's status as autobiography to Levi's masterful self-invention, not so much to the conditions of being mastered. Of the copious body of African American and women's life narrative coming out of oppression, he notes: "The richness of Black and feminist life writing inheres, I suspect, not so much in the intensity of protest that they represent as in the inventiveness of the literary traditions they call upon for their inspiration." Bruner understands inventiveness and suffering as almost mutually exclusive, and explains their apparent coincidence through the richness of tradition and individual genius.

⁴ This is the point made by Arch in *After Franklin*, that there must be a certain level of self-conscious distancing from the self, that personal exigency might get in the way of reflection. In *The Examined Self*, Sayre makes a similar point in relation to the unity of the life. By implication, people who live their lives without the leisure of such reflection cannot produce "examined lives."

⁵ See Gerri Reaves *Mapping the Private Geography* for a discussion of how place informs the aesthetics and politics of American autobiography. In the writings of Sacvan Bercovitch and Robert F. Sayre, the source of things autobiographical and American appear irreducible to the agency and genius of the narrator. William Charvat's groundbreaking work exposed the ways that the nineteenth century historical context made authorship, autobiographical or otherwise, possible. And Michael T. Gilmore's *Romanticism and the Marketplace* foregrounds the material basis and content of antebellum literary production.

⁶ By my rough math, about 37 percent of autobiographical production falls into topical narratives, or narratives of "extreme suffering." If 80 percent of those narratives are what I call captivity narratives, then that means that at least 29 percent (.296) of Buell's schema is comprised of captivity narratives.

⁷ Despite the trailblazing work of Frances Foster, John Sekora, Rafia Zafar and others, we have yet to appreciate the complex ways that slavery and Indian captivity, for example, speak to each other. More recently, in texts like *Brer Rabbit and The Coyote*, Tiya Miles *Ties that Bind*, Joanna Brooks *American Lazarus* and Michelle Burnham's *Captivity and Sentiment*, scholars have begun to see the common enunciation of several forms of captivity writing. I understand this work as continuing that good tradition.

⁸ At the very beginning of the slave narrative tradition, Briton Hammon bears witness to the experience of Indian captivity. In the nineteenth century, many Cherokees, for example, owned slaves as part of their understanding of themselves as "civilized." Haliburton notes that the Cherokee, for example, owned over 1200 slaves in 1825 (39). For the numbers of slaves held by post-removal Southeastern Indians, see the national census of 1860.

⁹ To call this an era of crisis in American identity is to state what is always and already the case, American identity and all identities are constantly and fundamentally anxious, by which I mean leery of opposition and fearful of disintegration, though some historical moments clearly have more anxiety than others. What is interesting about the anxiety of the nineteenth century was its particular relationship to the movement of bodies within and without the nation as well as the movement of the actual borders of the nation.

¹⁰ To be clear, the distinction between the "silent" and "separate" system cannot be based upon silence, as both ideally demanded the perpetual silence of their inmates. For more on the separate (Pennsylvania) and

silent (New York) systems, see Mckelvey's *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions* (1977) and Thomas Blomberg's *American Penology: A History of Control* (2000). An invaluable primary source for understanding the separate system is the *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy*, the unofficial organ of the separate system.

¹¹ In the post-Civil War era, the bonds between the prison and African American subjugation would become quite literal as the convict lease system constituted another form of African American slavery. See Edward Ayers's, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century South* (1984); William Banks's *Down on Parchman Farm: The Great Prison in the Mississippi Delta* (199); Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?*; David Oshinsky's "Worse Than Slavery;" *Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*; and Matthew Mancini's, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928*.

¹² For a survey of the several sources of modern notions of freedom, see R. W. Davis, *The Origins of Modern Freedom in the West* (1995). For a discussion of the concept of freedom as it emerges after the French Revolution and migrates into the nineteenth century, see Isser Woloch, *Revolution and the Meanings of Freedom in the Nineteenth Century* (1996).

¹³ See Malinowski's "solidarity thesis," another critics reading of ritual as "all purpose social glue," and yet another's reading of ritual as a form of ideology. One of the best studies of the current state of ritual studies is Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice*, whose sharp insights I apply later in this discussion.

¹⁴ Clearly, transcendental visions of the self as a loner, a keeper of his own company reflect this reading. As Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and R.W.B. Lewis argue in "A National Literature and Romantic Individualism, 1826-1861," "[. . .] transcendentalism was, at its core a philosophy of naked individualism, aimed at the creation of the new American, the self-reliant man, complete and independent" (21-22). It was a celebration of the "freestanding" and "contextless individual" (22).

¹⁵ Cotton Mather, for instance, describes seventeenth-century New England as a Judea Capta, or captive Israel, inasmuch as Native Americans assault and capture the settlers at will. By way of this term, Mather is concerned with lambasting the unfaithful ways of his parishioners. At the same time, it is also clear that bondage and submission to Indians are central to New World experience and character. See his *Magnalia Christi*

¹⁶ For an examination of the practical ways in which slavery worked in and impacted America, see Eltis, Lewis, and Sokoloff's *Slavery in the Development of the Americas* (2004).

¹⁷ In the process, of course, these white suffragists often overshadowed the claims of those who were both women and literal slaves. See Sanchez-Eppler for a more detailed discussion of the "asymmetric and exploitative" nature of these relationships (29). For a general elaboration of the feminist-abolitionist connection, see Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America* (1978).

¹⁸ This is a point that is also made by Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection* when she reveals the importance of "rights and responsibility" to post-bellum understandings of enfranchisement. In hyperbolic and perverted form, of course, the "responsibilities" (such as continuous employment) of the freedmen and women quickly took on the character of legal and social chains.

¹⁹ For an alternate reading of Romanticism as an endorsement of the market, technology, and science, see *Romantic Cyborgs*.

Chapter II

Re-membering “natives” in *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824)

In the “Author’s Introduction” to the best-selling Indian captivity narrative of the American 1820’s, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824), the amanuensis editor, James Seaver, offers a striking formulation of the relation between stories of Indian captivity and the constitution of American subjects.

It is presumed at this time there are but few native Americans that have arrived to middle age, who cannot distinctly recollect of sitting in the chimney corner when children, all contracted with fear, and there listening to their parents or visitors, while they related stories of Indian conquests, and murders, that would make their flaxen hair nearly stand erect, and almost destroy the power of motion. (53; emphasis added)

This passage is typical of many Indian captivity accounts in its sensational invocation of the widespread effect – here indexed by stiffened hair and comatose bodies – of things Indian on Anglo-Americans. But more than that, the passage implies that narratives of “Indian conquest” were almost inseparable from how subjects thought of themselves as “native” American, a term obviously meant to reference Anglo-American whites. Of course, for the early nineteenth-century American reader, “Indian conquests” could have referenced quite a few threats, among them ambush, scalping, decapitation, etc. But for those schooled in the considerable lore of Mary Rowlandson, John Williams, Hannah Swarton, Hannah Dustan, et al, Indian conquest often implied Indian captivity. Moreover, in a text dedicated to an account of Indian captivity, the phrase is implicitly

yoked to the figure of the captive white Anglo-American. As a result, this scene establishes an implicit model for how *A Narrative of the Life* authorizes the production of future “native” Americans, as it too is a story of “Indian conquests, and murder.” Hearing narratives of Indian captivity (and this one in particular) is formative in the construction of “native” Americans in the early decades of the Republic.²⁰

What is more, the entire communicative exchange involved in producing and disseminating a captivity story – the telling, writing, and reception of captivity tales – constitutes “native” American subjects. For if listeners obtain national nativity through these stories, then how much more so do narrators and ex-captives? As the seeming owners of the experience and story of Indian captivity, ex-captives and narrators of captivity tales should have access to a level of nativity unavailable to their audiences. As a result, “nativity” radiates from the social exchanges related to communicating Indian captivity narratives.

Interestingly, these exchanges and identities are founded upon the ability to remember, or “distinctly recollect” stories of Indian captivity. Consequently, the power of Indian captivity tales appears less a function of their relation to reality, and more a function of their ability to transfer memory. But the act of remembering should not be understood as the mere retrieval of information, but as an active and even dynamic process that contests the meaning of historical events and lived experience. As Jerome Bruner has pointed out, remembering is often a matter of reorganizing and making sense of past phenomenon in light of the exigencies of the present moment, the relation of that event to other events, and even the social scripts that govern what is memorable and how to remember it (45). To remember, then, is to re-member, to reorganize and invest

meaning into events. More to my point, inasmuch as Indian captivity narratives are animated by, dependent on, and shared through the dynamics of memory, they possess the ability to remake and renegotiate the apparently immutable facts they rehearse. In this way, they become a site for the contestation of American identity, not just its transmission.

Leaning on these observations, this chapter focuses on the contexts and texts that enabled the emergence of a “native” American narrator. More generally, it considers how Indian captivity narratives functioned as a scene of instruction through which (usually non-Indian) readers, editors, narrators, and writers could be understood as “native” Americans. By way of story, memory, and Indian captivity – Seaver tells us – subjects constituted, confirmed, and rehearsed their “nativity.”

But what exactly is a “native” American? How was it different than any other model of American-ness circulating in the 1820’s? What are the features that distinguish the “native” American from any other kind? In the passage above, for instance, “native” explicitly references Americans of “middle age,” subjects who have lived much, if not most, of their lives. If we consider that the average life expectancy was less than fifty years, people of middle age in the 1820’s would have been born approximately around the time of the American Revolution; they were thus the “first” Americans. But more importantly, “native” Americans are meant to be distinguished from the present generation of Americans. As several critics have noted, Americans of the revolutionary period frequently looked down on those of the 1820’s as an uninspired bunch, as is memorialized in Washington Irving’s “Sleepy Hollow,” where a lovable colonial subject awakes to the vicissitudes and confusions of 1820’s America. Washington’s rhetoric, as

well as the language employed here by Seaver, is a species of what Michael Awkward terms “strategic nostalgia,” the remembering of a previous time as idealized in order to foreground the present time as troubled. The subsequent deaths of ex-Presidents and revolutionary icons John Adams and Thomas Jefferson on July 4, 1826 would confirm the literal passing of the revolutionary generation and uncertainty about the present one. So, in contrast to the late, diluted band of contemporary Americans, a “native” American was one who was chronologically first and culturally better.

“Native” Americans were also indigenous to the country, that is, not European. This use of “native” can be found in Charles Brockden Brown’s famous message “To The Public” at the beginning of *Edgar Huntly* (1799). In this preface, he calls for a distinction between a British and American tradition of *belles lettres* that turns on the notion of “nativity.”²¹ “Native,” he declares, refers to that which is “growing out of our country,” that “which should differ essentially” from Europe, and that which is “peculiar to ourselves” (3). And what, one might ask, is “peculiar to ourselves”? “Indians,” he rejoins. With respect to the content and themes of American literature, he continues, “The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness, are far more suitable; and, for a native of America to overlook these would admit of no apology” (3). Read in this way, then, to be a “native” American is not to be British by virtue of “peculiar” knowledge of “peril,” “wilderness,” and “Indian hostility.”

But, to be entirely clear, neither Seaver’s nor Brown’s “native” is a lover of Indians, at least not in any sympathetic or mutually respectful way. On the contrary, a “native” was one who had established cultural primacy through the displacement, if not subordination, of indigenous peoples. Carol Smith-Rosenberg’s notion of the “surrogate”

underscores how the category of the American “native” means the literal and symbolic disappearance of Indians. In “Surrogate Americans: Masculinity, Masquerade, and the Formation of National Identity,” she argues that male American colonists’ masquerade as North American Indians at the Boston Tea Party ostensibly suggests their desire to be like Indians. By way of the psychoanalytic notion of “surrogacy,” however, Smith-Rosenberg submits that their cultural cross dressing was not about being more like Indians, but about being more like whites by virtue of their difference from Indians. The masquerade of white males in “Indian dress” only heightened their status as white, as the crisp contrast of their pale skins against “Indian” garb only intensified the difference between the two (1332). In so doing, the Tea Party participants actually disavowed the need for actual Indians, as their hyperbolic whiteness had become the focus of the charade. “That after all,” she concludes, “is what surrogacy is all about -- the replacement or displacement of one figure by another” (1332). A “native” American subject is one whose relationship to whiteness and American-ness (which are connected, but not one and the same categories) is dependent upon appearing like Indians, but is ultimately about reasserting whiteness and American-ness. To put it baldly, the surrogate is a kind of parasite that feeds off another in order ultimately to sustain itself.

It is one of the uncanny ironies of etymology that “native,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, once denoted a type of bondsperson, one who was “born in bondage” or a “born thrall.” This is precisely the tension on which this chapter, and entire project, depends. In the early American nineteenth-century, a fundamental sense of being born in or shaped through Indian bondage, as Seaver’s introduction suggests, informed the re-presentation of American subjects as first, authentic, distinctive,

authoritative, or “native.” In short, re-membering Indian captivity as distressing made authoritative Americans.

Hence, a “native” American was a subject chronologically before all other Americans and of the first order, as opposed to the “rabble” who came after the post-revolutionary period. Furthermore, natives were distinguishable from the British, in large part, because they were made through and in the condition of “peril,” presumably the kind of peril made available by “thralldom,” the “wilderness,” and “Indian hostility.” But even as they depended on the indigenous population for their nativity, they necessarily competed with Indians for cultural legitimacy. The “native” was thus an anxious category, but one which characterized a recognized route to fashioning one’s self as American, which oftentimes meant white.

As suggested by the previous discussion, the emergence of this “native” requires “distinct recollections” of bondage, Indian hostility, peril, the wilderness, and representations of Indian-ness. The proper site of such an endeavor is the Indian captivity narrative of the 1820’s. Even if based on “real” experiences, their stories were typically told according to or within the limits of particular narrative types. In so doing, the Indian captivity narratives offer an invaluable site to consider the intersection of nativity, Indian captivity, and American identity. In particular, I am interested in fleshing out this process of “native” American self-fashioning in Mary Jemison and James Seaver’s *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824), the most popular Indian captivity narrative of the American 1820’s. Both representative and exceptional, Seaver and Jemison’s collaboration links us with previous Indian captivity narratives of the colonial era even as it frames our discussion of early nineteenth-century representations.

The Text

The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison is the “as-told-to” life history of Mary Jemison, an 80-year-old Seneca and white woman. Originally told to local physician James Seaver over three days in Canandaigua, New York, the narrative recounts her family’s arrival in mid-eighteenth century Philadelphia from Europe, their settlement and eventual abduction by Shawnee Indians and French troops in Pennsylvania, her transfer to and adoption by Seneca Indians,²² and finally her old age as an elder woman in early nineteenth-century New York State.

The text, which runs a little over 100 pages, is written by Seaver from the oral recitation of Jemison, yet it reads like an autobiography since it employs the autobiographical “I.” Along with this subtle blend of biographical and autobiographical impulses, it incorporates history, fiction, ethnography, Indian-stereotyping, picaresque narrative, sentimental discourse, post-revolutionary zeal, and republican ideology (just to name a few of its drives) in the course of a life narrative. Not surprisingly, like many Indian captivity narratives of the early nineteenth century, it recounts several scenes of “Indian barbarities,” scalping, burning at the stake, eye gouging, etc. Additionally, it also includes tales that seem wholly calculated to entertain. One chapter, for example, is entirely dedicated to the biography of one Allen, whose romantic escapades, bouts with local law enforcement, and illicit commercial enterprises would rival any chapter from *The Life of Henry Tufts*, one of the most popular picaros of the early (Anglo) American nineteenth-century. These sundry plot details have allowed the narrative to be read

variously as anti-Indian propaganda, historical memoir, frontier ethnography, and inter-ethnic romance, just to name a few of its impulses.

Considered as a whole, though, the narrative details can be understood to constitute what Sacvan Bercovitch terms an “auto-American-biography,” an account of the life of the individual that reflects the life of the American nation. Jemison’s represented life reads like a history lesson about mid-eighteenth century colonial America up until the 1820’s. Accordingly, she is born on board the transatlantic voyage of her Scotch-Irish parents to America in the 1750’s. Significantly, then, she is neither Irish nor American, but located somewhere in between, or “an outcast to civil society” in the account’s language. During the Seven Years’ War (French Indian War, 1756-1763), she is abducted by six Shawnee Indians and four Frenchmen along with her mother, father, and other relations in 1758 (67). After her parents are murdered and scalped (71) on the ninth day of her captivity (recounted in chapter 3), she is transferred by the Shawnee Indians to the Seneca Indians at Fort Pitt and adopted by them (76). Later in chapter 3, she marries a Delaware Indian and bears him two children. Despite her marriage and Indian children, the narrator still refers to her experience as a form of “captivity” (82). Chapters 4 through 7 recount her life as a Seneca wife and mother, the Seneca participation in the French Indian War, their great losses in the Revolutionary War, and the relatively peaceful time in between.

The second half of the narrative, which appears to begin in chapter 8, is concerned with what is clearly her post-captive life, which is explicitly marked in chapter 9 by the moment when the narrator reveals: “Soon after the revolutionary war, my Indian brother [. . .] offered me my liberty, and told me that if it was my choice I might go to my

friends” (119). She is granted her own plot of land, but still does not return to the white world for fear that her part Indian children will be shunned (120). “I had got a large family of Indian children,” Jemison explains, and “if I should be so fortunate to find my relatives, they would despise them, if not myself” (119-20). From this point on, the account is less concerned with the difficulties of captivity, and more concerned with the hardships of living as an Indian and white woman in revolutionary, post-revolutionary, and early national America. In subsequent chapters, she discusses the growth of her children, altercations between them, the effect of intemperance on her male children and Indians in general, her acquisition of land in New York, the attempts of others to swindle it from her, and finally her naturalization as a citizen in 1817.

This narrative of identity formation appears to be specifically targeted at adolescent females in the 1820’s. Quite explicitly, Seaver notes in the preface that *A Narrative* is likely to be read “especially by children” and thus “the greatest care has been observed to render the style easy, the language comprehensive, and the description natural” (50-51). And, if we recall, the scene from Seaver’s introduction that opens this chapter is one populated by impressionable youngsters. In the narrative proper, Jemison’s character development is from an innocent girl, to adolescent captive, and eventually to a resourceful mother and sage grandmother. Indeed, the second half of her text is almost exclusively a meditation on the state of her part-Indian children. As a whole, then, the account seems to function as a scene of instruction for other fifteen and sixteen year olds, the age range Jemison is believed to be in when she was abducted.

In this sense, the Indian captivity narrative of the 1820’s might be understood as a species of what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de memoire* (“sites of memory”), or spaces where

a network of multiple and often conflicting meanings converge. As Nora defines it, “a lieu de memoire is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)” (xvii). It emerges in a context where genuine memory (recall that is based on lived experience) has vanished and, as a result, a sense of disconnection to the past exists. But in *lieux de memoire*, Nora explains, a “residual sense of continuity remains” between the rich, but disconnected, past and an empty, but immediate, present (1). In other words, sites of memory offer “symbolic elements” whereby communities can reconnect to a meaningful past and make new sense of it. Similarly, by the 1820’s, the realistic threat of Indian captivity for American subjects had all but faded (Levernier 167).²³ These narratives were a way of establishing “continuity” from a rich past to an uncertain present. In this sense, I understand Indian captivity narratives as significant repositories of America’s “memorial heritage” and, thus, ripe for investigating models of national identity.

What interests me here, in particular, is the status of the representation and re-membering of Indian captivity in Mary Jemison’s narrative of national and female becoming. I submit that the relation of her experiences of Indian captivity in the first half of the text is critical to her representation of legal citizenship at the end of it. Writing and re-membering Indian captivity, I argue, is crucial to the establishment of “native” authors and narrators.

Writing and Nativity

Jemison's relation to the writing of the text that bears her own name, and even that allegedly speaks from her own perspective, is a complex one. Consequently, her assumption of the "nativity" that emerges from it is also fraught. Seaver, for example, explains that Jemison's dictation has been rendered "without the aid of fiction" and that "what was received as matter of fact, only has been recorded" (51). But, in an early chapter on her childhood, Seaver has Jemison lament: "The morning of my childish, happy days, will ever stand fresh in my remembrance [. . .]" (Seaver 63). It seems unlikely that Jemison actually made or would have made such a highly stylized statement. In the narrative proper, we learn that from years of living with the Seneca Jemison is essentially illiterate in English and only has a basic command of spoken English. This passage, like so many others, implies a command of English that the text's own admission about Jemison's literacy would betray.

Even as appendages to the main account, the "Author's Introduction" and "Author's Preface," written in a voice that is clearly Seaver's, diminish Jemison's status as author, authority, and autobiographer. As critic Karen Oakes explains: "Using European American literary apparatus of preface, introduction, and appendices, [Seaver] calls into question the truth-value of Jemison's oral history by impugning her memory on two occasions before the story even begins" (6). On a more fundamental level, the very notion of Indian autobiography, Theda Perdue informs us, is itself contradictory to a notion of Native American cosmology, as it might imply an attendant notion of the lone individual (2). Hence, the autobiographical form of the account can be understood as a failure to re-present Jemison's Senecan subjectivity.

What is more, the scene of transcription, which occurs over a three-day period, indicates a multiplicity of authorial input. Along with Jemison as ex-captive narrator and Seaver as chief interrogator and transcriber “employed to collect the materials” and “prepare the work for press” (55), we also have potentially Jennet Whaley, the proprietor of the house in which Jemison related her tale, the publisher (J. D. Bemis), and Thomas Clute, Mary Jemison’s white companion who assists her in the narration of her tale. Of him, Seaver importantly remarks: “[. . .] if Mr. Clute had not been present, we should have been unable to have obtained her history” (57). All of these individuals potentially play some part in the authorship of this narrative. In an elaboration of the “chimney corner” scene that begins this chapter, “nativity” seems partially distributed among all of these actors.

A number of questions follow from this contested scene of writing and the type of “natives” that can proceed from it. How did Seaver “collect material”? Did Jemison relate her narrative mainly in response to a series of questions, impromptu memories, or in chronological order? Whenever Seaver did ask questions, what types of questions were they? How did they affect her response and narrative? Besides the introduction, preface, chapter divisions and head notes, what else did Seaver do in “preparing the work for press”? What was the role, if any, of Jennet Whaley or the publisher in this “collection”? How much did Thomas Clute, her ostensible friend, censor and shape the details Jemison revealed to Seaver? What of Jemison’s illiteracy in writing? How did it inform her ability to narrate her life? How did her advanced age inflect her memory and narration? How might her narrative have been different had she been able to

communicate in a Seneca language, to a Seneca audience? Indeed, what is the nature of authorship in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*?

Here, the lessons of deconstruction seem appropriate. In his notion of difference/*différance*, French philosopher Jacques Derrida posits a system of meaning that is differential and deferential; meaning is not defined positively, but through a relative and negative network of absences and traces. Quite rightly, several scholars have critiqued the apolitical potential of such a paradigm of meaning in which “play” replaces stable meaning, thereby making the violence attending the determination of meaning only appear playful. At the same time, the notion of difference effectively characterizes the indeterminate dimensions of authorship in *A Narrative of the Life*. In a text such as this, it is impossible to recover the original scene of Jemison’s intention and narration, both as in historical recuperation but also in the sense of critical re-presentation. Even as Jemison’s narrative defines itself against Seaver’s, it is dependent upon it as a condition for its articulation. There is no hidden and true text that exists behind it. As has been said of the process of deconstruction, an “unrecuperable rhetorical discontinuity” (Felperini 256) characterizes it. This is not to claim that we cannot understand the text better through historical research and critical rigor, but to make plain that the totality of the text depends on misreadings, mediation, and an irreconcilable ambiguity.²⁴

As opposed to the impossible extrication of some mystical authorized version from Jemison and Seaver’s collaboration, we can more fruitfully discuss the ways authority circulates and produces multiple versions and selves in the narrative. Hence, when I identify specific agents in the text, such as “Jemison,” “Seaver,” “Clute,” the “narrator,” or even the “text,” it should be with the awareness that these positions are not

the origins or ends of meaning, but provisional place-markers in what would otherwise be a blinding interpretive maelstrom. They index a network of other phenomena that differentially and deferentially produce meaning. It is on this tentative, but more accurate, ground that we must talk about the “native Americans” that emerge in the text.

Nativity, Biography, and History

We can locate the text within the larger impulse to fashion “native” texts through the appropriation of Indian subject matter. The emergence of “native” American authors, editors, and consumers of Indian captivity narratives functions within a larger movement to define America in the early nineteenth century. Texts like James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1827), Harriet V. Cheney’s *A Peep at the Pilgrims*, Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok* (1826), Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntley*, Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827), the anthology *Indian Atrocities*, as well as Sunday school primers and children’s history books all grounded the construction of American subjects through Indian encounter, if not Indian captivity. Hence, a slew of historical, sentimental, literary, and sensational investments in the pleasure and utility of the Indian captivity narrative situated nineteenth-century readers, writers, and captives in Seaver’s “chimney corner.”²⁵ For Anglo-Americans, Indian captivity narratives became the ground on which to consider national destiny and cultural authority.

Seaver, for example, describes his authorial labors as merely “taking a sketch” of Jemison’s oral account, invoking a striking, if unintended, relation between his own work and that more well-known New York State writer – Washington Irving, perhaps most famous for his serially published, *The Sketch Book* (1819-20). Despite the considerable

influence of European Romanticism and other transatlantic forces, his creation of “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” spoke to a specifically white American vision of the writer through oblique references to Indian captivity. But especially in *A History of New York, by Deidrich Knickerbocker* (1809), Irving’s satire of early New York personalities and the very idea of history, we found a model of how Americanness and history were intertwined. There, the re-presentation of New York State history is congruent with regional belonging and national affiliation. Writing American history encourages a type of “nativity.”

Similarly, re-membling the experience of Indian captivity not only allowed Americans to identify or articulate themselves as “native,” it also encouraged them to be auto-biographical. In reference to *A Narrative of the life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* in particular, this is no less the case. Mary Jemison dictates her experience of Indian captivity to New Yorker James Seaver who fashions it into a complete narrative, which he himself calls “biographical” (49). Nonetheless, he renders this transcription in the first person and liberally employs the autobiographical “I” and the consciousness of a first-person narrator. In other words, as opposed to the third person narration of “Indian conquest” he recreates in the introduction, Seaver clearly realized the cultural purchase, economic value, and rhetorical authority of a first-hand account of Indian captivity. Crucially, then, Seaver’s “native” American was one who not only experienced and remembered Indian captivity, but who also told the tale of one’s self for herself. It had to be written (or appear to be written) autobiographically.

A Narrative of the Life sees itself as a contribution to a rapidly accumulating history of the republic and a formalized sense of history. Correspondingly, the first line of the “Author’s Introduction” explains,

The peace of 1783, and the consequent cessation of Indian hostilities and barbarities, returned to their friends those prisoners, who had escaped the tomahawk, the gauntlet, and the savage fire, after their having spent many years in captivity, and restored harmony to society. (53)

Here, Jemison’s private history of Indian captivity foregrounds the public history of the nation, as glossed by the “peace” between the British and Americans. Equally important, the very notion of history depended on Native American presence. In *History’s Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century*, Steven Conn explains that in early America the “very presence of American Indians” “forced Americans to confront the meaning of history,” as they embodied a people apparently past and yet crucial to Anglo-Americans’ sense of their own history (6). Likewise, Jemison’s text is grounded in the cultural imperative “to preserve some historical facts” that “otherwise must be lost,” localized in the desire of some “gentlemen of respectability” on behalf of the New York state “public” (Seaver/Jemison 54). As a history of the republic and Indian captivity, *A Narrative of the Life* establishes a “native” and Irving-like purchase in American letters and authorship.

Aside from subject-authors, subject-readers also had models of “nativity” available to them that worked within the Indian captivity narrative. Here, *A Narrative’s* status as biography is critical to understanding how readers approach American “nativity.” Seaver and Jemison’s account of rude “Indian atrocities and savagery” begins, rather loftily, with the declaration: “That to biographical writings we are indebted for the greatest and best field in which to study mankind, or human nature, is a

fact duly appreciated by a well-informed community” (49). To an early national audience, David Thomas Konig makes clear in *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic*, “[. . .] many Americans believed that being informed was a necessary part of their citizenship” (169). An “informed citizenry,” he explains, was meant to “safeguard liberty from tyrants and demagogues” (Konig 168).

Seaver’s invocation of a “well-informed community” is a plea to understand Jemison’s life in captivity as the “necessary part” of American political subjectivity. Seaver then establishes the singular relation between the “appreciation” of life writing and a “well-informed community,” as biography is the “best” and “greatest” to consider human beings. As Scott Casper asserts in “Biographical Mania,” biographies were seen as especially important in the education of American audiences. Correspondingly, from this specimen of “biographical writing,” individuals may not only “study mankind” in a disinterested way, but they may also “select a plan of life” that will direct them in “paths of morality” (Seaver 49). Clearly, for Seaver and his early national audience, biographical writing is critical to the constitution of proper subjects and communities, the “we” who precede and proceed from the collectively understood lessons of a narrated life.

More to my point, strong doses of Indian captivity narratives also nourish a “well-informed community.” At the end of the preface, Seaver speculates on the power of a narrative of Indian captivity to shape his “well-informed community.” This time with a wish, instead of a declaration, he intimates, “[. . .] it is fondly hoped that the lessons of distress that are pourtrayed (sic), may have a direct tendency to increase our love of liberty; to enlarge our views of the blessings that are derived from our liberal institutions”

(52). Seaver gestures not just towards a relation between life-writing and a “community” of early Americans and New Yorkers, but towards a relation between an account of Indian captivity, here encoded by “lessons of distress,” and the fortification of an emerging nation, represented by “liberal institutions.” If his wish is fulfilled, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* will “increase our love of” a specifically American “liberty” and republican “liberal institutions.” To use my own language, biography and Indian captivity authorize the production of subjects as “native Americans” in terms of their ability to imagine citizens as a well-informed community.

Therefore, portraying “lessons of distress” leads to the appreciation of Anglo-American liberty and, presumably, even reveals or confirms Anglo-American identity. To be sure, though, this focus on the reader’s distress obscures the distress experienced by Indians due to the larger contexts of Anglo-American colonialism and exploitation. As Michelle Burnham contends in *Captivity and Sentiment*, the rehearsal of female captives’ suffering worked to “invite their readers into a national community that is experienced affectively precisely because its claim to integrity [. . .] depends on remembering to forget the border transgressions and colonial violence that have secured it” (4). Or, as suggested by Smith-Rosenberg’s notion of the surrogate, the “native” requires the displacement of Indians. The sense of “national community” emerges from re-membering the captive’s personal suffering and distress which is, in turn, at the expense of the historical suffering of Indians.

Seaver’s “native” Americans

This is a model of nativity amply displayed in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, that the suffering of the female captive inspires the Anglo-American reader's love for and membership in the "national community." In order to flesh out these allegiances, it is useful to examine what Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola calls the "rhetoric of captivity" ("Captivity" 113).²⁶ Although Derounian-Stodola does not specifically define this concept, her use of the phrase suggests it means the common language of escape, bondage, and release central to most Indian captivity narratives in North America. It is at these moments of "escape" and "ransom" – scenes of rupture and pressure – that Jemison's affiliation and membership, however irregular and complicated, most clearly emerge. In a narrative where personal commitments often seem unclear, the "rhetoric of captivity" gives us a means of figuring alliances.

An early scene in the text reveals the model of American "nativity" that comes about by virtue of distress in Indian captivity. About a year into her captivity, the narrator recalls, the British summon the Seneca to Fort Pitt in 1759 to discuss the release and ransom of white captives.²⁷ As a meeting of the red and white worlds, this is clearly a moment of personal and cultural definition for Jemison. The scene is meant to establish Jemison's longing for reunion with the white world and, consequently, confirm her persistent Euro-American commitments even after a year of captivity/adoption among the Seneca. Accordingly, when Jemison is spotted by other white settlers, and thus has an opportunity to be reunited with other whites, her Seneca companions quickly whisk her away, suspecting her possible redemption. Though with somewhat mixed feelings, the narrator undeniably speaks in a voice that is nostalgic for return to the white world. "Although I had been with the Indians something over a year," she admits,

and had become considerably habituated to their mode of living, and attached to my sisters, the sight of white people who could speak English inspired me with an unspeakable anxiety to go home with them, and share in the blessings of civilization. My sudden departure and escape from them seemed like a second captivity, and for a long time I brooded the thoughts of my miserable situation with almost as much sorrow and dejection as I had done those of my first sufferings. (81; emphasis added).

This “second captivity” is meant to underscore the magnitude of Jemison’s alienation from the white world. The passage foregrounds how the ever-persistent memories of her “first sufferings” are agitated and, in some ways, made worse than before by merely seeing whites. As suggested by the reference to the “blessings of civilization,” Seaver is clearly contrasting the repulsiveness of Indian life to the sophistication of the “liberal institutions” he alludes to in the introduction. Especially when the narrator reveals that her sisters “took their bread out of the fire and fled with me” (80), this suggests a perversion of the hurried escape of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery recounted in the Judeo-Christian sacred texts. Except here, of course, the food is hastily prepared in the services of continuing bondage, not of achieving freedom. For the Anglo-American reader, such a conflation of Hebrew escape and Indian bondage would have underscored the dread of Indian captivity.

Here, then, is the heartbreaking “lesson of distress” that communicates Jemison’s love for and separation from Anglo-American liberty. Just as her separation is experienced twice in a narrated “second captivity,” her devotion to and longing for the white, English speaking world is confirmed twice. As opposed to the other Americans who have never been forcibly separated from the Anglo-American world, her narrating “I” is now distinctly “native” by virtue of her distinct and doubled suffering. In her first person re-presentation of this moment, Jemison’s narrating “I” signifies her present and

authentic membership in the Anglo-American world by the distance of her narrated “I” from the Anglo-American world in the past.

Logically, this is the continuation and consummation of the “chimney corner” scene in which “nativity” is distributed throughout the entire communicative exchange that is the telling of Indian captivity. As Jemison’s “I” is partly Seaver’s as well, he too participates in this “nativity” inasmuch as he is the editor and shaper of such “distressful lessons.” For the anonymous reader, or perhaps the comatose child of the introduction, this is the “lesson” that contracts them in chimney corners and will slumber with them at least until their “middle age.” It confirms their membership in a “national community” of readers who mourn the abducted Jemison. Indeed, by the next page, the narrative informs us that Jemison is soon married to a Delaware and bears him two children (82). Presumably, this strategically delivered information and the sufferings of her “second captivity” radiate outwards towards the Anglo-American reader in the 1820’s. In turn, these readers share in the collective distress of “Indian hostility” and the “love of Anglo-American liberty” that proceeds from it. In this way, “lessons of distress” activate a “nativity” that circulates through narrators, editors, and readers.

Just as importantly, the scene draws the reader’s attention away from the “border transgressions and colonial violence” that contextualize Jemison’s “distress,” namely the politics of the French and Indian War. During the War, the Seneca had sided with the French against the British in their competing claims over the Northeastern U.S. Although the Seneca had tried to remain neutral, the competing demands of encroaching white settlers and intercontinental powers made it virtually impossible (Namias 27; Wallace 123). Hence, Jemison’s individual captivity fits within a larger context of European

quartering of and conflicts in Indian lands. Earlier, in fact, the narrative reveals that Jemison is given to the Seneca by the Shawnee in order to replace a Seneca who had died in an earlier battle between the Seneca and American colonists (77). Moreover, the narrative is published, and the life of Jemison becomes interesting, in the wake of what Anthony F. Wallace identifies as an era of Seneca cultural and geographic dispersion. By 1797, Wallace explains, the Seneca had sold off most of their lands in Pennsylvania and New York, severely diminishing the reach and power of the tribe (179).

The narrative's re-membering of Jemison's "second captivity," however, obscures a consideration of the larger context of colonial aggression and, instead, focuses on "Indian hostility" and the suffering of the white female captive. In turn, it secures readers' sympathy for the captive and, conversely, inspires audiences' antagonism towards Indians. Indeed, according to the logic of the "second captivity," where there should be a treaty and exchange of prisoners, there is only the retreat of Indians from the British and a flight into the wilderness away from the "blessings of civilization." Hence, the "nativity" possible by way of Indian captivity narratives appears diametrically opposed to a subtle and even sympathetic image of indigenous people. This "lesson of distress" is rehearsed throughout the narrative, as when the narrator speaks mockingly of the "tender mercies of the Indians" (63), sees her mother's scalp dried and scraped (71), or, in the final chapter, when she likens her captivity, adoption, and life among the Indians to a kind of "slavery" (157).

As a result, Jemison's narrative and the many others like it are read as exemplars of what I call the logic of removal, the notion that Indians are inherently incompatible with and inferior to whites and, thus, have to be excised from the white body politic.

Scholars read the Indian captivity narrative as legitimating the westward expansion of white settlers and the erasure of Indians from the Eastern landscape, as later codified in the infamous Indian Removal Act of 1830, which legislated the removal of Indians from the east of the Mississippi to the west of it.²⁸ As James Levernier and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola argue, Indian captivity narratives facilitated the enfranchisement of whites, and the disenfranchisement of Indians.

The locale for these narratives accompanies the westerly movement of the frontier. Initially, they are set primarily in the western parts of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and Virginia. As these areas were settled by whites and the Indians either contained on reservations or pushed further westward, the setting for captivity narratives shifts to the Midwest, specifically Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, and the territories surrounding the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri Rivers, which provided the major avenues for access for white pioneers in search of inexpensive lands. During the late nineteenth century, the primary setting for captivity narratives becomes Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, Utah, and the Dakotas, where the last of the wars between Indians and whites took place. (32)

According to this paradigm, the production and consumption of Indian captivity narratives accompanies the displacement of Indians from their lands and the advancements of whites into the west. To be sure, in the early nineteenth century East, Indians came to be seen as a “symbol of America’s national heritage” (Levernier 36). But even so, several critics remind us, such an Anglo-American movement to exalt Indians was in light of Native Americans’ steadily decreasing numbers and ironically reinforced their status as always and already “vanishing.” This is, in part, the point made by Lucy Maddox in *Removals* when she notes that nineteenth century literature about Natives in the U.S. turned on an axis of assimilation versus extermination. Either Indians would be physically eradicated from the U.S. and its holdings or be culturally assimilated to look more like whites, both projects of erasure. As Theda Perdue explains, under

President Thomas Jefferson, Indians had been considered as potential repositories for citizenship, even more so than African Americans; but by the early nineteenth century, they appeared “fundamentally different” (9). To be represented as a “native” American, *A Narrative’s* “second captivity” tell us, is ultimately to displace actual Indians.

Jemison’s “native” Americans

Against and alongside this narrative of Indian captivity where Anglo-American liberty is made visible and desirable in contrast to Indian captivity, the text offers alternative models of Indian captivity’s relation to American subject production. Indeed, at critical moments in the plot of Indian captivity, the tale’s plot and narration disclose a conspicuous ambivalence towards the “love of Anglo-American liberty,” an ambivalence that posits alternate relationships of re-membering Indian captivity to American “nativity.”

Later in the narrative, in what might now be described as a “third captivity,” Jemison is set to be released again to the British. After the conclusion of the Seven Year’s War in 1763, the local Seneca chief learns that the British are willing to pay for Jemison’s release, and he thus makes an effort to ransom her, even against her own wishes (93). Like the Dutchman who attempts to redeem Jemison earlier that year, the king wishes that Jemison might “receive [her] liberty and he the offered bounty” (93). Inasmuch as it contrasts the allegiances articulated in the “second captivity,” the representation of this scene is important as it fleshes out an alternative and inclusive model of American “nativity.” Indeed, it demonstrates how narratives of “native” American identity and Indian captivity could intersect without necessarily displacing

indigenous subjects from the literary landscape. What is more, the representation of Jemison's "third captivity" suggests a pointed critique of the freedoms of the white world and a call to imagine a model of American identity based on the fusion of Seneca and white American subjects.

Significantly, Jemison is represented as having no desire to be ransomed by the king at the end of the war. Typically, however, the end of war in colonial captivity tales signifies the restoration of order and the return of the divisions between so called Indian savagery and white civilization. As Seaver notes of the end of the Revolutionary War,

The Peace of 1783, and the consequent cessation of Indian hostilities and barbarities, returned to their friends those prisoners, who had escaped the tomahawk, the gauntlet, and the savage fire, after their having spent many years in captivity, and restored harmony to society. (53)

Hence, the depiction of ransom should be the restoration and consolidation of white, Anglo-American identity. Similarly, in her outline of Indian captivity plots, June Namias notes that the end of captivity is the beginning of Anglo-American reunion and happiness. "Progressing from a confrontation between whites and Indians," Namias explains,

narratives continued en route, with the Indians to the Indian camp, then followed, like Rowlandson's, with a discussion of life there and concluded with an escape, a rescue, or some other means of return (with the few exceptions of narratives of those who never returned). (122)

Both of these paradigms suggest the importance of the captive's return for the maintenance of normative notions of the captivity genre, the American nation, and white womanhood.

But in Jemison's "third captivity," the narrative reveals that Jemison and her Indian sister devise a plot for Jemison to remain with the Seneca, suggesting that the idea of return to the white world is akin to another kind of bondage from which she needs to

escape. As a result, where there should be the consolidation of desire for and commitment to Anglo-American liberty, there is a decided refusal of it. The story, in fact, frames the prospect of return to Anglo-American life as a kind of death. When Jemison's brother hears that the king intends to forcibly ransom her, he promises to kill her before he would let this happen (93). As a result, she is faced with what is presented as an unenviable choice between a forced reunion with and a violent and premature death by her Indian brother. One is a social death, and the other is a literal one. And, to be sure, though she clearly does not want to die at the hands of her brother, the fact that she does not then accept the king's offer – even as a means of preserving her own life – powerfully communicates her unwillingness to return to the apparent “blessings of civilization.”

At the same time, her brother's violent passion clearly reinforces the model of “distress” referenced in the “second captivity.” If captivity narratives consolidated Anglo-American readers by rehearsing the aborted reproduction of the nation, as Burnham argues, then the image of a vengeful Indian warrior murdering the young Jemison would have easily served such a purpose. But the crucial difference here is that her brother's threat of violence is an expression, though problematic, of his wish to keep her where she already wants to be, that is, with the Seneca. Furthermore, it is balanced by the perfectly benevolent and non-violent plan of her Indian sister to free Jemison from British ransom and a violent death.

The account recalls that Jemison's sister tells her about a secret location at which she can hide with her toddler son, and that depending on a clue the sister will give, Jemison will know when it is safe to return. “If I was to be killed,” Jemison re-members,

“she said she would bake a small cake and lay it at the door, on the outside, in a place that she then pointed out to me” (94). Importantly, as opposed to the masculine hatchet, file, or even knife involved in the escape schemes of many captivity narratives,²⁹ the account employs what is seemingly a harmless domestic treat: a cake. This cake, most likely made from corn,³⁰ is a powerful example of the way in which the narrative frames Jemison’s Indian captivity as a critique of “Anglo-American liberty” and the acceptance of a Seneca model of freedom.

For the Seneca, corn suggested a community of women laborers who were equal to and, in many ways, independent of men. Corn was the staple crop of Seneca life, and women were wholly responsible for cultivating it (Wallace 23-24). This fact was an important source of pride. Shortly after Jemison confesses that “with [the Seneca] was my home” in chapter four, for instance, she provides a survey of the various ways that Seneca women lived more comfortably than white women, noting “we planted, tended and harvested our corn, and generally had all our children with us; but had no master to oversee or drive us, so that we could work as leisurely as we pleased” (84). Significantly, the passage explicitly states that their labor was done without “masters” and in a relative state of “leisure.” To be sure, early American life for Indian women (as for most women) could be quite grueling (Heidler and Heidler 60-1). But as re-membered here, in contrast to white women in freedom, Jemison and her female peers have no “masters.”

And, in truth, June Namias explains, Seneca women enjoyed rights that were simply alien to white or black women in early America (22).³¹ Anthony F. Wallace goes so far as to state that the Seneca lived in a “quasi-matriarchal system” for much of the eighteenth century (28). He notes that “[. . .] Iroquois women were entitled formally to

select chiefs, to participate in consensual politics, and to start wars” (29). Furthermore, because Iroquois men remained away from their households for months at a time (28), Seneca women enjoyed governance over their homes in ways that early American white women did not. Most importantly for understanding *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, Iroquois culture was comprised of two “complementary parts, sedentary females and nomadic males” (29). “Thus,” Wallace concludes, “an Iroquois village might be regarded as a collection of strings, hundreds of years old, of successive generations of women [. . .]” (28). Seneca women had an important and privileged role in the Iroquois world.

Significantly, Jemison’s closest ties remain to these Seneca women. When she is first given to the Seneca by the Shawnees, it is to two Seneca women. From there, she is adopted in all female ceremony and called a “sister” afterwards. Just as importantly, throughout the narrative, the narrator refers to male Seneca as “the Indians,” but when the narrator refers to Indian women, the pronoun “we” is employed. As she later remarks, there was a definite difference between “the squaws as amongst the different Indians” (159). Hence, Jemison not only considered herself a native, but a native woman who would have had considerable power within her family. As a “woman’s life story” (Namias 12), then, Jemison’s captivity narrative employs corn to validate and enunciate her powerful, female Seneca subject position.

Ultimately, the invocation of the corn cake in Jemison’s “third captivity” communicates Jemison’s commitment to a vision of liberty available in Seneca life, especially as codified in the experiences and labor of Seneca women.³² And as one critic has argued, “In this domain Jemison’s voice is entirely invisible to Seaver, for she affirms

her identification with the Seneca by structuring her account with repeated references to corn” (Smith 4).³³ In turn, a narrator emerges who demonstrates a decidedly antagonistic relationship to Anglo-American liberty and engenders a benevolent one with Seneca women.

This moment can be linked to other representations throughout the narrative. In the seemingly irrelevant biography of a man named Ebenezer Allen, the narrative, in fact, retraces and even underscores Jemison’s defection from the white world through a similar rhetoric of captivity. After the Revolutionary War, the account explains, Allen “left his people in the state of Pennsylvania on the account of some disaffection towards his countrymen, and came to the Genesee river, to reside with the Indians” (109). Equally important and like Jemison, Allen is a person who above all else has a “love of liberty” (112).

Unlike Jemison, however, Allen is presented as a rogue, and, correspondingly, he goes about seeking the best way to satisfy his sexual, pecuniary, and political desires. As a result, his constant thievery, adulterous affairs, and run-ins with the law make him a perennial candidate for punishment and imprisonment. It is on one such occasion that both the British and a group of non-Seneca Indians actively pursue Allen in hopes of “making him a prisoner” (113). In a passage uncannily similar to Jemison’s own “third captivity,” Jemison notes of her protection of Allen, “I told him to go, but to return the next night to a certain corner of the fence near my house where he would find a quantity of (corn) meal that I would have prepared and deposited there for his use” (113). By coming at night and retrieving the meal, the narrative explains, Allen sustains himself as he evades his pursuers for two weeks in a nearby ditch.

Although clearly presented as a bit of comic relief within Jemison's much more serious life history, the chapter also underscores the liberties enabled by and the attractiveness of Seneca life. Furthermore, in both Jemison and Allen's represented life, Seneca women and their labor provide the means of thwarting undesired Anglo-American imprisonment. Like Jemison, Allen is represented as experiencing a "third captivity" in his escape of imprisonment and achievement of liberty with the Seneca, here now crucially embodied in the figure of Jemison, who plays the role of her Seneca sister.

Hence, the narrative aggressively frames Jemison's "third captivity" as the achievement of personal, occupational, and political liberties in the female world of the Seneca that are unavailable in the Anglo-American one. Moreover, the narration clearly refuses the performance of American identity found in Jemison's "first" and even "second" captivities where "nativity" is aligned with reunion with Anglo-American whites. Instead, Jemison's American "nativity" demands a union between the Seneca and American peoples. By the end of the scene, the Indian chief resigns from his plan to redeem her, and her brother no longer wishes to kill her. And a few pages later, the narrator reveals that Jemison has remarried to another Indian, Hiokatoo, by whom she eventually bears six children. Significantly, she names the children after the relatives she had lost in her abduction. The narrative thus suggests that Jemison refuses British ransom to remain and even intensify her bonds with the Seneca while still asserting the importance of her Euro-American familial connections. Against the narrative confluence of Indian captivity, Anglo-American nativity, and displaced Indians of the "second captivity," the "third captivity" re-members American "nativity" as a moment for the

integration of and partnership with Indian subjects. It demonstrates how a narrative of Seneca and female independence intersected with Indian captivity.

Naturalization and Indian Captivity

As opposed to an exemplar of aborted national reproduction, then, the representation of Jemison's iconoclastic "third captivity" is crucial to her representation as an American woman with allegiances to both the Iroquois and white America. It, in fact, anticipates the most important moment of American national identification in the second half of the narrative, her naturalization as a citizen. Both white women and Indian male and females, of course, held ambiguous relationships to American citizenship and land ownership in the early nineteenth century.³⁴ But Jemison's representation of naturalization and her "third captivity" work to fill in these gaps. The details concerning the nature of her departure from the Seneca in the second half of the work flesh out the connections between these apparently disconnected moments.

The narrative notes that Jemison's brother gives her liberty along with a plot of Seneca land, the Gardow reservation (121). But, as the account makes clear, such "Indian lands, which had been reserved, belonged exclusively to the United States" (154). Hence, her ownership of the land was tenuous, especially against the claims of encroaching whites. As alluded to earlier, the Treaty of Big Tree (1797) effectively sold off the remaining plots of Seneca land that had not already been claimed, purchased or negotiated by the U.S. government and essentially sealed the disintegration of the Seneca (Wallace 179). However, it left untouched several parcels of land that would remain under Seneca control. One of those parcels of land was the area that Seaver describes

Jemison as “planting, tending, and harvesting” up until the year of her meeting him, the Gardow reservation.

Jemison’s ability to continue living as a Seneca, however, was still predicated on precarious land rights. Before the Revolutionary era, Wallace explains, “All land was national land” according to the Seneca’s own ideas of land distribution and use; “hoarding” land “only led to hard feelings and strained relations” in times of need (24). But as suggested by the figure of George Jemison in chapter 13, a bogus cousin who schemes to steal her land, several attempts are made by local whites to take possession of Jemison’s land. And, indeed, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, white settlers rushed into Western New York to populate what had formerly been the domain of the Iroquois and especially the Seneca (Wallace 163). Jemison seeks U.S. citizenship, then, in order to secure, as the narrator explains it, the “rights and immunities of a citizen, so far as it respected [her] property” (Seaver 154).

It is in this context that Jemison announces, “On the 19th of April, 1817, an act was passed for my naturalization, and ratifying and confirming the title of my land [. . .]” (154). Her naturalization is about asserting and securing the right to her property. In *Untidy Origins: A Story of Women’s Rights in Antebellum New York*, Lori D. Ginzberg also makes it clear that early American women’s ability to own land (the prerogative of unmarried women) “held far more meaning than simply outlining the boundaries of a farm or even declaring its owner’s unassailable and individual title to it” (65). “Owning and working the land,” Ginzberg explains, “represented a particular relationship to the larger community, one that encompassed – and made tangible – identities of both gender and class” (65-66). In other words, to own land was to take part in the network of social

relations surrounding the land. Understood in this way, Jemison's ownership of her territory parallels the model of freedom suggested so powerfully in her "third captivity," the liberty to live as a Seneca and a white woman and maintain the social and family connections implied therein.

To be sure, *A Narrative's* depiction of citizenship is complicated because it was also complicit with the removal of the Seneca, the parceling of their land to white settlers, and the transformation of communal Indian subjects into individual property owning subjects. Too, as an adopted Indian, it seems that Jemison might well also displace the concerns of indigenous Indians who may have had more to lose culturally in the process of naturalization. But, significantly, this citizenship also retains what is most important and personal to Jemison, a place for her part-Indian children and a place to exercise the choice that Euro-American ransom threatened to compromise.

Therefore, in her naturalization (as in her "third captivity"), Jemison retains her connection to her Seneca family and secures the persistence of like generations. Just as her naturalization connects her to a community of biological kin through her land, her "third captivity" secures the safety of her son, binds her to a community of women, and protects her from a community of (white and Indian) aggressive men. As represented in the narrative, the rights of citizenship and the figure of corn constitute symbols of protection from Indian kings who wish to forcefully redeem her, brothers who wish to protect her by violence, and whites who wish to take her land. In all cases, citizenship and corn protect Jemison's physical person, material property, and ability to choose her own cultural allegiances. What is more, Jemison's "third captivity" and her citizenship reinforce the bond between Jemison and her Seneca and white children, and divorce her

narrative from the reading of captivity as mourning or ultimate longing for the white world.

Hence, Jemison provides a narrative that contests the “vanishing American” in an age where Indian removal seemed inevitable. In striking contrast to the banishment of the female Indian protagonist, Magawisca, at the end of Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827), *A Narrative* presents a story in which Indian women populate the literary landscape of New York State. Quite appropriately, Jemison’s narrative ends with a female genealogy of partly Seneca and white women who remain in New York, and not moving or moved to the West. “I have been the mother of eight children” the narrator makes clear,

three of whom are now living, and I have at this time thirty-nine grand children, and fourteen great-grandchildren, all living in the neighborhood of Genesee River, and at Buffalo.

I live in my own house, and on my own land with my youngest daughter, Polly, who is married to George Chongo, and has three children.

My daughter Nancy, who is married to Billy Green, lives about 80 rods south of my house, and has seven children.

My other daughter Nancy, who is married to John Green, has seven children, and resides 80 rods north of my house.

Thus situated in the midst of my children, I expect I shall soon leave the world, and make room for the rising generation. (160; emphasis added)

Like the end of many biographical and autobiographical accounts, the narrator’s “I expect I shall soon leave” is the expected plea of the aged narrator. At the same time, *A Narrative* re-members this moment as one where partly Indian women and children populate and occupy the geographic and literary landscape. The emphasis here is clearly on the significant presence that Jemison is leaving behind in the form of her children and their progeny, the “rising generation.” The stability of this next generation is reinforced by Jemison living on her own land and with her “youngest daughter,” who is essentially the future of Jemison’s matriarchal line. Significantly, like the “chimney corner” scene

of the introduction, then, the status and fate of present and future children are a primary concern. But the way in which the narrative re-members “nativity” here is not through the comatose bodies of flaxen hair children. As opposed to Seaver’s sensationalized rendition in the introduction, these children are both ambivalently white and Indian, suggesting a more complex picture than that of an always and already vanishing Indian. This end to Jemison’s narrated life speaks to the way the Indian captivity narrative could encode and authorize narrative subjects and re-membered worlds that were both Anglo-American and Native American. In the process, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* constructs a “native” American that is born out of bondage, but that is more critical of what it means to re-member Indians.

In my next chapter, I consider the ways that the Indian captivity narrative shaped narratives and the nation in the antebellum era in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849). That text helps us to understand how the “native” American captive and teller, emerging from narratives and tropes of Indian captivity, assisted the establishment of legibility, authority, authorship, and subjectivity in the antebellum slave narrative.

²⁰ In contemporary parlance, Native American, of course, typically relates to the indigenous people of North America. It should be noted that for many Indians, Sherman Alexie for instance, Native American is a term seldom used by them in reference to themselves or each other. As a non-Indian, I use the term Indian and Native American interchangeably in reference to the (very large and diverse) indigenous peoples of North America.

²¹ For an exciting discussion of Brown's life in Revolutionary America, see Pater Kafer's *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of the American Gothic Novel*.

²² Although I will henceforth use the two terms, Iroquois and Seneca, interchangeably, it should be noted that the Seneca, mainly situated in western New York, were one of six nations within the confederacy of the Iroquois. The other five nations are the Oneidas, Onandagas, Mohawks, Cayugas, and Tuscaroras. The earliest and still one of the most important studies of the Iroquois is Lewis Henry Morgan's *The Iroquois, or People of the Long House* (1851). Also see Tooker in *The Handbook of North American Indians* and Wallace's *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*.

²³ This is not to say that Natives did not reside in the East during and well after Removal to the West. For a refutation of this "thesis of vacancy" (1) in a New England context, see the article in which this phrase appears, "They Were Here All along: The Native American Presence in Lower-Central New England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" by Donna Keith Baron, J. Edward Hood, and Holly V. Izard. It should be also noted that in the Southwest and West, the historical reality of Indian captivity continued well into the nineteenth century as Anglo-American settlers and immigrants moved westward towards California.

²⁴ This point is especially important in light of the editor's decision to jettison a chapter from this edition of *A Narrative* on the grounds that it was fabricated and obscures Jemison's real voice, although it was included in the original publication. Even if it were entirely fabricated, it is still a necessary part of the document as collaboratively produced text.

²⁵ For an exhaustive list of Indian captivity narratives published in the nineteenth century see James Levernier and Kathryn Derounian-Stodola's, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*. See the *Garland Collection of Captivity Narratives* for the most comprehensive collection of North American Captivity Narratives. See the scholarship of James Axtell, Hening Cohen, Katherine Derounian-Stodola, James Levernier, Richard Slotkin, Edward W. Clark, Wilcomb Washburn, and Roy Harvey Pearce on the Indian captivity narrative in various forms.

²⁶ Also see David R. Sewell's discussion of the "language of captivity" in "Language and Interpretation in Early American Captivity Narratives" (40) for the ways that disparate captivities can be linked through common lexicons.

²⁷ According to the dating presented in the narrative, the time of these negotiations would be around 1759, if we believe that they are just one year after her abduction. June Namias, on the other hand, the text's editor, claims that these negotiations took place in 1763, at the end of the French and Indian War. However, Namias' dating would seem to be off, if only because a couple of chapters later, the narrator refers to other negotiations that took place in 1763. Even if Jemison's relation of dates is off by three years, as one critic has suggested, it does not seem that Seaver could have mistaken the end of such a prominent war for anything but 1763. In either reading, as it is presented in *A Narrative*, Jemison here refuses freedom with whites when she is offered the opportunity. See Vail for the hypothesis that Jemison's dating is off by three years.

²⁸ It should be clear that presidents Jefferson and Monroe anticipated Jackson's work in formulating and effecting the Indian Removal Policies that culminated in the 1830's and 1840's. For an extended discussion of Jefferson's role as primary architect of the program, see *The Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and Indian Removal*.

²⁹ Compare, for instance, Hannah Dustan's narrative of escape (over 100 yrs before) in which she thwarts her Abenaki captors by scalping them with their own hatchets. Like Jemison, Dustan's plan of escape implies her connection to "Indian culture," but while Jemison escapes to the Indians, Dustan returns to the white world to receive the reward for their scalps. Equally important, Jemison's mode of flight communicates her intimate connection to other Seneca women; Dustan's mode highlights the sensational nature of her situation and a stereotypically masculine reprieve.

³⁰ The text does not specifically call the cake a corn cake. But following the lead of Walsh, as well as from the context of the scene, it is reasonable to assume that the cake, if not made mostly, was at least in part from corn. On the Seneca uses of corn, see Fenton's "Iroquois Uses of Maize and Other Food Plants" in *Parker on the Iroquois*.

³¹ On the complexity of Seneca women's roles, see Jacob Jemison, Mary Jemison's grandson, in an interview with the archivist Asher Wright. Jemison contends, "Women are sometimes much respected as has been before observed & tho' they do not exactly consider them as menial servants, the weight of the labor is put on them" (130) in "Answers to Governor Cass's Questions by Jacob Jameson, a Seneca [ca. 1821-1825], ed. William Fenton. For a discussion of white women in relation to the discourses of rights and citizenship, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York* and Pauline Schloesser, *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic*.

³² For a reading of the unexpected liberties Indian captivity narratives presented white women at mid century, see Caroline M. Woidat, "Puritan Daughters and 'Wild' Indians: Elizabeth Oakes Smith's Narratives of Domestic Captivity."

³³ Oakes Smith, I think, overstates the case when she asserts that corn is "entirely invisible" to Seaver. For it is not that corn is necessarily invisible to Seaver, but that it is probably read as a sign of her excessive or abnormal labor – yet another "lesson of distress." Alternatively, Jemison's labor may have been read as a Benjamin Franklinesque industriousness. In the introduction, for example, Seaver informs the reader that Jemison has "planted and harvested" corn as recently as the past fall, suggesting that even at advanced age she has retained the fortitude that kept her in earlier life.

³⁴ For a survey of the changing relationships of Others to American citizenship, see Linda K. Kerber's "The Meanings of Citizenship" and Pauline Schloesser's chapter, "Race, Gender, and Woman Citizenship in the American Founding" in *The Fair Sex*.

Chapter III

Authorizing Civility and Citizenship in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1849)

In the decades after the publication of Jemison's narrative, the fact of Indian captivity (mostly in the West) and the tale of Indian captivity (in the East and West) persisted as a recognizable and influential form. Mary Jemison's life story had been reprinted several times, going through fourteen editions between 1824 and 1877. In 1856, for example, it was republished as *DEH-HE-WA-MIS or A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison*. Additionally, Mary Rowlandson's foundational 1682 captivity narrative had been made repeatedly available, with reprints in 1800, 1812, and 1856. Besides these well-known texts, various anthologies catalogued less popular Indian captivity narratives, most notably Gardner Drake's *Indian Captivities* (1839) and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *The American Indians* (1851). Later in the century several Indian tribes abducted captives in order to arrest the encroachment of white settlers, as evidenced by such narratives as Royal B. Straton's *Life among the Indians* (1857), an account of the Apache captivity of Mary Ann and Olive Oatman.

In that same time period another genre of captivity narrative had begun to rival the popularity of the Indian captivity narrative in the American East and Mid-West: the African American slave narrative. To be sure, the first slave narrative was published in 1703, and exemplars such as Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789) distinguished eighteenth century production. But from the 1830's onwards, we also

began to see the “classic” or book length and self-authored slave narratives that have come to define the genre (Gates).³⁵ Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life* (1845), William Wells Brown’s *Narrative of William Wells Brown* (1847), W. C. Pennington’s *The Fugitive Black Smith* (1849) and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) were all published during this era. What is more, these narratives were received in a climate that was more acutely aware of the high stakes of slavery. In 1836 alone, for example, there were at least a dozen periodicals dedicated to the plight of the slave, such as *The Emancipator*, the *Anti-Slavery Record*, the *American Anti-Slavery Almanac*, and of course, William Lloyd Garrison’s vitriolic *The Liberator*. The establishment of the anti-slavery Liberty Party in 1848 forced slavery to the fore of national conversation. So, although slave narratives would continue to be produced until the early twentieth century, the mid nineteenth century in many ways constitutes its heyday.³⁶

There were curious connections between the two genres of captivity narrative at this time having to do with the fact that slaves themselves became captives of Indians. As the scholarship of Theda Perdue and others reveals, in the state of Georgia and in Indian country -- mainly the state of Oklahoma, but also the state of Arkansas where the Cherokees had been removed -- several Indian tribes owned and traded in significant numbers of African-American slaves in the first half of the nineteenth century.³⁷ Thus when the “mulatto” slave Henry Bibb relates in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849) that he was sold as the “body servant” to a “wealthy half-Indian” in “Indian Country,” this transfer of ownership constitutes an intriguing, but predictable circumstance: a captive of Indians who is also a slave of whites. This doubling of captivity narratives gives us a unique opportunity to consider

the ways that Indian captivity might have authorized the production of the autobiographical in the slave narrative as well as an empowered model of antebellum American identity.

A number of questions emerge from this intersection of authority, captivities and autobiographical utterances. What are the differences and continuities between the authorized texts and subjects of the early national and antebellum periods? What type of autobiographical text and authorized American subject emerges from a scene doubly inflected by the slave narrative and Indian captivity narrative? Moreover, if slave narratives were authorized, what were they authorized to do and against whom or what? In order to address these questions, we have to consider the particular aims of Bibb's text, the ways the slave narrative already endorsed a model of autobiographical authorship, the particular challenges it faced in terms of textual and rhetorical authority, and the way it operated within a larger context of national self-definition.

The Slave Narrative and the "I"

In many ways, Bibb's account is representative of the wide array of texts covered under the label slave narrative as well as the particular breed of male slave narrative produced in the 1840's and 50's. In his pilfering of the master's wheat and livestock, he is reminiscent of the confessional slave criminal with his archiving of a list of offences. But he is completely unapologetic. "I acknowledge the wheat," he boldly declares late in his narrative. He also represents himself as playing the trickster, as when he maroons himself in the nearby woods to avoid punishment. And we can still see the spiritual autobiography in a story in which a Kentucky slave rises up from slavery to become a

speaker in the Detroit anti-slavery lecture circuit. But, like Moses Roper and Lunsford Lane, Bibb is, above all else, a master in what he calls “the art of running away” (Bibb 15). He attempts to escape to the North six separate times, and eventually and inevitably this Brer Rabbit like cunning culminates in four trips to as far North as Canada. This persistent will to escape and capacity to do so buttress his case, in the language of the familiar abolitionist refrain, to be a “man and a brother.”

At the same time, Bibb’s narrative contains a sustained and significant discussion missing in most male authored texts: the story of the slave family, here his wife, Malinda, and his daughter, Mary Frances. As in Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*, the dramatic draw of many slave narratives comes from finding out when and how the bondsman will find his individuality and much anticipated freedom. However, only four pages into the account, Bibb informs the reader that, at some point in his life, he had “landed [himself] safely in Canada” (4). And by the fourth chapter of *A Life*, in a work of twenty chapters, Bibb fully dramatizes his protagonist’s escape as far North as Detroit, a representation that would mark a triumphant freedom in many antebellum slave narratives. In contrast, Bibb makes repeated returns to the South in order to reclaim his small family, establishing what Charles Heglar calls a “a recursive pattern” (“Introduction” xiii). As a result, Bibb’s arrival in the North is essentially a foregone conclusion, making “the suspense of whether he can successfully rescue his slave family” central (xxxii). This recursive narration of familial obligation distinguishes Bibb’s narrative from the aforementioned classic slave narratives. But it identifies his with another and larger tradition of slave narratives. In the context of the larger body of shorter and less publicized slave narratives, Marion Wilson Starling reveals, “the overwhelming majority of the total

narratives” rehearse dramas of family escape to freedom (30).³⁸ In this light, Bibb’s is representative of the way slave narratives conceptualized the meaning of freedom through the family. Even after Bibb must leave his family in search of a solitary, individual liberty, as I will discuss further below, the reclamation of his wife and child is still a central concern. His need to be understood as a “husband and father” is connected to and just as important as the imperative to be seen as a “man and a brother.” In a fundamental sense, the narrative is about the justification and expression of his and his family’s will to freedom.

Connected to the expression of the family’s will to freedom is the ability to tell that story freely, to have a platform from which to tell it and the ability to shape that narrative in culturally meaningful ways. These concepts adhere in the notion of authority, what John Sekora identifies as the capacity for “begetting, continuing, and controlling a written text.” Such “free telling,” as William Andrews might term it, was essential to constructing complex and influential lives in print. Through the loose but connected groups that constituted the antislavery movement, slave narrators were both authorized and under another’s authority in terms of what they could speak and write. It is to a mapping of this domain that I now turn.

From the extremes of Garrisonian abolitionism to the ambivalence of the Free Soilers, perhaps no other institution was more responsible for the transformation of slaves into authors than the antebellum anti-slavery movement. Despite its heterogeneous and often contradictory purposes, this movement possessed a powerful sense of the authorial and autobiographical potential, if not obligation, of each captive. As John Sekora notes, “the abolitionist groups [had] decided that first-hand, eyewitness accounts by former

slaves [constituted] the most damning indictment of slavery” (493). No one, they seemed to reason, knew more about slavery than slaves, and this thinking occasioned interest in even the most nominal autobiographical utterances of former slaves. For Bibb, who was a dynamo on the anti-slavery lecture circuit, the resources of the Detroit Liberty Association allowed him the ability to tell his own story of Southern slavery beyond individual or local communities and into the North and Northern Midwest.

Particularly during the antebellum era, the slave narrative was becoming a more capacious tool for self-expression. William Andrews makes this clear in *To Tell A Free Story: The First Century of African American Autobiography* when he explains that prior to the 1830’s most slave narratives tended to function as “eye” witnesses, or regularized portrayals of slave life with little reference to the selves of the protagonists. After 1830, however, the general trend was toward “I” witnesses, or more complex meditations on slave experience revelatory of the desires, personality, and individuality of the narrating subject. As a result, the re-membered experience of the ex-slave had the potential for complex autobiographical and biographical re-presentations of the self.

Furthermore, as a result of their unique ability to witness, a few ex-slaves were able to parley their “naive” autobiographical skills, a la James Cox, into those of professional authors. As the scholarship of William Charvat and others attests, a notion of professional authorship had begun to emerge by mid-century, spurred on by the rise of a literate middle class, the transformation of American copyright law, and the means of distributing the printed word widely. This professionalization was, in fact, the case with Bibb, who was able to pen a profitable slave narrative, become involved in the world of printing, and eventually found Canada’s first black newspaper, *The Voice of the Fugitive*.

As suggested by Bibb's important newspaper career, the slave narrative constituted a powerful vehicle for challenging, if not reforming, pro-slavery supporters. Within his narrative, Bibb seems acutely aware of this potential. "For, I presume," Bibb speculates, "there are none who may read this narrative through, whether Christians or slaveholders, males or females, but what will admit it to be a system of the most high-handed oppression and tyranny that ever was tolerated by an enlightened nation." (11) Clearly, this is an idealization of the more nuanced and difficult process whereby readers are converted from one position to another by reading a text. Even so, such expectations undergirded the production of these narratives. As indicated by the threats of "tyranny" and "oppression," a proper reading of this life narrative will help the public avoid the despotism of previous years and move it closer to an "enlightened nation." To this end, Bibb quips about the power of his prose to transform subjects, noting of his ex-master: "I intend to reward him by forwarding him one of my books, hoping that it may be the means of converting him from a slaveholder to an honest man, and an advocate of liberty for all mankind" (196). Bibb's reference to the conversion narrative-like power of his tale captures the pseudo-religious hope of much abolitionist labor, to convert slaveholders, and those sympathetic to them and their cause, to the possibility of "liberty for all mankind." In other words, life narratives about captivity function as one domain in which the nation and its subjects can be transformed.

Ultimately, then, life narratives about African American slavery could potentially redeem the nation, which was at that time literally being divided on the issue of slavery. As new territories joined the nation, they were being classified as free or slave to maintain the balance between North and South in the legislature. As a result, the creation

and entrance of new states to the Union was inextricably bound up with the presence or absence of slavery. If slaves and their narratives could convert slaveholders to “advocates of liberty” then, theoretically at least, the slave narrative could transform the nation, one subject and one state at a time.

At the same time, of course, this emergent notion of authorship and autobiographical agency brought significant burdens. “White institutions,” Sekora notes, “are [. . .] deeply inscribed in the early slave narratives, to the extent that they will be published only when they bear the imprimatur as well as the *nihil obstat* of those institutions” (491). In the process of assembling the narrative, abolitionists resorted to a series of familiar questions which came to govern the production of slave “life.” As a result, “answers become episodes, and episodes become chapters” (Sekora 502). Even before the reader arrives at the text proper, the narrative is often sandwiched between several authenticating documents and peppered with intrusions from editors and other authority figures. Hence, even a document that was significantly “written by himself” might be irreducibly “written by someone else.”

Another obstacle to the power of slaves’ written lives was the fact that professional authorship was becoming increasingly understood as a commercial and less artistic enterprise. In relation to the constrictive economics of publishing and the consuming desires of audiences, Michael Newbury asserts, authors were often ambivalent towards their emerging status as professional speakers and writers. Instead of being considered a Romantic genius (5), as a writer might have been conceived a generation before, an author was now a “slave” to the market. Clearly, for the ex-slave narrator, such an analogy was more than metaphorical. It was expressive of real fears about

denied, compromised, or deferred freedom and authority. As a result, for the ex-slave, commercial and autobiographical success (defined loosely here as moderate sales as well as a relatively unencumbered revelation of the self) could ironically lead to further obligations and restrictions.

Additionally, fundamental doubts about the equality of African Americans restricted the rhetorical influence of the slave narrative on the Northern white reading public. Unlike the colonial Indian captivity narrative, the ex-slave was not necessarily assumed to be an upstanding individual unjustly snatched from an innocent community. Certainly, Indian captivity narrators had to prove that they had not “gone savage” while in the “wilderness,” but they usually had some prior communal status on which to call. By the early and mid-nineteenth century, on the other hand, most slaves were born as slaves in the United States, and thus inferiority and subservience were understood as natural and permanent features of African Americans. Even in the putatively free North, economic interests in slave production made African American manumission a difficult sell.

Thus, when an African American ex-slave attempted to write a narrative documenting the transition from captivity to freedom, he faced a challenge in representing the very notion of his freedom. In some ways, he might be understood to be positioned as the unreliable narrator, one representing himself to be something he is clearly not. To compound this problem of unreliability, the ex-slave often admitted that s/he often had to lie to escape to freedom. “In fact, the only weapon of self-defense that I could use successfully,” Bibb laments, “was that of deception” (17). Hence, part of the implicit project of the slave narrative was not simply to recount the subject’s journey

from the South to the North, but to disentangle and disarticulate the pejorative connections between slavery and the African American. In order to prove that one was indeed “a man and a brother,” one had to show how slavery was not a natural or suitable position for blacks.

Within the very binding of his narrative, Bibb has to contend with such attacks. In what are supposed to be the series of “authenticating documents” that prove the credibility of his narrative, several letters from his ex-owners and associates in the South impugn him. One notes that he is an incorrigible stealer of wheat (4) and a “notorious liar” and “rogue” (5). Furthermore, it adds that he was often “indolent and neglectful of his duty” (4). And, in a letter from the friend of this slave owner, we learn that this owner was a “good master” who “treated him well” (7). Now, inasmuch as these letters generally corroborate the particular dates and events that Bibb recounts, they enhance Bibb’s credibility. At the same time, they confirm the assumptions of laziness and rudeness that surround the image of the slave.

Bibb dramatizes the difficulties of overcoming these obstacles in the text of his narrative proper. On one of his final journeys to freedom, he explains:

The greatest of my adventures came off when I arrived at Jefferson City. There I expected to meet an advertisement for my person; it was there I must cross the river or take a steamboat down; it was there I expected to be interrogated and required as to whether I was actually a free man or a slave. If I was free, I should have to show my free papers; and if I was a slave I should be required to tell who my master was. (166)

This passage suggests that Bibb’s corporeal freedom is dependent upon his discursive representation in “an advertisement.” The ability to re-present himself literarily in print is connected with his literal achievement of freedom. As a result, in order to demonstrate his right to freedom, he must contest this representation by presenting

another text – his “free papers.” As a metaphor for the function of *The Life and Adventures*, the passage suggests that Bibb’s written life is an alternative announcement to counter the “person” running ahead, before, and around him in writing.

Correspondingly, his success in print informs his eligibility for literal freedom (bodily movement to free portions of the North) and narrative freedom (the ability to contest the slanderous claims of other texts).

It is into this context that Bibb re-members his experience of white slavery and Indian captivity. Slightly contrary to Bibb’s own schema, I contend that Bibb produces his “free papers” not by denying his ownership to another, but by intensifying and representing his mastery by another. It is precisely by telling who his master is that he “continues” and “controls” the meanings of his written text.

Indian slavery and the slave narrative

In the previous chapter, I argued that the historical fact of Indian captivity was responsible for the reality of the narratives themselves. Here, the experience of Indian captivity was much less a justification for publication of Bibb’s narrative than the experience of slavery. *The Life and Adventures* reaches the public mainly because of the interest in African American slavery sparked by the tactics and infrastructure of the anti-slavery movement, not because of interest in African American captivity among Indians. As part of his “adventures,” to be sure, readers would have probably been interested and fascinated by this feature. Even so, the front matter avoids any mention of his “Indian slavery” as do any other advertisements for it. As a result, Indian captivity appears to have little or nothing to do with the publication of the narrative.

However, his ability to shape the content and importance of the text does benefit from the facts and fictions associated with Indian captivity. In this respect, Bibb is unique, for he is the only antebellum slave narrator to provide such an elaborate treatment of Indian captivity. But situated within the larger context of African American slave narratives, his is not the first narrative of African American captivity to Indians. As Rafia Zafar and others have made clear, the beginnings of the slave narrative depend on multiple captivities, but especially Indian captivity. In *Surprising Deliverance*, what is ordinarily dubbed the first slave narrative, Briton Hammon is captured by Indians, impressed by a Spanish vessel, and jailed in a Cuban jail cell and thus inhabits some ambiguous position of servitude to a white “master.” This layered type of captivity can also be found in the narratives of John Marrant, Olaudah Equiano and James Gronniosaw. Additionally, Bibb is not the only slave narrator in the antebellum era to write about multiple types of captivity. Harriet Jacobs gives insightful representations of jailing, as does Solomon Northup, William Wells Brown, and Lunsford Lane. Likewise, along with his representations of Indian captivity, Bibb also reveals a quite detailed dramatization of his time in a Louisville, Kentucky jail. There, quite significantly, fellow inmates help him to read and write as well as plot to “get away from slavery” (95).

Despite this context, most scholarly studies have shied away from considering tropes of the colonial Indian captivity narrative alongside the antebellum slave narrative. Instead, critics have considered how the former chronologically anticipates the latter, but at the expense of a consideration of the ways they simultaneously articulate one another. In *Removals: 19th C. American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs*, for example,

Lucy Maddox compartmentalizes the question of Indians and African American slaves in this way:

My study of “the Indian question” focuses primarily (although not exclusively) on the period between 1830, when the U.S. Congress officially sanctioned the creation of an Indian territory west of the Mississippi and the Indians still living east of the Mississippi, and the middle of the 1850’s, when the attention of the general public shifted from the problem of the Indians to the problems of slavery and sectionalism.
(7)

Maddox astutely recognizes the transition from concerns about the Indian question to concerns about slavery; at the same time, such a strict periodization threatens to erase the ways that the Indian and Negro questions, as manifested in the Indian and slave narratives respectively, might have mutually defined each other throughout the late 1840’s and early 1850’s. The Indian question, as it surfaces in the Indian captivity narrative, I argue, significantly informs the imperatives of the slave narrative, especially as expressed in Henry Bibb’s *A Life and Adventures*.

In terms of this study’s interest in the relationship between captivity and American identity, Bibb’s servitude to a Cherokee is especially apropos, for holding slaves was part of the Cherokee elite’s identification as “white,” “civilized,” and “American.” To be sure, well before colonial contact with Europeans, Cherokee Indians practiced an indigenous form of “slavery.” However, as Theda Perdue explains in *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society*, “the term ‘slave’ can perhaps only be used inaccurately” because the makeup of slaves was not racially determined nor did it arise out of a capitalistic market economy (4). Unlike the nineteenth century American understanding of bondage, Cherokee slaves were prisoners of war and neither designated a space of racial otherness nor a site of surplus labor. But as the American colonists solidified their power during the post-Revolutionary period and particularly under

President George Washington, the government began a systematic plan to “civilize” the Cherokees, which consequently transformed the nature of Cherokee slavery. Perdue elaborates on the connections between the U.S. civilization policy and the changing meaning of slavery in this way:

By the third decade of the nineteenth century, therefore, the Cherokees had come to view themselves as radically different from Africans. Originally the “slaves” in Cherokee society had been war captives who were considered to be less than human because they were bereft of kinship ties, but as kinship receded in importance and as Indians began to identify with whites, Cherokees began to consider Africans more suitable for slavery than other Indians or Europeans. (49)

To be a slave owner was one way to be an American and civilized. Correspondingly, slaves under the Cherokees were typically treated no better than those under whites (Haliburton 4, 42-44).

And yet both groups were bound in similar contexts of forced removal as well as domination. As Tiya Miles notes in *Ties That Bind*, her study of a nineteenth century slave owning Cherokee family,

If slavery is the monumental tragedy of African American experience and the trauma of continual return in the memory of black people, then removal plays the same role in American Indian experience. The theft and destruction of lives, lands, and cultures link these events as holocausts, and in the specific contexts of Cherokee history, slavery and removal are intimately connected. (153)

Bibb’s contribution to our understanding of this complex connection is that he foregrounds yet another way that African Americans and Cherokees were connected. Indeed, if the Cherokees laid their claim to “civilization” (in part) by holding slaves, Bibb lays his claim to “civilization” by being a slave to the Cherokee.

Henry Bibb: “Civilized Man”

As mentioned above, Bibb announces that he reaches the North quite early in his narrative and makes several trips back to and from the South. These departures from the South, arrivals in the North, and returns to the South form the main tension of the text. Thus, each time he reaches the North without his family, the ordinary relief that we would feel at such a feat is postponed since we expect him to return to the South at least once more. But early in chapter 13, after Bibb, Malinda, and their daughter unsuccessfully attempt to escape and are recaptured, Bibb's master, Deacon Whitfield, informs him that he intends to make good on a promise to sell or kill Bibb if he escaped again (143). Upon his sale to Southern gamblers, Bibb declares, "I have never seen Malinda, since that period. I never expect to see her again" (149). This is a striking break from the uncertainty that has characterized the account. Though the narrated Bibb is not aware that this is his last meeting with Malinda, the narrator clearly is and, now, so is the reader. As a result, this revelation essentially transforms the narrative from one in which familial reunion is an ever-present possibility to one in which individual freedom can be the only outcome. Moreover, given his propensity for running away – even with wife and child in tow – it is at this point that we know Bibb will achieve a final and climactic freedom.

More to my point, it is at the end of chapter 13 that Bibb is sold into "Indian slavery" by the gamblers who purchase him from Deacon Whitfield. Indian slavery is his last captivity. From this point forward, Bibb proceeds steadily onwards to the North and is never recaptured again. Equally important, he never returns to the slave South. When he does return to as far south as Indiana – which is recounted in the climactic chapter 18 – he is still in a free state, and it is not dramatized as are his colorful and dangerous treks

through Louisiana, Kentucky, and Arkansas. Instead, he merely sends a white man into Kentucky to find out information about his wife. Properly understood, then, the chapters that describe Bibb's Indian captivity separate him from the recursive, equivocal freedom that had previously dominated the text and constitute a lone, singular representation of him. At the same time, they continue the protagonist's enduring interest in reclaiming his enslaved family. That is to say, given these facts, Bibb's Indian slavery is framed as the dramatic realization of his representation as a "man and a brother" as well as his longing to be a "husband and father."

But quite strikingly, scholars have paid virtually no attention to Bibb's narrative of Indian slavery. Charles Heglar, the scholar most responsible for the text's resurrection from literary anonymity, provides only fleeting commentary about Bibb's Indian captivity. In his detailed chapter-by-chapter explication of Bibb's *Life*, Heglar provides only two sentences regarding chapters 13-16,³⁹ the ones which directly correspond to his remembering of Indian slavery. William Andrews notes the fact of Bibb's Indian slavery, but in his pioneering study of "free telling" does not consider the ways that these representations might have advanced such a program. And several other critics make no mention of it all. But these chapters are indispensable to understanding the poignancy of Bibb's claim to his family and individual freedom. Indeed, given the structural location in his narrative, his representation of Indian captivity can be no less important than Douglass's much more well-known duel with the slave breaker, Covey. For here, too, is where Bibb most powerfully dramatizes his transformation from "a slave into a man."

Going West

The structural significance of Bibb's Indian slavery is underscored by its radical departure from the typical trajectory and geography of slave emancipation. According to Robert Stepto's notion of the vertical trope, the enslaved subject's "I" is typically identified as free by way of a movement of the protagonist from the South to the North. Heglar astutely notes Bibb's complication of this by his repeated immersions back into slave society to reclaim his wife. But after this final parting from his wife and child, Bibb performs a horizontal movement by way of his excursion into Indian Territory. As a type of national "abject zone," or space where the subject meets its constitutive Other (Butler), Indian country reframes the status of the fugitive subject not just between North and South, but between North, South, and Midwestern territory. Hence, even before the achievement of "vertical" freedom in the North, Bibb moves horizontally to Indian country. In order to understand Bibb's self and family presentation, we have to reckon with these chapters.

This representation of Indian slavery is spread over the course of roughly two and a half chapters, beginning with the subtitle, "Character of my Indian Master." Against the notion that similar cruelties obtained between white and Cherokee slavery (Haliburton), Bibb argues that Indian slavery is categorically milder than slavery to whites. In his capacity as a "kind of body servant" (150), he calls his owner "the most reasonable, and humane slaveholder that I have ever belonged to" (152) and, in contrast to his approach to naming his white ex-masters, refrains from revealing his real name. Moreover, Bibb contends that the corn and wheat he harvests in Indian slavery are simply for "consumption," but not for the "market," which is probably the reason for the improved conditions of the Indian slave (152). In this wise, Bibb notes he is allowed to

eat as much as he pleases and has enough clothes to wear, two perennial indictments of the slavocracy in the slave narrative (153).⁴⁰ Moreover, according to Bibb, Indian slaves are not especially subject to the lash and have even been known to whip their masters in retaliation (153). And, most important for Bibb's argument, Indian masters do not divide slave families.

Clearly, this catalogue of kindnesses is meant to indict white and Southern adherents of the "peculiar institution" and thereby buttress his call for its demise. To be sure, there must have been relatively kind Indian slave owners as there must have been relatively kind white masters. Even so, the perfectly neat opposition of the two here suggests that Bibb's re-membering is influenced by what Michael Awkward calls "strategic nostalgia." Although hardly approving of Indian slavery (he is just as eager to flee his Indian masters as he is his white ones), Bibb's representation of Indian slavery appears less about the Cherokees and more about critiquing the abuses of white slavery and advancing his other positions.

Accordingly, Bibb is just as quick to berate Indians if it suits his purposes. This pragmatism is, perhaps, why early in these chapters he seems to abandon the idea of mapping out a historically specific notion of Indian slavery and settles into the conventions and techniques of fairly stereotypical Indian captivity narratives. While the narrator never uses the phrase Indian captivity to describe his condition, it is clearly the subtext of his renderings. What is more, in these depictions, the differences and continuities between white slavery and Indian captivity are clearly in the service of his self-presentation as a reliable narrator and worthy American. In one re-membering of an Indian dance, he explains:

Their dress for the dance was most generally a great bunch of bird feathers, coon tails, or something of the kind stuck in their heads, and a great many shells tied about their legs to rattle while dancing. Their manner of dancing is taking hold of each other's hands and forming a ring around the large fire in the centre, and go stomping around it until they would get drunk or their heads would get to swimming, and they would go off and drink, and another set come on. Such were some of the practices indulged in by these Indian slaveholders. (154; emphasis added)

On the one hand, Bibb's denigration of his captors is unremarkable and in the tradition of the slave narratives. Like so many other slave narrators, he upbraids his masters and their "class" for lewd and hypocritical behavior. On the other hand, this lambaste also intersects with the well-known tradition of "Indian hating" found in Indian captivity narratives and other nineteenth century cultural productions.⁴¹ His remark that these are "practices" invokes the ethnographic and often culturally chauvinistic reports that marked Native Americans as degenerate, irrational, and violent. As Kathleen Sands notes in "Cooperation and Resistance: Native American Collaborative Personal Narrative," the careful description of Indian life is often complicit with "establishing the 'authority'" of the writing subject in interactions with Indians and white editors (135). In effect, Bibb becomes an ethnographic authority here through his masterful observations of Indian behavior. As a result, the negative representations of these dancing slaveholders, morally inferior for their slaveholding and culturally unsophisticated for their clothing, lend credibility to Bibb's character.

In a slightly revised form, we have the model of the "surrogate American" fleshed out by Jemison's Indian captivity account in the 1820's. Where there should be actual revelation about the dynamics of Indian life, we have an allegedly objective voice that condescendingly speaks about and for Native Americans. In the words of Kathryn Shanley, these are "The Indians America Loves to Love and Read" (26). Consequently,

Bibb's narrative voice is that of Seaver's "surrogate American," the one who displaces an Other, not out of sympathetic identification, but out of ambivalent envy. Bibb speaks the "silence" of Native American life and substitutes for it the voice of Anglo-American objectivity. In this way, Bibb participates in the model of authority as Indian displacement and reappropriation consistent with the "substitute American" of the 1820's, the white male subject who assumes the status of the American by displacing native Americans.

Along with and exceeding the imperative to displace Native Americans, Bibb's rendition of Indian dance also locates him within the domain of the civilized, what Crispin Sartwell defines in the context of the slave narrative as a "construction of the primitive, the unevolved, the apelike" (33). As noted earlier, in the 1830's and 1840's, the Cherokees had constructed just such a "civilized" picture of themselves against the perceived "primitive" and "unevolved" features of their own culture. Though still regarded by mainstream culture as culturally inferior to whites, they were typically regarded as superior to African Americans. This chain of cultural and racial being is cogently expressed by an 1854 passage from the *Southern Quarterly Review*: "How well is the vigilant, active, white man, contrasted with the drowsy, slothful black man, while the copper-coloured race holds the intermediate ground between them" (149). And midway through his re-membering of his time in Indian country, Bibb, in fact, makes explicit reference to the fact that the Cherokees had been calling themselves (and had been called) members of the Five Civilized Tribes. But instead of referring to them in this way (or simply not at all), he mockingly calls them the "various half civilized tribes" (158). In another scene in Indian country, Bibb observes of a group of the inhabitants

that “not one could talk or understand a word of the English language” (156). So, despite their relatively kind treatment of him, Bibb essentially argues that they are not worthy of their “civilized” moniker.

More to my point, by way of his removal into Indian country, and his removed (objective) descriptions of the Cherokee, Bibb suggests that he is the subject who is worthy of such a title. His display of his mastery of the English language as well as his mastery of the “heathen’s” cultural practices is made possible by their mastery over him. Thus within the figure, or the symbolic form if you will, of the victimized Indian captive is the form of the ethnographic observer. The cultural signification attached to this ethnographic chronicler was synonymous with the significations attached to the antebellum notion of a “civilized man.” Ultimately, then, Bibb fashions his own relationship to “civility” by impugning the “civility” of the Cherokees.

These shifting relationships to who was or was not civilized are characteristic of the important, but unstable, achievement of this subject position. Sartwell elaborates that especially for Southern whites, who were thought to be removed from the cultural centers of the North and Europe, their level of “civilization” was “tenuous” (38). Similarly, Anglo-Americans in the North laid their claim to civilization against the South, but in ambivalent contradistinction with Europe. And, of course, the notion of civilization in Europe, owing much to Greek and Roman civilizations (and African and Asian?), was anxious and unstable in the context of radical encounters with “savages” during the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

More consequentially, in the U.S., such anxieties about the status of the civilized were routinely orchestrated through the conditions and conceits of captivity. As their

paternalistic masters, whites viewed blacks as infantile and uncivilized. “The master was civilized, Christian, and so forth,” Sartwell explains, “precisely in relation to the slave.” (38) In an attempt to negotiate their own relationship to the entangled subject positions of American, white, and civilized, Cherokees viewed blacks as “fundamentally inferior.” Conversely, blacks viewed their lascivious white masters as “unrestrained” and “barbaric,” and, here, Bibb views his Indian captors as “half civilized.”

In light of the ways that Cherokees, whites, and blacks all laid precarious claim to being civilized, it is interesting to note that one of Bibb’s ex-owners calls him a “yellow man” (4), referencing his extremely light skin. Though unintentionally, the name aptly describes the complex relationship Bibb held to “civility” in relation to Cherokees and whites. As is the name “yellow man,” Bibb’s “civility” seems irreducibly bestowed by white men, inasmuch as his allegedly objective stance towards the Cherokees is nonetheless white. And, at the same time, his status as “yellow” would seem to be the symbolic tint of a “civility” that is neither quite white nor copper. Bibb’s thick description of Cherokee frolicking vaunts him above the “copper colored” “savages” as it differentiates him from the likes of slaveholders. Bibb’s yellow-ness then underscores the ways that his “civilized” status denigrated Indians, depended on white approval, and yet also critiqued the white lens through which he looked.

Henry Bibb: American Citizen

The ascription of “civility” in antebellum America was one way of marking national, racial, and cultural enfranchisement (or the lack thereof). Though not identical with these categories, it also worked in tandem with the categories of whiteness,

masculinity, and, especially, American citizenship. In *The Colonizing Trick*, David Kazanjian defines the citizen of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries as, at least in theory, “a subject formally abstracted from its particularisms and hence formally and abstractly equal to all its fellow citizens” (2). But, he goes on to add, the notion of “abstract equality” was actually “coincident with the rise of numerous, hierarchically codified, particularistic differences” (2), especially the “particularisms” of race and nation. Though read as equivalent in an abstract or conceptual sense, citizens were often marked by the specifics of particular races, genders, and nations. Against the notion that “all men are created equal,” Kazanjian insists that the constitution of the abstract citizen-subject is dependent on a hierarchy and codification of racial, national, and gendered particularisms. It is this model of citizenship, I argue, that Bibb invokes throughout his other re-memberings of Indian slavery, that he is “abstractly equal” to all other subjects, but through the suppression of his negatively codified particularisms. The most interesting way he achieves this conceptual equivalence with other subjects is through his abstraction (read extraction or removal) of himself from the narrative of American slavery into one of Indian captivity.

Interestingly, it is immediately after he “[leaves] the Indian territory” that he makes his most poignant appeal to white and male citizenship by way of Indian captivity. In keeping with his picaresque characterization, no one can keep Bibb in bondage for long. Thus, after his Cherokee owner fortuitously (for him) dies, Bibb sets out on his way North “before daylight the next morning” (155). Before leaving Indian country, however, he notices three white men on horseback and suspects that they are slaveholders. Once he passes into the state of Missouri (another slave state), he again

notes the white men's approach, and this requires him to steal a horse from a nearby plantation. In the following passage, notice the curious hypothetical situation Bibb conjures in order to justify his theft. "But I ask," he queries,

if a white man had been captured by the Cherokee Indians and carried away from his family for life into slavery, and could see a chance to get back to his family; should the Indians pursue him with a determination to take him back or take his life, would it be a crime for a poor fugitive, whose life, liberty and future happiness were all at stake, to mount any man's horse by the way side, and ride him without asking any questions, to effect his escape? [. . .] . Such an act committed by a white man under the same circumstances would not only be pronounced proper, but praiseworthy [. . .] . (163)

The idea is clear here: his theft would have confirmed the perceived baseness of his character; it would have merely duplicated the misleading "advertisement" that will run ahead and around him in Jefferson City; but as a "white" captive of Indians, his theft is "proper" and even "praiseworthy." In Kazanjian's lexicon, the particularity of Indian captivity gives him the means of articulating his "universality" or whiteness. Now, as an extremely light skinned black who actually passes for white several times in his narrative, this may have been less of a leap for the biracial Bibb.⁴² But in all things important, such as the treatment of his own body, the protection of his family, and the status of his life, he is read as black. Hence, it takes Indian captivity to abstract him from the narrative of unethical behavior and to abstract him from the specificity of African American particularism, in the sense of removing and making him conceptually equivalent to others. Put differently, Bibb's horse stealing is most powerfully legitimated by way of the allegedly universal and abstract imperatives associated with Indian captivity.

Hence, his properness and praiseworthiness (both despite and because of his theft) is only possible through the assumptions surrounding the authority of the Indian captive. Unlike African American slaves, the white Indian captive is licensed to take

what is necessary for his survival and escape and, moreover, will be lauded for doing so. As a result, in comparing his act to that of a “praiseworthy” white Indian captive, Bibb effectively resists the derogatory readings that attend his own picaresque characterization. In this way Bibb finds a way of resolving what Raymond Hedin calls the “dilemma” of the picaro, “to keep himself clearly on the side of morality while depicting actions often hardly moral at all” (636). Equally important, coming right after his section on Indian slavery, Bibb actually extends the reading of himself as Indian captive into the “slave narrative” portion of his account. Inasmuch as Missouri is a slave state, it is bound by the same rules of narration encoded in the vertical trope; the South is enslaved and the North is free. But as a kind of textual and cultural capital, his literal Indian slavery allows him to shape himself literarily and authoritatively according to the rules governing Indian captivity even in Missouri.

What is more, in his justification of horse stealing, Bibb does more than rationalize the questionable means of his escape. His justification of horse stealing authorizes the aggressive and willful possession of all that matters in his narrative, even the narrative itself. In a rough play on Richard III’s famous lament, we might say that Bibb gains his citizenship through a horse.

We need to recall here that what defined the slave was not only his/her ownership by another but his/her inability to own anything else, even and especially him/herself. Indeed, as was also true in American slave law, slaves were explicitly prohibited from owning property in the Cherokee nation. As an 1833 Cherokee statute reads, “no slave or slaves in the Cherokee Nation, shall have the right or privilege to own any kind of property whatever” (qtd. in Haliburton). But inasmuch as the crime of theft presumes

that the offender can own their transgression, theft problematizes the bondsperson's status as a non-owner and inert being. Indeed, to steal, if only momentarily and covertly, is to resist the rules of bondage and begin to forge a free identity.

Elsewhere, the narrative confirms this relationship between the maintenance of slavery and the problem posed by possession, even possession by theft. This is made clear when Bibb half-jokingly tells his readers that he could not have "stolen" a jackass because both he and the donkey were property. There should be, Bibb surmises, "no more sin committed in this than if one jackass rode off another" (122). Though clearly put to comedic use here, the inability of the slave subject to own another object defines his condition. Similarly, when he and his compatriots are caught and interrogated during an attempted escape, he tells his fellow rebels to "own nothing," implying that the renunciation of all property (even thoughts) is fundamental to being a proper slave.

As a result, possessing property must nullify or resist the subordination of the bondsperson, and even provide a literal and symbolic space to reclaim free status. To wit, in the scene directly following his theft of the horse, Bibb feigns legal freedom as he avoids recapture through his talk of purchasing property, specifically "buying land, stock and village property, and contrasting it with the same kind of property in Ohio" (164). According to Bibb's narrative, for a slave to possess anything besides the vice and stupidity that were associated with him is to disrupt his enslavement and find freedom.

The specifically national dimensions of such possessing are made clear in the following meditation, made by the narrator after Bibb's first escape when he is ten:

I could see that the All-wise Creator, had made man a free, moral, intelligent and accountable being; capable of knowing good and evil. And I believed then, as I believe now, that every man has a right to wages for his labor; a right to his own wife and children; a right to liberty and the

pursuit of happiness; and a right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. But here, in the light of these truths, I was a slave, a prisoner for life; I could possess nothing, nor acquire anything but what must belong to my keeper. (17)

Seen from the eyes of the mature, adult Bibb, the protagonist's life has been one long struggle for possession. This is the ability that has marked him as a "prisoner for life." But what is more, possession brings him into the American national fold. As made clear by his signification on Jefferson's "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," Bibb submits an antebellum male slave's Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights that detail the conditions for his freedom and his citizenship. He will have a right to his labor, body, freedom, wife, children, and God. To possess these "rights" is to be like "every man," or as Kazanjian would remind us, mostly white, American males.

Beyond and along with national membership, Bibb's possession of the horse also justifies his possession of an aggressive masculinity. Like John Williams, Daniel Boone and others before him, male Indian captives encoded a decidedly aggressive model of masculinity under and as a result of their Indian captivity. As represented in the sensational and fictionalized account of Indian captivity in Kentucky, *Nick of the Woods*, white males could even indiscriminately kill and or mutilate others in the name of the exigencies of captivity. Though Bibb does not go to such lengths to achieve his freedom, he clearly understands the achievement of manhood as inseparable from a notion of freedom. As Maurice Wallace succinctly puts it, "What slavery is to freedom, boyhood is to manhood" (253). Male slaves remained eternal boys in the eyes of their white masters and, often times, fathers. Hortense Spillers notes in her foundational "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," "Legal enslavement removed the African American male not so much from sight as from mimetic view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of the

Father's name, the Father's law." In other words, male slaves could not participate in the social fiction of white masculinity, due to both their symbolic removals from the (often white) father's genealogy and their literal prohibitions from protecting and providing for their families. As Bibb notes generally, "It is almost impossible for slaves to give account of their male parentage," and as he notes of his own white father in particular, "I have no personal knowledge of him at all, for he died before my recollection" (14).

In Bibb's re-membering of himself as an Indian captive, he literarily recollects the adult masculinity that he cannot literally remember. Moreover, this masculinity is importantly in the service of re-collecting his wife and child. His insertion of the fact that a hypothetical white captive has been "carried away from his family for life into slavery, and could see a chance to get back to his family" is clearly illustrative of his own literal condition. With respect to his own child, he reclaims the "name of the Father" with his horse stealing. Before this moment, he actually loses an unborn child while in slavery due to his inability to help Malinda when she is ill. Hence, as a unit that requires constant protection under slavery, his family is the domain in which his masculinity (or the lack thereof) is most legible and desirable. As elements or objects that Bibb understands as essential to freedom, his wife and children are possessions that he has a "right" to claim. To be sure, as other critics have made clear, the equation of Malinda and Mary Frances as mere possessions to be owned erases their identities inasmuch as they become a series of objects for Bibb to attain. In this sense, his mastery of his family is fraught with both the meanings of caring for and possessing his family.

It is also important to remember the ways that American antebellum notions of masculinity thrived on such proprietary models. Raymond Hedin's cautions against

overly harsh readings of Booker T. Washington's representation of fatherhood and masculinity in *Up From Slavery* may well apply here. He suggests,

[. . .] the basic drive that informs *Up From Slavery* and much of Washington's life clarifies as the historically based, long frustrated desire of the once vulnerable ex-slave to act at last as an unencumbered father to as many of his people as possible and in as many ways as possible. From that perspective Washington comes to look genuinely, if awkwardly, paternal rather than offensively paternalistic or perversely authoritarian. His actions are the gropings of the neophyte father, eager to take on that role but uncertain how to act in it, and very reluctant to let any rival impinge on such hard-won authority [. . .]. (95)

Even as Bibb assumes the role of protective father (and husband), he is still attempting to negotiate what such a subject position means. And this partly explains, though does not dismiss, his proprietary view of his family.

Lastly, Bibb's aggressive seizure of the horse is also about the reclamation of his life narrative. Much like the horse, Bibb's recorded life is his ticket to freedom. It is the "free paper" that certifies his eligibility to be a "man and a brother" and a "husband and a father." And just as any Indian captive would have been entitled to tell the tale of his fantastic sufferings, so is Bibb. Hence, Bibb's representation of Indian slavery in American slavery succinctly links and authorizes the desires for his freedom, family, and text. By way of his slavery to the Cherokee, he is able to articulate a masterful re-membering of his life.

It cannot be overstated that such mastery comes by way and at the expense of the Cherokee. His self-presentation of himself as masterful is dependent on a master narrative of Indian inferiority and depravity. Despite the real trials and sufferings of white Indian captives, their captivities routinely worked in the services of displacing Indian subjects. Such re-membering and authority comes at the literal expense of actual Native Americans. To varying degrees, both *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary*

Jemison and *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* achieve a “negative liberty” by negating Native Americans. Particularly in Bibb’s text, the escaped slave passes over Native Americans as he had passed for “white” in so many of his escapes. Even in 1849, Bibb’s text constitutes another Cherokee Indian removal inasmuch as it includes and occludes them within the slave narrative tradition. In the process, Bibb passes over them on his way to a freedom that is both rhetorically and literally dependent on, but exclusive of, them. He is understood as a “citizen” only inasmuch as the particularisms of the Cherokee are disavowed.

The Last Removal

Like so many other male slave narratives, Bibb’s “adventures” ends when he establishes himself in the North, remarries, and begins to speak on the anti-slavery lecture circuit. The last page concludes with the date and place of his writing, “May 1st, 1849, New York City” (204). Based on this ending, one would assume that Bibb ultimately accepts, and resides in, America, and that he wholeheartedly accepts the American vision of “civilization” and “citizenship” he champions throughout his Indian captivity.

But here, Bibb’s short lived life after freedom is instructive. Bibb’s narrative is published at the beginning of what Howard H. Bell identifies as the Negro Emigration Movement from 1849-1854 (135). Indeed, Bibb’s status as “the most foremost advocate of Canadian emigration” (Hite 270) provides a necessary counterpoint to and clarification of his representation of “manhood,” “citizenship,” and “civility” in Indian country. Greatly influenced by the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, Bibb eventually decided to engineer one last removal: to Canada. Following the lead of the 15,000 to

20,000 blacks who fled to Canada in the decade after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (Landon 22), Bibb relocated to Canada where he helped escaped slaves and free blacks resettle. And in 1851, Bibb founded and began to operate Canada's first black newspaper, *The Voice of a Fugitive*. Though it only ran for a few years due to a suspicious fire and Bibb's untimely death in 1854, the fundamental mission of the paper was clear from the first issue:

We shall also persuade, as far as it may be practicable, every oppressed person of color in the United States to settle in Canada, where laws make no distinction among men, based on complection [sic], and upon whose soil "no slave can breathe."

In other words, Bibb knew the value of various removals, from running away, from projecting negative qualities on to others, to removing oneself to Indian country, to full scale emigration. Furthermore, he was hardly uncritical of the limits of fashioning oneself within the terms of American citizenship and, in fact, actively sought to author new models of transnational identity, cooperation, and resistance. In his capacity as editor of *The Voice*, Bibb worked with correspondents James T. Holly, Henry Highland Garnett, and Martin Delany, all three of whom championed their own unique plans for black emigration (270). While James T. Holly sponsored plans for black American emigration to Haiti, Henry Highland Garnet endorsed movements for settlements in Africa, and Martin Delany championed a program for black American colonization in South America and the Caribbean.

It is along these same separatist and radical lines that Bibb formulated the North American Agricultural League, an organization that, in theory, would have put slavery out of business by producing cash crops such as rice and sugar in Jamaica and effectively competing and outselling similar goods produced in the American south (Hite 277).

Though he never managed to realize such a grand scheme, his project nonetheless underscores Bibb's clear commitment to work against and outside the traditional bounds of America to achieve pragmatic goals. Bibb's apparent wholehearted acceptance of white, American, middle class notions of citizenship and civility needs to be balanced with his impulses toward separatism and emigration. In this light, his adventure in Indian country and use of the Indian captivity narrative in some ways complements his later involvement in Canadian emigration, for all three of these removals assisted his authorizing of himself and his resistance to white American slavery.

In and of itself, the question of Bibb's slavery among whites is not unimportant. Indeed, the "native American" and "civilized American" gave way to other authoritative captive positions: namely, those of the slave. As we shall see in the next chapter, "Captivity as American Slavery," the vocabulary of slavery provided a language that authorized the concerns of more than one disenfranchised group.

³⁵ In Henry Louis Gates' *The Classic Slave Narratives* (1987), "classic" is used in this sense but also in Heglar, Wilson, and others.

³⁶ A considerable number of slave narratives were produced in the 1930's under the auspices of the Works Project Administration (WPA). See Paul D. Escott's "The Art and Science of Reading WPA Slave Narratives," 40-47 in *The Slave's Narrative* (1985).

³⁷ See Theda Perdue's *Slavery and The Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866*, R. Halliburton, Jr.'s *Black Slavery among the Cherokee Indians*, and Daniel Littlefield's work. In terms of the numbers of black slaves held by the Cherokee, Elias Boudinot notes that there were 1,217 slaves in 1825 (Halliburton 39). Halliburton states that post-removal numbers are "not known," but that many slaves traveled with their masters into the west (39). The 1840 U.S. Census records 2,487,455 slaves, but the numbers of Indian slaves was not tabulated in this number. For the state of Arkansas, the 1840 Census records 19,935 slaves out of total population of 97,574 (475). For the same state, the 1850 Census records 47,100 slaves out of a population of 209,897 (535). The 1860 Census, however, reveals that the "Choctaws held 2,297 negro slaves, distributed among 385 owners; the Cherokees 2,504, held by 384 owners; the Creeks 1,651, owned by 267 Indians; and the Chickasaws 917, to 118 owners" (xv). The same census estimates that throughout these tribes, "there are nearly eight Indians to each negro slave, and that the slaves form about 12 and ½ per cent. of the population, omitting the whites and free colored" (xv). The Treaty of New Echota (1835) and The Trail of Tears (1838) are, of course, decisive moments in the history of Cherokee removal. For more on the unique tensions created by differing groups of Cherokee émigrés, see William G. McLoughlin's *After The Trail of Tears* (1993) and *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (1986), John Ehle's *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* (1988), and Thurman Wilkins' *Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People* (1986). For a compilation of excellent essays on the Cherokees see, Duane H. King's *The Cherokee Indian Nation: A Troubled History* (1979).

³⁸ The numbers of family escapes for the state of Kentucky are considerably lower. In *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (2002), J. Blaine Hudson notes that "group escapes" constituted a little bit more than 20% of the total 472 fugitive flights.

³⁹ The spectacular brevity of Heglar's commentary (or lack thereof) is worth quoting in full: "Bibb functions more as a manager of his owner's wealth than as a slave; in fact, he finds this to be the mildest of all his experiences with slavery. Upon the death of this owner in 1840, Bibb escapes like the old master of the "art of running away" and finally returns to the North." In Marion Wilson Starling's pioneering *The Slave Narrative*, she makes no comment at all.

⁴⁰ Earlier in the narrative of white slavery, Bibb declares ". . . I have suffered much from the lash, and for want of food and raiment" (15).

⁴¹ See Melville's "The Metaphysics of Indian Hating" in *The Confidence Man*.

⁴² The most glaring example of this is when other whites inquire of Bibb if "a man so near white as myself could be a slave" (60).

Chapter IV

Authorizing Epistolary Motherhood in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

As suggested by Henry Bibb's *Life* in our previous chapter, the literature of African American slavery – and the slave's narrative in particular – marks an important site to explore the authority of literal and literary removals. Unlike colonial Indian captives, most antebellum African American slaves were not whacked over the head by a tomahawk and dragged off into the wilderness, to employ a common trope of Northeastern captivity narratives. Instead, by the early nineteenth century, the overwhelming majority of American slaves were born into that condition.

This birth into Southern slavery clearly enacted removals from the freedoms of white, Anglo-Saxon American females. Yet, I submit, these removals paradoxically created critical sites for imagining autobiographical and motherly subject positions. This chapter, in particular, considers the ways that the captivity narratives emerging from American slavery in nineteenth-century America memorialized the literary, literal, and figurative labors of enslaved women. By way of reading Harriet Jacobs's antebellum slave narrative, *Linda, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself* (1861), I will be exploring how the text imagines an epistolary motherhood, a model of womanhood that maintains and intensifies maternal connections to prior and future generations through a space of constriction and the construction of letters.

In *Incidents*, no other representation lends itself more favorably to such a project than Jacobs's rendition of her seven-year seclusion in her grandmother's garret. Shortly after Jacobs is forced to serve on the plantation of her master's son to be "broken in," she learns that her master intends to install her children there as well (Jacobs 77). Since her children's presence would essentially "fetter" her to the plantation (77), it would also foreclose any possibility for a long-desired escape. As a result, the night before they are to be relocated to the farm, Jacobs runs away from the plantation, and eventually hides herself in her grandmother's attic (92). Among other effects recounted in the text, the experience numbs her limbs, sends her into unconsciousness, and nearly leaves her a cripple (101).

While simultaneously and arguably the narrative's most conspicuous symbol of the protagonist's submission, Jacobs's re-membering of her time in the garret also legitimates her self-presentation as a respectable mother and enunciates the ways that concealment and constriction informed her ability to write her own life. Unlike Bibb's dramatization of Indian captivity, scholars acknowledge the centrality of Jacobs's seven-year stay in the nine feet long, seven feet wide, and three feet high (at its highest point) crawl space. But it has been read in one of two ways that I hope to complicate. Her self-imprisonment has been mainly understood as an event she experiences despite or in contrast to her later freedom in the North. As Rafia Zafar summarizes it, it was "the escape that was not an escape" (2). Or, on the other hand, critics recognize the structural significance of the crawl space, the way it contests Flint's efforts to master her, and the rhetorical power it affords the narrator.⁴³ But they overlook the ways the crawl space also doubles as an architectural womb that allows Jacobs to present herself in the pains of

maternal delivery as well as in the security of being mothered, a move that endears her to her northern female readership. As a result, *Incidents* posits the possession and occupancy of symbolic wombs as central to projects of racial and patriarchal resistance. It also understands the womb as a model of freedom within confinement that articulates the way that women's writing can be produced from the smallest spaces, can go undetected or be misunderstood by agents of white and male supremacy, and can link women in a community of letters. Ultimately, it maps a model of resistance to silence, patriarchy, and racism that is dependent upon the alleged constrictions and confinements of women's bodies. It celebrates the dynamism of the reproducing, female body to encode its own escape from subjugation.

African American Removals

Now, the case of antebellum slavery would appear to present a unique case in terms of mapping the effects of removal. As outlined in the introduction, the capacity for captivity to produce authority is dependent upon a drastic removal from a condition of relative freedom. Hence, there is some space and or time that is marked as "not captive" that is productively contrasted with a space and/or time marked as "captive." But, since slaves were apparently born slaves, what did removal mean for them? Indeed, if there is no anterior experience to African American slavery besides that of slavery, then what does removal look like in slavery and the slave narrative?

In *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, Wilma King succinctly explains the situation of North American slavery in relation to a theory of physical removal:

Most slave societies in the New World used massive importation of Africans to maintain their populations. In the United States, by contrast, the population sustained itself through reproductions. Less than one million Africans were imported into the country before the Atlantic slave trade ended in 1808. Although enslaved children fell into an ‘actuarially perilous category,’ the population had increased to 3,952,760 by 1860. Of that population 56 percent were under twenty years of age. The ability to reproduce the population is the most distinctive feature of slavery in North America. (emphasis added; xvii)

Hence, despite the high mortality rate of bondpeople, the most tangible way that slaves were removed into slavery was, in fact, their birth. Typically following “the condition of the mother,” removal meant the immediate assumption of the mother’s slave status.⁴⁴

But in reality, of course, the assumption of slave identity was neither instantaneous nor irreversible. In *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South*, Mary Jenkins Schwartz expresses this idea in this way:

Each time a child was born in bondage, the process of enslavement began anew, as owners attempted to teach these children how to be a slave and parents struggled to give them a sense of self and belonging which denied the owner complete control over their lives. (18)

In this sense, then, it is also clear that the birth and development of the slave shared affinities with the literal and ideological battles of the Indian captive that we see, for instance, in Indian captivity narratives. At the impending birth of a slave child, Schwartz reveals, sometimes stood a cadre of people with varying claims on the newborn: the laboring mother-to-be, a midwife, an assistant to the midwife, a female friend of the slave, and the master (19). Hence, given the competing interests of this motley crew, newly born slaves clearly had the potential to understand themselves and be understood in ways independent of their owners.

The first lines of Jacobs’s narrative, in fact, attest to a time and space before removal, even for the slave: “I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away” (3). As suggested by King, the *a priori* status of the

bondsperson as always and already captive was not a given. Jacobs's opening exposes the difficulty and even impotence of the enslavement process, as she does not come to the realization of her enslavement "till six years" later, and of "happy childhood" at that. Even if Jacobs presents an extreme or rhetorically convenient instance, it is nonetheless clear that slaves had alternate models of experience besides their captivity.

Even adult slavery was not one long unchanging night; rather it constituted a series of breaks and removals from lesser to greater captivities or vice versa. The nineteenth-century writings of Jesse Torrey on the American domestic slave trade make it clear that physical separation obtained throughout a slave's entire life. As suggested by the fact of the auction block, crucially re-membered in Jacobs's account, slaves were forcibly removed from their families and homes throughout their lives. In turn, these movements could increase or decrease the often harsh conditions of servitude. In one way, the definition of servitude was to be subject to such unexpected and forced removals.

The Narrative

Jacobs's fashioning of her life in *Incidents* can be understood as a literary rendering of the effects of such physical and social removals. It remarks, for example, on the fear and flight of blacks after Nat Turner's 1830 rebellion, but especially on the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, which legalized the capture and return of enslaved blacks from the North to the South. Several times throughout the narrative, the narrator pauses to lament: "But while the Free States sustain a law which hurls fugitives back into slavery, how can the slaves resolve to become men?" (38) In other words, the

logical counterpart of freedom was manhood; and consequently, to keep African American males slaves was to reduce them to a state of perpetual infancy. Policies and techniques of African American removal threatened the creation of mature adults.

Likewise, slavery had particular consequences for the “slave girl.” Namely, by way of the unofficial removals of sexual abuse, coercion, and violence, slavery threatened to prevent “slave girls” from ever becoming respectable women. Jacobs’s entire narrative can be read as an attempt to re-present the transformation from slave girlhood to free womanhood. While using the alias of Linda Brent, Jacobs chronicles her life from her 1813 birth in Edenton, NC. There, she is born a slave but lives in the household of her grandmother (Molly Horniblow) and is surrounded by her mother, father, and brother, William (John S.). When she is six, however, she is transferred to the household of Dr. Flint (Dr. Norcom). True to his name, Flint is callous as a stone and makes repeated sexual advances on Brent’s chastity and, failing that, threatens to remove her from her family to a secluded cottage. As a means of adjusting to her almost certain sexual violation, the narrative tells us, Jacobs accepts the affections of a Mr. Sands (Samuel Tredwell) and conceives Ellen (Louisa Matilda), hoping that her amour will purchase her and her child’s freedom. He doesn’t, and the continuing dangers of slavery to herself and her (now) two children eventually force her into hiding in her grandmother’s garret. Her attempt to free herself from the garret, reclaim her children from the claims of Flint, and ultimately reunite them in the north brings us to Jacobs’s representation of the garret. After seven years of confinement, she eventually escapes and temporarily reunites with her children in the North. Financial difficulties prevent her

from maintaining a house for them, though, and the narrative ends with Brent working as a nurse, hoping one day to procure a “hearthstone of my own, however humble” (156).

Resisting Incidents

Like so many sentimental novels, and in that same stylized language, Brent is remembered as a virtuous and naïve heroine hunted and haunted by a lecherous seducer, as Pamela is by Mr. B in Samuel Richardson’s novel. And like the protagonist of Susan Warner’s best-selling novel, *The Lamplighter*, Brent is motherless, though not without mother figures, from the onset of the narrative, compelling the reader to empathize with her lonely situation. Hence, both her overexposure to sexual advances and her status as motherless would have been familiar to white middle-class Northern women. As devotees of what Barbara Welter famously called “true womanhood” – the principles of female chastity, piety, submissiveness – her white, female Northern readership would have deplored Flint’s assaults and sympathized with Linda’s plight.

At the same time, important differences about and within the text would have made these readers resistant to sympathizing with the young female protagonist. Most notably, Brent’s premarital sexual relationship with Sands, a wealthy and white Edontonian, would have shocked many nineteenth-century audiences, as it crossed established racial, economic, and moral boundaries. This is why the narrative frames her union with Sands as a defensive move, as is suggested by Tredwell’s and Norcom’s diametrically opposed names: Sands and Flint. Furthermore, since Brent earnestly tries to marry a black suitor before aligning with Sands (33-37), we are meant to understand the tabooed biracial relationship as another function of the horrid and particular effects of

the slave system on the female. But it is also clear that if her union with Sands were merely strategic, this still does not explain why two years later she has another child by Sands, when the first one fails to stop Flint's advances? Hence, there might have been a relationship with Sands that was independent of Flint's (though not slavery's) designs. Or, as Frances Smith Foster has speculated, given the conventions of white middle class delicacy that informed Jacobs's writing, Flint may indeed have actually raped Jacobs, and thus her two children may have actually been fathered by him (77).⁴⁵ Hence, the focus on a figure like Sands may have simply been a way of delicately deflecting the more difficult representation of slave rape. Whatever the motivations behind her depictions, Brent thus has more than one reason to implore of her readers, as she does after her first pregnancy, "Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader!" (47).

Animating and compounding these issues, of course, was the fact that Brent was a black female. As Frances Smith Foster elucidates in "Resisting Incidents," "nineteenth century audiences struggled desperately against the belief that black women could be intelligent and eloquent" (60). What is more, Brent as represented in her narrative was not simply black, but "mulatto," or the light skinned product of a black and white sexual union; and in some ways, this category was seen as even inferior to blackness. Werner Sollors explains that the word "mulatto" arose out of a Victorian racial science that argued that the white and black races were fundamentally different. As a result, just as the union of horses and donkeys produced a lesser breed, mules, so the union of the white and black produced an inferior set, biracial offspring. In this sense, the narrative clearly fits within Judith Berzon's model of the "tragic mulatto," "the almost-white character whose beauty, intelligence, and purity are forever in conflict with the 'savage

primitivism' inherited from his or her Negro ancestors" (99). Brent's tragic flaw is her fundamental failure to be completely white or, put differently, to completely renounce blackness. Hence, according to an antebellum chain of racial being, the mulatta was one who had no right to be reproduced and, furthermore, whose reproduction was marked by the stigma of inferiority and abnormality.

Girl Interrupted

These observations underscore the urgency of Brent's plea to be considered alongside the "women at the North" (Jacobs 6). If she is understood as nothing more than a racial mongrel, then how can she be eligible for the status of woman or mother? Indeed, Flint's brand of mastery either denies these subject positions or constitutes them in ways that misrepresent Brent. As a result, to be a slave in Jacobs's narrative is to be severed from maternal ties, what Orlando Patterson calls "natal alienation," the separation of the slave subject from descending and ascending familial ties (ie. fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, etc.). For Brent especially, it is to experience what Angela Davis terms "fragmented and alienated maternities," to be cut off from or have compromised the experience of motherhood based on one's class, race, or gender position (qtd. in Ragone 1). Indeed, given the insistent focus on the loss of the mother in Jacobs's imagining, I would dub Jacobs's rehearsal of natal alienation as maternal alienation. In Jacobs's re-membering of her girlhood in slavery, we see a textual manifestation of these processes.

Her departure from childhood and entrance into slavery, for instance, is conspicuously and insistently marked by a trail of dead maternal subjects. "When I was

six years old, my mother died;” Brent re-members, “and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me that I was a slave” (5). Later, however, her new mistress assumes a mother-like affection for her. “I loved her,” Brent informs her reader, “for she had been almost like a mother to me” (5). In turn, this compels Brent to declare that she felt as free as “any freeborn white child” (5). This woman gives Brent her first lessons in reading and writing, skills that will ultimately be useful in planning her escape from slavery and writing her narrative of slavery. Conversely, the absence of mothers discourages the healthy development of the young girl. When this mother/mistress dies, Brent is forced to live with Dr. Flint.

Dr. and Mrs. Flint’s household is, of course, the antithesis of motherly love and fatherly protection. There she becomes the property of their five year old daughter, a striking inversion of the normative model in which the younger female child is protected by her older sister. And all around her, the sign of slavery is the continued denial of the female bondswoman’s status as mother. When the slave cook does not prepare a meal on time, Brent laments that Flint locks her away from her “nursing baby” (9-10), a muted but clear echo of Brent’s premature separation from her own mother’s care.

This separation of enslaved mothers from their daughters reverberates throughout the entire text. Shortly after the death of her own mother, Brent offhandedly reveals: “I had been there nearly a year, when a dear little friend of mine was buried. I heard her mother sob, as the clods fell on the coffin of her only child, and I turned away from the grave, feeling thankful that I still had something left to love” (12). Only two sentences later, Brent receives the news: “your father is dead” (12). In another instance, an anonymous mother sends “seven children to the auction block” (17). But most

conspicuously, Brent's grandmother's son is sold, whose fate anticipates Brent's fear for her own children: "Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened the irons upon his wrists" (23).

In her re-membering of her own daughter, Ellen, it is just this fear of maternal alienation that marks her imagining. Shortly after the christening of her and Mr. Sands's offspring, Jacobs guards against the severance of her ties to her daughter in even apparently benign forms. "She clasped a gold chain," notes Jacobs of her father's mistress,

round my baby's neck. I thanked her for this kindness; but I did not like the emblem. I wanted no chain to be fastened on my daughter, not even if its links were of gold. How earnestly I prayed that she might never feel the weight of slavery's chain, whose iron entereth into the soul! (66)

The narrator is acutely aware of how seeming gifts can extend "the condition of the mother" (64) to the child as well. Later in her narrative, when Mrs. Bruce (Willis) purchases her freedom, it is just such kindness that she fears, because it now obligates her for life and for her life. Similarly, the gold chain around Ellen's neck assumes the potential of "binding" her to Brent's father's mistress, thereby repeating Brent's loss of her own mother that commences the narrative.

Besides maternal alienation, what also threatens to thwart the development of the slave girl is exposure to unwelcome sexual attention, as revealed in the chapter "Trials of Girlhood." "He peopled my young mind with unclean images," Brent laments, "such as only a vile monster could think of" (26). Flint's immodest proposals threaten to convert Brent from an innocent girl into a "monster," the hybrid of soul and metal of the previous passage. Moreover, these statements reflect Flint's desire for, and perhaps even achievement of, physical violations: "He told me I was his property; that I must be

subject to his will in all things” (26). Her seemingly unmitigated availability to Flint’s assaults, verbal or otherwise, marks Brent as a slave. “My master,” Brent re-members of Flint,

met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day on unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother’s grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. (28)

Significantly, even Brent’s attempts to mourn her mother are under surveillance, and thus her exposure to Flint denies her connection to maternal relations. Here, both the techniques of maternal alienation and overexposure conspire to interrupt and corrupt the development of the slave girl.

Escape in the Garret

If overexposure is the modus operandi of slavery, then concealment is the means by which to evade its power, but by further delving into the submission, powerlessness, and anonymity already required of slaves. As Michelle Burnham proposes, “Concealment – whether by crowds, wealth, or barrels – continually marks off in this text a protective space from which one might gaze or act [. . .]” (281). To wit, only four sentences into Brent’s narration, she reveals her reliance upon the suppression of details: “I have concealed the names of places, and given persons fictitious names” (xiii). Indeed, the fact that the name of Harriet Jacobs is literally nowhere to be found in a narrative that is ostensibly about her life and from her perspective speaks to the fundamental ways that her account demands her absence in order for her to be present. As Jacqueline Goldsby asserts in “I Disguised my Hand,” Jacobs uses self-screening “as a discursive mode with which to transcribe her experience” (12).

Understood in this light, the representation of the garret is one of the most powerful instances of Brent's resistance to Flint. From there, "She is able to reverse the master-slave power relation," Michelle Burnham explains, "and to assume a kind of male power only because that reversal and deployment are concealed and contained within the semblance of black enslavement and female powerlessness" (284). The evidence of these reversals is everywhere in the text. Previously, Brent learns that she is a slave and Flint is a lecher "by the talk around her" (10). But in the garret, Brent learns that she is relatively free from Flint's designs by his talk in the street (103). Outside the garret, Flint writes notes that compel Brent to appear before him, making her subject to his written will (52). In the garret, Linda writes letters that compel Flint to travel to New York, making him subject to hers (102). Outside the domain of the garret, Brent's body is the object of Flint's lascivious gaze (28), but within it, Flint's body becomes the object of Brent's gaze (93). And, finally, prior to entering the garret, Brent cannot purchase her children; but while trapped within it, Flint sells them in the hopes of spiting the fugitive mother (85).

To be sure, the garret is also a space of perilous confinement. Its effects fall only slightly short of being fatal. At one point, in fact, Jacobs goes unconscious for sixteen hours during her second winter in the attic. Her immobility is such that she fears "becoming a cripple" (134) as her limbs often go cold and numb (135). Jacobs remembers herself as unable to move about in any significant way and, moreover, has limited social interaction with the people in the house. She cannot speak to her children at all.

The space of the garret, however, is paradoxically freer by its intensification of the subjugation of slavery. As Jacobs intones, “[y]et there was no place where slavery existed, that could have afforded me so good a place of concealment” (132). So, it is not that the garret is safer because it is apart from slavery in some place eternally removed and outside of it. Rather, its efficacy as a hiding place as well as a trope for Jacobs’s power comes from its incredible complicity with slavery. It renders Brent a literal prisoner in her grandmother’s house and a slave to the confines of the attic. From the perspective of a controlling master, such power over the slave’s body could be understood as the singular achievement of domination. And, at the same time, Brent’s binding to her grandmother’s house and her physical immobility within it make her essentially invisible to Flint. He can no longer see, speak or approach her, except when she chooses to make herself available to him (as in the letter writing campaign). In this way, by superficially following the mandates of slavery (constriction, immobility, self-effacement), Brent occupies a space that is strategically beyond its surveillance. In short, the garret works, to employ Maggie Sale’s language, precisely because it is, quite literally, a “critique from within.”

This counterintuitive logic finds acute expression in the figure of the trickster, with which Jacobs was probably well familiar. As Francis Smith Foster suggests, perhaps from an elusive figure like Brer Rabbit, “[. . .] Linda understood that physical superiority or social status is not necessarily the deciding factor in any contest” (63). Brent seems to confirm her knowledge of such a tradition with her references to the African inspired Johnkannu festival of dancing and masking that she dramatizes at the beginning of her narrative. And though she does not specifically mention Brer Rabbit,

she mentions other animal figures that populate African American, Native American and Anglo-American incarnations of the trickster.⁴⁶ At one point when she fakes her location in the North, Brent scoffs, “Did the old fox suppose I was goose enough to go into such a trap?” (135). At another point while she is in the garret, Brent recalls Mary Howitt’s poem “The Spider and the Fly,” which presents a wonderful metaphor of her and Flint’s sparring. Brent muses, “Come up into my parlor,’ said the spider to the fly” (145), a clear signification on the web of misconceptions and misdirections in which Brent has entangled Flint.

But the evasiveness of the ingenious rabbit provides the most telling clue of the garret’s importance to Brent. In one telling of the famed story, the rabbit is thrown by his enemies into the briar patch as punishment for avoiding work. While his foes believe it to be his sure end, he joyfully exclaims: “Whup-pee, my God, you couldn’t throw me in a better place! There were my mammy born me, in the briar patch” (“Tar Baby” 64). In the context of Jacobs’s *Incidents*, this is quite literally the case. The place that forms her prison is also her grandmother’s home and the place of Brent’s birth; what confines and restricts her also frees her from her pursuers and binds her closer to her family. Flint’s literal inability to find her reflects Brent’s narrative evasion of Flint and the space of her authority. As Francis Smith Foster has noted, Jacobs finds her freedom by not “fleeing the site of conflict” (65). Her “physical and textual strategies succeed,” Michelle Burnham concurs, “because they mime – sometimes to the point of hyperbole – those systems or discourses that otherwise oppress her” (155). Brent’s resistance is realized through her constriction.

In this light, it is more than ironic that Brent writes from her grandmother's North Carolina garret in the South. For so many other slave narrators, the ability to write comes upon reaching the North. But Jacobs's garret becomes her North. Upon seeing that Flint believes her residence in the North to be "genuine," Brent reveals: "I resolved, therefore, to continue to write letters from the north from time to time" (134). In the space of the garret, Brent re-members her self-imprisonment as one that is freeing, even akin to being in the North. In turn, her mastery by the physical constraints of the garret facilitates her mastery over Flint.

Family Ties

In addition to the excellent observations of Burnham, Foster, and others, there are other ways that the garret is empowering for the narrator. Specifically, its representation permits her to illustrate a space that would have powerfully resonated with many antebellum mothers: the womb. In *Incidents*, the garret functions as a space of reproduction through which Brent is variously figured as a fetus living in a womb and as a mother who has just given birth. Her subtle and sensitive portrayal of these moments, in turn, endears her to a community of white female mothers who would have understood biological reproduction as the most sacred of offices. As a result, Brent's changing relationships to the womb mark her both as a protected and loved child and as a respectable and protecting mother.

It should be noted that at mid-century the womb was a contested symbol that often marked women's exclusion from public and civic life and, moreover, their ultimate enslavement to their bodies. In *Disorderly Conduct*, Carrol-Smith Rosenberg explains

that women's reproductive organs were understood as marking them as not only fundamentally different, but inferior, to men. As one political satirist rehearsed the prejudice, "How funny it would sound in the newspapers, that Lucy Stone, pleading a cause, took suddenly ill in the pains of parturition, and perhaps gave birth to a fine bouncing boy in court" (qtd. in Sanchez-Eppler 30). In the previous scene, the womb threatens to overstep the boundaries of order in the court room, thus making women unfit for public and legal life. Furthermore, it characterizes women as unpredictable and hyper-embodied. Significantly, it is at the critical moment of speech that parturition occurs, replacing the legible and privileged utterance of a lawyer's "plea" with the seemingly illegible and frantic outburst of a woman in labor. In short, though wombs are ironically necessary for the production of "fine bouncing boys," they still preclude women's participation in typically male affairs.

As reflected in the garret, however, the womb is not a sign of women's exclusion from public life. Indeed, the garret is seen as a natural extension of the most important maternal structure in the account, Brent's grandmother's house. Her grandmother's house is where she gives birth to her own children (Jacobs 110). It is "[to] this good grandmother" that Jacobs describes herself as being "indebted for many comforts" (3). When she is denied proper sustenance and clothing at Dr. Flint's, it is her grandmother who provides her food as well as clothing (7-8). And after her mistress dies, Brent is sent for a short stay at her grandmother's before she is taken possession of by the five year old daughter of Flint.

These maternal connections between Brent and her grandmother find expression in Jacobs's depiction of the garret. Indeed, if her grandmother's house is imagined as a womb, then Brent is a fetus within it. Of her first night in the crawl space, she recalls:

Morning came. I knew it only by the noises I heard; for in my small den day and night were all the same [. . .]. This continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light. Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave though white people considered it an easy one; and it was so compared with the fate of others. (128)

So, like a fetus, Jacobs finds her safety quite literally inside her grandmother's home.

And like a fetus, she finds protection and sustenance within the womb created by the crawl space. It is the place in which Jacobs sleeps and eats and which provides for the basic needs of her existence (91-94). Conversely, if Brent is the "cramped" but protected fetus, then "Aunty Marthy" is presented as the nurturing mother. The text frequently references the grandmother's concern over Brent's prolonged hiding, almost as one would stress over a seemingly endless pregnancy. Too, as a mother would talk to an unborn that she cannot see, Aunt Marthy speaks to Brent (92). So, here again, as Brent notes of her grandmother's previous kindnesses, she acts as a "mother to her orphaned grandchildren" (17). Against her alienation from maternal care in childhood, Jacobs constructs a relatively safe and removed space ("compared with the fate of others") for maternal connections in the garret.

Now, for twenty-first century readers, it is clear that Jacobs's representation comes uncannily close to positioning Brent as an unborn fetus in her grandmother's crawl space. But for antebellum women, such a direct connection might have been probable as well. As evidenced by the antebellum and post-bellum success of Charles Morrill's *The Physiology of Woman and Her Diseases from Infancy to Old Age, Including All those of*

her critical periods, pregnancy and Childbirth; Their Causes, Symptoms, and Appropriate Treatment, with Hygenic Rules for their Treatment, which went through at least eight editions during the nineteenth century, antebellum women knew something of (or had access to information about) fetuses' experience of pregnancy. In Morill's treatise, for example, he included detailed descriptions and, sometimes, pictures of the growth of the fetus in the womb (297), thus giving antebellum women a sense of how their babies lived before entering the outside world. What is more, though less so today, for instance, nineteenth century medical professionals and lay people often referred to childbirth or labor as "confinement." And though the narrator never explicitly uses the word in reference to the garret, perhaps no other word best describes the "cramped position" (92) Jacobs remains in for most of her time in the crawl space. Read in this way, the narrative's re-membering of the garret presents Brent as bridging the maternal connection that was so prematurely interrupted by her mother's death. She is mothered in the garret in a way that is scarcely available in Flint's world of overexposure.

In her drawing of the garret, Brent also re-presents herself as the protective mother of her children. In the sacrificial language of a mother, she reveals, "I tried to be thankful for my little cell," Jacobs explains, "dismal as it was, and even to love it, as part of the price I had paid for the redemption of my children" (137). Later, when Jacobs descends from the garret to negotiate her children's freedom from Mr. Sands, she emerges as one who has just given birth. "I found myself so stiff and clumsy," Jacobs bemoans,

that it was with great difficulty I could hitch from one resting place to another. When I reached the storeroom my ankles gave way under me, and I sank exhausted on the floor. It seemed as if I could never use my

limbs again [. . .] . I crawled on my hands and knees to the window, and screened behind a barrel, I waited for his coming. (99)

This is a critical moment in Jacobs's representation of her literal captivity and maternal confinement. The impending conversation between her and Sands will determine the status of her children. Will he, in fact, free them as promised? Hence, the success of her labor here is critical to the birth of her children as free subjects. Accordingly, Jacobs's ambulatory difficulties suggest the gait of one who has just given birth: exhausted and weak. This laboring, both in terms of her arguments to Sands as well as her bodily suffering in the crawl space, would have potentially endeared her towards nineteenth century American "daughters and mothers."

What is more, Jacobs describes the discomforts of the garret in ways that would have been generally consistent with the difficulties of pregnancy and childbirth. As Sally McMillen explains in *Motherhood in the Old South*, antebellum parturition was often accompanied by incredible pain and extended suffering and that "no other occupation of the antebellum period was as hazardous or as demanding" (1). Similarly, the same "headaches, fevers, stomach pains, and general debility" that many Southern women experienced (44) is also characteristic of Brent's confinement. Too, both biological confinement and Brent's confinement necessitated medical intervention. In one instance, Brent goes unconscious for sixteen hours and is subsequently delirious (97). It is unclear if similar drugs were used for those who were pregnant such as calomel, laudanum, or morphine. But we do have this admission from Brent: "[. . .] they stupefied me with drugs" (97). Upon the failure of continued bed rest – a treatment for the trials of pregnancy, then and now – William sees a "Thompsonian doctor," who prescribes a series of "herbs, roots, and ointment" to be applied "by a fire" (97). Interestingly, the

practice of Thomsonian medicine had come to its rise in the decade just before Brent's pregnancies and was often used to treat the symptoms of pregnancy (McMillen 12). But as with many antebellum pregnancies, the presence of the woman's mother was most desirable to ease tension and produce relief. And, similarly, Molly Horniblow makes repeated checks on her laboring (grand)daughter.

Inasmuch as it rehearses the sufferings of motherhood, the garret might be said to symbolize Brent's entrance into what McMillen has called the "sacred" occupation that was antebellum female reproduction (12). Parturition could be said to bind women together in at least two ways. First, the confinement of pregnancy produced what were believed to be inimitable bonds between the child and its mother (McMillen 55). As a result of the exigencies of childbirth, women were thought to have unique influence over their children. Secondly, the labors of pregnancy and parturition tied (white) women together in a revered community of child bearers. "Whatever their sentiments toward the act of giving birth," McMillen concludes, "both men and women regarded motherhood as the premier occupation of southern women" (32). Hence, to be a mother was also to be a sister with other women.

As detailed above, Brent's relationship to this highest of offices, as well as to sisterhood with white females, was fraught. She is not married at the time of conception, regards her sexual encounter as a strategy, and enters into a sexual union with a white man – all marks against her claiming the title of respectable mother. Too, as a biracial person, her own parentage further marked her as one who was potentially unworthy of "true womanhood." However, the garret becomes, I maintain, a way for Jacobs to communicate the unique distress and joy of her literal and figurative labors for her

children. The depiction of Brent's hardships in the garret becomes the sublimated representation of the maternal labors that the text represses. In so doing, Jacobs opens a space in her narrative to be considered equal according to the overlapping (though not identical) reproductive experiences of free and enslaved antebellum women.

To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that this was necessarily Jacobs's intention or that there is some one-to-one correlation between crawl space and the female womb. Rather, I mean to state that the language and scenes informing the crawl space signify on the reproductive process and women's privileged role within that process. As throughout the account, narrative details are marked by what Frances Smith Foster calls "undertell," the ways that delicacy and modesty "demanded that narrators systematically come short of the 'truth'" (77). So, by moving from the constrictive "demands of referentiality" and the "politics of transparency" that defines the reading of black women's writing (77), we can better see how the crawl space also references Brent's "alienated and fragmented maternities." The articulation and reclamation of these maternities are crucial to Brent's status as a daughter and mother and as one who has completed the cycle from girl to her own vision of the "true woman."

Again, these references are more implicit than explicit, but they fit within the framework of delicacy, undertell, and, of course, concealment that have marked the representation of reproduction. For instance, in a comment that she makes when descending from the garret shortly before sending Ellen to the north, we learn that she birthed Ellen in her grandmother's house. On returning to the room of her childhood, she states,

memories crowded on me! There I had taken shelter when my mistress drove me from her house; there came my old tyrant, to mock, insult, and

curse me; there my children were first laid in my arms; there I had watched over them, each day with a deeper and sadder love; there I had knelt to God, in anguish of heart, to forgive the wrong I had done. (emphasis added 110)

Snuggled and smuggled in with the other critical moments of her life (in sentimental and delicate language), Brent reveals that her baby was born in her grandmother's house. What is more, all of the particulars of the trying pregnancy – why the child was born premature, the messy details of childbirth, the agony of labor – are reduced to a sentimental and sanitized “children” in “arms.”

Though for present day readers such references might seem needlessly subdued, for antebellum readers and writers they seemed perfectly consistent with the principle of “delicacy.” “I do this for the sake of my sisters in bondage,” intones Lydia Maria Child, “who are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them” (6). In other words, the implied readership of the account could not be expected to process graphic or “foul” details in indelicate terms. In this sense, delicacy did not mean the disavowal of harsh realities, but their careful presentation. Jacobs herself was invested in this form of “delicacy” as a means of controlling and re-presenting the incredible trauma of her own life. When she first arrives in the North, Brent recalls of a friendly, but enquiring abolitionist, “He was approaching a subject on which I was extremely sensitive. He would ask about my husband next, I thought, and if I answered him truly, what would he think of me?” The gaze of others demands that Jacobs not tackle her own life too directly. Rather, what she prefers is the implied and subtle understanding exemplified in the abolitionist's wife, Mrs. Durham. Brent admires her because she does not ask direct questions and by that communicates “the delicate silence of womanly sympathy” (128). Quite significantly, Ellen knows of the vexed context in which she was

conceived and born but refuses to address it directly with her mother. When Brent finally broaches the subject with her, she discovers Ellen already knows. Brent proudly declares: “But I loved the dear girl better for the delicacy she had manifested towards her unfortunate mother” (146).

Given that the conventions of “delicacy” govern white and black women’s responses to and characterizations of sensitive/sexual/bodily information, we should not expect Jacobs to divulge the complete conditions of her children’s birth. Or rather, we should not expect them to be divulged openly. Explicit references would have been “indelicate,” not only for Jacobs’s readers, but clearly for her. But more to my larger point, these delicate or nuanced representations of pregnancy and birthing probably would have endeared her to her readers. As a specifically women’s domain for much of the antebellum era, the event of childbirth was a space that might have solidified her position in a community of childbearing and childrearing women. By virtue of its restrictions and rights, the garret becomes a metaphor for her connection to her mother as well as her labor for her children. Ultimately, the garret ironically symbolizes the narrator’s long cherished wish, as she states when she finally is reunited with Ellen in the North, “to be entirely free to act a mother’s part towards my children” (133). Through her representation of her many labors in the garret, she “acts the part of a mother.”

A Room of One’s Own

The powerful and anti-patriarchal nature of the “I” produced under Jacobs’s slavery is powerfully suggested by the garret as well. In microcosm, her letter writing in the garret reflects the way that *Incidents* is meant to be read like a personal letter

submitted to the white women of the north, albeit through the diffuse mediations of mid-century publication. The letter provided a form in which many middle class white women felt comfortable expressing themselves autobiographically. As Carol Smith-Rosenburg notes in *Disorderly Conduct*, “The letters and diaries of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women” make apparent “a female world of great emotional strength and complexity” (28). Through letter writing, then, women could share and build intimate bonds. Writ large, both titles of the text, *Linda* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, suggest the ways that the “I” related to epistolary forms of telling, one a personal letter by “Linda” and the other from a black collective relating “Incidents.” So, even if denied the form of the “I” as subjects of or participators in world affairs, many women understood letters as providing a space in which they could more comfortably assume the autobiographical “I.”

If we recall, Jacobs discusses writing her life by way of a series of letters to her female white friend, Amy Post (Yelin 119-20). Then, her first foray into the public sphere is her letter in *The New York Tribune* to First Lady Tyler’s opinion of the suitability of blacks for slavery (Yellin 122). Later in the Civil War and in Reconstruction, Jacobs would write letters about the unfortunate state of refugees and freedpersons in the south, from Alexandria, Savannah, and Washington (Yellin 158). Especially from woman to woman, then, the letter was an acceptable site to relay information and write autobiographically.

At mid century, of course, the lives of slaves had become particularly popular, which worked in tandem with the epistolary form to provide Jacobs with a model of life writing. As she tells Amy Post in 1853 of her decision to tell her story publicly, “Now is

the time when their (sic) is so much excitement everywhere” (qtd. in *A Life* 119).

Previously in 1845, of course, Douglass’s *Narrative* had centered the slave narrative in national consciousness. But especially after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 (as part of the Compromise of 1850), national interest had begun to peak in the life of the slave. And in 1853, a slew of slave narrators were working on new life narratives, including Douglass, William Grimes, Austin Seward and Samuel Ringold Ward. Then as Jacobs completed her manuscript in 1859, John Brown’s raid of Harper’s Ferry further incited interest in slavery and the life of the slave. Along with these extra-textual factors, the form of the letter further buttressed her attempts to script her life.

Equally important, just as much as the letters produced in the garret helps women to communicate with each other, the letters confuse and misdirect the efforts of hostile men. As Brent confesses of her letter writing campaign in her narrative, “It was a great object to keep up this delusion, for it made me and my friends less anxious, and it would be very convenient whenever there was a chance to escape” (147). Indeed, when Flint receives and reads Brent’s letters, he feels he literally has a firm grasp on her intentions to free her children and her location in the North. As presented in the account, this is his main reason for traveling to New York, to find Brent based on the details included in the letter. Significantly, Flint’s literal reading of the letter overlooks the way the letter is not a replica of reality, but merely Brent’s re-presentation of what Flint desires. His inability to appreciate this eventually results in the sale of Brent’s children, the narrative re-members, to their own father.

So, though the letter presents itself to Flint as the transparent revelation of Brent’s will, it in fact speaks in ways that he does not anticipate and threatens to divest him of his

so-called property. When Flint comes to “Aunt Marthy” with the bogus letter he has constructed, Brent’s grandmother is fully aware of his chicanery. As a result, the letter only confirms Flint’s base character, and does not serve as the catalyst for the revelation of his allegedly magnanimous character, as he hopes it will be. As envisioned from the scenes relating to Jacobs’s crawl space, letter writing thus effects the literal freedom of bondspeople.

If we take the garret as the model for enslaved women’s autobiographical production, then a number of facts become clear about the narrative. The “I” that is produced in *Incidents* is one that is specifically related to the “I”s of other women. It is written in an autobiographical form that was familiar to and functional for women. This point specifically relates to the language of delicacy that infuses the text. Though a seeming sign of weakness by some readers, this delicacy is, in fact, a kind of shorthand that is misrecognized and overlooked by other readers. To be sure, even between white and black women, letters had dramatically different meanings, as the letters between Brent and Flint’s daughter suggest. But as rehearsed between Flint and Brent, the letter is a tool specifically available to women for their self-expression that is beyond the understanding of slaveholding men.

Like the letter that Brent writes from the garret, the autobiographical “I” of *Incidents* emerges out of exigency, but it also works in secrecy. It is shrouded in the language of delicacy and concealment, making it difficult to be understood by those who may not share its imperatives, as is encoded in Flint’s clumsy handling of the letters. Hence, letter writing in the crawl space, and autobiographical writing in *Incidents*, is about creating fictions that speak truly and yet resist detection and manipulation. In this

sense, the garret becomes the paradoxical “room of one’s own” inasmuch as it provides a model for writing and self shaping that evades detection and speaks to the needs of dispossessed women.

When combined with our previous discussion of how Jacobs establishes her position as a mother within the representation of the crawl space, it becomes clear that the garret becomes the gateway to her identity as a writer and mother. Both subject positions proceeded from the exigencies and ironic prerogatives of captivity. Her ability to play the part of her mother as well as play the role of a life writer are contextualized and realized through her bondage.

⁴³ See Burnham, Sartwell, and Foster.

⁴⁴ In 1622, following the precedent set by Roman law, Virginia was the first state to declare that children would follow the condition of the mother. In contrast, by English common law, the child followed the condition of the father. For further discussion, see Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*.

⁴⁵ In light of the technique of “undertelling,” one also wonders about the assaults Flint has made through and by way of her “ears.” In many ways, the ear becomes the narrative’s symbol of sexual violation which, on the surface, it never reveals is carried out. Smith Foster has suggested that this violation may have actually taken place, but like, her, I agree that it is an issue that must necessarily remain “indeterminate.” For an extended reading of hearing and violation in the text, see Deborah M. Garfield’s “Earwitness: Female Abolitionism, Sexuality, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.”

⁴⁶ See Jeanne Reesman’s *Trickster Lives* for a discussion of the interconnected use of tricksters in several cultures.

Chapter V

Authorizing Whiteness in *The Narrative of Robert Adams, a Sailor* (1816)

Judging from the experiences and narratives of Mary Jemison, Henry Bibb, and Harriet Jacobs, it might appear that the emergence of authority is limited to captivities within the continental U.S. But a considerable number of American subjects were also taken and held hostage in a non-American setting. Several hundred U.S. soldiers, for example, were captured in (what is now) Mexico during the Mexican American War. Too, significant numbers of American seamen were impressed aboard British and other European vessels in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As suggested by *The Narrative of Robert Adams: A Barbary Captive* (1816), though, North Africa was an especially important site for the capture and confinement of American subjects.

Robert Allison notes that roughly 700 American captives were captured between 1785 and 1815. The single largest of these American captivities occurred when the U.S. refused to pay the Bashaw of Tripoli the required tributes, resulting in the capture of 300 American seamen from the *U.S.S. Philadelphia*. Paul Baepler explains that these captives' accounts and others went through roughly 100 editions between 1798 and 1817 (24). These substantial numbers are borne out by the narratives of travelers, merchants, and sailors such as Joshua Padduck, James Cathcart, and especially James Riley, whose narrative is the best-selling account of all Barbary captivity narratives.

In this way, North African or Barbary captivity offered European-American males (and sometimes females) a “garret” of sorts, a geographical space associated with bondage that signified in authoritative ways.⁴⁷ Once on the “dark continent,” many captives were bound, tied, and chained in bleak cells. Others were compelled to travel several hundred miles through and across the desert, sometimes carrying heavy loads, going without water and food, and suffering other privations. But just as Jacobs’s garret does for her, Barbary captivity prompted and permitted the assumption and representation of subject positions that had been implicit, difficult, or impossible in other contexts.

Also as in Jacobs’s narrative, the garret as re-membered is also a space for various kinds of ideological and narrative reproductions. North African captives were compelled to reproduce themselves (and were reproduced) according to specific religious, cultural, or social codes. Only a few pages into the narrative, Adams encounters a Frenchman who maintains that he had not “turned Mohammedan,” but he still “dressed like a Moor” (216), implying some ambiguity about the status of the Frenchman’s national and cultural identity. And though clearly not born in slavery, the threat of biological and physical transformation never seems far from the surface of Adams’s tale. Of newborns in Timbuktu, the narrator recalls, “The infants are at first of a reddish colour,” Adams objectively relates, “but become black in three or four days” (226). Implicitly, the statement seems to ask, how long will it take before Adams’s cultural gestation in North Africa replicates this biological model? If African born infants become black in three or four days, how long will it take American born and even “mulatto” captives? In this sense, North Africa and its various captivities constitute another “birth” for Adams through a quite literal berth across the sea. And, of course, once they returned from

Africa, if only by virtue of the lure of the unknown continent, ex-captives were often requested to produce oral accounts, if not written ones, of their experiences.

Prompted by the models of cultural, biological, and narrative reproduction presented here, the next portion of this chapter explores the ways that authority emerges from the reproductions demanded by North African slavery. Especially for the “American mulatto,” who was already understood as a type of racial chameleon, how did North African captivity authorize forbidden or empowering identities?

North African Slaveries

North African slavery was markedly different from nineteenth-century American antebellum slavery for a number of reasons. But the most important reason was that there were at least two distinct, but overlapping, forms of captivity existing at the same time: the Islamic slave trade and the indigenous African slave trade.

Considered more of a strategic ploy rather than a discrete institution, Barbary captivity was nonetheless an important reality of European American seafaring in the early nineteenth-century Mediterranean. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the states that constituted North Africa – Morocco, Tunisia, Tripoli, Algiers – all had seafaring contingencies that demanded tributes in order to guarantee foreign vessels’ safe passage (Nickerson 77). As ABC Whipple notes, “By the late eighteenth century, when [Thomas] Jefferson confronted the problem in France, piracy and the white slave trade had become the major industry of the North African coast” (20). Typically, hostages would be held for weeks or months until they were ransomed back to their respective countries or traded throughout the North African coast.

This strategic and local manifestation of captivity operated within the context of the much wider and far reaching practice of Islamic slavery. As an outgrowth of Islamic holy wars, Shaun Marmon explains, the Islamic slave trade spread throughout several regions, from Saudi Arabia to the Middle East, India, North Africa, and eventually to the Sudan. It was grounded in the belief that if slaves would convert to Islam, then they would be freed or at least be eligible for emancipation. It is in this sense that Paul E. Lovejoy characterizes Islamic slavery as a “religious apprenticeship for pagans” (16). In practice, of course, Muslims often enslaved other Muslims; but, even so, Islamic slavery was built upon a fundamental opposition between Muslim and non-Muslim, which was routinely read as Christian.

These “pagans” were taken from the Caucasus, Circassia, the Crimea, North Africa and other supply centers to markets in Istanbul and throughout the Islamic world. As Bernard Lewis makes clear in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, this traffic in white slaves had dominated much of Islamic slavery up until the nineteenth century. But when the availability of European slaves diminished, “black Africa” (South of the Sahara) became an increasingly economical choice. By the early nineteenth century, black Africans constituted a significant supply of slave labor for the Islamic world (Lewis 73). Between 1801-1867, for example, roughly 1.2 million Islamic slaves had been transported through the trans-Saharan trade (Lovejoy 137).

The success of the Islamic slave trade in “black Africa” was facilitated by the presence of an indigenous and self-contained form of African bondage: “lineage slavery.” In the indigenous African slave trade, groups such as the Mandingo, Ibo, and Fulani enslaved the members of tribes with which they were at war. Various understood as a

form of punishment, a means of gaining human sacrifices, or simply harvesting the spoils of war, slavery practically meant that subjects were alienated from kinship ties. “In this setting,” Lovejoy explains, “people had slaves along with other types of dependants, but society was not organized in such a manner that slavery was a central institution. These were not slave societies” (13). As a result, the line between captive and captor could eventually be crossed as the captive became apart of the local kinship system through intermarriage, childbirth, and communal living. After the intervention of European demand for slaves in the Atlantic slave trade, the line between free and unfree became more pronounced in lineage slavery. Lovejoy explains, “The pull of the market had the effect of pushing indigenous forms of slavery further away from a social framework in which slavery was another form of dependency in societies based on kinship relationships to a system in which slaves played an increasingly important role in the economy” (18). Though not taking on the ideological assumption of fundamental inferiority that many Europeans held towards Africans, indigenous African slavery nonetheless transformed from a marginal system to a central one by the early nineteenth century.

Adams’s 1810 shipwreck bears him into this bubbling cauldron of complementary and competing slaveries. According to his narrative, he is taken captive by Moors on the North African coast (Barbary captivity) and then later captured by a band of Negroes (indigenous African slavery). The realities and representations attendant to these two modes of bondage inform the figuration of identity in Robert Adams’s *Narrative*.

The Narrative of Robert Adams

American seaman Robert Adams's account of North Africa captivity was first published in London in 1816 as *The Narrative of Robert Adams, a Sailor, who was Wrecked on the Western Coast of Africa, in the Year 1810, was Detained Three Years in Slavery by the Arabs of the Great Desert, and Resided Several Months in the City of Tombuctoo.*⁴⁸ It was based on the "American mulatto's" interrogation by Simon Cock and other members of the Committee of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa (or the African Company), a London based organization that had recently become interested in exploring Africa. The secretary and government liaison for the committee, Simon Cock, had heard of Adams tale from another acquaintance and, upon seeing Adams destitute in London, offered him food and clothing for the recollection of his journey. Along with Joseph Dupuis, the North African Vice-Consul who ransoms Adams, Cock writes, constructs, and edits the details provided to him by Adams. Hence, the tale is strictly biographical, although it does contain incidental uses of Adams's actual "expressions."

The actual content of the narrative proper is divided into four chapters, each of which corresponds to a phase in his captivity. In chapter one, Adams sets off from New York while aboard a British trading vessel bound for the Island of May. Eventually, the vessel runs aground off the coast of El Gazie, some several hundred miles north of Senegal, and the seamen are forced to abandon the ship. Upon swimming ashore, they are captured by Moors who abuse and harass them as they lead them into the desert. Sometime thereafter, as the Moors are attempting to steal indigenous Africans, the Moors and their captives are themselves taken as prisoners by a group of "Negroes." It is at this point, now chapter two, that the band of shipwrecked captives and Moors are taken to

Timbuktu. During his six month stay, the narrative recalls, Adams becomes the cherished captive and houseguest of the King and Queen. He receives the mildest treatment of his captivity here. In chapter three, Adams and the rest of the Moors are ransomed out of Timbuktu by another band of Moors, and he soon finds himself abused as he was in chapter 1. Finally, in chapter 4, after being traded to several more harsh Arab masters, Adams finds his way to the British Vice-Consul at Mogadore. There, he is eventually ransomed, makes his way to England, and looks for a way to gain passage back to America.

The most spectacular (and unbelievable) portion of the tale is its account of Timbuktu. Accordingly, the year after its English publication, the *North American Review* lambasted most of the document, calling it a “gross attempt to impose on the credulity of the publick” (162). More recently, but in more measured terms, Ann Fabian suggests that it is impossible to determine the relation of the lived events of Adams life to the written representation in his narrative (29). But the entire narrative, she suspects, may well be a “cock and bull story” (30). However, Charles Hansford Adams’s critical edition concludes that much of the narrative is credible, though large parts of it are clearly fabricated or based on gross misinformation. Aside from the usual indictments against historical re-creation, Adams surmises that all that pertains to the Barbary captivity narrative (chapters 1,3,4) more or less corresponds to Adams’s lived experience. And virtually all that pertains to Timbuktu (chapter 2) is fabricated. Based on what was discovered of Timbuktu when Europeans finally set foot in the city in the 1830’s, as well as what is known from present day scholarship, Adams’s “Tombocoo” appears to be the “cock and bull” story Ann Fabian calls it. To wit, according to the account’s depiction,

there are no Muslims or signs of Islam in early nineteenth century Timbuktu. In truth, at least since the Middle Ages, Timbuktu has been and remains to this day strongly influenced by Islamic culture (Saad 10). Even more strikingly, Adams's narrative evacuates all Muslims from Timbuktu and populates it with a group of black Africans who have "no public religion" (42).

The question becomes, since the representation of Timbuktu is fabricated, why fabricate and what does it mean? What effect does its particular construction have in the narrative? In response to these queries, scholars have read Timbuktu's place in the account variously: as a function of Robert Adam's desire for money, status, and a way back to America; as the African Company's desire for knowledge and power in relation to Africa; as the propensity for exaggeration in travel narratives; and as an extension of the Orientalist imperatives of the Barbary captivity narrative.⁴⁹ Of the evacuation of all Muslims from the city, in particular, Charles Adams notes:

This view of Timbuctoo is, historically, the most implausible part of Adams's story, but considered in relation to the conventions of the captivity genre, it helps confirm the hero's essential role as a Christian martyr thrown into an Islamic lion's den. (xv)

Hence, according to "anti-Islamic rhetoric" found throughout many Barbary captivity narratives (xv), Adams contends, the representation is perfectly consistent. Furthermore, the effect is to solidify or encourage Adams's reading as a "Christian martyr."

This reading and accounting of Timbuktu is important and, in many ways, supports my own thesis about captivity and authority. In its difference from Islamic slavery, Charles Adams appears to imply, the slavery of indigenous Africans in chapter two actually underscores his position as an empowered captive, one who has mastered his masters. His repeated rehearsal of beating and mistreatment under Hamet Laubed, Bel

Cossim and other Muslim masters in chapters 3 and 4 only underscore his power over them (Cock 53,61). Charles Adams elaborates: “Through it all, the victim maintains his moral integrity, doing what is necessary to survive and ultimately escape, while resisting the constant temptation to descend to his captors’ depravity or accept their false religion” (xlv). This model of Barbary captivity is also evident in the narrative of James Riley, published just the year before Adams, and other contemporaneous accounts.

At the same time, while such a reading suggests the power encoded in Adams’s North African captivity, it glosses over two important and related points. First, irrespective of the Barbary captivity narrative, the representation of Timbuktu constitutes its own captivity account with its own distinct meanings and valuations. To read the illustration of Timbuktu only as a function of Barbary captivity is to ignore the complex figurations of Chapter 2.

Secondly, Adams is not a “typical” white captive posing as a Christian within the frame of Islamic slavery; he is, according to his own amanuensis, an “American mulatto.” As the only known Barbary captivity narrative by an African American, the discovery and representation of Timbuktu, in particular, takes on meanings that exceed and are different from those of white captives. Against this idea, Charles Adams argues, “[Adams’s lack of] credibility was understood to be a function of his class and his education, but only implicitly his race” (xliv). But his race becomes explicit at several points through his narrative and, thus, informs our reading of Adams within and beyond the Muslim/Christian divide. The representation of Timbuktu, I argue, is also about the ways that the figure of the “mulatto” is prone to extend and interrupt the narrative of Euro-American domination made available by North African captivity.

So, to whom does this complex authority belong? Of the text's "achievement," (although we disagree on the nature of that achievement) Charles Adams argues that it is overwhelmingly on the side of Cock, Dupuis, and other more respectable white figures. I would not totally disagree. As I will be detailing further below, far more than any other text considered in this study, these editors fashion and create his narrative. At the same time, his narrative as a whole and his confinement in Timbuktu more specifically compel them to authorize him. Their status is bound up within his status, and as a result they must make him over into their own image. And there is the rub. Their inability to completely do so complicates theirs and his narrative and cultural authority. They tell a tale that is partly one of a doubly white and black man's journey to the "center" of Africa.

The African Company

Any power in (or of) the narrative to extend, produce, or revise narrative identities proceeds, in part, from changing Euro-American interests in North Africa. The African Company's specific relationship to Africa offers an incredible allegory of those changing interests. In the previous century, the African Company and Simon Cock had been in the business that characterized much of England's relationship with West and North Africa for much of the eighteenth century: the Atlantic slave trade. The company was in fact responsible for "20% of the British slave trade to the New World between 1690 and 1800" (xxiv). However, with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the African Company was compelled to change the object of its mission. Instead of trading human property, they now traded in more modest goods such as cloths, precious metals, and, that most valuable of nineteenth century commodities: knowledge about Africa. But they

were woefully behind and, furthermore, regarded as still harboring the slave trading sentiments of the previous century.

As typified by Joseph Banks and his Royal Association, which had sponsored the exploration of such distinguished African explorers as Mungo Park, other groups had long and distinguished non-slave related histories of African exploration. The African Company desperately wanted and needed to be a part of this coterie, as its existence depended on the renewal of a government charter. This, in fact, is why Cock notes that Adams experience might be useful to “the expedition actually on foot” (208) by a Major John Peddie, another North African explorer. But as Charles Adams reveals, Peddie was actually sponsored by the Colonial Office, a government agency, and not directly tied to efforts or imperatives of the African Company (xxix). In other words, the narrative was meant to solidify their position within the new governmental hierarchy and secure future financial support. Indeed, just days after the completion of Adams’s manuscript, Cock would go before the parliament to defend the Company’s expenditures for the previous years (xxvi). And only five years later, the African Company would eventually fold after government withdrawal of support (xxv).

Adams’s unexpected North African captivity and consequent adventures in the interior provided a fortuitous inroad into this burgeoning field, for anyone with first hand experience with the African interior, but especially Timbuktu, was uniquely esteemed in early nineteenth century European eyes. As Frank Kryz makes clear in *The Race for Timbuktu*, ever since Mansa Musa’s fourteenth century frolic through North Africa bearing gold bars carried by thousands of attendants, Timbuktu stood for the transcendental signifier of economic power, cultural authority, and imperial knowledge

(xiv). Though greatly overestimated according to European reports, the city was in truth an actual crossroads of Moorish trading routes as well as a hub for Islamic learning and political power (*Saad* 22). Fed by European desire and speculation, however, the city was understood as ultimately and inevitably conquerable, as suggested by one of its many pseudonyms, the emporium of Africa. Adams's narrative clearly participates in this meta-narrative of white domination of an African interior.

But of course, such a claim to Africa was usually expressed more benevolently.

“At a time when the civilization and improvement of Africa,” an appendix in the narrative confesses,

and the extension of our intercourse with the natives of that long-neglected country, seem to be among the leading objects of the British government and nation, -- and when, with these views, great exertions are making to procure information respecting the interior of that vast and unknown continent; the following account of Tombuctoo, and the trade and navigation of the Niger, may perhaps prove not altogether uninteresting.
(125)

The African Company understood Adams's exceptional experience and subsequent narrative as helping to make its claim on these “leading objects.”

In such a situation, the African Company was just as dependent on Adams for relevant information as he was on them for money, food, and the means of publication. His incredible narrative of captivity was his intellectual capital among these learned and distinguished men. Furthermore, this was not a capital that he exclusively possessed, but rather was a function of the relationship between those who experienced the “facts” of captivity and those who crafted the facts into narrative. In this sense, Robert Adams as biographical subject was both powerful in relation to and under the power of his various editors and benefactors.

North African “I’s”

Most notably, by way of his presumed journey to Timbuktu, Adams becomes the successor of the famed Mungo Park. In the 1790’s, Park had explored the Niger valley and got close to Timbuktu, publishing his account in his widely read *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799), his first person rendition of his experiences. But then, in 1805, he had set off again to determine the directional flow of the Niger and to visit Timbuktu, which had resulted in his death. Chronologically, “Major Peddie’s” expedition would have been the next such European journey to attempt such a feat. However, Adams’s chance captivity in Timbuktu in 1812 privileges him as the actual successor to Park. As presented in the narrative, Adams implicitly and effectively nullifies Peddie’s mission. Short of a commission from the Royal Association or the Colonial Office, it would have been difficult for Adams to be in such an esteemed position.

Furthermore, Adams’s figuration in his narrative presents him according to the empowered model of European exploration found in Park’s published accounts. Just as Park opens up in *Travels* (5), Adams opens with a map, foregrounding the ways the narrative is specifically meant to increase European knowledge of African geography. As Park’s is sponsored by the African Association (*Travels* 4), so Adams’s is backed by the (now) likeminded African Company. Likewise, following the title page, where Park submits his account to the African Association as a “humble servant,” so does Adams’s amanuensis, Cock, sign himself as the “faithful and obedient servant” to the African Company. What is more, the explication of the contents in abstract form (*Travels* 6), the inclusion of testimonials from other authorities within the narrative, the ending of the

project with a glossary of African words, and the citation and analysis of other external sources in an appendix all find uncanny analogues in Park's *Travels*. Hence, by way of his Barbary and Negro captivity, Adams's star becomes hitched to one of the most renowned autobiographical narratives of North African exploration.

Adams's narrative is in quite literal dialogue with the content of Park's travelogue. Several times in the footnotes of the narrative as well as in the extensive discussions afterwards, Adams's observations about the North African interior are compared to Park's statements in his 1799 account. In fact, at several points, the editors reconcile Park's with Adams's observations, suggesting that the two are on comparable footing. In addition to Park, Leo Africanus, that other famed explorer of North Africa, is also cited, and Adams's observations are similarly brought into conversation with his.

Equally important, as in Park's account, captivity is the condition in which Adams explores and maps Africa. At least two separate times in his travels, Park relates that he was held as a captive during his journeys. In his capacity as captive, Park makes observations about his surroundings and the people who detain him. Likewise, Adams's captivity is the opportunity and context for his observations and self-presentation. As a result, captivity literally and literarily adheres to Park's distinguished model of African exploration and life writing.

Conversely, Adams's status as African explorer and narrative subject is also constrained by his relation to Park and his tale. As in Park's *Travels*, numerous additional materials are affixed, so as to underscore and extend the mapping of Africa that the narrative promises. For example, as in Park's *Travels*, when Adams's narrative proper begins, each of the four chapters is introduced by a paragraph long summary of

each of the events, almost point by point recapitulating the details of the narrative. Of course, in Adams's case, these documents are probably multiplied because Adams is understood as an "ignorant" sailor, and not a Scottish explorer. Accordingly, Cock and Dupuis provide some 64 endnotes, totaling some 50 pages, in a document that is only 60 pages in length. Explaining the precise relation of Adams's observations to those of Park, Reichard, Africanus, and other authorities on Africa, these notes constitute an almost entirely separate narrative. This extensive discussion is followed by the "Concluding remarks," totaling almost two dozen pages, where Dupuis again is made to corroborate Adams. Finally, in the twenty pages that make up the two appendices, the Editors again verify more particulars of the account's geography and give a general classification and history of North African inhabitants.

But most damningly against Adams's textual authority, the editors take the scripting of the document out of Adams's hands. "Upwards of fifty gentlemen," the introduction confesses, question Adams about the detail of his narrative (11). What is more,

[. . .] all the information contained in the Narrative was drawn from Adams, not as a continuous strait-forward story, but in answer to the detached, and often unconnected, questions of the Editor, or any of the gentlemen who happened to be present at his examinations; for he related scarcely any thing without his attention being directed to the subject by a special inquiry. (11)

Hence, the questions and questioners are just as, if not more, responsible for controlling the narrative as Adams. Furthermore, they shape the presentation of the narrated subject according to their desire for information about Timbuktu, it "being the point to which the curiosity and inquiries of all his examiners were mainly directed" (11). The process of the composition and representation of the narrative largely rest on the will of Cock, the

African Company, and their associates. In fact, inasmuch as Cock is our only avenue into Adams consciousness, he inhabits the “I.” This is quite literally the case following the title page when he addresses the African Company thusly, “Gentlemen, I beg leave to present you the narrative of the sailor, Robert Adams...” (3). This is Cock’s story told through Adam’s life.

Consequently, Adams maintains an ambivalent position of authority in relation to his text. On the one hand, he is the human subject and subject matter at its center, the seeming face of the African Company as they present themselves to the government and other learned gentlemen. And on the other hand, even if Adams is the face of the African Company, he is without a voice or, at the very least, he is made to say words that are not exactly his. He speaks for and through another. As a result, just as the identity of the face is conditioned by the words that come out of it, so the voice is conditioned by the type of face that we associate with it. In Timbuktu, we see the contest over Adams’s identity as a malleable voice of the African Company and as a face that complicates and exceeds what it might say.

Uncommon Interest

As mentioned above, at the end of chapter one and the beginning of chapter two, the narrative concludes its Barbary captivity narrative portion and segues into a description of a mild and fortuitous detention in Timbuktu. But as Park’s own journey suggests, indigenous Africans were not necessarily receptive to European outsiders (72). Furthermore, as also indicated in his narrative, Moors were often intrigued by their Western visitors (55). Adams’s account on the other hand takes no such subtleties into

account. The Moors are categorically mean and familiar with whites, and the indigenous Africans are categorically amiable and unfamiliar with them. Clearly fulfilling the wish of Cook and other Euro-American readers, the Moors who had previously been Adams's captors are jailed by the natives.

In this semi-captive state, Adams is something less than free, but more than a prisoner in Timbuktu. He and a "Portuguese boy" – a clear symbol of Adams's status as *de facto* white – are "treated as curiosities" and ushered into the King's quarters (35). What is more, Adams appears to go where he pleases in Timbuktu. In fact, "neither Adams nor the Portuguese boy," maintains Cook, "were ever subjected to any restraint while they remained at Tombuctoo. They were allowed as much food, and as often as they pleased; and were never required to work" (47). This clearly contrasts with the savage and horrific picture of Islamic slavery drawn elsewhere in the account. Yet, Adams does not seem completely free. For example, he is clearly not free to leave Timbuktu, either from not knowing the land or the implicit understanding that he is free within the land but not to go elsewhere. In his capacity as "human merchandise for six months" (Adams xii) he is not free enough to leave Timbuktu at his own behest. It is only when the Moors ransom Adams, Stevens, and the imprisoned Moors that he is able to leave Timbuktu. So, Adams is represented as still holding a significant, though comparatively free, relationship to captivity.

It is the narrative's invention of this relatively mild, but still constrictive, captivity that permits and prompts Adams's detailed description of Timbuktu. Adams's role as fact finder, we are led to believe, is not hampered by the usual limitations of the captive. In fact, his position as a guest in the King's house means that he has access to

information and details that are possibly unknown by ordinary natives. And yet his constriction is still valuable to the picture of Timbuctoo. If it were not for his capture by the anonymous group of Negroes, the narrative implies, it would have been impossible for Adams to find the “emporium of Africa.” The narrative rationalizes an ignorant sailor’s discovery of a 500 year “secret” by an appeal to one of the fundamental realities of captivity: subjects must go where their captors take them. So, inasmuch as captives are at the behest of their masters, Adams’s subservient status provides him the most efficient route to the city. Furthermore, once he is there, the fact that he cannot leave or does not know how to (a typical feature of most captive figures) means that he is compelled to stay there and, judging from the narrative, make meticulous mental observations of every animate and inanimate object around him.

Though admittedly mild, Adam’s detention in Timbuktu becomes the pretext for his portrayal as an essentially white and privileged subject. “The natives of Tombuctoo are a stout, healthy race, and are seldom sick,” the narrator intones, “although they expose themselves by lying out in the sun at mid-day, when the heat is almost insupportable to a white man” (225). Implicitly, Adams’s cultural authority is ironically supported by the unsupportable heat. While the “insupportable heat” might have been a sign of bodily weakness in a white man, for Adams this corporeal failure becomes a moment of fraternity with other whites. Furthermore, according to this logic and narrative, the native subject becomes the embodiment of physical superiority but usually at the expense of mental swiftness. It is precisely by virtue of his weakness, sickness, and timidity that Adams is considered in union with Euro-American whites.

Though intended for specifically “American” texts, Eve Raimon’s observation is equally appropriate here, that the “male light-skinned bondsman” is read as exhibiting “greater intelligence and subjectivity” (5-6) than his female counterparts. Where Jacobs’s near- whiteness might be seen as tragic, Adams’s almost-whiteness is heroic. Indeed, such a wholesale presentation of Adams as a representative white man also threatens to erase the difference of his blackness. By this formula, a mulatto in African detention equals white masculinity and whiteness only. Here, Sterling Brown’s original indictment against the figure of the mulatto still has value, as Adams’s representation seems merely to “pander” to white and, here, Euro-American sensibilities.

At other points, though, Adams’s union with whiteness is a bit more complicated. At first glance, for instance, the following passage appears to be the standard invocation of white privilege by way of the novelty of captivity.

Adams could not hear that any white man (sic) but themselves had ever been seen in the place; and he believes, as well as from what he was told by the Moors, as from the uncommon curiosity which he excited (though himself a very dark man, with short curly black hair), that they had never seen one before.” (47; emphasis added)

As also with Mungo Park’s narrative when he is taken captive, the arrival of the captive/explorer is a fantastic spectacle. Almost in the identical language of the *Travels*, the Queen and her attendants “sit and look at Adams and his companion for hours together” (35) and offer them “great kindness” (35). Furthermore, it would appear that Adams’s putative “whiteness” in relation to the African natives buttresses his positioning, but also the African Company’s. When whites come to Timbuktu, the narrative implies, they will be met with shock and awe, certainly workable conditions for maintaining trade and dominating a people.

But here, of all places, Cock is careful to insert that Adams is not really white, an observation on Cock's part that appears counter to his own objectives. Recall, if Adams had simply been white, this would have worked in favor of the narrative's factual credibility and its rhetorical effect on white audiences. The "veiling of Adams's blackness," Charles Adams explains, would have facilitated the "political and scientific weight that the Narrative had to bear for the African Company" (xliii). But here, Cock insists on reminding the reader that Adams is "very dark" or, more importantly, that he is not racially white. Of course, we must understand Cock's definition of "very dark" to be relative to his own presumed Anglo-Saxon features. But what is more interesting is that this designation of darkness works so fantastically against the putative whiteness that Cock has been constructing for Adams. Indeed, of all the references to Adams's racial identity, this is the most extensive. So, why underscore Adam's race in the middle of the account's depiction of Timbuktu, whose illustration is all that separates Adams from the mass of destitute sailors? Why foreground Adams's dark complexion at a moment clearly meant to channel the cultural superiority of the famed and white Mungo Park?

I would submit that the reason for Cock's untimely revelation is that Adam's is coming off as too white, and in relation to the natives who should esteem only "real" whites. That is, the authority and respect that had been reserved for whites is being squandered on an illiterate, American, mix-breed. What is at stake in Cock's insertion of the idea that Adams is "very dark" is the ownership of the achievement of the text, that Cock is not fooled (and neither should the white readership be) as the foolish natives are into reading Adams as white. Later Cock makes a point of correcting Adams, noting that while he may have been the first Christian, he was not the first white to reach Timbuktu.

In the “Concluding Remarks,” Dupuis is also certain to note that the Timbuktu natives must have been surprised to see a Christian, as Adams could clearly not be mistaken for white. In other words, the imputation of Christian to the “American mulatto” is something Cock and his company could have allowed, but the ascription of whiteness must have been too much, even if it served their interests.

This inability to grant Adams the whiteness the natives imagine for him (as imagined by Adams) poses problems for the narrative of Euro-American domination prompted by descriptions of Timbuktu. It creates a proto-colonial scene in which whites are not necessarily the masters of their hosts/captors, but where the characteristic of whiteness is even ascribed to the “very dark.” As a result, the account places a “very dark” and “curly haired” man at, quite literally, the center of his narrative. This scene occurs roughly halfway through the narrative and, more importantly, marks the moment when the text should be making its most important point: the African Company has discovered the route to Timbuktu and it is a haven for white subjects. As a result, the effect that we have here is to have a congress of black subjects at Timbuktu, none of whom, according to Cock, could technically be considered white. At the point that Cock reminds the reader that Adams is very dark, the narrative of white privilege by way of captivity becomes difficult to maintain and another emerges: “very dark” subjects who are held in awe by other dark subjects. If we recall, it is here in Timbuktu that Adams makes his observation that the native infants are first born with a “reddish color, but become black in three or four days” (43). But is not that Adams turns black under the pressure of captivity, which might be a great enough catastrophe, but that he is already

“very dark” to begin with. The captive subject is read as “dark” when he should be read as his most white.

But this is more than a mere reversal or transfer of interpretive power from Cock to Adams. Cock means to impugn Adams status as white. Yet the natives, who set the terms of value in the context of Timbuktu, clearly have a different interpretation. Ultimately, the whole notion of whiteness is not merely authorized under the pressure of captivity, but here it is also brought into question. If what is clearly a “mulatto” for Cock can be understood as “white” by African natives, then what is the foundation of whiteness and the idea of race for that matter in a North African context? As a mulatto, Adams’s variable identity in such a complex scene threatens to escape the confines of white and black. Regardless of his intention, what Cock does is to underscore how Adams has been working to “call attention to the constructedness of blackness and whiteness” (6).

The achievement of the text here then is not only a privileging of whiteness or blackness (which it is) but a destabilization and reappraisal of the two. While whiteness as privilege is certainly valued in the account’s rendition of Timbuktu, it is a whiteness that can be extended to the “very dark,” those outside the Euro-American standard of whiteness. In such a context, Adams is simultaneously an emissary of whiteness, and also its confounder. His authority is under the sign of whiteness as privilege and, at the same time, a whiteness that is accessible to “darker” subjects.

At the same time, this intrusion of Adams’s “black face” sustains, even if incompletely, the reading of white privilege throughout the Timbuktu chapter. Most noticeably, the narrator recalls Adams’s accompaniment of a party to kill elephants, again

invoking a similar scene in Mungo Park's *Travels*. "Upon the occasion of the elephant being killed," Cock informs the reader,

The Negroes were greatly delighted: and Adams frequently laughed with them, at the recollection of their appearance as they stood round the dead carcase [sic], all laughing and shewing [sic] their white teeth at once, which formed a ridiculous contrast with their black faces. (40)

Clearly, Adams's recollection of the "black faces" is meant to highlight his own difference from them, further reinforcing the aesthetic value of the white subject and whiteness more generally. But only three pages earlier, Adams is revealed to be "very dark." In one way then, Adams is implicitly and grammatically included with those who show "their white teeth at once" and look "ridiculous" (40). In this light, Cock might be said to orchestrate a scene of black performance in Africa for whites, even if none are represented as present.

Fertile subjects: (Re)creating Timbuktu

Later on, in his description of the Timbuktu vegetation, wildlife, and natural resources, Adams's "darkness" again challenges the easy reproduction of whiteness when Adams plays the familiar role of Adam-like discoverer. As mentioned above, the account was already understood as contributing to a narrative map of the African interior, as made clear by the actual map found in its opening pages. The second half of the Timbuktu chapter is the narrative counterpart and inset to this map. Functioning like a Biblical Adam here, Cock/Adams recreate an African garden of Eden,⁵⁰ inasmuch as Timbuktu was understood as a site for the consummation of an idyllic Euro-American desire. Consequently, his catalogue of places and phenomenon initiates an Adam-like naming, classification, and ownership of all that is around him. This is seen most clearly in the

narrative's invention of the "courcoo," a cross between a horse and rabbit that carries its food in a pouch on its back.

More tellingly, the account's rendition of a nearby river illustrates how the narrative is meant to master what it only seemingly describes. "The river," he begins, "is well stored with fish, chiefly of a sort that Adams took for the red mullet: there is also a large red fish, in shape somewhat like a salmon, and having teeth; he thinks it is the same fish which is known in New York by the name of sheep's-head (222). If we recall, a water route to Timbuktu had been one of the main assumptions and hopes of European explorers in the early nineteenth century, so just the mere mention of a river would clearly have excited European interest. Equally important, though, the account presents this river as always and already known, thus making it safe to navigate and imagine. Note the presence of the "same fish" that are found in New York, as well as the fact there are others that look "like a salmon" and "the red mullet," suggesting that Adams remembers only what he has already seen. Seeming more like the Hudson on which Adams is allegedly born, the river is merely a duplicate of what Adams/Cock can already see.

William Boelhower expresses a similar notion when he writes that early European maps reflected "an interpretive gaze that objectifies the eye of the beholder and offers an identikit of his desires and possibilities" (51). In other words, Adams and Cock do not record a map of Timbuktu, as much as produce one from available models and forms. The fact that this larger model pre-exists the particulars of the smaller one suggests the always and already pre-determination of the interior of an unknown Africa. So even without setting foot in Timbuktu, it was already pre-formulated according to an Euro-

American worldview. So though the account is factually negligent, it also strikes a pose that is representationally honest, that of rendering foreign lands in the language of home – the Hudson River plus Africans. By virtue of an even mild detention, the narrative installs Adams at the center of a desirable and subdued African universe.

But, here, as opposed to Mungo Park, we have the mixed race Adams, a figure that imperfectly reproduces the alleged naturalness and inevitability of such an account. Cassandra Jackson contends, “Mulatto figures demonstrated the fallacy of Adamic racelessness” (5), or the idea that the subject was without a historically specific and racialized body. Into this African Eden, Adams suggests (and Cock underscores) how the mulatto carries the trace of geographically contingent identities and unequal aesthetic valuations. There is nothing natural about Adams’s assumption of privilege in Timbuktu. As a figure who is “very dark,” (again, at least in Cock’s sight) as dark as those grinning natives, as dark as those native babies that will soon turn black, Adams is not the diametric opposite of the subjects and objects he names. As before, this complex situation places a “very dark” subject at the beginning of European-American first contact, clearly a boon for Adams, but it also reproduces conditions of power in which the native must and will be amenable to domination.

Lost in Space

At the end of his sojourn through Timbuktu, Adams/Rose is ransomed to Moors and, after many hard trials, finds the Vice-Consular at Mogadore, Joseph Dupuis, who helps him find his way to Cadiz and London to tell his story. Ultimately, the narrative suggests, Adams resists the sirens of North African reproduction, and he does not turn

Mohammedan. As reflected in the Christian slaves who, melodramatically, submit to their masters and convert only three days before their eventual ransom, Adams resists and remains Christian.

But as I have also tried to show, the figure of Adams is also putatively white according to the rules of his confinement, and a whiteness that is both read as authoritative and which his own figure confounds. In this light, it is interesting to recall that much has been made of the fact that Adams might have been the first African American Barbary captive. However, my own readings of his account reveal his characterization to be much less sure. Indeed, if he is an African American, it is not so much by virtue of being an American with African ancestry, but in the sense of being understood as American by way of Africa. Africa becomes the space in which his whiteness, though with a crucial difference, is made most legible.

Besides the narrative he left behind in at least two distinct forms, nothing else is known about the life of Robert Adams. Unlike Bibb and Jacobs, he did not lead a productive post-captive life that suggests the saliency of captivity and captivity narratives for the ex-captive in later life. Perhaps after hearing of *The North American Review's* indictment of his narrative, Adams consciously decided to steer clear of the public sphere. We do not know. Similarly, the African Company eventually folded in 1821, due to lack of governmental support, which was ironically facilitated by Joseph Dupuis's critique of the operations of the company. And then, in the 1830's, John Lander and other Europeans would eventually set foot in Timbuktu, dispelling years of rumors about what the place may or may not have been.

In this sense, Adams's life and narrative seem to have fallen away much like the institutions and desires that impelled him and contributed to his greatness. Ironically, the fact of the utter silence of the historical record of Adams before or after his captivity ironically highlights how significant his bondage was. Without the alignment of stars that took place when Adams/Rose set sail on the Charles and found himself captive on the coasts of North Africa, his entire life would have probably flown under the radar. In the final analysis, then, his life and narrative testify to the power of captivity to make written lives and fashion selves. And even if only a fleeting achievement and story, it was still an important one.

⁴⁷ See Harry P. Riconda's *Prisoners of War in American Conflicts*, for a general survey of American captives since the colonial era to the present. For more on the American experience of British captivity during the Revolutionary War, see Linda Colley's *Captives*, 216-230.

⁴⁸ Though my analysis focuses on the London edition, it should be noted that the narrative was reissued in Boston under the same title in 1816. Also in 1816, a Cadiz narrative emerged, a first person account of his experience related in Spain to Bostonian William Storrow.

⁴⁹ For a reading of Robert Adams's potential economic motives, see Fabian's discussion in *The Unvarnished Truth*, 29-38.

⁵⁰ In this light, it is interesting that Biblical scholars have long interpreted the creation story recorded in Genesis as emerging out of the Hebrews condition of Babylonian captivity (*Cambridge Companion to the Bible* 7). Both the lushness of the garden and the dangers within have been seen as indicative of the ambivalence the Hebrews felt to their simultaneously lavish land and restrictive surroundings. In other words, out of their captivity, they fashioned or re-presented a world that was the composite of the one before them and the one they had left.

Chapter VI

The Power of Imprisonment in *Prison Life and Reflections* (1847)

Adding to the maps of Indian captivity, African American slavery, and North African captivity already outlined, this last chapter considers the relationship between authority and state incarceration in pre-Civil War America. It does so in the context of an overlooked but important prison narrative of the mid-nineteenth-century, the multiply authored *Prison Life and Reflections; Or, A Narrative of the Arrest, Trial, Conviction, Imprisonment, Treatment, Observations, Reflections, and Deliverance of Work, Burr, and Thompson, Who Suffered An Unjust and Cruel Imprisonment in Missouri Penitentiary, for Attempting to Aid Some Slaves to Liberty* (1847). The account chronicles the stay of James Burr, Alanson Work, and George Thompson for four months in Palmyra Jail and then for almost five years in the Missouri State Penitentiary. It is divided into three “volumes,” one which corresponds to the men’s stay in Palmyra Jail, and the other two to their years in Missouri State Penitentiary. During their imprisonment, all three kept journals and wrote letters of their experiences to friends and newspapers, but the majority of the account is based on Thompson’s letters, journal entries, and meditations. Essentially, he is the main author and compiler of the narrative. Roughly a year after his release in 1846, he compiled his and his friends’ letters, diaries, and notes, as well as added further commentary, and published *Prison Life and Reflections*.

Remarkably, almost nothing has been written about the text, even though the account went through several editions between its 1847 publication and the Civil War. Furthermore, the narrative is one of the most extended expositions of nineteenth-century U.S. prison life, totaling almost 400 pages and covering a period of over five years in the mid-nineteenth century penal system. Still, there is no standard critical edition, and there are no article length studies of the text. Modeled after the Auburn Prison system, Jefferson State Prison is representative of a number of Northern antebellum penal practices: mandated silence, separate cells, aggregate labor, pinstriped clothing, and shaved heads (*Prison Life* 116-117).

Equally important, Thompson, Work, and Burr present their incarceration as the pivotal era of their lives and flood their narrative with metaphors, language, and paradigms that speak to the significance of imprisonment. Beyond and through its status as a historical document, the account is critical for a consideration of the meaning of imprisonment, the conditions under which representation of imprisonment could take place, and how that representation refracted and exceeded the power of penal discipline. Especially since many prisoners were essentially illiterate, the perspectives of Thompson, Burr, and Work offer invaluable first-person point-of-views.

I argue that *Prison Life* demonstrates the interconnectedness of narratives of confinement in the antebellum era, joining aspects of the slave narrative with features of narratives of state incarceration. Further, I contend that its representation of imprisonment overlaps with and buttresses the imperative for the prisoner to write of his experiences. Further, it augments white abolitionists' ability to sympathize with the imprisoned, enslaved, and dispossessed and, thereby, fortify their identification with a

radical and redemptive American identity. In short, *Prison Life* re-members incarceration as a time of inmates' moral, spiritual, and political power over the technologies of state discipline and racial inequality.

Fatal Contamination

We can situate *Prison Life*, and better appreciate its contributions, within the context of what I consider the normative readings of antebellum prison literature. Both in primary and secondary sources, three connected strains of thought exist within this complex body of antebellum prison literature: 1) that the convict is the embodiment of the disease and corruption in society; 2) that the incarceration of the prisoner is the triumph of state power and the subjugation of the prisoner; and 3) that the writing of prisoners is the expression of prisoners' monstrosity, subjugation, and/or reformation. In all three readings, imprisonment and its representation mean the lack of prisoners' power.

According to late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century observers, for instance, criminals threatened to corrupt good citizens, and when huddled close to each other in a prison, could even kill each other. As formulated by the late eighteenth-century Philadelphia physician and reformer Benjamin Rush, Thomas Blomberg notes, criminals carried social diseases that, like biological diseases, could spread to the healthy (54). In Gustave de Beaumont and Alex de Tocqueville's survey of early nineteenth-century American prisons, *On the Penitentiary System in the United State and its Application in France* (1833), the two observed that prisoners had a potential for "fatal contamination" (57). "The intercourse of criminals is necessarily of a corrupting nature," they surmise,

“and this intercourse must be prevented if we wish to protect the prisoners from mutual contagion” (56).

It is in this context that the famous “separate” and “silent” systems of Auburn and Philadelphia flourished in the early nineteenth century.⁵¹ With their emphasis on complete silence, daily labor, and separate cells, these systems hoped to decrease the likelihood of such contamination and, more importantly, produce reformation. But just as often, the result was the prosecution of state power and the cowering of inmates. On his observation of the silent separate system of the Eastern Pennsylvania Penitentiary, English novelist Charles Dickens declared:

I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body. The wounds it inflicts are not upon the surface, and it exhorts few cries that human ears can hear. They are nothing more than men buried alive, to be dug out in the slow round of years, and in the meantime dead to everything but torturing anxieties and horrible despair. (99)

In similar language, Tocqueville and Beaumont describe the effects of silence without labor in the Auburn prison of the 1820’s: “it destroys the criminal without intermission and without pity; it does not reform, it kills” (41).

More recently, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Michel Foucault has famously argued that the well-meaning invention of the penitentiary in the early nineteenth century essentially consolidated the subjection of prisoners. Echoing and extending Dickens’s interpretation, Foucault asserts that the absence of the tortured body belies the domination of the subject’s soul, defined as “the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” of the person (Foucault 16). By way of the subject’s awareness of a constant and unverifiable fact of surveillance, s/he lives in “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). The effects

are tragic: “A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body [. . .] . the soul is the prison of the body” (30). What was formerly held to be unique to the individual and inaccessible by the state – the soul – is now mastered by it.

Logically, the argument of Foucault and others continues, the writing done by prisoners is an extension of this mastery. This domination is no clearer than in *The Auburn State Prison Reports* (1829) – a document submitted annually to Congress by the Ossining (Sing Sing) prison inspectors. In these reports, prison administrators produced one to two paragraph biographical accounts of inmates who had been reformed and, thus, who were ready to be released. Though inmate reform was a slow, incomplete, and often unsuccessful process (Beaumont 87), these accounts followed a general pattern of narrating childhood mischief, parental negligence, adult delinquency, and, after incarceration, state reformation.⁵² With their inevitable happy endings, they formed another cell of sorts as they contained prisoners’ lives within a sterile model of family dissolution and state reformation.

Against these readings of imprisonment as the prisoner’s annihilation, cooptation, or reformation, Henry David Thoreau’s “Resistance to Civil Government” (more commonly known as “Civil Disobedience”) offers a striking alternative. Inspired by the presence of slavery, the Mexican American War, and a whole host of injustices perpetuated by the government, the essay is a call for American males to “rebel and revolutionize” (67). Towards this end, Thoreau cites his own refusal to pay his poll tax for the last six years, and his subsequent jailing for one night. Of his captivity under the State, he notes,

It was like traveling into a far country, such as I had never expected to behold, to lie there for one night. It seemed to me that I never had heard the town clock strike before, nor the evening sounds of the village, for we slept with the windows open, which were inside the grating. . . . It was a closer view of my native town. I was fairly inside of it. I had never seen its institutions before. This is one of the peculiar institutions; for it is a shire town. I began to *comprehend* what its inhabitants were about. (82)

Far from containing him within any mechanism of surveillance, or even implanting one within him, Thoreau's incarceration is a journey into a "far country." Moreover, his imprisonment activates an improved "comprehension" where he hears new sounds and obtains "a closer view" of his "native town."

What is more, after his release, his incarceration allows him to make these observations of his fellow townspeople,

I saw to what extent the people among whom I live could be trusted as good neighbors and friends; that their friendship was for summer weather only; that they were a distinct race from me by their prejudices and superstitions, as the Chinamen and Malays are. (83)

Imprisonment differentiates him from the "distinct race" of fickle, superstitious New England subjects. Furthermore, it binds him to a nobler class of people. As Thoreau concludes,

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison [. . .]. It is here that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race should find them; on that separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not *with* her, but *against* her, -- the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. (76)

The prison is a place, the narrative extols, for "just men," or those who are typically excluded from national enfranchisement: slaves, Mexicans, and Indians. Interestingly, slaves were less likely to be imprisoned before the Civil War, as masters typically undertook the punishment of their slaves themselves (Oshinsky 6). So, what Thoreau actually does is to populate his jailhouse with the blacks who were, for the most part,

excluded from prison discipline. This willingness to imagine slaves as imprisoned, even if they were not incarcerated at the time, perhaps reveals the dangers of Thoreau's romantic vision; it is almost too playful with respect to the realities of prison. Even so, his vision also reverses what that incarceration might mean.

Given these radical propensities, it should not be surprising that the prison is the place for revolutionary writing.

[. . .] I found that even here there was a history and a gossip which never circulated beyond the walls of the jail. Probably this is the only house in town where verses are composed, which are afterward printed in a circular form, but not published. I was shown quite a long list of verses which were composed by some young men who had been detected in an attempt to escape, who avenged themselves by singing them. (82)

Incarceration prompts inmates to produce a "history" (written and oral) that challenges the operations of the jail. To be sure, these artistic productions stay safely within prison walls, but they nonetheless "avenge" their authors' failed attempts at escape and constitute a literary response to the reality of punishment.

Against the vision of imprisonment suggested by Rush, Dickens, and *The Auburn State Prison Reports*, "Resistance to Civil Government" suggests a radical, even if romantic, revision of the meaning of incarceration away from disease, annihilation, and written reformation. Instead, it imagines the prison as a site for the increased understanding of social ills, the separation of "just men" from the baseness of society, and the creation of a vengeful and critical literary tradition. Building on this iconoclastic rendering of imprisonment, I would like to consider how imprisonment in antebellum America generates power for the imprisoned. In its ability to write narratives critical of state discipline, to author representations that hedge against state encroachment, and to

re-member incarceration in ways that promote prisoners' agency, prison literature, I submit, might also encode prisoners' power.

By "power" I mean the capacity for what Dylan Rodriguez calls "radical prison praxis," or writing that elucidates the inequities of the social world by way of its location within them (411). Far from only reproducing the typical yield of antebellum prison discipline – remorseful, obedient, and/or monstrous subjects – *Prison Life* also suggests willfully disobedient and critical subjects. In fact, the power of its representation is its ability to write incarceration as the achievement of moral superiority and prohibited social alliances in the context of subjugation. As in "Resistance to Civil Government," this power is sometimes represented as what Rodriguez terms "individual transcendence" – "the author's attempt to defy physical incarceration by finding freedom in the creative act" (410) – and thus threatens to ignore the realities of the pained body. But in *Prison Life*, the achievement of transcendence is grounded in the particularity of the suffering body as well as radical ways of reading punishment. In so doing, *Prison Life* provides a counternarrative to the reading of antebellum imprisonment as subjugation, but without much of the romanticization of Thoreau.

To be clear, Thoreau's experience and text are atypical of the narratives with which I am concerned, accounts of long term sentences in penitentiaries. He is incarcerated for one night and in a county jail. Though his biographer notes that it was a "formidable jail" (Harding 102), Thoreau's brief stay and mild treatment temper this observation. Too, he is already an author and relatively well known before his imprisonment. Hence, his captivity is not his first or main inroad into published writing

or powerful self-fashioning. Nonetheless, he opens an innovative way to write and read prison experience.

Additionally, his prose encodes the difficulties of writing freely while literally in (or while recovering from the effects of) a prison system that is necessarily restrictive. As Jason Haslam reveals in “‘They Locked the Door on my Meditations’: Thoreau and the Prison House of Identity,” Thoreau’s language often mimics the reformatory language of the State, thereby making him another agent of state power. Writing of Thoreau’s assumption of authority over a huckleberry party “who were impatient to put themselves under [his] conduct,” Haslam explains, “Thoreau’s huckleberry party, and any converts in his audience, can be seen as merely exchanging one dominating power for another” (473). Too, Thoreau imagines himself as a “just man” at the exclusion of differently raced and classed men, as his reference to the “Chinamen” and “Malays” makes clear. Indeed, Thoreau’s remark that it is the “whitest” cell in the jail, even if unintentionally, underscores the ways that the reformatory potential of the penitentiary (whether to obey or disobey the state) was a possibility open primarily to antebellum white males. As Angela Davis has shown in *Are Prisons Obsolete*, women and minorities were not considered eligible for such improvement. In this light, it can also be stated that “Resistance to Civil Government” considers the prison not only as the location of “just men,” but as a location that is just for men. Finally, he imagines the imprisoned body as a “dog,” which the state can feel free to kick and wound as long as his transcendental mind is free (80). But in this way, he obscures the ways that his white, well-respected and New England body (which is bailed out of jail the next morning) is exempt from the

hyper-embodiment of antebellum women and people of color. Since his body remains in a comparative state of well being, he can afford to consider it an unwanted beast.

Read in this way, Thoreau's rendering of political imprisonment is more in line with Foucault's observations of sensational crime writing, that the "literature of crime" can be an "ambiguous ritual," or a discursive practice that both reproduces and exceeds the imperatives of state power (67). In its more radical manifestations, Foucault continues, prisoner writing is more than "moralization from above," but "a locus in which two investments of penal practice met – a sort of battleground around the crime, its punishment and its memory" (67). As a result, Foucault concludes, such writings "may be read as two-sided discourses, in the facts that they relate, in the effects they give to these facts and in the glory they confer on those 'illustrious' criminals [. . .]" (68). As a "two-sided discourse," "Civil Disobedience" encodes the possibility of re-inscribing and resisting punishment.

Similarly, George Thompson's *Prison Life and Reflections* (1847) encodes like-minded revolutionary renderings of imprisonment. Like Thoreau's account, George Thompson, James Burr, and Alanson Work's narrative is one that results from their disobedience of State laws: they attempt to aid Missouri slaves across the Ohio River. But as mentioned before, their incarcerations are for several years in a jail and a penitentiary. Their text helps us to flesh out a number of important questions that can only be suggested by Thoreau's account of a mild and fleeting political imprisonment. How are the juridical sentences of punishment and imprisonment refracted in the grammatical sentences of writing? In what ways might the writing of imprisonment extend the mechanism of discipline? Under what conditions can imprisonment be

understood as powerful for prisoners? How does writing about imprisonment intersect with a script of national becoming? And, ultimately, how does the writing of incarceration reiterate and revise penal discipline?

Disobedient Reform

Prison Life and Reflections comes to the public sphere in the context of the movement for moral reform that gripped the nation in the three decades prior to the Civil War. Spurred by what John Thomas calls a “romantic faith in perfectibility” (153), antebellum reformers sought to annihilate a host of social evils: secularism, adultery, and, most of all, intemperance. As a result, they formed themselves into a host of temperance groups, benevolent organizations, evangelical groups, and missionary societies that canvassed the U.S. in the hopes of creating an improved society. Initially begun as a conservative movement, Thomas explains, to shore up the blurring distinctions between right and wrong, the reform movement eventually took on an egalitarian character that spilled into organizations for the advancement of women and other marginalized groups (154).

It is from just such an organization – Mission Institute – that George Thompson and James Burr received the initial impetus to aid slaves to freedom. Understood as a function of its evangelical commitment, the school was adamantly antislavery, and both faculty and students actively participated in rescuing slaves from the upper South in the late 1830’s (Harrold 91). Though not a student at the academy, Alanson Work clearly shared the same mix of evangelical faith and moral reform of the Institute. The institution sought primarily to redeem the world through Christianity. George

Thompson's post-imprisonment life bears this out, as is made clear by his later missionary activities in West Africa and his subsequent account, *The Palm Land* (Harrold 97).

The narrative also participates in the movement for prison reform first begun by John Howard in England at the end of the eighteenth century. In its American incarnation, reformers such as Dorothea Dix, who visited Missouri State Penitentiary in Thompson's final year of imprisonment, challenged prison administrators and the government to alleviate the crowded conditions, poor administration, and abusive staffs of many antebellum penitentiaries. Just one year after the publication of *Prison Life*, Dix would publish her own account of the deplorable prison conditions throughout the U.S. In 1790, of course, the U.S. had inaugurated the era of modern penology with America's first penitentiary, the Walnut Street Prison. But as Blake McKelvey argues, "America had succeeded in establishing a penal system by 1835 but could boast of no great mitigation of crime" (34). This fact necessitated still yet more reforms and organizations, such as the founding of the New York Prison Association in 1844.

Prison Life thus depends on the potentially radical and disobedient spirit of religious, social, and penal reform that swept through the North in the first half of the nineteenth century. As Thoreau stated in his response to Massachusetts' complicity with the Fugitive Slave Act, "Slavery in Massachusetts," "The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free. They are the lovers of law and order, who observe the law when the government breaks it" (98). So though many reformers like Thoreau considered themselves Americans, their political allegiance was first to the party of right. Similarly, Thompson, Work, and Burr are most concerned with preserving "the

law of God” (29). *Prison Life* is meant to reaffirm the supremacy of God’s law – even beyond and through imprisonment in a slave state.

The Aesthetic of Separation, Contamination, Alienation, and Reformation

Now, in many ways, the narrative rehearses the language of corporeal suffering and social death mapped out by Dickens. In the volume dedicated to Palmyra Jail, depictions of sickness (23), mild depression (24), and heavy shackles (24) mark the representation. When the men first arrive at the prison, the narrative relates, they are “stripped, examined, recorded, and the sides of [their] hair cut close” (116-17). Then, once immersed into prison culture, many of the inmates are poorly fed (123), worked hard (125), and even flogged by the guards and administration (131). And in the final year of his imprisonment, Burr loses his arm while at labor and is made somewhat bitter about this injury.

The account is also the record of “mutual contamination” and “fatal contamination” suggested by Tocqueville. In Palmyra Jail, the account focuses on the “polluting influence” (37) of their fellow captives, as when Thompson re-members that a horse thief uses “the most abominable and profane” language (22). Likewise, in a journal entry dated July 31, the diarist observes: “The conversation is the most filthy [sic] imaginable” (23) and that “It would be pleasant to be alone” (23). And just months after being in jail, Thompson writes in an August 20th entry: “Have been unwell. Looked at Death” (25).

Foucault's theory of inmate alienation is equally persistent. Rendered in comic language, the rules of silence and separation find their narrative corollary in the following scene. "When I was before [prison authorities]," Thompson explains,

I used the expression, "Mr. Burr." "No, no; there are no *Misters* here."
 "Well, brother Burr, then." "No, there are no *brothers* here." "Well, what shall I call him?" "Why, *Burr*, in just the roughest way you can speak it."
 Frequently afterwards, we were checked for applying Mr. to a convict.
 (118)

The prison is presented here as the opposite of all sociality; there is no invocation of the Thoreauvian brotherhood.

Too, *Prison Life's* picture of imprisonment rehearses the imperative of state reformation and religious conversion set forth in *The Auburn State Prison Reports*.

In the last volume of the book, Thompson relates that roughly forty prisoners have been converted to Christianity, many of whom are subsequently freed (223-4). Thompson's representation of these prisoners' lives, incarceration, and conversion follow the model of reformatory biography found in the state reports. One prisoner, for instance, a cursing sailor, is "very profane and ignorant of Bible truth" (337). However, after Thompson talks with him and shares Christian books with him, the sailor "cease[s] swearing and reprove[s] the sin in others" (337). Hence, the rendition of the imprisoned life becomes a testament to the mercy of God and even the benevolence of the state.

Just as problematically, *Prison Life* clearly seems invested in the logic and inequities of the prison system. Indeed, Thompson, Burr, and Work, and the narrative they produce are not opposed to the prison *per se*. Rather, they are against corruption within what might otherwise be a very good institution. Late in the narrative, and while expressing disgust at the behavior of other prisoners, Thompson makes this statement, "We were glad that we were here as abolitionists, and not as State Felons" (283). As

“state felons,” the passage suggests, they would have been the proper receptacles for state punishment and opprobrium. So, the narrative leaves the institution of imprisonment intact and unquestioned.

Moreover, like Thoreau, it is also clear that their power in the prison is dependent upon their power over others. If Thoreau is the dean of the huckleberry expedition subsequent to his release, then Thompson and his compatriots are the deans of the other inmates while in prison. The text also paints a clear hierarchy of captives, even if they are all wrapped in chains. Late in the narrative, for example, Thompson refers to the inmates and slaves whom he has been championing as “heathens” in bad need of redemption (363). Hence, the narrative still works within the framework of moral absolutism and racial separatism that marked antebellum reformist discourse. To wit, at one moment, the account disparages the union of a white male master and black female slave with as much sadness for the coercion of the union as for the repulsion of amalgamation (251). Hence, the enunciation and achievement of a pan-racial unity is one that is sometimes equivocal in the text.

Chain Letters

At the same time, another and more insistent strain also characterizes the illustrations in *Prison Life*. In these scenes, imprisonment is not simply the negation or co-optation of prisoners’ desire and difference, but the achievement of a moral superiority and radical will that is critical of the state. But, again, this achievement is all the while in the context of the suffering of the subject and the aggression of the state, not an escape from it. As Thompson succinctly observes, “Though we are in the lion’s

mouth we find honey in the carcase [sic]" (23). As in Jemison, Bibb, Adams, and Jacobs, suffering is imagined here as entangled with particular rights.

The very existence of the narrative is dependent upon such paradoxical logic, that being confined can permit strange benefits. Particularly as encoded in the tradition of the criminal confessional narrative popular throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the ability to write or speak autobiographically was one prerogative of the convict. In that form, H. Bruce Franklin reveals, "The author offers himself as an example for all other members of society to shun, and he seeks forgiveness not in this world but the next" (127). Here, of course, Thompson, Burr, and Work maintain their absolute innocence; but, even so, their ability to declare is dependent upon the singular prerogative of the criminals to talk about their crime. By this logic, autobiographical utterance was the natural consequence of criminal behavior. As made clear by other texts such as *A Voice from the Prison; Or, Truths for the Multitude and Pearls for the Truthful*, James A. Clay's meditation on antebellum imprisonment in Maine, the disclosure of crime often gave ex-convicts a license to write autobiographically or be written about.

More self-consciously, *Prison Life* takes part in the most popular form of antebellum prison literature, protest writing. As the criminal confessional ebbed at mid-century, Franklin explains, protest writing became the most prominent form of autobiographical prison writing. "Rather than wallowing in guilt, or professing to wallow in guilt, about their crimes," Franklin argues, "these convict authors began to turn a critical gaze upon society" (133). Like *Six Years in a Georgia Prison* (1851), Lewis W. Paine's account of slave rescue, these prison accounts lamented society's labeling of their behavior as deviant.

However, *Prison Life* relies most extensively on a model of first-person writing from another captive: the New Testament writing of the oft-imprisoned apostle Paul. Known for his persecution of the early Christian church, Paul had famously been converted on the road to Damascus and, eventually, became the exemplary figure of inspired Christian authority. He is believed to have written over half the New Testament. More to my point, in his post-conversion spread of the gospel, Richard Cassidy notes, Paul was imprisoned several times for his activities and, under the duress of such captivities, penned at least three New Testament letters – Romans, Philemon, and Philippians (4).⁵³ *Prison Life* draws on the fact and form of these letters as its main model of a powerful, captive “I.”

Like Paul’s autobiographical voice, Thompson’s “I” emerges out of the need to assure and support a community of believers in the midst of his absence. As M. Luther Stirewalt, Jr. maintains in *Paul the Letter Writer*, Paul’s letters were always addressed to a specific community (13) and read aloud among that body (14). It is indeed through the circulating letter that Paul forged a community of Christian believers out of the inchoate rabble of the first century Greco-Roman world (14). Similarly, Thompson and his fellow prisoners’ letters were directed to the Mission Institute community and meant to fortify that community in case they lost faith in God’s providence. As Thompson begins one missive, “Some of you doubt that we can truly be happy in a prison,” and then goes on to comfort his family and friends that God is keeping him in safety (69). Hence, a strong, encouraging autobiographical voice was the logical consequence of captivity according to Pauline poetics and the practical difficulties of imprisonment. In turn, the narrative

produces living testaments or letters to the “dead letter” that imprisonment and slavery threaten to make of God’s law.

Chain reactions

The autobiographical purchase of Paul’s captivity works within the larger context of *Prison Life*’s appeal to powerful and useful models of Biblical captivity. Indeed, no other text is quoted or alluded to more frequently in *Prison Life* than the Bible. The Babylonian captivity of the Israelites, in particular, is an important source for the account’s re-writing of state captivity. When Thompson and his friends are asked to operate the kiln on the Sabbath, for instance, Thompson assumes the subject position of Daniel trapped in the furnace of the Babylonian King Belshazzar. “Fear not, thou shalt not be burned,” – “I am with thee,” Thompson writes of his deliverance from the prohibition of working on the Sabbath (128). Earlier in the narrative, Thompson compares himself to the “Jews in Babylon” (29) who must “sing the Lord’s song” “though in a strange Land” (29). And when thinking of the attention the abolitionist cause will receive on their transfer from the jail to the penitentiary, Thompson quips, “if I go to Jefferson, there is no doubt that thousands will be delivered from worse than Egyptian bondage” (90-91), making an explicit connection between Egypt and Jefferson, Missouri. Hence, Thompson consecrates his suffering through the images, metaphors, and narratives of Judeo-Christian imprisonment.

Paul is the privileged symbol of how captivity is useful for Christian believers. For example, on their transfer from Palmyra Jail to the penitentiary, Thompson remembers that the prisoners are unnecessarily chained, since they would not have escaped.

On his needless chaining, Thompson quips: 'Is it uncharitable to say, "And Felix willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound?"' (94) Taken from Acts 24:27 (KJV), the scripture refers to Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea by the Roman governor Antonius Felix. At the request of Jews who accuse him of inciting a riot, Felix "shows the Jews a pleasure" by leaving Paul in chains when clearly it is not necessary for his detention (Cassidy 40). In the Biblical account, Paul's chaining establishes the unsympathetic character of his jailors. Likewise, Thompson's reference underscores the carelessness of his nineteenth-century wardens, who like Felix, only care about appeasing the crowd. But even more critically, Paul's shackles underscore his innocence and maintenance of piety in the midst of incredible obstacles. Though Paul has been accused of inciting a riot, readers of the Biblical text know that he has merely been preaching the gospel for the benefit of the public. Similarly, Thompson, Work, and Burr, the passage implies, have not been involved in immoral activities, but have been doing God's work. In this way, the chains of Paul and Thompson link them to the Christian messiah.

The connection between captivity and the singular authority of Christ is one that the account repeatedly makes. For example, Thompson includes an extended section in which he lists the many convicts, especially murderers, who have been pardoned by the various Missouri Governors (346-48). One killer, Thompson recalls, is sentenced to several years, but is then pardoned in a matter of months (346). Significantly, Thompson likens this figure to Barnabas, the thief who was set free while Jesus remained on the cross (346). Likewise, Thompson says of his own unwarranted abuse, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (80), mimicking the dying words of Jesus at this crucifixion. In both invocations of Jesus's afflictions, Thompson's compassion for the

wicked is underscored. So, by way of a redemptive model of suffering and captivity set forth in scripture, Thompson and his companions align themselves to Jesus' trials and triumph, but clearly at the expense of other prisoners' representation.

More radically, *Prison Life* frames the benefits of imprisonment as socially liberating and politically advantageous. As Thompson notes in an August 28th journal entry,

1st. We know how the chain *feels*.

2nd. We know what it is to be at the will of another; to do as others say; receive what they see fit to give; eat and drink what their will supplies, and await their pleasure.

3rd. We understand what it is to be forcibly separated from wife, children, parents, and friends, and denied the sweetness of their society. (56-7)

Waxing like Thoreau here, Thompson's incarceration activates new knowledge and

comprehension of the circumstances of other disenfranchised subjects. But most

importantly, this knowledge and understanding, in turn, links them with the community

of chained sufferers. As Thompson ends one of his letters to his church, he is now in

"chains and gospel bonds" (20), and thus in partnership with prisoners, slaves, and

Christian martyrs. Hence, the invocation of the chain precipitates the rhetorical

achievement of prohibited social alliances. If we recall, it is precisely for fraternizing and

redeeming slaves that Thompson, Burr, and Work are arrested. Their status as prisoners

paradoxically punishes them, however, by placing them in a similar antagonistic relation

to the state as slaves. So, much like the "paradigmatic body of the slave" (Eppler-

Sanchez 30), the subject position of the prisoner offers a site at which several

disenfranchised groups can congregate.

For Thompson and his fellow abolitionists, these "chains and gospel bonds" with other abject subjects are quite literal. The narrative is certain to note the many slaves

who are unfairly imprisoned in the penitentiary with the reformers. One slave is incarcerated because his master suspects he “*would* run away,” (315) or that is to say he is imprisoned for an act that he has not even committed. In another instance, the narrative mentions that three runaway slaves are detained simply for “safe-keeping (345)”, which is clearly meant to show the continuity between the operations of slavery and the infrastructure of imprisonment, which become much more tangible after the Civil War. And then there is the story of the slave who is horribly beaten and denied food for escaping to see his wife (298). But most damningly, James Burr tells the tale of the Christian slave who Thompson represents as knowing more about faith and virtue than many slaveholders. Of him, Thompson boasts, “Let this poor, despised slave teach them purer theology” (336). As brothers of the fraternity of the chain, the marginalized men of the prison constitute the community of “just men” in a world corrupted by unjustified incarceration and immoral slavery.

Abolitionists’ suffering on behalf of the slave, Sylvan Tomkins submits, was a critical component of white male antebellum reformers’ understanding of themselves as morally superior. In “The Psychology of Commitment: The Constructive Role of Violence and Suffering for the Individual and for his Society,” Tomkins argues that suffering, often in the form of imprisonment, encouraged abolitionists’ positive feelings toward suffering on the behalf of slaves and prisoners. In the case of William Lloyd Garrison’s seven day incarceration on behalf of the slave, Tomkins explains, “He appeared to enjoy both his martyrdom and the notoriety he gained, writing to everyone and conducting interviews from his cell” (54). Like Thoreau’s stay, Garrison’s is incredibly short; nonetheless, it underscores the symbolic value of suffering.

Imprisonment and suffering could foster such positive effects and affects, Tomkins posits, because “in a democratic society, based on belief in individualism and egalitarianism, it is possible to arouse vicarious distress, shame, fear, or sympathy for a victim and anger or contempt for an aggressor” (60). Furthermore, such trials could cause a domino effect of empathetic feeling from the sufferer to other witnesses of suffering. As Tomkins notes of abolitionist suffering more generally, “by offering themselves as victims,” “they evoked sympathy for themselves and their cause, and provoked anger and contempt for those who supported slavery” (61).

Saidiya Hartman’s warnings against the “precarious nature of empathy” notwithstanding, the pain of imprisonment was an affliction suffered on behalf of eligibility for national identity. Thoreau notes that “heroes, patriots, martyrs” and “reformers in the great sense” necessarily serve the State by “resisting” it. By way of this logic, Thompson and his fellow reformers are paradoxically “patriots, martyrs, reformers” and even “men” because of their antagonistic stance towards the law. It is by being a prisoner of the State that they mark their adherence to its ideals. In *Prison Life*, then, the chain links penal sufferers, slaves, and believers into a community of righteous, empathetic, and American men. Realizing the “imagined community” of “just men” suggested in Thoreau, Thompson presents himself as literally and literarily linked to a coalition of righteous sufferers inside and outside the prison.

So, ultimately, what does this re-writing of imprisonment mean? To employ Foucault’s language, who wins “the battle over the meaning and memory of punishment” here? For the most part, *Prison Life* registers a powerful and useful incarceration on behalf of its authors. Through an intensification and remapping of the tropes that would

rehearse the contamination, degradation, and annihilation of the imprisoned subject, the account paints a starkly different picture of triumphant inmates. In narrative, it presents a far different “history” than the one recorded by prison officials and even other prisoners. Suffering and imprisonment justify abolitionist identification with Christian and democratic subject positions as well as alliances with racial others.

⁵¹ The Pennsylvania prison system has also been called by some commentators the “silent system.” This is misleading, however, considering that both the Pennsylvania and New York models of prison reform agreed that convicts should live in complete silence. The story of the early American penitentiary has been told variously. See *The Discovery of the Asylum, With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America*, *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions*, and *The Encyclopedia of American Prisons*.

⁵² Elam Lynds’, warden of Auburn State Prison, offers this sober assessment of rehabilitation: “I do not believe in a *complete*, reform, except with young delinquents. Nothing, in my opinion, is rarer than to see a convict of mature age become a religious and virtuous man. I do not put great faith in the sanctity of those who leave the prison. I do not believe that the counsels of the chaplain, or the meditations of the prisoner, make a good Christian of him. But my opinion is, that a great number of old convicts do not commit new crimes, and that they even become useful citizens, having learned in prison a useful art, and contracted habits of constant labor. This is the only reform which I ever have expected to produce, and I believe it is the only one which society has a right to expect.” (qtd. in Beaumont 164)

⁵³ Other New Testament books in which Paul’s imprisonment is considered are Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, and Acts. Cassidy notes that the authorship of these texts has been disputed; as a result, Romans, Philemon, and Philippians constitute the undisputed body of Paul’s “prison letters.” (4) For a more detailed excavation of Paul’s imprisonment as recorded in Acts, see “Paul as a Chained Prisoner in Acts” (211-234) in *Paul in Chains*. For a discussion of the various types of Roman imprisonment, see “Images of Imprisonment” (36-54), also in *Paul in Chains*.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

I would like to close this project by making a final gesture towards outlining the effects of antebellum captivity narratives as well as by mapping the end of this literary-historical era. I conclude by reiterating the central observations of this study.

Capital and Captivity

This study shows that antebellum captivity narratives functioned as an important form of cultural capital, that is, a means of access to powerful types of writing, status, and belonging. The notion of cultural capital expresses the stakes of captivity narratives in a number of ways. In *ReWriting White: Race Class, and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century America*, for instance, Todd Vogel argues that the writings and speeches of Native Americans, Chinese Americans and African Americans “acted out their message in a manner that demonstrated command of society’s cultural capital” (1). By capital, Vogel means their “cultural competence,” or their capacity to deploy written and oratorical forms that endeared them to a model of American whiteness (3). Turning the right phrase, for example, was part of the constellation of practices that underwrote and performed “whiteness.” This notion of capital resonates strongly with what Paul Guillory terms “linguistic capital, the means by which one attains to a socially credentialed and therefore valued speech, otherwise known as ‘Standard English’” (ix). But instead of

focusing on the school, which Guillory locates as the repository and unequal distributor of such credentials (ix), I privilege experiences and representations of captivity as sites for authorizing subjects. Following the lead of Guillory, I have been suggesting that captivity narratives can also be understood as “*symbolic capital*, a kind of knowledge-capital whose possession can be displayed upon request and which thereby entitles its possessor to the cultural and material rewards of the well-educated person” (ix).⁵⁴ To render oneself and be rendered in the form of captivity narratives is to gain access to powerful, credentialed language as well as important models of self-representation and understanding.

At the same time, the language of captivity narratives often gained credence through the denigration and displacement of various subjects. The cultural and economic value of tales of bondage depended on disparaging the worth of white slaveholders, Southeastern Indians, and even fellow captives. The depiction of George Thompson, Alanson Work, and James Burr as righteous prisoners was directly opposed to the corrupt disposition of so called “state felons.” And in Henry Bibb’s *Life*, the appraisal of Bibb as an antebellum man, in particular, was directly opposed to Cherokee males’ depiction as less than men. As a result, the cultural capital of ex-captives’ narratives and self-constructions came at the cost of other groups and by way of Othering groups. In doing so, these accounts reinforced the legitimacy of representations that constructed virtuous subjects by way of maligning Others.

Just as problematically, to identify the achievement of these texts and writers as a form of capital is, in some ways, to extend the objectification and commodification that they tried to resist. Harriet Jacobs, for instance, certainly understood her narrative as a

commodity that had to be fashioned to satisfy the appetites of a white, female middle class readership, but her story is further commodified if it is only understood as producing economic and cultural capital. Even so, by ascribing the features of capital to her and other ex-captives' writings, I also mean to foreground these authors' awareness of their positions in such systems of profit, and how these texts critically intervened on their behalf.

Indeed, in many instances, captivity narratives reconfigured the binaries underlying hierarchies of race, class, and gender. As Vogel notes of many racially and culturally Othered antebellum orators, their assumption of "white" rhetorical ploys also challenged the meaning of whiteness (3). Similarly, I argue that captivity narratives re-wrote what it meant to be white, American, masculine, and feminine. They wrote it with a difference or differences that problematized the construction of those categories.

Captivity narratives' revisions of national, gendered, and personal scripts of identity affected an entire network of represented identity. The autobiographical posturing of ex-captive narrators often augmented claims to national identity. In turn, the re-presentation of national affiliation facilitated linkages with various models of masculinity and femininity. And particular models of femininity worked to buttress affiliations with differently classed groups. We can think about these effects more specifically, though abstractly, according to their autobiographical, racial, national, gendered, and economic manifestations.

For Mary Jemison, who was also illiterate in English and thus unable to tell independently her own tale, her extraordinary Indian captivity account refashions her as autobiographical speaker. Though the autobiographical dimensions of her "I" are

significantly co-opted by her editor, James Seaver, the account nonetheless exhibits the autobiographical imperative contained in Indian captivity and early American history. The autobiographical capital of captivity can also be seen in George Thompson's multiply authored account, *Prison Life*, which employs an epistolary self made available in Paul's letters to the early Christian church. Of necessity, Paul's missives were documents produced under duress and yet also understood as records of redemption through and triumph over material conditions. Likewise, Harriet Jacobs's letter writing constitutes an "I" that is realized in constriction but that is equally able to escape detection and that can even cause misdirection. In the larger context of antebellum women's personal letter writing, Jacobs's "I" makes use of the autobiographical forms available to and legible for many white middle-class women. Henry Bibb, on the other hand, assumed the autobiographical voice becoming then standard after Douglass's 1845 *Narrative*, an "I" at once critical of a larger American narrative even as it writes within it. Even though he produced an autobiographical account of his experience, Robert Adams's London narrative is a record of the connected biographical imperative attendant to North African captivity narratives. Within and through these "I"s, other subject positions speak.

On a hyperbolic scale, Robert Adams's narrative of travel and captivity in the famed city rehearsed the more modest models of Anglo-American whiteness remembered in less fantastic Barbary captivity narratives. What was believed to be the cultural capitol of the North African interior directly related to the cultural capital of those who possessed knowledge and/or experience in reference to the "emporium of Africa." Mary Jemison's account of Indian captivity is as much an account of the

particular exigencies of whiteness as it is of settlers, immigrants, or colonists. By the end of the narrated time of the narrative, the figure of Jemison is ambivalently white or Seneca, but she is hardly ever read as Scott-Irish. At least implicitly, *Prison Life* renders a captivity that is the ironic prerogative of whites, as antebellum penal practices were almost unanimously aimed at reforming white males. In this sense, to be incarcerated (or not to be) was a particularly racialized kind of punishment and, as envisioned here, a particularly racialized space for privileged self-fashioning. Bibb's tale, of course, with its strategically placed comparison of Bibb to an anonymous and captive "white man," also memorializes the linkages between white identity and Indian captivity. However, he is not merely interested in his likeness to whiteness *per se*, but the category's license for aggressive possession of his family and himself.

In its various forms, writing about captivity also animates figurations of cultural and even American identity. Most notably, Mary Jemison's tale of Shawnee abduction and Seneca adoption enshrines her as a substitute for Indians who are perceived as vanishing into the colonial American and frontier past. Moreover, she is representative of the figure of the "native" American who rises up to displace this fading group. And Bibb's narrative is of an "American slave," which is at once critical of but yet still invested in the notion of American allegiance. Similarly, George Thompson, James Burr and Alanson Work's narrative performs a longsuffering American subjectivity by way of its critique of the failings of American justice.

Just as important, the captivity narratives discussed here secure relationships to authors' compromised or denied gendered identities. In Mary Jemison's narrative, her captivity cuts her off from her own mother and other blood relatives. But her account of

captivity and adoption also make her eligible as a “sister,” “daughter,” “mother,” and even foremother of Native and American subjects. And though scholars continue to disagree about the meaning of Jemison’s indigeneity, they all concur in reading her narrative, in June Namias’s words, as a “woman’s life story.” Similarly, in the garret of her grandmother’s house, her autobiographical reverie tells us, Harriet Jacobs occupies multiple positions of unborn child, niece, daughter, and mother, but also an American sister. Her framing of captivity hedges against a “fractured and alienated maternity” and forges one that is healing and connected. The “slave girl” is a proper woman in her grandmother’s garret.

Similarly, Bibb’s account of Indian captivity frames him as a virtuous father, both protective of his family and possessive of them. Too, scenes of fugitive escape – as in his trek with his companion Jack through the backcountry – frame him as a lone and aggressive manly hero. Likewise, Robert Adams is a masculine and meditative explorer, rationally moving through a dangerous African landscape. As opposed to the show or promise of physical aggression presented by Bibb’s horse stealing, however, Adams’s narrative reminds the reader of the “insupportable heat” of the North African sun, and thereby paints Adams as a privileged, if embattled, model of white masculinity. In a similar way, George Thompson, James Burr, and Alanson Work’s text memorializes a longsuffering but redemptive masculinity under the pressures of state captivity. The narrative tells of the brotherhood of sufferers who bond together despite and because of the penal chain.

If captivity narratives generated value, this value was necessarily shared by a number of subjects, as slaves, prisoners, and others usually lacked the means to produce

their stories unilaterally. Harriet Jacobs was famously assisted by Lydia Maria Child in the production of her account, leading some to even speculate that any value (cultural, literary, or otherwise) in the narrative was attributable to her (which has been definitively been disproved by Jean Fagan Yellin). In the case of Robert Adams's account, the Committee of Merchants Trading to Africa, embodied in the person of Simon Cock, claimed a large share, if not much, of the economic and cultural capital produced by the text. Unlike Jacobs, he was illiterate, as were many sailors of the time, and thus had to depend on others for the actual scripting of his experience as well as its production. Similarly, Mary Jemison's narrative comes to the public sphere by way of "several respectable men" interested in preserving local New York history. Having spent the majority of her life as a Seneca woman, she is illiterate in English and requires the aid of James Seaver and Thomas Clute in order to fashion her life into a form recognizable to early nineteenth-century Anglo-American audiences. As is typical of most slave narratives, Henry Bibb's account is edited by a white amanuensis and benefits from an extensive network of anti-slavery agents, societies, and readers. However, the picture of the shared and dispersed nature of captivity's capital is George Thompson, James Burr, and Alanson Work's *Prison Life*. Although Thompson compiles and authors much of the account, it also speaks to a connected experience of bondage that is then disseminated through and by way of the intersecting social reform and anti-slavery movements.

Finally, such texts also produced economic capital. *The Narrative of Mary Jemison* – the best selling Indian captivity narrative of the 1820's – sold thousands of copies, as did many other Indian captivity accounts of that era. *Prison Life*, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, and *The Narrative of Robert Adams* all went through several

editions, earning their authors, editors, and sponsoring organizations tangible profits. Hence, even if one were not the subject of such captivity, as James Seaver, Lucius Matlack, Lydia Maria Child, and Simon Cock were not, there were still financial profits to be gained from the productions of narratives of confinement.

The nature of this capital must always be understood in relation to the totality of captivity narratives. If the antebellum slave narrative was a legible or credible form it was in large part due to the groundwork that had been laid by the Indian captivity narrative. In that genre, Anglo-American subjects saw a model of bondage in which captives were resilient, worthy of sympathy, and even heroic. Though the leap from Northern white female captives of Indians to Southern black male and female slaves of whites was not automatic, it was an identifiable and important transformation. And as Jemison's references to the runaway slaves who share her land makes clear, the Indian captivity narrative and the ex-slave narrative share similar historical contexts as well as discursive links. This connection is more fully realized in Bibb's tale of resistance to Southern American slavery which is then buttressed by his rendition of Cherokee slavery. *Prison Life*, on the other hand, clearly relies on a model of redemptive suffering found in the first century writing of the oft-imprisoned apostle Paul, but also on a prophetic style established by mid-nineteenth century slave narratives. *A Narrative of the Life of Robert Adams* depends on the Barbary Coast captivity narrative popular in the early nineteenth century, but also narratives of African exploration, which sometimes included scenes of submission and captivity. Adams's narrative is also contextualized by the overlapping contexts of African and Islamic slavery. Hence, the capital of captivity narratives depended on the circulation and intersection of several types of captivity writing and

meant that almost every articulation of captivity (if only implicitly) depended on other and seemingly far removed types of writing about confinement, bondage, and slavery.

The end of an era

Important differences mark the post-bellum world from the antebellum one. In the pre-Civil War era, philosophical and literary movements lent themselves to sympathetic interest and even the cultural authority of a wide range of captives. In the post-Civil War era, many of those supports were absent or had greatly diminished. In the post-bellum era, moreover, some forms of autobiographical captivity writing simply faded or moved to other parts of the country.

In the post-bellum period, John Hope Franklin reveals, northerners became increasingly invested in gaining financial profits from the war-time industries, and the desire for reform consequently declined (8). As Kenneth Stamp avers: “In the new age of industrial enterprise there seemed to be no place for the old families with their genteel culture and strong traditions of disinterested public service” (17). In contrast, in the antebellum north, a general movement towards social and moral reform animated sympathetic interest in the captive as well as the production of narratives about his/her life.

As opposed to the “spilt religion” of the antebellum era, reconstruction was a more conservative movement that leaned towards national reconciliation. As William C. Harris argues, the impulse that has typically been described as reconstruction was more often envisioned as restoration, a moderate and even conservative move towards patching up the national union (5). Despite the new rights and protections for blacks granted under

the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, the general move of the political climate was towards national recuperation, which meant the further marginalization of racial and socio-economic Others. Especially after 1867, Heather Cox Richardson makes clear, both Republicans and Democrats looked at blacks as inefficient and belligerent laborers. This perception was compounded by new waves of European immigration that increased American xenophobia (19). In such a context, the lives of captives and other downtrodden subjects had less purchase.

These socio-economic changes had quite specific consequences in the world of letters. Literary romanticism, for instance, which had provided a context in which confinement and bondage were useful and interesting subjects, had given way to realism and regionalism. Previously, romanticism had encouraged sensitive and strategic readings of the captive in the name of freedom, readings from which Indian captivity narratives, Barbary captivity narratives, slave narratives, and prison narratives benefited. But in the post-Civil War era, the general trend toward realistic and less idealized portraits of human experience meant that the captive was no longer the focus. Industrialization and a consequent concern with wage bondage overshadowed the plight of the bondsperson. As Susanna Egan argues in “‘Self’-Conscious History: American Autobiography after the Civil War,” industrialization and technology changed the context of post-bellum autobiographical production as “new ideas in science, psychology, economics, and the treatment of history were revolutionizing the ways in which autobiographers thought about themselves” (70-71). In particular, post-bellum writers selected “forms that conceal[ed] or minimize[d] the self” (77). Too, autobiographical production became involved in the movement towards westerly locales (80). Both of

these strains were quite a departure from the (North)Eastern focus on the prisoner, slave, and captive.

By the end of the 1840's, for instance, the last remnants of Indian captivity had faded in the East, and even in the South. Despite the Cherokee slavery of Henry Bibb near mid-century, Indian captivity was highly unlikely in the east past mid-century (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 167). Moving westward, of course, Indian captivity remained as real a threat as ever. The account of Apache captivity and scarring of the Oatman Girls was as popular as any Northeastern captivity narrative. But in the Southeast, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Trail of Tears in 1838 had seriously diminished the presence of Native Americans. Hence, the possibilities for captivity realized and refracted in Henry Bibb's narrative were extremely unlikely afterwards.

Likewise, the slave narrative, which had been the most popular and lucrative narrative of captivity in antebellum America, lost much of its appeal after the Civil War. As Marion Starling Wilson explains of this era, the slave narrative "all but vanished from common knowledge" (2). As suggested by the poor sales of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), the slave narrative had crested in the 1850's, but had faded in the anxious context of the approaching Civil War. In the post-war era, narratives such as the successful businessman (J.P. Morgan), the immigrant turned American (Horatio Alger), and the Franklinesque bootstrapper took center stage. To be sure, such works as Frederick Douglass's *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1880) and Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* still made an impact on the post-War period. But in both of these texts, the emphasis is on the struggle towards freedom and acceptance, not the trials of enslaved life. Elizabeth Keckley's narrative of presidential connection and

Zilpha Elaw's spiritual autobiography are more representative of post-bellum production. As Susanna Egan explains of post-bellum minority writers, "what could be their full and authentic voice is muted or adjusted to suit a white audience and often to suggest conformity with the white culture" (83). The decline of the slave narrative was crucial as many other antebellum traditions of captivity narratives operated and regained significance in the context of the slave narrative, such as the North African captivity narrative, the Indian captivity narrative, and the prison narrative.

Prison literature, on the other hand, continued to flourish in the post-bellum East as prisons continued to expand. Even so, the reformatory impulses that had marked the meaning and representation of incarceration in the antebellum era gave way to, what Blomberg and Lucken term, the "post-Civil War pessimism about the reformatory powers of the prison-come-penitentiary" (70). As H. Bruce Franklin reminds us, much post-bellum prison writing leaned towards criticism of the prison system (138). It was not until the Progressive Era of the 1870's and 80's that such innovations as the indeterminate sentence, parole, and probation became widespread (Blomberg 72). So, the reformatory context which had celebrated the prisoner was not immediately present after the Civil War. What is more, as imprisonment in the post-war South became a de facto form of African American slavery, and as disbelief in the reformatory nature of inmates consequently declined,⁵⁵ the prisoner became a less likely site for sympathy. In post-Civil War America, the new racial composition of prisoners made them much less likely to be read as cultural heroes or spiritual martyrs.

A species of North African captivity narrative continued into the late nineteenth and even early twentieth century, as can be seen in *Driven to the Sea; or, the Sailor's*

Secret, Story of the Algerine Corsairs (1904), a *Pluck and Luck* dime novel of the early twentieth century (Baepler 49). But without the early national context of war with North Africa, these texts take on a radically different meaning than early national Barbary accounts. In short, by 1861 some forms of antebellum captivity narratives had faded while others persisted in dramatically different forms and with dramatically different meanings.

What this body of literature means

The question now becomes, what does this body of literature conceived as a whole mean? More specifically, what is the nature and extent of their authority, capital, power, or mastery? In texts that are contextualized by bondage and that thematize submission, how is it possible to envision authority?

We find a typical example of this dilemma in Frederick Douglass's 1845 slave narrative. In *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which has taken on the status of a master narrative for the entire genre, the narrator famously exclaims that he is now a "master of himself" upon achieving independence. But in so doing, of course, he expresses the content of his freedom in the form of captivity. Of this representation, Samira Kawash writes,

For this reason, Douglass's conception of freedom remains firmly within the liberal tradition, in which slavery persists as the foundational social relationship such that the physical and historical relation of slave to master is neither destroyed nor abandoned; rather, it has reinstalled itself as the basis for the rational free subject. (40-41)

In this reading, freedom is (at least theoretically) a recuperation of domination. For even in his freedom, Douglass relies on tropes of bondage and is captive in form if not in fact. Based on this curious situation, Kawash wonders if "the liberal conception of freedom as

self-mastery is itself deficient” (41). Kawash’s criticism and questioning of Douglass’s achievement of freedom seems equally apropos to my own study. What are the implications of a freedom, power, or authority that is grounded in a metaphoric of captivity? In short, does the exercise of authority mean the reproduction of domination?

My study concludes that the representations that attend captivity narratives necessarily extend the domination of Others. The self-possession of the ex-captive directly affects and even results in the dis-possession of the captor, thereby producing authority out of the denigration of an(o)ther. But this does not mean that captives’ authority is bankrupt. Rather, what the narratives of Jacobs, Adams, Bibb and the many others they stand for illustrate is that authority needs to be imagined in more contradictory and reflexive ways that allow for the centrality of submission in bondage and freedom. As Kathleen B. Jones contends in *Compassionate Authority* (1993), it is necessary to formulate “a more contradictory and more difficult theoretical position with respect to the problem of authority” (3). So, while it is clear that submission structures relations of inequality, it must also become clear that submission, bondage, and captivity work within and structure representations and realities of freedom, authority, and power. It is within this more complex framework that we must measure the success and stakes of these texts.

As one final case in point, in *Autobiography of an Ex-white man: A New Master Narrative for America*, for example, Paul Wolff argues that American historiography needs a new “master narrative.” The former narrative, he explains, suggested that the story of America is essentially and overwhelmingly one of the achievement and advancement of freedom. Against this “master narrative,” Wolff astutely and

meticulously paints a starkly different picture, where oppression and tyranny form the everyday reality of distinctly American experience. The Puritans quickly practice the intolerance they fled from in the Old World; indentured servitude and chattel slavery mark the beginnings of the republic; and the invention of the penitentiary is the distinct legacy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Concluding his survey of the history of America up until the present, Wolff declares, “America was born as a Land of Freedom and Bondage, and it remains to this day a Land of Freedom and Bondage” (97).

But this is precisely the conceptualization of America and freedom that this study has striven to avoid. Like Wolff, to be sure, my project has attempted to illustrate the ways that America is not just “A Land of the Free.”⁵⁶ However, this observation threatens merely to dissolve into an acknowledgement that bondage was also a part of the American past. As a result, there were some pockets of freedom in America and its literature; and there were some pockets of bondage in America and its literature. But these pockets were wholly unconnected. In reassessing the importance and meaning of captivity narratives in nineteenth century America, I have tried to trouble the difference between freedom and bondage; power and powerlessness; and submission and mastery. I have tried to think through the ways that bondage counteracts as well as confirms the imperatives of freedom. In this sense, one might say that “America was born as a Land of Freedom *in* Bondage, and it remains to this day a Land of Freedom *in* Bondage.”

The study is then not the substitution of one totem for another – bondage for freedom – in understanding literary production and meaning. It seeks to understand literary production and the meaning of representation through recognition of the interconnected categories of bondage and freedom. While a history of American

narrative (or even a narrative of American history) marked by a decisive movement from slavery to freedom may be dramatically exciting, a more accurate and nuanced narrative is one of the interdependence of bondage and freedom and even how bondage informs freedom. This master narrative gives us an important and insistent sense of the productive role of writing bondage to self-hood, national identity, and gender in antebellum America. According to Thompson's text, for instance, to be a Christian subject was to surrender one's will to god (even in the form of the state), and then to gain spiritual rights from that subjection. To be a protective father, Bibb's account suggests, was to rescue one's self and family from Indian captivity, thereby proving one's virility in the midst of danger. And to be a good woman, Harriet Jacobs's text tells us, was to undergo various biological and physical confinements to guarantee the safe reproduction of one's offspring. In this way, accounts of bondage, slavery, and submission helped to delimit and refigure the borders of who was literate, moral, American, equal, civilized, and worthy to write. Ultimately, these narratives demonstrate the centrality of submission – not only as the negation of writing, rights, and identity – but as fundamental to literary life and production in antebellum America.

⁵⁴ The notion of cultural capital, of course, comes from Bourdieu. See *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984).

⁵⁵ See Davis, Oshinsky, and Taylor on post Civil War southern penology.

⁵⁶ In the tradition of this writing, one of the earliest and best examples is Edmund S. Morgan's *Slavery and Freedom*. More recently, see Peter Caster's meditation on the meaning of American identity and the prison system in "'Land of the Free': U.S. Literature and Detention." For a provocative transnational consideration of captivity's relationship to enfranchisement, see *Captivating Subjects: Citizenship and Captivity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*.

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