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"The freemasonry of the race": The cultural politics of ritual, race, and place in postemancipation Virginia

Corey D. B. Walker

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"THE FREEMASONRY OF THE RACE": THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF RITUAL,

RACE, AND PLACE IN POSTEMANCIPATION VIRGINIA

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the American Studies Program

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
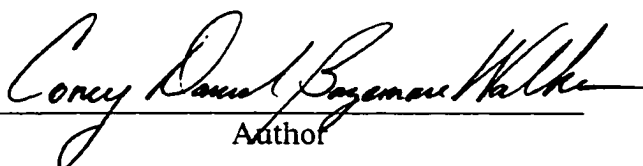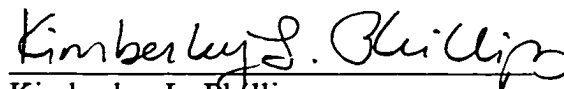
by

Corey D. B. Walker

2001

APPROVAL SHEET

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the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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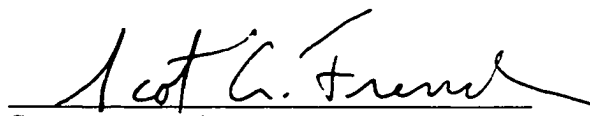
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"My final prayer:

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!"

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

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Most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Carthene Bazemore Walker, Ph.D. More than any other, she has shown me what it means to be human. Thank you for your unending support and encouragement. I love you.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my grandfather, the Reverend T. M. Walker, a great man and Mason.

ABSTRACT

African American cultural and social history has neglected to interrogate fully a crucial facet of African American political, economic, and social life: African American Freemasonry. *"The Freemasonry of the Race": The Cultural Politics of Ritual, Race, and Place in Postemancipation Virginia* seeks to remedy this neglect by developing an in-depth and critical treatment of this fraternal order. This project broadly situates African American Freemasonry in the complex and evolving relations of power, peoples, and polities of the Atlantic world. The study develops an interpretative framework that not only recognizes the organizational and institutional aspects of African American Freemasonry, but also interprets it as a discursive space in and through which articulations of race, class, gender, and place are theorized and performed. These public and private performances – often encoded in *archaic* symbols and languages – mark the cultural divides and socio-political conflicts that litter the landscape of United States social and civic life.

"The Freemasonry of the Race" presents a critical cartography of African American Freemasons' responses to the social and political exigencies of the postemancipation period. Through the lens of African American Freemasonry, this project presents a textured reading of the social, cultural, and political situation of African Americans in the postemancipation period. The study connects the developments of African American Freemasonry in the Atlantic world with the every day culture of African American Freemasonry in Charlottesville, Virginia from the conclusion of the Civil War until the turn of the century. Utilizing African American Freemasonry as a critical optic, the major question this study attempts to respond to is: How can we historicize and (re)present African American Freemasonry in order to rethink the cultural and political space of the postemancipation period in the United States? This project is also concerned with the issue of how to conceptualize a *postemancipation* South as a moment of intersection of different historical temporalities each embedded with various cultural, social, political, and economic projects.

Borrowing and blending a number of methodologies from social history, literary theory, and cultural studies, *"The Freemasonry of the Race": The Cultural Politics of Ritual, Race, and Place in Postemancipation Virginia* presents a set of analytic essays on African American Freemasonry, each intimately concerned with deciphering some of the principles that organized and (re)constructed various regimes of power and normality along the fault lines of race, sex, gender, class, and place. By thinking and working through African American Freemasonry in such a manner, this project seeks to open up new interdisciplinary horizons in African American cultural and social history.

A NOTE ON FREEMASONRY

As the title, *"The Freemasonry of the Race": The Cultural Politics of Ritual, Race, and Place in Postemancipation Virginia*, intimates, the major themes explored in this dissertation go beyond the intimate confines of the Freemason Lodge. It should not be assumed that the reader must have a deep knowledge of this fraternal order, nor must s/he fully understand the ritual practices and logics of this group. However, it may prove helpful to be acquainted, by way of this brief introductory note, with some of the particulars of this cultural formation.[1]

Freemasonry in the United States has its origins in the first Lodges and Grand Lodges that appeared in London around 1717.[2] Shedding its image as a trade guild for operative stonemasons, speculative Freemasonry emerged as a ritual based fraternal order designed to inculcate the "noble" principles of love, charity, and brotherhood in all of its members. As Freemasonry spread, the "craft," as it is colloquially known, grew to encompass other peoples from various cultures in all regions of the globe.

Each Lodge of Freemasons is composed of a minimum of seven members. These seven members, in rank order, are: Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Senior Deacon, Junior Deacon, Secretary, and Treasurer. In order for a group of Freemasons to meet as a regularly constituted Lodge of Freemasons, they must obtain a charter from an authorized Grand Lodge that has jurisdiction over the geographic area

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[1] This "Note" was inspired by C. L. R. James, "A Note on Cricket" in *Beyond A Boundary* (1963; Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xvii-xx.

[2] On the origins of Freemasonry, see Robert Freke Gould, *Gould's History of Freemasonry throughout the World*, Dudley Wright, ed. 6 vols. (1885-1889; New York: J. C. Yorston , 1936); John Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1986); and David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For a summary of the sources on Freemasonry, see Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 321-324.

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where the Lodge will be located. The Grand Lodge is the presiding body of Freemasons endowed with Masonic jurisdiction over a prescribed area. The presiding officer of the Grand Lodge is the Grand Master. In the United States, the boundary of each state forms the jurisdiction for the Grand Lodge.

In order to become a Freemason, a male of "lawful age" (generally 21 years old) must submit an application or "petition" to a Freemason Lodge in his local area. If the members of the Lodge accept the petition, the individual undergoes the ritual initiation into the "mysteries" of Freemasonry. The initiation is a three-part process whereby the individual, upon exhibiting satisfactory mastery of the rites and ritual of each stage, is "initiated" as an Entered Apprenticed, "passed" as a Fellow Craft, and "raised" as a Master Mason. Each component of this process is referred to as a degree, with the Master Mason being the third and final degree. As a Master Mason, the individual is welcomed as a full member of the Lodge and the brotherhood of Freemasonry. The individual may acquire additional degrees in either the York or Scottish rites of Freemasonry, however the first three degrees form the basis of the fraternity.[3] Every Freemason, as well as the institution of Freemasonry, is governed by an elaborate structure of Masonic jurisprudence, which sets the guidelines for membership, ritual instruction, organization, and discipline.[4]

In the United States, African American Freemasons are generally affiliated with the Prince Hall Masonic order. With Grand Lodges operating in forty-one states, Prince

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[3] For an excellent discussion of the origins and developments of these degree orders, see Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood,* 239-273.

[4] On some of the problems confronting Freemasonry in the United States, see *Time,* May 25, 1998, 64-66 and *The Washington Post Magazine,* November 25, 2001.

Hall Freemasonry is the largest body of African American Freemasons. Long considered

illegitimate or "clandestine" by white Freemasons in the United States, Prince Hall

Freemasons were formally recognized as "regular" Freemasons in 1996 by the United

Grand Lodge of England.[5] Since then, most white Grand Lodges in the United States

have followed England's example, with the notable exception of the former slave-holding

states of 1861.[6] Although some have heralded the reconciliation of white and black

Freemasons, African American and European American Freemasons still maintain

separate and distinct identities.[7]

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[5] See Boston, *Boston Globe*, June 11, 1996.

[6] Paul Bessel has created an accurate and up-to-date web-based archive of this aspect of Masonic history along with a stunning graphic depiction of white Masonic recognition of African American Freemasons. See www.bessel.org.

[7] See for example, the recent celebration of Prince Hall Freemasons in Washington, DC. Washington, DC, *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1998.

"THE FREEMASONRY OF THE RACE": THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF RITUAL, RACE, AND PLACE IN POSTEMANCIPATION VIRGINIA

INTRODUCTION

A first impression, a persisting malaise: culture is soft. *Analysis slips everywhere over the uncertainty that proliferates in the gaps of prediction as soon as the certainty of the illusory statistics of objective signs (behavior, images, etc.) slips away.*

Michel de Certeau[1]

Conjunctural analysis, even when it is pursued on several levels, cannot provide the total undisputed truth. It is however one *of the necessary means of historical explanation and as such a useful formulation of the problem. We have the problem of classifying on the one hand the economic conjunctures and on the other the non-economic conjunctures . . . A conjunctural scaffolding helps to construct a better house of history.*

Fernand Braudel[2]

In the course of "divulging the great secret of my life" in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, James Weldon Johnson's Ex-Colored man comments:

Through my music teaching and my not absolutely irregular attendance at church I became acquainted with the best class of colored people in Jacksonville. This was really my entrance into the race. It was my initiation into what I have termed the freemasonry of the race. I had formulated a theory of what it was to be colored; now I was getting the practice.[3]

After plunging headlong into the turbulent currents of the Afro-Cuban cigar factory world of Jacksonville, the unnamed narrator in Johnson's novel discovers that as a result of his encounter with the "best class" of African Americans he is forced to rethink his previous understanding what it *means* to live in a racialized society. Heretofore, the Ex-Colored man theorized what it meant to be colored and took his theoretical explication as the

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[1] Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural*, Tom Conley, trans., Luce Girard, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 133.

[2] Cited in Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9.

[3] James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912; New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 54.

primary epistemological grounding for his articulation and understanding of what it meant to be black in a racist society. Only now was he able to gain a deeper, more nuanced portrait of how African Americans negotiated the treacherous terrain of the racial line. His initiation into the "freemasonry of the race" augmented his theoretical position with the practical experience of how those who lived with and under the markings of race came to know and experience life in a racially determined – at times overdetermined – society.

"The novelty of my position," the Ex-Colored man continues, "caused me to observe and consider things which, I think, entirely escaped the young men I associated with; or, at least, were so commonplace to them as not to attract their attention."[4] The narrator's initiation involved more than just a baptism or rite of passage into a new order however. His entrance into the "freemasonry of the race" increased his awareness of the racial economy of African American and American life and culture. It was a kind of second sight – similar to that articulated earlier by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* – that the Ex-Colored man was gifted with as he came to view life and the experiences of race on a broader, more expansive horizon.[5] Being initiated into "the

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[4] Ibid. 54.

[5] It is interesting to note that in *Souls* Du Bois writes, "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." The state of what can be termed the "false consciousness" of African American being that lies at the heart of Du Bois's project is extended in Johnson's commentary about the lack of awareness of "the young men" the narrator associated that enabled him to realize his gift of "second-sight." See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; Dover: Dover Publications, 1994), 2. On the relationship of Du Bois's *Souls* and Johnson's *Autobiography* see V. P. Franklin, *Living Our Lives, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African American Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 95-138; Donald C. Goellnicht, "Passing as Autobiography: James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiograpy of an Ex-Coloured Man*," *African American Review* 30.1 (Spring, 1996), 17-33; and Richard Kostelantez, *Politics in the African American Novel:*

freemasonry of the race" gave the Ex-Colored man a "fuller comprehension of the tremendous struggle which is going on between the races in the South."[6]

To begin a historically informed study of African American Freemasonry with reference to James Weldon Johnson's classic work may seem a bit out of place. Such an introduction may cause some to think that I have been initiated into what Michel Foucault has called "the great warm and tender Freemasonry of useless erudition."[7] Nowhere in the novel does Johnson make explicit claim to the institution, structures, rites, or rituals of African American Freemasonry. For Johnson, freemasonry is a sort of short hand, a metaphor for the secret knowledge of race that is revealed to his unnamed narrator only after he has become acquainted with the "best class of colored people in Jacksonville." Indeed, this metaphorical usage is presaged in the Preface of the text: "In these pages it is as though a veil had been drawn aside: the reader is given a view of the inner life of the Negro in America, is initiated into the 'freemasonry,' as it were, of the race."[8]

But it is this sort of appropriation that makes Johnson's colloquial phrase such an apt point of entry for examining the relationship between African Americans and the culture and institution of Freemasonry. Johnson reminds us of the adoptions, adaptations, and transformations African Americans made to the terms, meanings, and uses of and associations with the secretive fraternity of Freemasonry. Johnson's appropriation and

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James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

[6] James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography*, 54.

[7] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 79.

[8] James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography*, xxxiv.

deployment directs our attention to the multiple dimensions and ways that African Americans utilized and signified on the language, institution, and culture of Freemasonry. In the end, he points us in a new and interesting direction in exploring the connections between African Americans and Freemasonry.

Far from being just a fraternity of African American men organized around the principles of morality, charity, and brotherhood, African American Freemasonry encompasses much more than the ritual performances of idealized notions of what it means to be a virtuous man. Through the experiences of forced migration, slavery, discrimination, dehumanization, and degradation, African American Freemasonry was forced to come to grips with the undemocratic sensibilities of the United States and the Western world. In this connection, Roger Chatier makes a useful observation of these inconsistencies in his discussion of Freemasonry and the French Revolution: "This ideal, clear as it is, nonetheless contrasts with the realities of an inegalitarian society – realities often reflected within Freemasonry itself."[9] Just as the egalitarian tendencies of European Freemasonry confronted the inegalitarian social, political, and economic practices of the emerging French Republic, African American Freemasonry faced a similar, if not more tenuous, situation in the less than equal social, economic, and political milieu of the United States. In the broader context of such inconsistencies and contradictions we come to understand how African Americans navigated the contested terrain of the United States and the larger Atlantic world in and through the culture and institution of Freemasonry.

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[9] Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 164.

Recognizing the multiplicity of meanings, uses, and appropriations of Freemasonry by African America, *"The Freemasonry of the Race": The Cultural Politics of Ritual, Race, and Place in Postemancipation Virginia* highlights the manner and method by which African Americans appropriated the symbols, rituals, languages, and structures of Freemasonry in their attempt to negotiate the fluid and contradictory landscape of postemancipation United States. The ritual practices and ideology of Freemasonry offered African Americans a cultural and institutional model that resonated within the ideological and structural frameworks of the Western world.[10] As such, its parallel structure, ideology, and ritual provided an attractive medium through which African Americans could articulate their place and position in a post-Civil War world where, to appropriate Marx's phrase, "all that is solid melts into air." African American Freemasonry embodies and exhibits the potentials and the possibilities in African American and American postemancipation life, thus exhibiting the intricate process of "African Americans living and working in a world of overlapping diasporas."[11] Furthermore, by exploring the contours of this fraternal order, we can begin to unravel how and in what manner African American Freemasonry functions as a sign of the logics of race while operating as a signifier of the anti-black racialist and racist ordering of postemancipation society.

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[10] On this point, see Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[11] Earl Lewis, "To Turn As On A Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas," *American Historical Review* 100 (June, 1995), 767.

With the demise of the slave regime and the formal inclusion of African Americans to the political body of the United States, the ritual space of the lodge provided African American Freemasons with a critical location in and through which they could articulate their membership in United States civic and political society. Roger Chartier is instructive on this point as he explains the possibilities offered by the institution of Freemasonry:

> Perhaps it can be explained – in an approach inspired by Augustin Cochin's thesis—as the expression of an impulse toward egalitarianism that cleared new space within a society of orders and estates, a space where individuals were not distinguished by their juridical condition and merit was the only legitimate basis for attaining higher ranks and dignities. In this view, Freemasonry set up an area of "democratic sociability" within a society that was far from democratic, showing by its example that social ties could be forged not on the basis of obligatory membership in separate and stratified bodies but on that of the essential equality that exists between all individuals.[12]

Freemasonry provided a haven from the turmoil of society and politics, in which African Americans of various social classes could come together and develop strategies for staking their claims as citizens of the United States. As the earliest attempt by African Americans to create a national organization, Freemasonry afforded African Americans the opportunity to develop and perform the requisite forms and rituals of citizenship in a

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[12] Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins*, 163-164.

society that marginalized them at best, excluded them at worst.[13] "Within their own

black organizations," Lawrence Levine writes, "Negroes could run for and hold office,

vote, administer the expenditure of monies, wield power, surround themselves with the

prerequisites and prestige forbidden to them outside of their own communities."[14] The

ritual and performative arena of Freemasonry allowed African Americans to formulate

the basis of, and articulate their desire for, a place within the structures of the political

economy of the United States.

The independence of African American Freemasonry was conducive to the

creation of an atmosphere whereby the interests of African Americans could be discussed

and strategies plotted in an autonomous and self-determining space. The critical space

opened up by Freemasonry also enabled African Americans to engage in a vibrant

exchange of ideas. The social and political strategies formulated and refined in the

Lodge contributed to the development of various political and social ideologies that aided

African American Freemasons in navigating the contested terrain of American society.

To this end, the culture and institution of African American Freemasonry was an

empowering cultural formation for African Americans as they "gained critical leadership

experience, channeled their opposition to setbacks in civic conditions, and gained

monetary respite from the unpredictable world of American racism."[15]

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[13] Harry Reed, *Platform for Change: The Foundation of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 63.

[14] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 268.

[15] Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 23.

Freemasonry offered its African American members more than just the opportunity to articulate their position within the United States national imaginary. The fraternity provided African Americans with an independent vehicle in and through which they could cultivate the bonds of community and develop a cultural identity. This aspect of African American Freemasonry was evident in the early development of the fraternity as Joanna Brooks has argued:

> Segregationist social habits and widespread prejudice against the reputedly "clandestine" African Lodge further bolstered the Black Freemasons' ability to regulate membership and attendance. Thus, the "Africans" of this organization could exercise a degree of self-governance unparalleled among the proliferation of similarly named groups in the Northeast. The "African Societies" of New York and Pennsylvania, for example, were not societies of "Africans" but of anti-slavery whites; others, like Samuel Hopkins's "African Union Society," organized African Americans according to the political or religious agendas of a few white leaders.[16]

In the postemancipation world where stability coexisted in tandem with fluidity, African American Freemasons capitalized on this character of their fraternity as they sought to place the rituals, symbols, and culture of Freemasonry within a context that affirmed the worth, value, and dignity of African American life and culture. Through speeches, parades, civic rituals, and social functions, African American Freemasonry became an important and noteworthy exhibition of the significance of African American life and

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[16] Joanna Brooks. "Prince Hall. Freemasonry. and Genealogy." *African American Review* 34.2 (2000), 201.

culture. Indeed, the lasting impression of the public presentation of this African American cultural formation was excitedly recollected by Booker T. Alexander who remarked on his experience of witnessing the activities of a lodge of black Freemasons in his youth: "I will never forget they had parades, and the music, and the gaily colored uniforms and I was wild eyed and I will never forget that."[17]

The cultural, political, and economic strategies of African American Freemasons, however heroic, were not without its own contradictions. In as much as members of this fraternity espoused universalist themes and principles and sought to place them in the service of advancing the interests of African Americans, they were nevertheless part and parcel of a gendered and class conscious hierarchical ordering of American society. African American Freemasons readily accepted and accommodated the dominant patriarchal structures and gender conventions of American society. The place and position of African American women was subordinated to the advancement of the interests of this group of African American men. Indeed, in (re)constructing the image of African Americans, the fraternity readily promoted the masculine ideal of the African American Freemason as the true embodiment and representative of the race. Moreover, African American Freemasons relied heavily on normative proscriptions of morality in struggling for citizenship and material advancement in the American capitalist economy. African American Freemasons espoused a politics of respectability concomitant with its politics of masculinity in advancing bourgeois cultural values that affirmed economic thrift, social purity, and "Victorian" mores of a proper and respectful member of society.

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[17] Booker T. Alexander. interview June 11, 1982. Washington, DC, untranscribed tape, Orai History Collection – Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

In all, African American Freemasonry was a tension filled cultural form as it reflected

competing and contradictory visions of African American advancement in the midst of an

unequal and unjust American society. As Kevin Gaines writes of African American

racial uplift ideology, African American Freemasonry "reflect[ed] popular and elite

tensions: black folk religion and group aspirations for emancipation, land ownership.

literacy, legal marriage, equal rights, federal protection, the suffrage contended with an

elite, missionary culture of Christian evolutionism, whose rhetoric gained authority in the

context of U.S. imperialism."[18]

Despite these drawbacks, the adoption of the rites and rituals of this brotherhood

was not a wholesale capitulation to European American norms and values as articulated

through the institution of Freemasonry. Nothing could be further from the experience of

African American Freemasonry. African American Freemasons added, adjusted, and

appropriated the meanings and usages of this fraternity for purposes that would affirm not

only African American humanity, but also validate the many arguments for African

American advancement in the larger political economy of the United States. "Although

the Masons pledged to serve their membership," James and Lois Norton justly note.

"their commitment to freedom and racial uplift delivered a message of community wide

relevance."[19] In this manner, Freemasonry became an extension of the cultural

negotiations and translations in a complex cultural web that marked the encounter of

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[18] Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 4.

[19] James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126.

African Americans and European Americans throughout the United States and the

Atlantic world.[20]

"*The Freemasonry of the Race*" interrogates the complexities of the cultural

negotiations and translations in the encounter of African and European Americans in

postemancipation Virginia by engaging in an extended dialogue with the various political

and economic structures emerging in the postemancipation context and the cultural space

of African American Freemasonry. My aim in what follows is to present an analysis of

African American Freemasonry that places an emphasis on interpreting the culture,

structure, and ritual of Freemasonry as they were adopted and adapted by African

Americans in the decades following the conclusion of the Civil War. In opting for such

an analytic method, the arguments advanced in this work necessarily eschew a

straightforward narrative of the history of African American Freemasonry in

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[20] See for example Roger D. Abrahams. *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); Ira Berlin. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Michael Gomez. *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebelleum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin American and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake& Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, & Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (1974; New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000); Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Richard Price, *Alabi's World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Frank Shuffelton, ed., *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jon Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

postemancipation Virginia. Instead, what is offered is a collection of closely connected

analytic essays that explore the forms and functions of African American Freemasonry in

contributing to the construction of cultural, political, economic, and ideological fronts on

which African Americans contested the meanings of emancipation and freedom in a

period of tremendous social, political, and economic turmoil.[21] The central question

animating this project is: How and in what ways are symbolic, social, and political forms

of capital (re)formulated and (re)organized by African American Freemasons in an

attempt to carve out new spaces in the postemancipation world of the United States for

African American cultural, civic, and political advancement?

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African American Freemasonry and the cultures and structures engendered by this

particular cultural formation have received relatively little scholarly attention. Although

there has been a significant renaissance in studies on European and American

freemasonry, there is no such parallel for African American Freemasonry.[22] The

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[21] This method was inspired by Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Antebellum Communities* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997). On the concept of fronts, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), xvii-xx.

[22] In the past decade, there has been an explosion of studies on Freemasonry: Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); James Stevens Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry: An Introductory Study* (Woodstock: Overlook, 1993); Anthony D. Fels, "The Square and Compass: San Francisco's Freemasons and American Religion, 1870-1900," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1987; John D. Hamilton, *Material Culture of the American Freemasons* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994); Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Frank Karpiel, "Mystic Ties of Brotherhood: Freemasonry, Royalty and Ritual in Hawaii, 1843-1910," Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1998; William D. Moore, "Structures of Masculinity:

exception to this trend is the work of African American Masonic scholars who continue to produce a prodigious amount of work about the fraternity.[23] However, these works are generally produced by and for members of African American Masonic organizations. As such, they generally lack the critical methodologies and scholarly argumentation of historians. The limited historical context of these works along with their unapologetic championing of the fraternity and its history fail to highlight and include other historical insights and connections that would provide a nuanced portrait of the fraternity. Despite these drawbacks, these works serve the important function of providing a foundational understanding of African American Freemasonry and its place within African American and American society.

The main scholarly studies that are continuously consulted in interpreting and understanding African American Freemasonry are supplied by the studies produced by

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Masonic Temples. Material Culture. and Ritual Gender Archetypes in New York State, 1870-1930." Ph.D. diss.. Boston University, 1999; Richard A. Ruyna and Peter C. Stewart. *The History of Freemasonry in Virginia* (Lanham: University Press of America. 1998); David Stevenson. *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century. 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990).

[23] African American Freemasons have produced a number of studies on and about the institution. These works have tended to present the "great story" of African American Freemasonry while simultaneously advancing the argument for the Masonic legitimacy of African American Freemasons and Freemasonry. Many works by African American Masonic scholars are out of print and reflect the sort of ad hoc publishing method used by African American social and fraternal organizations along with the concomitant social and political exigencies surrounding African American publishing. A sample of works include: Donn A. Cass. *Negro Freemasonry and Segregation: An Historical Study of Prejudice Against American Negroes as Freemasons. and the Position of Negro Freemasonry In the Masonic Family* (Chicago: Ezra A. Cook Publishers. 1957); William H. Grimshaw. *Official History of Freemasonry Among the Colored People in North America* (1903; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); William Upton, *Negro Masonry. Being a Critical Examination of Objections to the Legitimacy of the Masonry Existing Among the Negroes of America* (Boston: Prince Hall Grand Lodge. 1902); Harold Van Buren Voorhis, *Negro Masonry of America* (New York: Henry Emmerson, 1945); Joseph A. Walkes. Jr. *Black Square and Compass: 200 Years of Prince Hall Freemasonry* (Richmond: Macoy Publishing, 1979); Charles H. Wesley. *Prince Hall: Life and Legacy* (Philadelphia: Afro-American Historical Museum and Washington: United Supreme Council, Prince Hall Affiliation, 1977); and Charles H. Wesley, *The History of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Ohio, 1849-1960* (Wilberforce: Central State College Press, 1961).

William A. Muraskin and Loretta J. Williams more than two decades ago. William

Muraskin's text, *Middle-class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in

America*, is an in-depth study that concentrates on fleshing out the concept of the black

middle-class by examining the institution of Prince Hall Freemasonry.[24] Deeply indebted

to the pioneering work of E. Franklin Frazier and, to a lesser degree, Oliver C. Cox,

Muraskin situates African American Freemasonry in the nexus of black middle-class

values and behavior. Viewing "the middle class [as] a tragic group deserving of respect

and empathy than condemnation," Muraskin's work is primarily a sociological study of

black middle-class attitudes and social practices as revealed in and through the structures

of African American Freemasonry.[25]

Five years after the publication of Muraskin's book, Loretta J. Williams' *Black

Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* extended his work, but with a marked

difference.[26] Williams accepted the basic thrusts of Muraskin's middle-class framework.

Instead of viewing African American Freemasonry as an exemplar in promoting black

bourgeois middle-class values and traditions, however, she opted to place African

American Freemasonry in the context of the racial and class politics of United States

civic and political society. Williams took issue with Muraskin's indictment of African

American Freemasonry as "merely an assimilationist response of bourgeois-oriented

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[24] William A. Muraskin, *Middle-class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

[25] Ibid, 5.

[26] Loretta J. Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980).

elites" and posited a "fascinating history of black middle-class males integrally involved

in the affairs of the evolving community and society."[27]

Both Muraskin and Williams relied heavily on a middle-class construct that

undergirded their respective analyses of African American Freemasonry. In a similar

vein, but dealing with a different historical and geopolitical context, is the

anthropological and ethnographic work of Abner Cohen. His *The Politics of Elite*

Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society explores

the development of elite culture through an examination of upper-class Creoles in Sierra

Leone.[28] In light of the work by Muraskin and Williams, Cohen's text can be seen as an

"internationalization" of a class interpretative strategy as it relates to the adoption of

Freemasonry, among other secret orders and rituals, by Africans and people of African

descent in Sierra Leone. In all, each of these works have contributed to the collective

understanding of African American Freemasonry in light of the particular realities of

United States and Western political, economic, and social structures and institutions.

As much as these books offer in terms of their class analyses of African American

Freemasonry, they fail to yield substantive insights into the dynamics of the cultural form

itself. Each of these authors, particularly Muraskin and Williams, downplays the critical

function the symbols, structures, and rituals of this fraternal order played in aiding

African Americans to articulate a place within the larger political economy of the United

States and the Western world. Muraskin's commitment to a middle-class ideology as the

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[27] Ibid, 4.

[28] Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

predominant factor in the actions and behaviors of African American Freemasons, for example, fails to highlight the conflicting and contesting interests found in the fraternity. Muraskin's argument understates the inherent diversity of this organization which encompassed different rites and internal divisions and included the presence of many different lodges within a geographic locale. Such a rigid class structure overshadows various ideologies and strategies that emerge and subside in light of particular social and political experiences of African Americans. Furthermore, both Muraskin and Williams' development and deployment of the category of "middle-class" is fraught with ambiguities and defined by amorphous criteria. For instance, although Muraskin attempts to define how he understands the middle-class construct and describes the social markers by which one is included in the middle-class, his definition involving "social perceptions" and an ideology of respectability is flat and driven by an underdeveloped idea of class antagonism. In his production and deployment of the middle class construct, Muraskin also exhibits a pronounced ahistoricism that falsely unifies his application of the concept from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Notwithstanding the serious historical problematic of such a wholesale adoption and application of this concept, Muraskin's framework also fails to take into account the critical *infrapolitical* zone that is so crucial in understanding the political responses of marginalized groups.[29] Muraskin

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[29] See James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). For the application of this insight to African American history, see Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith, "'Unhidden' Transcripts: Memphis and African American Agency, 1862-1920," in *The New African American Urban History*, Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996), 142-165; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History*, Darlene Clark Hine, et. al. eds. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1995), 3-24; Robin D. G. Kelley, "An Archaeology of Resistance," *American Quarterly* 44.2 (June, 1992), 292-298 and "'We Are Not What

neglects to critically interrogate what he pejoratively terms the "bourgeois values" of

African American Freemasons, and he indicts the entire institution for being a major

proponent of the values and traditions of a racialized *petite bourgeoisie*.

Williams attempts to overcome the shortcomings of Muraskin's work by adopting

and developing the concept of pillarization in coming to terms with the responses of

African American Freemasons to the political and social exigencies of a racialist and

racist social order. Although Williams' theoretical intervention draws our attention to the

important issue of power and its operation in a social and political system intent on

maintaining white hegemony, her approach suffers from a similar fate that also marks

Muraskin's text. Williams fails to delineate how the operations of power affect class

development and ideology. In her analysis, power operates *only* through the technologies

and logics of race – specifically in the binary of black versus white. The middle-class

category as adopted by Williams is a straightforward construct and is applicable to all

places and all times. Thus, the ahistorical tendency present in Muraskin's text is equally

prominent in Williams' work.

Aside from these limitations in their respective class constructs, both Muraskin

and Williams fail to place African American Freemasonry in the context of other African

American fraternity and sorority movements. Such a move may have helped the

interpretative strategies of their class analyses. However, the failure to include this

context along with the lack of a critical historical awareness enables these two books to

perpetuate a stereotype of African American Freemasonry as primarily a middle-class

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We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *The Journal of American History* 80.1 (June, 1993), 75-112.

phenomenon. Aside from these limitations, what the work of Muraskin and Williams

highlights is a deeper problem in the literature on African American Freemasonry: the

dearth of investigations seeking to yield a deeper understanding of the logics and

trajectories of African American Freemasonry in specific periods and locales.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

"The Freemasonry of the Race" examines and interprets the various cultural and political

responses of African American Freemasons to the new terrain of the postemancipation

United States in general and the state of Virginia in particular. This study highlights the

intersections of the culture of African American Freemasonry and the culture of the

postemancipation South in an effort to flesh out the meanings of freedom for the newly

emancipated. "For former slaves," Armstead Robinson argues, "freedom opened new

horizons of personal autonomy and facilitated hitherto unrealizable degrees of economic

and geographic mobility. In fact, no other single event exerted more pervasive influence

over the lives of nineteenth-century Afro-Americans than did emancipation."[30] In this

study, African American Freemasonry, both as an institution and as a cultural form,

becomes the critical lens through which we examine the promises and perils of a society

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[30] Armstead L. Robinson, "The Difference Freedom Made: The Emancipation and Afro-Americans," in Darlene Clark Hine. ed., *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986). 53-54. See also Ira Berlin. et. al. eds.. *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1992); Eric Foner. *Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Herbert G. Gutman. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher. eds., *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture After Slavery* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992); Roger L. Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise : The Political Economy of Slavery. Emancipation. and the American Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch. *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

and nation "beyond slavery."[31] The chapters that follow will enable us to begin to understand African American Freemasonry not as a static institution, but as an evolving cultural formation that responded and reacted to the external and internal political, social, and economic forces of the United States and the modern Western world. Indeed, the structures, rituals, and rites of African American Freemasonry lend themselves to a more thoroughgoing analysis in a critical effort to (re)cover and (re)present the intimate contours and the systems and patterns of thought and behavior that characterize postemancipation life. As Lenora Auslander instructively argues:

> The challenge . . . is to simultaneously grasp the manifestations of the very large and abstract structures and transformations of the world in the small details of life; to re-capture people's expressions – in all media – of their experiences of those abstractions, while attempting to understand the forces shaping the multiple grids mediating those expressions; and finally, to analyze how concrete and mundane actions in the everyday may themselves transform the abstract structures of polity and economy.[32]

To this end, this study is concerned with analyzing the manner in which African American Freemasons negotiated various regimes of power that were (re)organized and (re)constructed along the fault lines of race, gender, class, and place while being (re)produced through state and local institutions and social and cultural apparatuses in the postemancipation period.

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[31] Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 4.

[32] Cited in Thomas Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History," *The American Historical Review* 100.0 (February, 1995), 8.

In as much as *"The Freemasonry of the Race"* aspires to be a history of African

American Freemasonry in postemancipation Virginia, it does not present a traditional

historical narrative of African American Freemasonry. In a broad sense, this research

effort is not strictly *about* African American Freemasonry. This project is more properly

understood as a critical examination and analysis of how African Americans shaped and

utilized the culture, symbols, and institution of Freemasonry to make sense of their place

in the social and civic order of the postemancipation United States. Since this is an

interpretative, study of African American Freemasonry, I have bridged a number of

disciplines and approaches in attempting to come to grips with this complex cultural

formation. In attempting a pioneering study into African American Freemasonry, I have

embraced rather than avoided an interdisciplinary approach. To this end, I have relied on

the theoretical insights from the wide and disparate fields of cultural studies and

postcolonial studies in order to interpret African American Freemasonry and to connect it

with other social, political, and economic formations.[33] African American literary theory

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[33] Here I draw the methods and theories of a number of sources, principally, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies,Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996); Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural*, Tom Conley, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans. (New York: Routledge, 1994); Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Donald F. Bouchard, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993); Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie, eds., *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall* (London: Verso, 2000); Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1975); Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996); Chandra Mukerji and Michael

proved to be critical in understanding the rhetorical and textual moves and motives

animating the various discourses of African American Freemasonry.[34] Various

methodological and theoretical insights from sociology and political science aided me in

revealing the manner in which a subculture appropriates the forms and functions of a

dominant culture's institutions, symbols, and organizations.[35] The growing field of

gender studies, particularly works dealing with the cultures of African American

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Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); E. San Juan, *Hegemony and Strategies of Transgression: Essays in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative, Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

[34] I have found the following works extremely helpful in formulating some of the interpretative strategies in this project: Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *"Race," Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Farah Jasmine Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'?" The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Karla F. C. Holloway, *Moorings & Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Eric Sundquist, *To Wake The Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Claudia Tate, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[35] See for example Arrighi, Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); Clyde W. Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State: Marxist, Neo-Marxist, Post-Marxist* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princton University Press, 1996); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Richard Nice, trans. (1979: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Oliver Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1948); Clark Everling, *Social Economy: The Logic of Capitalist Development* (London: Routledge, 1997); Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974); Steven Lukes, ed., *Power* (New York: New York University Press, 1986); Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Theda Skocpol, *Social Polity in the United States: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

masculinity, opened up a creative opportunity to investigate the (re)production of gender and sexual identities in and through the culture of African American Freemasonry.[36]

African American Freemasonry is a complex cultural formation that does not readily lend itself to critical scholarly study. As a fraternal order based on a culture of secrecy and with a decentralized organizational structure, this fraternity is not easy to study. These problems are compounded when attempting to examine the society and culture of the postemancipation period through this fraternity. In researching this subject, I encountered a number of challenges that forced me to rethink my approach in writing a critical study of African American Freemasonry that would take seriously its long heritage in the United States and its contributions to African American life and culture. The silences and gaps in the historical record on African American Freemasonry were the primary barriers I encountered in this research effort.[37] Compounding the problem of the

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[36] See for example Gail Bederman. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Marcellus Blount and George P. Cunningham. eds., *Representing Black Men* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Terrell Carver and Véronique Mottier, eds., *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 1998); Charise L. Cheney, *Phallic/ies and Hi(s)stories: Masculinity and the Black Nationalist Tradition, From Slave Spirituals to Rap Music* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1999); Laura Doyle. *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Volume I*, Robert Hurley, trans. (1978; New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur, eds., *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Phillip Brian Harper. *Are We Not Men: Masculine Anxiety and The Problem of African American Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michelle Mitchell. *Adjusting the Race: Gender, Sexuality, and the Question of African-American Destiny, 1877-1930* (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1998); Robert Reid-Pharr. *Conjugal Union: The Body, The House, and the Black American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Joan Scott. *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Maurice Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideology in African-American Men's Literature and Culture* (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1995).

[37] The problem of the availability of sources I encountered was the opposite of the experience of Steven Bullock, but we both concur on the issue of interpretation: "Rather unexpectedly, the study of Masonry poses a problem not so much of finding materials as of making sense of them." See Steven Bullock,

scarcity and thinness of the sources was my inability to gain full and thorough access to various state and local Masonic archives, particularly European American Masonic archives. My standing as a Freemason did not grant me unlimited access to all available Masonic sources for this research project. As a matter of fact, I found when speaking with members of the fraternity that some were highly suspicious of my motives and intentions. They wondered, openly at times, whether I could be trusted with certain materials or whether I would needlessly expose the operations and secrets of the fraternity. Others were hesitant to talk with me because of my affiliation with an academic institution. Still others were concerned that I would not present the fraternity "in the best light" in researching and writing a study that challenged some deeply held beliefs of the order. Some of the older members of the fraternity readily recognized a fact that I would only come to later in my research, namely that many records of the fraternity have been lost or destroyed. These issues, along with others, forced me to reassess how I would approach this topic without comprising my intellectual integrity and, more importantly, without needlessly alienating members of the fraternity.

Owing in large part to the limitations of my primary source materials, *"The Freemasonry of the Race"* does not claim to be the definitive work on this topic. Rather, I see this project as an initial chapter in what I hope to be an ongoing critical (re)assessment of African American Freemasonry in African American and American life and culture. The challenges of this project are met by a employing a dynamic methodology based on the work of Lauren Berlant in her collection of essays, *The Queen*

Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 321.

of America Goes to Washington City.[38] In her reconsideration of "the American Dream machine," Berlant directs our attention to often overlooked textual and material artifacts in a strategic writing performance that "does not aspire merely to comment on or contextualize its object; it brings new objects into being via the textual performance."[39] Berlant's example provides us with a new model and framework for investigating and analyzing African American Freemasonry. In this regard, the textual and material sources in this project are (re)configured and (re)presented in such a manner so as to recover layers of hidden meaning. In dialogue with other primary and secondary materials, this method shifts our attention away from the silences of the historical record to new and interesting readings of how African Americans utilized the structure and symbols of Freemasonry in their navigation of social, political, and economic structures of the United States. With Berlant, the textual performance of *"The Freemasonry of the Race"* is a critical aspect of this project in its sustained effort to develop fresh perspectives and understandings of historical events, moments, and geographies when viewed through the lens of African American Freemasonry.

The method employed in *"The Freemasonry of the Race"* is based on a careful selection and analysis of select primary and secondary sources that highlight an intricate process in and through which African American Freemasons utilized a fraternal form to navigate postemancipation society. I have consulted a previously unknown collection of unpublished nineteenth century minute books of the Jefferson Lodge #20 in

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[38] See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of American Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), esp. 10-15.

[39] Ibid, 14.

Charlottesville, Virginia. This collection represents the oldest such intact and accessible written record of African American Freemasonry in nineteenth-century Virginia. The recovery and analysis of these documents reveal an intricate world of overlapping interests, contested meanings, and public encounters that present a challenge to the dominant narratives of the postemancipation era and of African American social and cultural agency in the period typically defined as the nadir in African American life and thought.[40] This source has been complemented with the constitution and by-laws of the Lodge along with oral history accounts I have conducted with the older members of the Lodge. I have also relied on Grand Lodge proceedings, photographs, city directories, census records, and local and state government records. These sources were subjected to multiple readings that reveal varying levels of meanings when taken into account with the sources on African American Freemasonry. Together they reveal unexplored worlds of meaning that lie hidden just beneath their surfaces. For instance, newspaper articles reveal the quotidian experiences of life while also shedding light on the racial, gender, sexual, and class politics and ideologies prevalent at a given moment. Moreover, select newspaper reports reveal a vast structure of surveillance reporting practices focused on various aspects of African American life and culture and disseminated to a white body politic invested with the cultural and civic authority to patrol and police black people, neighborhoods, and organizations. Through multiple readings, these sources illuminate a maddening labyrinth of legal precedent, legislative maneuvering, social policing, and cultural marking that enacts a macabre scene of racial violence, social and cultural

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[40] The concept of the "nadir" and its production is owed to the work of the pioneering African American historian Rayford Logan. See Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (1954; New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), esp. 52-53 and Chapter 5.

contestation and negotiation, and the reorganization of social and civic life in the postemancipation era.

This study is divided into two parts. The decision to develop this two-part architecture was prompted by the realization that in order to analyze African American Freemasonry in postemanicpation Virginia, first there needed to be a (re)presentation of African American Freemasonry in the Atlantic world. In other words, before endeavoring to examine the manner in which African Americans employed the culture and institution of Freemasonry in postemancipation Virginia, I believe it is necessary first to come to grips with the cultural translations, responses, and adaptations of Freemasonry by African Americans as they encountered this cultural formation in the flux of the Atlantic world. By tracing the broad outlines of the geopolitical flow of this cultural form, we will be better positioned to understand and interpret how and why it resonated with the sensibilities of African Americans in Virginia in the postemancipation period. Moreover, such a process empowers a critical method whereby we can connect the everyday experiences of African Americans with the "abstract structures of polity and economy."

The first half of this project employs a broad and sweeping time frame to highlight the outlines of an African American and African diasporic zone of cultural contact with the culture and institution of European Freemasonry. Situated roughly from the early 1700s to the mid-nineteenth century, the first half of the project investigates the cultural translations and transformations of Freemasonry by African Americans and persons of African descent. The deliberate use of the phrase zone of cultural contact is employed here in order to underscore and "focus on intersections among equally centered

entities."[41] In other words, this temporal and geographic framework enables a (re)reading of the African and African American encounter with the culture and structures of European Freemasonry in the Atlantic world not as an encounter of European Man with the African Other, but as an encounter of cultural equals with various cultural traditions and cultural abilities to assimilate or reject, wholly or partially, other cultural forms. Indeed, the processes of the Atlantic exchange of culture, capital, and commerce structured complementary and competing cultural fields.[42] Through a variety of cultural mechanisms – retentions, adoptions, adaptations, and transformations – Africans and their descendants navigated this terrain in a commonsense and very human effort to make sense in a world that was constantly in flux. Viewing the Atlantic world as a zone of cultural contact provides us with a conceptual frame of reference to chart and track the actions of people of African descent in relation to the cultural formation of European Freemasonry.

Whereas the first half of this project is broad in range and scope, the second half focuses on African American Freemasonry in the context of postemancipation Virginia by drawing out the local responses and operative mechanisms that African American Freemasons employed in contributing to and contesting the emerging social, political,

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[41] Sally Engle Merry. *Colonizing Hawai'i: The Cultural Power of Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29.

[42] See for example Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

and economic order.[43] Saskia Sassen has instructively argued, "The global does not (yet)

fully encompass the lived experience of actors or the domain of institutional orders and

cultural formations; it persists as a partial condition."[44] In order to augment the "partial

condition" African American Freemasons and Freemasonry in first half of the study, the

second part examines the postemancipation context of everyday life of African American

Freemasons in Charlottesville, Virginia.[45] Sitting in the long shadow of three former

Presidents – Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe – who resided in and around this central

Virginia town, Charlottesville is an optimal locale for studying the manners and methods

by which African American men utilized the culture of Freemasonry in their attempt to

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[43] My adoption of such a method was inspired by my reading of Alon Confino. *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 199), esp. 3-23; Earl Lewis. "To Turn As On A Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas." *American Historical Review* 100 (June, 1995), 765-787; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. 49-88; and Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. 251-270.

[44] Saskia Sassen, "Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization." *Public Culture* 12.1 (2000), 215.

[45] On the history of Charlottesville see James Alexander, *Early Charlottesville: Recollections of James Alexander, 1828-1874*, Mary Rawlings, ed. (Charlottesville: The Michie Co., Printers, 1963); Newton Bond Jones, *Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Virginia, 1819-1860* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1950); Ervin L. Jordan, *Charlottesville and the University of Virginia in the Civil War* (Lynchburg: H. E. Howard, 1988); Jefferson Randolph Kean, *"Forward is the Motto of Today": Street Railways in Charlottesville, Virginia, 1866-1936* (Forty Fort, PA: H. E. Cox, 1984); William Edward Webb, *Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Virginia 1865-1900* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1955); *Albemarle County and Charlottesville, Virginia: At the Junction of Chesapeake & Ohio and the Richmond and Danville Railways* (Charlottesville: J. C. McKennie, 1890?); *Charlottesville and Albemarle County: Being a Brief Sketch of their Early History, Present Prosperity and Future Prospects, as well as some mention of Prominent Business Men* (Charlottesville?: D. Harmon Jr., and R. P. Valentine, Publishers, 1888).

On African Americans life and culture in Charlottesville see Agnes Cross-White, *Charlottesville, An African-American Community* (Dover, NH: Arcadia, 1998); Bradley Charles Mittendorf, *From Discussion to Confrontation: Defining Race Relations in Charlottesville Before the Brown Decision* (MA Thesis, University of Virginia, 1993); Joshua D. Rothman, "Essay on Sources: African-American Life in Charlottesville, Virginia 1890-1920," unpublished paper in author's possession; James Robert Saunders and Renae Nadine Shackelford, *Urban Renewal and the End of Black Culture in Charlottesville, Virginia:*

"find a sense of belonging as citizens of formally defined nation-states and as members of communities worked out among former slaves."[46] Lying to the west of Richmond and southeast of Washington, DC, Charlottesville lies almost equidistant from the former capital of the Confederacy and the capital of the United States. As such, its geographic positioning symbolizes the strains between the call of a united nation and the sectarian pull of a disgruntled region, the hesitancy between the enactment of the universals of citizenship in the nation for African Americans and the subordination and relegation of African Americans to a system first of chattel slavery and then of disenfranchisement and segregation. As the home to three former Presidents and the formerly enslaved, Charlottesville encompasses the promises and perils of American democracy in the postemancipation era. The political divides and socio-cultural fractures of this period come into great relief in this town as African American Freemasons utilized the culture and institution of this fraternal body to make a place for African Americans in this setting as well as in Virginia and the United States.

Chapter 1 of *"The Freemasonry of the Race"* addresses the issue of the translation of European Freemasonry in the African Diaspora. Given that there are distinct power differentials and hierarchies present within the Atlantic world, this chapter grapples with the question, "Where could Africans throughout the Diaspora possibly come into contact with the culture of European Freemasonry and in what ways did they appropriate and transform this cultural form?" This chapter recreates, albeit in truncated

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An Oral History of Vinegar Hill (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998); Joseph C. Vance, "Race Relations in Albemarle During Reconstruction," *The Magazine of Albemarle County History* XIII (1953), 26-45.

[46] Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery*, 5.

fashion, the flux of the Atlantic world and describes some of the zones of cultural contact which possibly helped to facilitate the negotiations and translations of European Freemasonry in the African Diaspora. Following the example of Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. who argues for multiple voices and viewpoints in historical practice, this chapter posits an expanded frame of reference in (re)reading the narrative of the origins of African American Freemasonry.[47] Building on this narrative (re)construction, this chapter develops an analysis of African American Freemasonry that *signifies* on the meanings, symbols, rituals, and rites of European Freemasonry in an attempt to articulate a distinct African American Freemasonry that responds to the conditions, contingencies, and contradictions produced by the experiences of the African Diaspora.[48] Under such conditions, African American Freemasonry is revealed as a critical oppositional cultural practice that seeks to develop an epistemological and ontological framework for African American position and place within the United States and the larger Western world.

Just before the conclusion of the Civil War, in front of a crowd of 1,600 African American worshippers, the Reverend William H. Hunter remarked, "I remember how we used to have to employ our dark symbols and obscure figures to cover up our real meaning. The profoundest philosopher could not understand us."[49] Hunter's remark highlights the importance and significance of the various coded practices adopted and transmitted throughout the African American cultural milieu. Building on the

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[47] See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[48] See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. Chapter 2.

interpretative method of the previous chapter, Chapter 2 focuses on the plethora of meanings and metaphors that were grafted onto the cultural practice African American Freemasonry as African Americans articulated their understanding of the idea of nation. First, I present a reading of the particular production of the meanings of Freemasonry in connection with the nation building exploits of Gabriel's Rebellion. The re-reading of this slave rebellion reveals a hidden dimension of African American resistance owing largely to the coded meanings of the culture of Freemasonry along with the concomitant struggle over the position of African Americans within the national imaginary and political economy of the United States. The chapter continues with an examination and analysis of Martin Delany's serialized novel *Blake, or the Huts of America* as a prototype for announcing a national ideal in and through the language, imagery, ritual, symbolism, and structure of African American Freemasonry. Delany's novel directs us to reassess the impact of African American Freemasonry on the cultural imagination of African America. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the meanings and metaphors of Freemasonry in connection with African American ideas and ideals of the nation were manifested in the postemancipation era in Charlottesville, Virginia. This chapter will enable us to make certain interpretative connections between the strategies of nation as articulated in and through the culture and social practices of African American Freemasonry in the postemancipation United States.

Chapter 3 examines the ideological dimensions of African American Freemasonry in the context of the fluid postemancipation social and political culture of Virginia. The

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[49] Cited in Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 467.

postemancipation world was, if anything, a moment of false starts, repressed aspirations, violent reactions, and a constant struggle to define the parameters of society in light of the collapse of the Southern slave regime. It was also a time of rapid technological advances, vast population shifts, and economic surges and upheavals. Such an ambivalent and ambiguous historical moment is best captured in the pioneering work of Edward Ayers, who aptly characterizes this period as one of "continual redefinition and renegotiation, of unintended and unanticipated consequences, of unresolved tensions."[50] If African American Freemasonry had to respond to the ebb and flow of this fluid context, it also had to contend with the pervasive specter and experience of racial violence against African Americans. The landscape of postemancipation Virginia was littered with violent acts against African Americans as they attempted to assume their

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[50] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), viii. See also Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (1935; New York: Touchstone, 1995); Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: American's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Janette Thomas Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in The American South, 1862-1882* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (1954; New York: De Capo Press, 1997); Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Steven Elliott Tripp, *Yankee Town, Southern City: Race and Class Relations in Civil War Lynchburg* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

newly legislated role as citizens of the nation and as free laborers in a capitalist economy. "They have taken off the bridle," an elderly African American man remarked after hearing the news of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1865. However, the promises of freedom were nebulous and incomplete as the remarks of the elderly gentleman reveal: "But [they] left the halter."[51] African American Freemasonry was forced not only to develop an ideological practice that responded to the fluidity of the postemancipation context, but also contend with the reality of a violent racialist and racist regime that sought to limit the opportunities and life chances of African Americans. In this nexus, African American Freemasons developed a complex corporeal ideology that articulated African American equality, self-sufficiency, and racial solidarity.

In the contested terrain of postemancipation society, the ideological strategy of African American Freemasons was necessarily augmented by a political strategy that employed the secretive rites and symbols of Freemasonry for political ends. Chapter 4 explores the political dimensions of African American Freemasonry through a critical examination of African American Freemasons' efforts to employ the symbols, rites, and rituals of their fraternity in articulating a political presence in postemancipation Virginia. In his study of African American expressive culture, Lawrence Levine notes:

> Nothing, for example, could look more benign than the behavior of the vast
>
> majority of black fraternal and religious institutions during the century after

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[51] Cited in Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 163.

emancipation. When their role is finally studied with the care it demands, I suspect it will become evident that they played a subversive part.[52]

The performance of African American Freemasonry in the postemancipation context provides crucial evidence that confirms Levine's insights. In this chapter, I argue that African American Freemasonry performs an intricate and complex cultural politics that contests the boundaries of race, class, gender and place in an emerging postemancipation order. The exploration of the fraternity in this light makes clear the cultural and socio-political conflicts over the divisions of race, class, and gender. James Scott argues, "By assessing the discrepancy *between* the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse."[53] In a slight departure from Scott, this chapter posits a reading of the discrepancy between these two transcripts as a critical political strategy – not so much a point of judgment of the level of domination in a social context – that *directly* assaults the political sensibilities of the dominant culture. African American Freemasonry enacts a counter political culture that challenges the given norms and understandings of the postemancipation political order.

Embedded in the arguments and observations advanced in chapters three and four is a parallel discussion of the quests and contests over African American masculinity as revealed in and through the culture of African American Freemasonry. These chapters reveal that the (re)presentation of black masculinity in the postemancipation period is (re)constructed in and through the culture and institution of African American Freemasonry. By highlighting the ways in which black masculinity is (re)constructed

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[52] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 268.

[53] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 5.

and performed through this fraternal form we are able to analyze and assess the ways in which a masculinist politics sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly, operates as African American Freemasons position themselves as representative of all African Americans. In *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Gail Bederman argues, "To study the history of manhood, I would argue, is to unmask this process and study the historical ways different ideologies about manhood develop, change, are combined, amended, contested – and gain the status of truth."[54] These chapters find conceptual utility in extending Bederman's argument to the culture of African American Freemasonry in postemancipation Virginia in that by examining the ideological and political strategies of this group of men, we are able to expand our understanding of the manner and method in which African American masculinity developed and evolved in a period of flux.

"The Freemasonry of the Race" hopes to illuminate a severely neglected and understudied aspect of African American social and cultural history in the postemancipation era. Just as the Ex-Colored Man in James Weldon Johnson's classic text came into an awareness of the complex racial politics and negotiations after his initiation into "the freemasonry of the race," this study seeks to delve into the quagmire of postemancipation life and culture in Virginia and highlight how an investigation into African American Freemasonry reveals the varied textures of the contested public spaces and places of this social and cultural terrain.

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[54] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

Margaret Jacobs observed over a decade ago, "The symbolic universe of the freemason is yet to find its historian or perhaps its historical anthropologist."[55] Although this study is far from a remedy to this situation, I hope that it lays the groundwork that will initiate serious scholarly attention to African American Freemasonry. In turn, we can begin a process of redressing the lack of understanding of African American Freemasonry and Freemasonry in general will be improved upon.

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[55] Margaret C. Jacobs, *Living the Enlightenment*, 208.

CHAPTER I

RITUALS OF RACE, POLITICS OF EMPIRE: TRANSLATING FREEMASONRY IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Africa is no vast island, separated by an immense ocean from other parts of the globe, and cut off through the ages from the men who have made and influenced the destinies of mankind. She has been closely connected, both as source and nourisher, with some of the most potent influences which have affected for good the history of the world.

Edward Blyden[1]

"The task of the translator," writes Walter Benjamin, "consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."[2] Benjamin's message reminds us that the duty of the translator is not enshrining the language of the original in the language of translation. Such a task, as Benjamin points out here and in other sections of his provocative essay, is untenable. What Benjamin posits is the centrality of dealing with the complexities of the language of translation in order to convey some semblance of meaning found in the language of the original. The language of translation is not a mirror to the language of the original. The language of translation must, however register an "echo" that hints of the meaning of the language of the original. Benjamin purposively leaves the questions of tone, depth, and pitch of the "echo" unanswered for it is not the task of the translator to attempt a translation that reverberates in the same style as the original. By displacing issues of authenticity and originality in the language of translation, Benjamin is empowered to carve out a creative space for the translator. In this space, the translator embarks on a

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[1] Cited in George Shepperson, "African Diaspora: Concept and Context," in Joseph E. Harris, ed., *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1983), 43.

[2] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 76.

process that – while dependent on the artifact of translation – disrupts a linear formula that equates the translation with the original. "The movement to translation from the original is," as Betsy Flèche argues, "dialectical rather than organic, discontinuous and interruptive rather than progressive."[3] The disruption sounded in the "echo" signals, therefore, the production of a new text while hinting of the residue from the original.

Benjamin's directive – far beyond its application to the linguistic problematics of translation – provides an illuminating point of entry into the study of African American Freemasonry. The recognition that a translation is never the same as the original and that discontinuity lies at the heart of the project of translation empowers a (re)reading of African American Freemasonry through a fractured, de-stabilized, and de-centered lens. Through such a lens "we are not to think of history as ripening, as organic growth, or even as a dialectic, as anything that resembles a natural process of growth and of movement."[4] Instead we begin to privilege a critical resistance to totalizing narratives and simplistic equations that suggest an authenticity or originality or exactness of the past and complicate existing narratives of African American Freemasonry. These complications are not reasons to despair for they open up vital opportunities for the interrogation of this cultural formation yielding new insights, new understandings, and new meanings. Thus, we are able to break with strict chronologies that posit a series of unenviable and irreconcilable dichotomies – past and present, then and now, history and

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[3] Betsy Flèche. "The Art of Survival: The Translation of Walter Benjamin," *SubStance* 28.2 (1999), 97.

[4] Paul de Man as cited in Betsy Flèche, "The Art of Survival," 98.

memory.[5] What Benjamin offers is an instructive historical hermeneutic that can help

guide us in opening up possibilities for re-envisioning the process of social and cultural

translation as it relates to African American Freemasonry.[6]

In the space opened by Walter Benjamin, I will (re)read the founding narrative of

African American Freemasonry and argue for an expansion of the geographic landscape

in casting the cultural translation of European Freemasonry in African America. This

perspective will highlight the geographies of the interactions between Africans and their

descendents and the cultural formation of European Freemasonry in the Atlantic world.

In opting for such an expanded frame of reference, this engagement will focus on

recovering the diasporic experiences of Africans and their descendents which are central

to African American Freemasonry. Paul Gilroy reminds us, "This change in perspective

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[5] The "new" African American social and cultural history has indeed taken up this challenge. A few examples include Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freeedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); Kimberley Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

An excellent essay collection that challenges the dichotomy of history and memory is Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History & Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[6] For other possibilities regarding the intersection of Benjamin and history, see Irving Wohlfarth, "Smashing the Kaleidoscope: Walter Benjamin's Critique of Cultural History," in Michael P. Steinberg, ed., *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 190-205. For more thoroughgoing discussions on the relationship between translation and culture see Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier, ed., *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995) and Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

is aimed at transforming the more familiar uni-directional notion of diaspora as a form of dispersal which enjoys an identifiable and reversible originary moment, into a much more complex 'chaotic' model in which unstable 'strange attractors' are also visible."[7] In place of the "oneness" underlying the founding narrative of African American Freemasonry, I will (re)read the development of African American Freemasonry in the maelstrom of the Atlantic world, co-extensive with the multiple points of contact between Africans and their descendents and European Freemasonry. Thus, the cultural practice of African American Freemasonry will be embedded in the experiences and conditions of the African diaspora. By (re)reading the narrative of African American Freemasonry and developing such a critical cartography, we will be better positioned to interrogate the diasporic experiences of African American Freemasons that were central to and constitutive of their experience with this fraternal form.

We will next consider a dimension of this once "hidden history" of diaspora as manifested in African American Freemasonry. Recognizing the import of Stuart Hall's prescient observation – "'Hidden histories' have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time – feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist" – I will articulate a new understanding of the rituals of African American Freemasonry as "rituals of race."[8] By this I mean through certain Masonic rituals, African American Freemasonry serves as a central site whereby a cultural identity based

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[7] Paul Gilroy, "Route Work: The Black Atlantic and Politics of Exile," in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996), 21-22. See also. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[8] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (London: Routledge, 2000), 22.

on the construct of race is produced and reproduced as a part of one's participation and membership in African American Freemason lodges.[9] As much as African Americans are performing Masonic rituals and functioning in forms similar to their European American counterparts, I argue that they are also participants and ritualists in the larger production of a new racialized identity. These rituals of race signify on the obscured and often hidden racial prerogatives of European Freemasonry by extending the universalist assumptions undergirding the fraternity to African Americans with recourse to Africans in the diaspora. Furthermore, in positioning the ritualistic performances of African American Freemasonry as "rituals of race," I will highlight how this cultural production initiates African American Freemasons into a cultural identity that is critically informed by the textured images and experiences of the diaspora.

Closely associated with my argument for casting the rituals of African American Freemasonry as "rituals of race," I will conclude this chapter by examining the manner and method in which Freemasonry in this diasporic key orients and directs African American claims to national identity by way of a *supranational* identity. The *supranational* identity of African American Freemasons is, I argue, rooted in the particular understanding of membership in Freemasonry as a global fraternal order conscious of its particular geopolitical context.[10] As such, African American members

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[9] I am using the phrase "ritual of race" in a narrower and more parochial sense than Alessandra Lorini's production of the phrase. Although my development of this idea was derived independently of her work, I am nevertheless working within a framework similar to the one she articulates: "The word 'ritual' has a religious connotation. Yet when associated with race, public culture, and democracy, it takes the broader meaning of collective symbolic behavior, a practice that connects individuals to a social body." See Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), xiii.

[10] Nell Painter has argued that African American journalists communicated "a sense of a supranational racial identity." See Nell Painter, "Black Journalism the First Hundred Years," *Harvard Journal of Afro-*

come to view themselves as part of an international network of cultural and commercial exchanges and interests which facilitates their engagement with the social, political, and economic systems of particular nation-states while residing within their confines, even for a limited time. The emergence of African American Freemasonry is a phenomenon that cannot be disengaged from the fractious politics of national identity in the United States. For African American Freemasons, the politics of the nation, particularly with regard to citizenship, are intertwined with the cultural formation of African American Freemasonry. Thus, I will concentrate on the importance of African American Freemasonry in articulating African American claims to United States citizenship via a *supranational citizenship*.

II

Shrouded in mystery and hidden by mystique, African American Freemasonry has always traced its beginning to its venerated namesake – Prince Hall. In the first officially published history of the fraternity, William H. Grimshaw captures the founding moment of this chapter in African American fraternal life:

> Prince Hall, then twenty-seven years of age, wended his way to the quarters of General Gage, on Copp's Hill, Boston Harbor, Mass. The purpose of his visit was the insatiable desire to become a Mason. He feared nothing, not even in the enemy's camp, but with a firm trust in God, knocked and the door of Masonry was opened to him – thus his eyes beheld for the first time the form and beauty of

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American Affairs 2.2 (1971), 32. Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs has argued for an imperialist reading of "supranational identity" in reference to European Freemasonry and British Imperialism. See Jessica Leigh Harland-Jacobs, *"The Essential Link": Freemasonry and British Imperialism, 1751-1918* (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2000).

a military Lodge. In that traveling British Lodge, No. 58, before the first blood

had flowed upon the green grass at Lexington, he received the light of Masonry,

and was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason – the first one of African

descent who had been initiated into the order in the American Colonies.[11]

Prince Hall's initiation into the Masonic fraternity in 1775 serves as the founding

narrative of African American Freemasonry in America. With characteristic legendary

flair, Grimshaw underscores Hall's single-minded determination to satisfy his "desire to

become a Mason." Prince Hall not only enacts the fate of his journey to Boston, but with

Divine Providence he is led to become an initiate in the mysteries of Freemasonry. In

this formula, Prince Hall inaugurates the black presence in Freemasonry in America.[12]

As the story goes, Prince Hall, along with fourteen other black men, formed the

first African American lodge of Freemasons in the Early Republic. What came to be

known as African Lodge #459 evolved into the first Grand Lodge of African American

Freemasons in the United States. This Grand Lodge set up other African American

Freemason lodges in Providence, Rhode Island and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After his

death in 1807, Hall was further enshrined in the history of African American

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[11] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry Among the Colored People in North America* (1903; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 71-72.

[12] Some debate of has surrounded some of the facts in Grimshaw's history of African American Freemasonry, specifically his recounting of the birth and early life of Prince Hall. However, the main facts of his presentation have withstood critical Masonic and scholarly scrutiny. Indeed, his narrative of the origins of African American Freemasonry beginning with Prince Hall forms the foundation of various histories of African American Freemasonry. For comparison, see Harry E. Davis, *A History of Freemasonry Among Negroes in America* (New York: Scottish Rite, North America, 1946); Harold Van Buren Voorhis, *Negro Masonry of America* (New York: Henry Emmerson, 1945); Joseph A. Walkes, Jr., *Black Square and Compass: 200 Years of Prince Hall Freemasonry* (Richmond: Macoy Publishing, 1979); and Charles H. Wesley, *Prince Hall: Life and Legacy* (Philadelphia: Afro-American Historical Museum and Washington: United Supreme Council, Prince Hall Affiliation, 1977).

Freemasonry by having his name attached to the Grand Lodge. The creation of the

Prince Hall Grand Lodge solidified his connection with African American Freemasonry

and the fraternity's connection with him. Hall's legacy as founder of African American

Freemasonry and the legitimacy of those who trace their Masonic heritage to the lodge he

founded in Boston rest on this narrative that positions his initiation as the founding

moment of African American Freemasonry. Over a century later, Prince Hall Masonic

scholar Harry Davis fondly remembered Hall: "The establishment of Freemasonry

among colored men in America focus about Prince Hall, a very remarkable man to whom

history has not yet assigned an appropriate place on its roll."[13]

Prince Hall's initiation into the Masonic world and the founding narrative that has

come to occupy a central place in the history of African American Freemasonry obscures

and submerges richer streams of cultural contact between Africans and their descendents

and European Freemasonry. Given the dramatic demographic patterns of the voluntary

and involuntary migration of people, the variety of the zones of contact between different

cultures, and the diverse interactions that resulted in these new spatial arrangements,

possibilities for persons before Hall to interact with European Freemasonry are

numerous. These possibilities direct our attention to a new and more expansive

landscape that connects African Americans with European Freemasonry. Recognizing

the multiple cultural cross currents of the Atlantic world as a result of the transoceanic

flow of people, what emerges is the dormant, but *always already* idea that the cultural

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[13] Harry E. Davis, "Documents Relating to Negro Masonry in America," *Journal of Negro History* 21.4 (October, 1936), 411.

production of African American Freemasonry is related to the conditions and experiences of diaspora.

In raising this issue, I do not deny the historical veracity of the main points of the account relating Prince Hall's initiation into European Freemasonry. Nor do I seek to challenge the widely shared memory of many African American Freemasons who trace their origins to the life and work of Prince Hall. I recognize the worth, value, and dignity invested in this narrative as conveyed in the pronouncement of several leaders of Prince Hall Freemasonry who argued at the turn of the last century:

> We can, as Craftsmen, take our stand on actual minutes of Lodges, Chapters, Councils and Commanderies, beginning in the United States as early as 1775, and presenting an unbroken series of records to the present year, supported on one hand by copies of the 'Old Charges' and laws dating from the Fourteenth Century, and, on the other, by special regulations of the Craft some three centuries later.[14]

Indeed, I would argue against the position held by such an accomplished historian as Charles H. Wesley who claims, "It may well be that I saved Prince Hall from destruction . . . .There were growing forgeries about him . . . .I want to do my part in straightening out some of the facts."[15] Positing what is factually accurate and what is mythmaking or issuing a challenge to those who have invested an elaborate world of meaning in this foundational story is not my aim. For, as Benedict Anderson argues, "Communities are

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[14] William H. Grimshaw. *Official History of Freemasonry*, Preface.

[15] Washington, DC, *The Washington Post*, October 25, 1977.

to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."[16]

By (re)reading the founding narrative of African American Freemasonry in the expanse of the Atlantic world, we can develop a critical cartography that highlights the larger, more extensive currents of culture, commerce, and capital of Africans and people of African descent and their European colleagues in the Americas. This is not to say that the historical framework focusing on the primacy of Prince Hall and his actions did not and does not serve a variety of critical cultural and organizational purposes – as founding story of the fraternal order, as a central claim for legitimacy of Prince Hall masons in the Masonic world, and as an assertion of agency in a historical moment that marginalized men and women of African descent.[17] Such laudable and worthwhile goals notwithstanding, adopting a broader perspective can, I believe. demonstrate the rich possibilities of a more nuanced history of the contact and interactions between Africans and their descendents and European Freemasonry.[18]

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[16] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1982; London: Verso. 1991), 6. By placing Prince Hall as a slave in New England. Charles Wesley is able to develop a strict genealogy of African American Freemasonry and linking it to slave experience of African Americans in the United States. To date. the issue of the politics of place in Wesley's account has yet to be explored. See Charles H. Wesley, *Prince Hall: Life and Legacy.*

[17] In another context. Peter Wood makes a similar point. See Peter Wood, "'I Did The Best I Could for My Day': The Study of Early Black History During the Second Reconstruction. 1960-1976," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 35.2 (April. 1978), 185-225. esp. 191-192. Given the intense Masonic (and inevitably racial) politics surrounding the issues of legitimacy for Prince Hall Freemasonry. it would be intellectually dishonest and disingenuous to relegate these issues to the realm of myth. or. more sinisterly. consider them hyperbole.

[18] Robin Kelley provides an excellent genealogy of a global orientation present in the work of earlier generations of scholars of African American history. See Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History*, 86.3 (December. 1999), 1045-1077. See also the impressive collection of essays in Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in the Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

In his celebrated study of African American seafaring men, W. Jeffrey Bolster offers this descriptive account of an Atlantic world in motion:

> Imagine a graphic rendition in black of the volcanic Caribbean archipelago. From each island radiate short spokes that dead-end, like antennae: the out-and-back daily voyages of slave fisherman. Each island, too, is encircled by loops from point to point along its shore: the coastal trips of slave boatmen. Bold lines connect virtually every island to others: the inter-island voyages of black and white crews and runaway slaves. Finally, even more prominent lines arrive at most islands from (and depart to) African, American, and European ports: international voyages on which black sailed. Instead of charting an exchange of commodities, we have mapped currents of black people in motion carrying and exchanging ideas, information, and style. If mercantilists' cartographic vision of the "triangular trade" speaks to one aspect of eighteenth-century maritime activity, this dynamic graphic of black seafaring speaks to the evolution of Diasporic consciousness and blacks' cultural hybridity, and to the spread of blacks' news – subversive and otherwise.[19]

Bolster's imaginative rendition of an Atlantic world in flux provides a textured visual of the world in which Prince Hall and others like him found themselves. As a major port city in the British colonies, a cosmopolitan atmosphere engulfed Boston and African American sailors and seamen imbibed this culturally diffuse air as they made it their temporary or permanent home. Traveling the Gulf Stream, ships from all over the

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[19] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 21.

Atlantic world docked in this next to last major port on the Eastern seaboard. Boston was not only a hub in a global network of commercial exchange, but it was enmeshed in an oceanic network of inter- and intra- cultural exchanges. In this nexus where old and new cultural forms contacted and connected, individuals grafted and transformed various forms of culture.[20]

The adoption of the rites and rituals of Negro Election Day in the election of King Dick by African Americans in Dartmoor prison provides an illustrative case in point of the cultural adaptations in light of the realities of the Atlantic world. Richard Carfus, better known in the confines of Dartmoor as King Dick, stood at an imposing 6'3" and had a commanding "strength far greater than both height and proportions together."[21] Arriving in October, 1814 to Dartmoor, King Dick was chosen as the monarchial representative of African Americans assembled in Number Four at Dartmoor. The election of Richard Crafus represents a continuation and adaptation of the Negro Election Day rituals that were very much a part of African American life in the New England states and throughout the diaspora. As Jeffrey Bolster informs us, "In ports and colonies around the Atlantic including Antigua, Barbados, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Venezuela, New Orleans, and Argentina, all familiar to African American sailors, festivals inducted or honored black kings and queens."[22] African Americans imprisoned at Dartmoor created a distinguishable political culture, one that fused the cultural traditions of the

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[20] For a discussion of cultural translations between Africans and Europeans in the period prior to the 1700's, see John Thornton. *African and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 206-234.

[21] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 102.

[22] Ibid, 109.

African diaspora to the existential realities of life in a British prison. The culture of

"reading whiting Fenceing, Boxing Dancing & many other schools which is very

diverting to a young Person," that blacks created at Dartmoor, they highlight the intricate

and dynamic process of cultural transformations and revisions that were the result of the

flux of the Atlantic world.[23]

The maritime culture of the Atlantic world was also a fertile area for the

propagation and dissemination of ideas and information. Ideas in flux throughout the

Atlantic world were communicated by persons of African descent who traveled

throughout this nexus of sun, surf, and sand to others in the diaspora. This intercoastal

and intercontinental communication medium was a critical carrier of "news of special

interest to Afro-Americans all over the Caribbean and beyond." "Whether at sea or on

land," Julius Scott reminds us, "masterless people played a vital role in spreading rumors,

reporting news, and transmitting political currents. . . ."[24] By highlighting this Atlantic

world as the contextual reference, we can begin to incorporate new scholarly approaches

and present new analyses in fleshing out the parameters of the diasporic dimensions of

the zones of contact between Africans and people of African descent and European

Freemasonry. We may also begin to recover the submerged experiences of the diaspora

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[23] On African American expressive culture in the Early Republic, see for example Joseph P. Reidy, "Negro Election Day and Black Community Life in New England, 1750-1860" *Marxist Perspectives* 1 (Fall, 1978), 107-108; William D. Piersen, *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and *Going Though the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); A. J. Williams-Myers, "Pinkster Carnival: Africanisms in the Hudson River Valley," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 9 (1985), 7-17; and Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[24] Julius Sherrard Scott, III, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986), 4, 113.

of Africans and their descendants that lie in the unconscious of the official history

African American Freemasonry that enshrines Prince Hall.

The cultures of space and time dramatically changed as European nation-states

transformed the islands of the Caribbean and lands of Africa and the Americas into large

factories whose mission was to supply an ever increasing amount of products to satisfy

the consumer desires of an awakening Europe.[25] This Atlantic exchange, comprised of

networks of commerce, capital, labor, and culture, altered previously existing social,

political, and economic relations. Dotting this rapidly transforming land and seascape

and aiding in the development of a global extension of European power and influence

were various lodges of Freemasons. Jessica Harland-Jacobs offers an intriguing reading

of the centrality of Freemasonry in the promotion and perpetuation of the British Empire:

> Freemasonry was one institution that contributed to the development of [the]
>
> intra-cultural connections in the British Empire. By creating a global network
>
> that had both practical functions and ideological dimensions, Freemasonry played
>
> a critical role in building, consolidating, and perpetuating the Empire. . . .

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[25] The literature on the Atlantic world is voluminous and I cite only a few examples here: Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997); David Elitis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229-1492* (London: Macmillan Education, 1987); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Richard Price, *Alabi's World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1984). For an insightful review of some of the latest scholarship of this period see Ida Altman and Reginald D. Butler, "The Contact of Cultures: Perspectives on the Quincentenary," *American Historical Review* 99.2 (April, 1994), 478-503.

Specifically, the Masonic network functioned to fulfill the emotional, spiritual,

intellectual, social, and material needs of members.[26]

Harland-Jacobs goes on to posit the rationale for the growth and proliferation of

Freemasonry in the British Empire:

[F]reemasonry found fertile ground in the British Empire because belonging to

the fraternity conferred privileged access to a global network that helped men

adjust to strange surroundings, find fellowship in new environments, and secure

employment and assistance when in need. By making life easier for those who

directed, defended, and lived in the empire, Freemasonry lubricated the wheels of

imperialism.[27]

Harland-Jacobs's insightful observations of Freemasonry as it developed in the context of

the British Empire can be extended to other European nations where Freemasonry played

a crucial role in aiding the exploits of Empire. The example of the British was paralleled

by the Dutch and the French as Freemasons established lodges in the colonial holdings of

these European powers.[28] Each of these countries would establish freemason Lodges in

their outposts throughout the Atlantic world. These lodges served similar purposes as

those founded by citizens of Great Britain. Given the importance and prominence of the

role, function, and position of these freemason Lodges in the Atlantic world, it would

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[26] Jessica Harland-Jacobs. "'Hands Across the Sea': The Masonic Network. British Imperialism, and the North Atlantic World," *The Geographical Review*, 89.2 (April, 1999), 239. See also Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 345-349.

[27] Ibid, 25 .

[28] On the Dutch example in Africa, see A. A. Cooper, *The Freemasons of South Africa* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1986) and on French freemasonry in colonial America, see Lucian J. Fosdick, *The French Blood in America* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, Company, 1906).

appear that the diasporic experiences of Africans and descendents of Africans would logically confront and connect with these networks and institutions.[29]

Despite undergoing the transformative and tragic experiences of enforced migration, the points of cultural contact between European Freemasonry and the peoples of Africa would not have struck a *totally* discordant cord. In *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, Michael Gomez develops a comprehensive approach to explicating the complexities of the negotiations of African and African American identity. Gomez provides a convincing framework for understanding the cultural reserves that quite possibly played a crucial role in aiding Africans and their descendents in the process of inter- and intra- cultural communication and translation in the experiences and conditions of diaspora. With reference to Africans from Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, Gomez considers the gendered meanings and possible points of contact of Africa secret societies with Western secret societies designating the former as *"societies of men and women* or *male and female societies."*[30] Although Gomez is centrally occupied with the issue of African cultural retention in the antebellum United States, he touches on the possible influences and backgrounds of West African "societies of men and women or male and

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[29] On this point, see Abner Cohen. "The Politics of Ritual Secrecy." *Man* 6.3 (September, 1971), 427-448.

[30] Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 95. Other sources which posit similarities between African secret and social societies, their European counterparts, and their extension in African America include Susan Greenbaum. "A Comparison of African American and Euro-American Mutual Aid Societies in 19th Century America," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 19 (1991), 111-); Melville Herskovitz, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941); Betty Kuyk, "The African Derivation of Black Fraternal Orders in the United States," *Comparative Studies in Societies and History* 25 (1983), 559-594; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Salves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 119-141. On West African secret societies, see Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) and F.W. Butt-Thompson, *West African Secret Societies: Their Organizations, Officials, and Teaching* (New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, Ltd, 1969).

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female societies" that may have been complicit in the exchanges and negotiations of

Africans and their descendents with the rituals and organization of European

Freemasonry.[31]

Instead of proceeding along the "the premise of discontinuity [that] forms the

starting point from which to theorize contact, conflict, and contradiction between cultures

and societies," Gomez posits a rapprochement between West African secret societies and

European Freemasonry.[32] Gomez observes:

> Another possible area in which elements of these societies were retained or
>
> merged with non-African influences is Freemasonry. Matthews, Winterbottom,
>
> and Rankin all likened the activities of the Poro and Bundu to European
>
> Freemasonry. In 1901, Alldridge similarly characterized the Poro as "a system of
>
> Freemasonry amongst the men." Glaze's reference to the "graduation of the
>
> 'finished man'" among the Senufo is strikingly similar both in substance and even
>
> in wording to the "making of the man" ritual within Freemasonry.[33]

The parallels between West African secret societies and European Freemasonry touched

on by Gomez remind us that even in the flux of the Atlantic world, West African

adoption and adaptation of Freemasonry is not without precedent or point of

correspondence. This is not to say that such points of contact or correspondence directly

resulted in Africans and people of African descent readily jettisoning their cultural forms

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[31] Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 99.

[32] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," in Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 34-35.

[33] Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 101.

for those of European Freemasonry or that West African secret societies and European

Freemasonry are *syncretic* cultural forms.[34] The example of West African secret

societies and European Freemasonry must be approached with extreme caution as the

experience of diaspora and cultural negotiation must be cognizant of the political context,

the cultural norms operative at a given time, the politics of place, and more importantly,

the issue of power. In addition, the flow of this contact must not be read in a uni-

directional manner for we know that "Africans nonetheless succeeded collectively in

maintaining significant elements of their material and spiritual culture [and] influence[ed]

other groups with whom they had contact."[35] These caveats notwithstanding, we can

begin a critical process of (re)reading the founding narrative of African American

Freemasonry as not one with just a singular point of origin, but as cultural formation

embedded in a wider geography that highlights the zones of cultural contact of Africans

and their descendents confronting European Masonic activity in the emerging spaces of

the African diaspora.[36]

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[34] In this regard. Ida Altman and Reginald D. Butler offer these critical remarks:
> "The term 'syncretism,' frequently used in reference to the religious systems that developed in the Americas after contact may not adequately reflect the process that actually took place. By analyzing the translation of catechisms for religious instruction into Nahuatl. Louise Burkhart demonstrates how the very effort to find linguistic equivalents for terms expressing key elements of Christian doctrine (sin. immorality. the Virgin Mary) subtly or significantly changed their meaning. The result. she argues. was not a blend of the two religions but rather a Nahua belief system with a Christian overlay."

See Ida Altman and Reginald D. Butler. "The Contact of Cultures." 496. For a revision of the theoretical grounds for understanding syncretism see Charles Stewart. "Syncretism and Its Synonyms: Reflections on Cultural Mixture." *Diacritics* 29.3 (1999). 40-62.

[35] Ida Altman and Reginald D. Butler. "The Contact of Cultures." 494.

[36] Gomez concludes his argument with the following statement:
> Indeed. it is plausible that African American Freemasonry is an institution derived from West African. and specifically Sierra Leonian. origins. having subsequently assumed a more Western guise.

Michael Gomez. *Exchanging Our Country Marks.* 101.

With the possibilities opened up by Gomez's project, we are better positioned to consider how the diasporic experiences of Africans and their descendents present alternative chronologies and histories in revising the narrative of African American Freemasonry. It is through a more expansive geopolitical and temporal range that the possibilities of Africans and their descendents adopting, adapting, and transforming the structures of European Freemasonry may be located. Looking to the decades preceding Prince Hall's entry into the rites of Freemasonry we find an interesting anecdote. In the early eighteenth century there arose a particular uproar over the presence of Africans or persons of African descent in the mainland British Colonies who claimed to be Freemasons. Winthrop Jordan records the incident in full:

> In the 1730's in New York some Negroes were reported to have had "the Impudence to assume the Stile and Title of FREEMASONS, in Imitation of a Society here; which was looked upon to be a gross Affront to the Provincial Grand Master and Gentlemen of the Fraternity . . . and was very ill ACCEPTED."[37]

The display by the Negroes in New York in the 1730's represents an adoption of a cultural practice and form of representation that is co-extensive with their diasporic experiences in the British colonies. Just as "colonial Masons recreated the fraternity in their own image," these Negroes who assumed "the Stile and Title of FREEMASONS"

Although much is possible, Gomez overstates his case here and commits the fallacy of oversimplifying a series of correspondences without due consideration to the factors discussed above. His probing and innovative theoretical and historical work, I would suggest, should be tempered by the position advanced over two decades ago by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price. See Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (1976; Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

[37] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 130.

recreated the fraternity in *their* own image.[38] What is revealing about this account is the

early recognition of black participation and adoption the characters and symbols of

Freemasonry. Although we lack a complete description of the activity of these

individuals who assumed "the Stile and Title of FREEMASONS," we can ascertain from

the account that their actions as "FREEMASONS" raised the ire of the leading Masonic

authority in the colony, the Provincial Grand Master. That the recognition of

Freemasonry as adopted by these Negroes in eighteenth-century New York was similar

and recognizable their European counterparts who practiced the craft may not prove to be

the most critical insight offered by this story. What is just as important is the marking of

racial difference that the author of this account relates in detailing the astonishment felt

by the Masonic authorities in the Colony that demands our attention.[39] This marking of

racial difference announces a moment in which the black presence in Freemasonry is –

for better or for worse – acknowledged. The presence of the black Masonic Other

denotes also a moment of black cultural production in the diaspora. This early account

provides a brief glimpse into the world of an African diaspora (re)presenting a European

cultural form as its own made possible by the very experiences of an enforced diaspora.

Thus, we confront not only the appropriation of European Freemasonry by blacks, but

also a sign of the cultural adoption and transformation in the African diaspora.

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[38] Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 51.

[39] The concern of the Provincial Grand Master over the presence of these black Freemasons could also be read as a part of a general uneasiness of white colonists due to the unrest of "Negroes" in New York around this time. See T. J. Davis, *A Rumor of Revolt: The "Great Negro Plot" in Colonial New York* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

The experience of Africans and their descendents with European Freemasonry was not confined to the British colonial context of the African disapora. First published in 1798, Thaddeus Mason Harris's little book, *A Few Notices of the History of Free Masonry in Several Parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa*, reports an extensive Masonic network operative throughout the Atlantic world and beyond prior to the turn of the nineteenth century. Although Harris does not provide any information on the membership composition of these lodges, what he does offer is a wider geography in our consideration of the zones of cultural contact of Africans and their descendents with European Freemasonry. In his 20-page book, Harris details the development of Freemasonry from its origins in Europe to its expansion in the overseas holdings of European nation-states. Of the transmission of Freemasonry in Asia, Harris writes:

> From the travels of Alexander Drummond, Esq. English Counsul at Aleppo, we learn that he formed a Lodge there about the year 1740; which he mentions as the only Lodge in Levant. Many worthy brethren were made in it. About the same time a Lodge was formed at *Bengal*, in Asia: Masonry has lately flourished in that extensive quarter of the globe in a very extraordinary manner. There are several Lodges in *Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Bencollen, Fort George, Tortolla, China, For Marlborough*, in the East Indies, *Batavia, Ceylon, Calcutta, Chandanagore, Patna, Burdwan, Dacca, Maxadabad*, &c. &c.[40]

The presence of freemason lodges in these areas of Asia created an opportunity for Africans and their descendents to be introduced to European Freemasonry in areas

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[40] Thaddeus Mason Harris, *A Few Notices of the History of Free Masonry in Several Parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa* (Boston: Samuel Etheridge, 1798), 17-18.

outside of the Atlantic world. Considering the extensive East African commercial networks with India along with the fact that "Africans had established a long residence along India's west coast" and in other areas consistent with the location of these lodges, it is entirely possible that these networks played a pivotal role in introducing European Freemasonry to Africans and their descendents in this diasporic context.[41]

If the presence of the 76 lodges of Freemasonry in Asia by 1780 aided in this introduction, Africans nevertheless had an opportunity to come into contact with the culture of European Freemasonry with the presence of 13 freemason lodges in Africa. Harris informs:

> Confining our remarks to the modern history of Free Masonry, we can inform that a Lodge was constituted at *James' Fort*, on the river Gambia, A. D. 1735. There is also a Lodge at the *Cape of Good Hope*, formed in 1773. A French Lodge in the Island of *Mauritius*; and a Dutch Lodge in the Island of *Madagascar*. There is likewise a Lodge at *Saint Helenas*. And Masonry is known and cultivated in *Algiers, Tunis,* and *Morocco*.[42]

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[41] Joseph E. Harris, "Africans in Asian History," in Joseph E. Harris, ed., *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1993), 328. See also Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971) and J. O. Hunwick, "African Slaves in the Mediterranean World: A Neglected Aspect of the African Diaspora," in Joseph E. Harris, ed., *Global Dimensions*, 289-323.

Freemason Lodges in India faced a number of problems. Peter Clark notes some of these issues: "One Bengal lodge wrote to London that 'the residence of persons in this country is very precarious and . . . all societies here are consequently subject to great fluctuations, presenting in progressive and sometimes rapid succession their rise, decline, and extinction or renovation.' . . . Communication with the home grand lodges was fraught with difficulty, particularly for the Indian masons. In 1793, for example, the Bengal grand lodge protested of writing several times to London but never getting a reply." Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 346.

[42] Thaddeus Mason Harris, *A Few Notices*, 19.

Freemasonry's extension into parts of Africa, particularly the west coast of Africa, provided an African locale for the peoples of Africa to cultivate a working knowledge of the institution. The Freemason Lodge at James' Fort on the river Gambia was at a crossroads of commerce, culture, and capital in the rapidly expanding Atlantic world. European Freemasonry was well positioned to connect with an extensive network of commerce and culture described by noted historian John Thornton:

> Not only did the Niger-Senegal-Gambia [river] complex unite a considerable portion of West Africa, but the Niger provided a corridor that ultimately added the Hausa kingdoms, the Yoruba states, and the Nupe, Igala, and Benin kingdoms to a hydrographic system that was ultimately connected to the Atlantic."[43]

With cargoes of products and people interacting and traveling in this rich network, it would be an *exception* for Africans and their descendants if they had not at least acquired a working knowledge, if not become initiated members, of Freemasonry. This area was rich in cross-cultural fertilization as evidenced by "the creation of an Afro-Portuguese community of *lancados*, traders whose political and cultural orientation was Portuguese, even though by the late seventeenth century they were physically indistinguishable from other Africans." Such cross-cultural contact was very much evident by the community called *grumetes* who were "comprised of African boatmen, seamen, soldiers, and others (including women) who worked for Europeans and the Afro-Portuguese." The *grumetes* also practiced a hybridized form of Christianity – "Africanized Catholicism."[44] If we

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[43] John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 19.

[44] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 51.

recognize the extensive cultural intermingling in this region, the logical extension would be to consider seriously the Masonic lodge as a possible site in this process of cultural translation and negotiation. Concomitant with this West African context of Freemasonry is the revelation Harris documents of Freemasonry was also "cultivated in Algiers, Tunis, and Morocco." To this end, in a brief footnote, Harris intimates of inter-cultural contact and communication between members of African Freemason lodges and their counterpart in the Americas: "Some *Algerine* Brethren, about two years since visited the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts."[45]

The impressive global and temporal range of European Freemasonry and its connections to Africans and their descendents throughout the Diaspora comes into clearer focus in the Caribbean. The uniqueness of the Caribbean – its continuities of "one experience, one identity" and its converse of "ruptures and discontinuities" that constitutes the trappings of diaspora – mark this as a quintessential arena where we can begin to situate the diasporic consciousness at the heart of African American Freemasonry.[46] With lodges reportedly in existence in Martinique by 1738, Jamaica and Antigua by 1739, Barbados by 1740, San Domingo by 1749, Virgin Islands by 1760, Bermuda by 1791, Bahamas by 1785, and Trinidad by 1798, the West Indian component of the Atlantic world was a fertile ground for the mixture of the culture of European Freemasonry and the peoples of Africa and their descendents.[47] With the creation of the

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[45] Thaddeus Mason Harris, *A Few Notices*, 19.

[46] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 23.

[47] For a complete listing of dates and lodge presence in the Caribbean and other parts of the world, see William H. Grimshaw, *History of Freemasonry*, 52-55. In an interesting note, "In the Boston Freemasons' Magazine for *January*, 1849, it is stated that 'in 1835 the Grand Lodge of France instituted a Lodge at Point

first Caribbean "free port" in 1724 by Denmark and the evolving "free" trade traffic

picking up steam in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Caribbean was a central

locus for cultural negotiation, fusion, and transformation.[48] As Africans and their

descendents moved throughout this world, the cultural and commercial networks of the

Caribbean "provided the medium of long-distance communication and allowed interested

Afro-Americans to follow developments in other parts of the world."[49] No doubt that one

of these developments that was followed with interest and emulated throughout the Afro-

Atlantic world was Freemasonry.

The centrality of the Caribbean in reconsidering the geography of African

American Freemasonry is underscored by the fact that it was this area where the founder

of African American Freemasonry, Prince Hall, was reportedly born. William Grimshaw

is the source of this information when he wrote that "Prince Hall was born September

12th, 1748, at Bridgetown, Barbados, British West Indies."[50] Although the origins of

Grimshaw's account are unknown and subsequent scholarship has called his recollection

into question, by placing Prince Hall in Barbados, Grimshaw provides an early account –

possibly drawing on previous narratives or sources long lost – that underscores the

centrality of the Caribbean to the later African American cultural production of

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Petre, Guadaloupe, for *colored men*, and in 1845 added a Chapter.'" See *Catalogue of Books on The Masonic Institution, in Public Libraries of Twenty-Eight States of the Union* . . . (Boston: Samrell & Moore, 1852), 102.

[48] Julius S. Scott. "The Common Wind," 68-69.

[49] Idid. 60.

[50] William H. Grimshaw. *History of Freemasonry*, 69.

Freemasonry.[51] Although subsequent scholarship places Hall's birth in Boston, in (re)reading the founding narrative of African American Freemasonry through a wider geographic lens, to echo the sentiment expressed by Douglas R. Egerton in another context, "The fact [may be] wrong, but the logic is impeccable."[52]

A roster of members of the African Lodge #459 of Philadelphia from 1797-1808 shows an extensive influence of the Caribbean as a critical juncture in the extensive contact between Africans and their descendents and European Freemasonry. Out of 62 members listed, over half (32) were made Masons in lodges located throughout the Atlantic world including those in the West Indies. The founding of the Philadelphia African lodge was, as Harry Davis has related, by members who all "had received their degrees abroad."[53] Although detailed records of which specific lodges these individuals were initiated as Masons have yet to surface, it can be safely assumed that some, if not a great many, were initiated, passed, and raised in lodges found in the Caribbean.[54]

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[51] Grimshaw is the earliest published source available that posits Prince Hall's birth and early life in Barbados. Charles H. Wesley, after traveling to Barbados for evidence to substantiate Grimshaw's account, disputes this claim, adding: "There was no evidence that Hall was born in Barbados – as many people thought." Quoted in Hollie I. West, "A Black Historian Straightens Out Some Facts, *The Washington Post*, October 25, 1977. In the face of this contradiction, one wonders, why *place* Hall's origins and early life in Barbados? What function did (does) this serve Grimshaw and others? See also Charles H. Wesley, *Prince Hall: Life and Legacy*, 217-219.

[52] Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 & 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 98.

[53] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry*, 112. Harry Davis as cited in William A. Muraskin, *Middle-class Black in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 34-35.

[54] In her study, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, Julie Winch observes, "The roster of the lodge for the years 1797-1818 indicates that more than one-third of the members had received their degrees in the West Indies or in Europe." See Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 171. For other discussions of African American Freemasonry in Philadelphia in the period of the Early Republic, see Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard

The pull of the Caribbean not only operated in one direction as one of the names

on the roster – Prince Saunders – attests. Prince Saunders is listed as a member of the

African lodge in Philadelphia at the time of the Lodge's founding in the late eighteenth

century. In 1806, Saunders traveled to the Grand Lodge in England as a representative of

African Lodge #459 of Boston, Massachusetts. Gaining entry into the abolitionist circles

in England, Saunders would capitalize on his educational background to begin his critical

work in aiding Haiti. Returning to the West Indies and eventually serving as the Attorney

General for an independent Haiti, Saunders was charged by Henri Christophe to

"organize Christophe's school system and change Haytian religion from Catholic to

Protestant."[55] In 1816, upon returning to England, Saunders wrote and published *Haytien*

Papers. A Collection of the Very Interesting Proclamations and Other Official

Documents . . . of the Kingdom of Hayti. His publication was designed to inform the

African diaspora of the revolutionary transformations occurring in Haiti and of its

"dedication to unconditional personal liberty and political equality 'whatever be your

origin or your colour.'"[56] Capitalizing on his Masonic connections in Philadelphia and

Boston, Saunders returned to the United States and used his extensive fraternal network

to push his plan for African American emigration to Haiti. The large Caribbean

population in the eastern seaboard cities positively received his message of emigration to

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University Press, 1988); and John W. Oldmixon, *Transatlantic Wanderings: or A Last Look at the United States* (London: George Routledge, 1855).

[55] Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *The Roots of African-American Identity*, 147-148. See also Chris Dixon, *African American and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 32-34. On the influence of Haiti in African America, see Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

[56] Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *The Roots of African-American Identity*, 148.

Haiti. "As a result, many African Americans listened with more than passing interest as

Prince Saunders, a young New Englander believed to be 'of pure African blood,'

described the Haytian emigration program during the final years of the Christophe

reign."[57] Saunders work and travels highlight the importance of the convergence of the

culture of Freemasonry and the Caribbean world in the diasporic dimension of African

American Freemasonry.

The influence and presence of the Caribbean in the wider geographic landscape of

African American Freemasonry is further confirmed by the large number of Caribbean

identified Freemasons who were members of a late eighteenth-century French lodge in

Portsmouth, Virginia. This city, located on the shores of one of the busiest seaports in

the Atlantic world, was home to a continuous stream of seamen engaged in the

transoceanic commerce between the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa and the European

continent.[58] The combination of this extensive network of commerce and culture is

reflected in the *Tableau De F. F. qui composent la Loge Provinciale Francaise, Sous le*

Titre Distinctif de la Sagessee: A L'Orient de Portsmouth, en Virginia, Etats-Unis De

l'Amerique of 1798. This membership roster lists persons from St. Domingue,

Guadaloupe, St. Croix, and Bermuda as members of the lodge.[59] In the era of the Haitian

Revolution, this Virginian coastal city was the docking point of many French refugees

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[57] Ibid, 149.

[58] For a description of the commercial and cultural traffic in and around this area in the late eighteenth century see Thomas C. Parramore with Peter C. Stewart and Tommy L. Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 102-118 and Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1931).

[59] *Tableau De F. F. qui composent la Loge Provinciale Francaise, Sous le Titre Distinctif de la Sagessee: A L'Orient de Portsmouth, en Virginia, Etats-Unis De l'Amerique of 1798* (Norfolk: Willett & O'Connor, 1798).

from the former French colony.[60] The presence of the enslaved "refugee Negroes"

among these groups caused much fear and anxiety in white Virginians. As early as 1793,

Colonel Thomas Newton of Norfolk wrote to Governor Henry Lee, "Our place is

crowded with Frenchmen and too many negroes have been brought with them."[61] The

presence of these "Negro refugees" was also a concern of Governor Monroe who

cautioned, "The scenes which are acted in St. Domingo must produce an effect on all the

people of colour in this and the States south of us, more especially our slaves, and it is

our duty to be on guard to prevent any mischief resulting from it."[62] Of critical

importance would be the spread of conspiratorial ideas to enslaved African Americans

through secret orders such as Freemasonry. Although the roster of 1798 does not identify

members as Africans or African descent or of any other ethnic origin, what this

membership list does demonstrate is the rich cultural mix of people from all over the

Caribbean intermingling in the culture of European Freemasonry. Indeed, as this Lodge

was also chartered as Lodge of Wisdom No. 16 under the Virginia Grand Lodge, the

membership returns for the Lodge of Wisdom No. 16 – during the same period as this

Lodge was also known in the French as *Sagessee* No. 2660 – "reflect the diversity both in

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[60] Some of the refugee possessions included: "The Masonic regalia, apron and ribbons of a Santo Domingan exile who left the island in a cask on one of Stephen Girard's boats." See Frances Sergeant Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States, 1790-1800: An American Chapter of the French Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), xv. See also, Thomas Wood Clarke, *Émigrés in the Wilderness* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) and Lucian J. Fosdick, *The French Blood in America*.

[61] Thomas Newton to Governor Lee, July 9, 1793 as cited in Winston C. Babb, *French Refugees from Saint Domingue to the Southern United States: 1791-1810* (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia 1954), 221.

[62] Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 47.

the national and *ethnic* mix of its members."[63] From Philadelphia to Portsmouth, the

Caribbean is a central location in the geography of the cultural exchanges and translations

of Africans and their descendents and the culture of European Freemasonry.

In this Atlantic world, there was a wide zone of cultural contact facilitating points

of cultural exchange, transmission, and transformation between Africans and their

descendents and Europeans and their descendents. Dotting the landscape at every turn

were freemason lodges. Africans and their descendents – both slave and free – had ample

opportunity to engage the culture and structure of European Freemasonry in locales from

Asia to Africa and from the Caribbean to the Chesapeake. Blacks traveling in this world

were able to draw from their own traditions of secret societies and combine these rich

cultural reservoirs with European Freemasonry. Recognizing these crucial points in this

wider geographic land and seascape plays an important role in (re)reading the narrative of

African American Freemasonry. By engaging in this network of culture, commerce, and

capital in creative tension with an emerging African Diaspora, Africans and their

descendents began a new tradition in the culture of Freemasonry that would eventually

find its apotheosis in the man, the myth, and the legend of Prince Hall.

III

The trajectory we have followed thus far in this chapter is one geared towards (re)reading

the historical geography of African American Freemasonry. We will build upon these

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[63] Richard A. Rutyna and Peter C. Stewart. *The History of Freemasonry in Virginia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 96 (emphasis added). Rutyna and Stewart base their claim on the original petition of this lodge housed in the library of the Virginia Grand Lodge. In his study *American and French Culture*. Howard Jones offers the following: "In Virginia the Grand Orient Lodge in 1799 had chiefly Santo Domingan refugees as its members." See Howard Mumford Jones, *America and French Culture, 1750-1848* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1927), 399.

observations in considering the complexities of cultural identity as produced in and through African American Freemasonry. The symbolic acts of fraternal and cultural memory enacted in the space of African American Freemasonry provide an interesting site to examine the multiple meanings of identity produced in and through these performances. When situating African American Freemasonry as the central site for interrogating cultural identity, we are reminded of the rhetorics, discourses, and performances utilized by these historical actors in this fraternal order in attempting to articulate some sense of a shared cultural ethos.[64] In his intervention in the discourse on cultural identity, Stuart Hall makes a critical contribution in defining this as the "first position" of cultural identity:

> The first position defines "cultural identity" in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective "one true self," hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed "selves" which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people," with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.[65]

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[64] Louis Dupré has provided a most cogent argument in favor of cultural coherence while not discounting cultural variety. See Louis Dupré, "Cultural Variety and Metaphysical Unity," in Mieke Bal, ed., *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 255-267.

[65] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 22. Hall's intervention is a critical response in the ongoing debate on the continued political, social, intellectual, and cultural relevance of identities. The literature in this area is voluminous, spanning the fields of Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Psychoanalysis, Political Theory, and Cultural Criticism. For an excellent collection of some of the more seminal texts in this area, see Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996).

By participating in the functions and structures of African American Freemasonry, black Freemasons in the diaspora occupied this "first position" of cultural identity as articulated by Stuart Hall. The mysteries of an ancient fraternal institution, along with its emphasis on a universal brotherhood based on the values of honor, love, virtue, integrity, and discipline, encode a shared cultural identity of all Freemasons. These values became a dominant frame of reference for African Americans who enacted the rituals of Freemasonry. Steven Bullock informs that "brothers used the fraternity to pioneer a new romantic vision of the self, an internal identity based in the heart and expressed through emotional outpourings rather than through controlled and polished public self-presentation."[66] For European and European American Freemasons, the overarching conceptions of self as expressed in the shared cultural identity of Freemasonry commenced a process of imaginative discovery of a shared cultural world for those initiated into its secret mysteries. For African American Freemasons in the diaspora, however, such a shared cultural identity was necessarily fractured by the growing tensions and strains spurred by inegalitarian ideologies and unjust material practices based on and produced through the construct of race.

In order to make space for a shared cultural identity fractured by logics and technologies of race, we need to continue with Hall's conception of cultural identity as augmented by what he terms as the "second position":

> There is, however, a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute "what we

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[66] Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 4.

really are"; or rather – since history has intervened – "what we have become." We cannot speak very long, with any exactness, about "one experience, one identity," without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities . . . . Cultural identity, in this second sense. is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being." It belongs to the future as much as the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power.[67]

Hall's second position takes into account the experiences of diaspora. In other words, he posits the critical idea that in the space of diaspora the production of an African American cultural identity is marked not only by continuity – in the case of Freemasonry, continuity with the universal aims and objectives of the craft – but by the "otherness" that constituted Africans and their descendents as objects rather than subjects. Cultural identity is not a fixed or static identity in Hall's production of the concept. It is very much in motion – a process of continual evolution. Such a conception of cultural identity is deeply indebted to the triangular traffic between Africa. the Americas, and Europe. The whirlwinds and ocean currents of the Atlantic world are the places for the production of a cultural identity. In these new spaces cultural identity has its history. The ongoing transformations are the product of this exchange and history. Thus, the prescriptions of a

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[67] Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." 23.

shared cultural identity within the confines of Freemasonry are necessarily fractured when African Americans take up "the Square and Compass." For African American Freemasons, the second position of cultural identity empowered them to use "Masonic values to challenge post-Revolutionary white society as a whole."[68] Thus, it is in this manner that I will argue that African American Freemasonry performs a new cultural identity through the rituals of race.

We should not neglect or underestimate the positioning of African American Freemasonry as a ritual of race. The chimera of universalism and brotherly love that the fraternity so carefully sought to cultivate was predicated on exploiting the divisions of society. As Steven Bullock argues, "[C]olonial Masonry helped blunt and buffer the divisive forces of ethnicity, religion, and nationality – but it did so, ironically, by reinforcing the crucial eighteenth-century social division, that between gentlemen and others."[69] Although Bullock pays inadequate attention to the production of race in this cultural formation, he nevertheless provides a conceptual framework to understand how the rituals of Freemasonry for African Americans are simultaneously rituals of race. The egalitarian rhetoric of Freemasonry masks the deep divisions that are operative within the ritual spaces of this cultural production. It is in the rituals of Freemasonry where "race creation emerges . . . out of the creations – the fabrications – [of] real social actors in their constructed reproductions and transformations of established discursive formations

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[68] Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 5.

[69] Ibid, 59.

and expressions."[70] Thus, African American Freemasonry understood as a ritual of race

becomes the critical space where we can (re)read this formation as part in the

(re)construction of an African American cultural identity.

For European American Freemasonry, a necessary first step in establishing a

communal foundation for the membership of the order was to separate the fraternal body

from the non-Masonic world. In doing so, the Freemason could then act for the

betterment of society with a purity of intentions and motives. The Lodge then became

the sacred site where the Freemason is invested with the ability to purify his intentions,

motives, and actions. Freemasonry represented the highest virtues and values of the mind

and heart of men who entered its secret chambers. "Speculative Masonry became a

powerful tool for thinking about and experiencing these values. The new group defined

itself as a fictive family, as a fraternity held together by brotherly love – a conception

reinforcing and reinforced by the ideals of benevolence and sociability."[71] African

American Freemasonry, particularly as embodied in the example of Prince Hall,

continued with this dimension of European American Freemasonry. Prince Hall is

remembered as one uniquely embodying the ideals of benevolence and sociability

founded on a purity of purpose and design:

> Prince Hall was much interested in the uplifting of the people with whom he was
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> associated. Intellectually he was far superior to most men of his day. He saw the
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> end of the struggle from the beginning, and therefore worked with a confident

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[70] David Theo Goldberg. *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (London: Blackwell Publishers. 1993). 83.

[71] Steven Bullock. *Revolutionary Brotherhood.* 39.

spirit, and his foresight and God's providence, developed all his plans day by day.[72]

The purity attached to the Masonic ideals of benevolence and charity was embraced by Prince Hall as he enacted the cultural practice of Freemasonry on the same ideals as his European American counterparts. The fraternal principles of European Freemasonry can thus be understood as analogous to and constitutive of the same ideals that lead Prince Hall and the fourteen others to found African Lodge. The ideals defining the fraternal and charitable actions of the Freemasonry and the Freemason were based on a critical disjuncture of the fraternal body from the everyday realities of the world. As African American Freemasons engaged this fraternal form, the concept of "brotherly love" reinforced their charitable efforts and with a similar sense of honor and a spirit of love as their European American colleagues they took on the title of Freemason. "The indwelling of the spirit of God," as Grimshaw writes of Prince Hall, "can only account for the continued success of this good man."[73]

However, the appropriation and development of the rituals of Freemasonry as enacted in the space of African American Freemasonry were, I would argue, co-extensive with what I have termed the rituals of race. In other words, although African American Freemasons based and understood their fraternal family on the principle of purity they were nevertheless unable to act freely from this foundation because of the racial privileges of United States society. At strategic moments, the culture of European American Freemasonry became complicit with the racial prerogatives of an anti-black

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[72] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry*, 74-75.

[73] Ibid, 71.

racialist and racist ordering of society. Indeed, European American Freemasonry failed to transcend the particularities of the social, political, and economic context, and was a willing accomplice in the racial hiearachy of United States civil society.[74] The positing of this difference is not a radical contradiction. As Stuart Hall argues, "Difference, therefore, persists – in and alongside continuity."[75] In other words, in light of the racial economy of the United States and the experiences of diaspora, the European American and African American members of this fraternal order came to understand the intimate connection of an African American racial difference. This difference transformed the rituals of Freemasonry into the rituals of race. It is this "difference of diaspora" that operates in the intersection of the rituals of Freemasonry and race.

The transformation of one of the Masonic rituals into a ritual of race is highlighted by the experience of Prince Hall and the fourteen other African American Freemasons in applying for a charter from the Provincial Grand Master of Masons in Massachusetts in 1775 so that they would be able to fully function as a lodge with the right to initiate members. The petition was rejected "on account of color."[76] Though such a ritual of extending the Masonic privilege to function as a lodge would seem automatic considering the manner in which Hall and the others were made Freemasons,

[74] On the imbrication of culture and race see Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999) and Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[75] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 25.

[76] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry*, 73.

this courtesy was not extended to these members of the African diaspora.[77] Recognizing

a larger world in which they engaged – both Masonic as well as the social and economic

context of the Atlantic world – "Prince Hall and his followers decided to make

application to foreigners for that which had been refused them at home. . . ."[78] The act

reveals the tension between the internal universalism of Freemasonry and the politics of a

racially driven society.   In the face of the barrier of race, Prince Hall and the other

African American Freemasons call on the egalitarian impulse of Freemasonry as they

sought to obtain a charter from "foreigners" and in the process perform this ritual of

Freemasonry on the very tenants which were supposedly extended to all who entered the

sacred portals of Freemasonry. Thus, with difference and continuity, African American

Freemasonry inaugurates a spectacular revision of this ritual of Freemasonry into a ritual

of race.

The intermingling of the rites of Freemasonry and the rites of race are nowhere

more pronounced than in the ritualistic performance of Masonic orations. In these public

gestures of oratorical prowess, European American Freemasons sought to communicate

the lofty aims of love and honor so much promoted by the fraternity to a wider public.[79]

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[77] As Steven Bullock's *Revolutionary Brotherhood* attests, in years of the Early Republic, Freemasons lodges, particularly European American lodges, were regularly provided with charters. See especially chapter 1.

[78] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry*, 73. This was also the case of "one Philadelphia lodge founded by black seamen in 1798 [who] received its charter from a lodge in Germany." James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126.

[79] On the culture of rhetoric and its relation to the civic order of the Early Republic, see Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence Is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Representative samples of African American rhetorical performances of this period can be found in Philip S. Foner and Robert J. Branham, eds., *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

The (in)visible principles and symbols of the fraternity were connected with a ritualistic rhetorical performance of the order in many public processions. These demonstrations of the pomp and circumstance of Freemasonry in the American context along with the orations of some of its more distinguished members were designed to prove the almost singular grasp of enlightenment ideals by members of the craft. One such occasion is sketched by Steven Bullock:

> Undoubtedly dressed in similarly elegant clothing, the brothers in the 1755 Philadelphia procession entered Christ Church only after all others had been seated. The service that followed further highlighted the fraternity's connection with cosmopolitan society by asserting ties to love and public concern. After prayers and psalms, grand chaplain William Smith proclaimed Masonic allegiance to the ideals of benevolence and sociability, the central concepts of enlightened social theory. To the non-Masons in the church he described the fraternity as "a Society of Friends" – significant words in the Quaker City – "linked in a strong bond of Brotherly Love." "Let no rude Gust of Passion," he warned the brothers, "extinguish the Candle of Brotherly Love, which illuminates your Souls, and is the Glory of your Nature."[80]

The formidable performances of these rhetorical acrobats served to solidify not only in the mind of the Freemasons, but also in the mind of the public as well, the intensity of feelings and the trueness of the sublime emotions of members of the fraternity. The ritualistic Masonic oration was designed to reassure the public and the members of the

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[80] Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 56.

fraternity that regardless of the vicissitudes of life, the Freemason and Freemasonry stood

as a bulwark against a descent into chaos. Whatever the fractious and rancorous politics

of the period demand, Freemasonry would be unscathed as the duty of each member of

the order was to "let no rude Gust of Passion extinguish the Candle of Brotherly Love."

Thus, with rhetorical gesture one Masonic orator of the period could posit for public

contemplation, "What greater blessing can descend from heaven . . .than universal love

with healing in its wings[?]"[81]

For African American Freemasons, the experience of diaspora engendered a

difference in the role and function of the Masonic oratorical ritual of European

Freemasonry. The claims to a Masonic identity were inextricably intertwined with the

claims for a cultural identity for those who inhabited the marginal spaces of Masonic

society as well as European American society throughout the Atlantic world. The

language expressing the ideals of love and honor so often articulated in the rituals and

rhetoric of European Freemasonry was exploded by the strategies of African American

Freemasons who (re)articulated and (re)produced these ideals in the rituals and rhetorics

of race. The multiple productions of cultural identity through difference were co-

terminus with the ideas and ideals of European Freemasonry. It was not the case that

African American Freemasons rejected *in toto* the languages and symbols of European

Freemasonry or completely assimilated this "tool kit." Instead, what resulted was a

complex hybrid – European Freemasonry with its expansive moral vision and egalitarian

rhetoric was appropriated and adapted to the peculiar circumstances of Africans and their

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[81] Ibid, 58.

descendents in the New World in order to transform and re-orient a social environment that deemed persons of African descent less than human. The refashioning of this ritual of Freemasonry empowered a doubled articulation of the rituals of Freemasonry – understood here as a ritual of race. From the "in-between space" of Masonic oratorical performance, African American Freemasons constructed new "terrain[s] for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."[82]

In an address delivered on the occasion of the Masonic celebration of St. John on June 25, 1797, Prince Hall employed the rhetorical ritual of Freemasonry to articulate his vision of the ideals of the fraternity, and in doing so enacted a ritual of race. Addressed to the African Lodge, Hall reminded those assembled in Menotony, Massachusetts of the time that has passed since his last address and the significance of the structure of Freemasonry:

> Beloved Brethern: It is now five years since I delivered a charge to you on some parts and points of Masonry. As one branch or superstructure of the foundation, I endeavored to show you the duty of a Mason to a Mason, and of charity and love to all mankind, as the work and image of the great God and the Father of the human race.[83]

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[82] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-2.

[83] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry*, 91. Future quotations from this speech as reproduced in Grimshaw will be cited parenthetically.

In this introduction, Hall echoed the sentiments expressed by many Masonic orators of the period who sought to inculcate the Masonic virtues to those member of the fraternity assembled for the address. Hall mimicked the instructions of William Smith, who charged his fellow European American Masonic brethren in Boston:

> You should consider that not only your Reputation, but the Reputation of all the fraternity, is affected by your behavior. Invested as you are with that distinguishing Badge which has been worn with pride by the most noble and most worthy of mankind: you should Scorn to do a mean thing: Walk worthy of your vocation, and do honour to your profession.[84]

The key themes of love and charity, so influential in ritual Masonic discourse, are also evident in Hall's sermon: "I shall not attempt to show you that it is our duty to sympathize with our fellow-men under their troubles and with the families of our brethren who are gone, we hope to the Grand Lodge above." Hall continues in this vein by saying, "We are to have sympathy, but this, after all, is not to be confined to parties or colors, nor to town, or States, nor to a kingdom, but to the kingdoms of the whole earth, over whom Christ the King is head and Grandmaster for all in distress" (91). Thus far, Hall kept with Masonic tradition in elevating the universal in articulating the foundations of Freemasonry. Although Hall remained within the Masonic tradition of this oratorical ritual, he nevertheless crafted a space of difference to enact the transformation of this ritual into ritual of race.

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[84] Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 73.

The submerged memory and history of diaspora emerges as the critical ground for this performance of this ritual difference. Prince Hall reminded his fellow Masonic brethren:

> "Let us see our friends and brethren; and *first let us see them dragged from their native country by the iron hand of tyranny and oppression, from their dear friends and connections with weeping eyes and aching hearts, to a strange land, and among a strange people whose mercies are cruel, and there to bear the iron yoke of slavery and cruelty, till death, as a friend, shall relieve them*" (91-92, emphasis added).

Although their duty as masons bind them to universal aims and goals – to "see our friends and brethren" – the fulfillment of those ideals are hindered by the condition of Africans and their descendents in the New World "where the fateful/fatal encounter was staged between Africa and the West."[85] In the displacement and disjuncture produced by this experience of diaspora, Hall's ritual of race transforms the rhetorical ritual of Freemasonry by highlighting the false assumptions that undergird claims to universality, equality, honor, and love that are the cornerstones of Masonic oratory. By first affirming the principles of Freemasonry and then drawing attention to those on the underside of modernity, these very concepts are critiqued and directly called into question through Hall's doubled articulation. This section of Hall's sermon connects past and present, history and memory in an attempt to raise to a heightened conscious of the brethren of African Lodge the contradictory forces unleashed in the Atlantic world and embodied in

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[85] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 30.

the rituals of Freemasonry. In this scenario, the charge to the African American

Freemason cannot be severed from the existential situation of Africans and their

descendents throughout the diaspora. "And must not the unhappy condition of these, our

fellow-men," Hall exhorts, "draw forth our hearty prayers and wishes for their

deliverance from those merchants and traders whose characters are described in

Revelation 28:11-13?" (92).

Hall then switched his articulation of a ritual of Freemasonry as a ritual of race

from a mode of critique to one of prophecy. Prince Hall drew on the reserves of the

American and African American jeremiad tradition as he employed a strategy based on

the biblical tradition and its prominence in his New England setting.[86] He extends the

logics of his ritual of race in informing his audience that the "day of judgment" was

coming near. Drawing on the rich images and deep textures of diaspora and speaking

from an indeterminate social and political space, Hall informs, "The day dawns now in

some of the West India Islands. God can and will change their condition and their hearts,

too, and let Boston and the world know that He has no respect of persons, and that the

bulwark of envy, pride, scorn and contempt, which is so visible in some, shall fall" (92).

Hall's stinging rebuke of the empty rhetoric of the egalitarian principles of Freemasonry

are here conjoined with his prophecy of a righteous social order that came into focus as a

result of the actions of those C. L. R. James termed "the Black Jacobins." As harbingers

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[86] On the American jeremiad and African American jeremiad tradition, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Perry Miller, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Pres, 1978); Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) and David Howard-Pitney, *The Afro-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

of and fighters for freedom, Hall's invocation of Divine action coupled with his nuanced critique of Freemasonry, sounded a warning to Boston and the Atlantic world.

The ritual of race that Hall enacted within the cultural space of Freemasonry is privileged not only by the oratorical rituals of Freemasonry but, more importantly, by the Grand Architect of the Universe who sits in judgment not only of the Craft but also of the social order. To this end, Hall provided a biblical basis for the equality of all people, regardless of race:

> Jethro, an Ethiopian, gave instructions to his son-in-law, Moses, in establishing government. – Exodus 29:22-24. Thus Moses was not ashamed to be instructed by a black man. Philip was not ashamed to take a seat beside the Ethiopian eunuch and to instruct him in the gospel. The Grand Master Solomon was not ashamed to hold conference with the Queen of Sheba. Our Grand Master Solomon did not divide the living child, whatever he might do with the dead one; neither did he pretend to make a law to forbid the parties from having free intercourse with one another, without fear of censure, or be turned out of the synagogue (92).

Veiled in this biblical allegory was a not too hidden criticism of the inability of Prince Hall's European American Masonic brothers' to accept the place, position, and prominence of African American Freemasons. If Jethro instructed Moses, and Moses was "not ashamed to be instructed by a black man," and if Philip and Solomon freely conversed with Africans, why would European American Freemasons object to holding Masonic relations with their African American brothers? Hall's testimony provides a different voice that challenges Steven Bullock's observation concerning the goals and

aims of European American Freemasonry in the Early Republic: "The attempt of brothers to give Freemasonry a genteel and honorable reputation, despite occasional jests and suspicions, largely worked."[87] In a not too subtle manner, Hall not only critiqued the shortcomings of his European American counterparts – within the sacred space of the Lodge as well as in the larger society – but he made the claim, by averring to the biblical narrative, that African American Freemasons have the requisite knowledge to properly instruct European American Freemasons on the *true* meaning of the principles and aims of the fraternity.

After exhorting his brothers to remain calm in the face of the mounting racial violence – "A slave in the West Indies, on Sundays, or holidays enjoys himself and friends without molestation. Not only this man, but many in town, have seen their behavior to us, and that without provocation twenty or thirty cowards have fallen upon one man" – Hall closed his sermon with an appeal to those in the diaspora (93). The Caribbean stands as the beacon of hope for Hall and the rest of the African diaspora:

> My brethren, let us remember what a dark day it was with our African brethren six years ago in the West Indies. Nothing but the snap of the Whip was heard from morning to evening. Hanging, breaking on the wheel, burning and all manner of tortures were inflicted on those unhappy people. But, blessed be God, the scene is changed. They now confess that God hath no respect of persons, and therefore receive them as their friends, and treat them as brothers. Thus doth Ethiopia stretch forth her hand from slavery to freedom and equality" (93).

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[87] Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 82.

Hall picked up "the common wind" that was "sweeping across linguistic, geographic, and imperial boundaries" in the Afro-Atlantic world in the closing moments of his sermon.[88] The revolution in Saint-Domingue instantiated the intense emotions of freedom and justice that were taking root in the African diaspora. Breaking with their slave past, the "Black Jacobins" were an inspiration for all Africans and their descendents throughout the Atlantic world. It was this sentiment that Hall touched upon in his sermon. He held in tension the unsubstantiated universals of European American Freemasonry with the desires for freedom and equality of his African American Masonic brothers. In this complex dialectic, Hall affected a transvaluation of the rituals of Freemasonry. Instead of continuing along the same trajectory as his European American colleagues, Hall opted for a ritual of race – one predicated on the acknowledgement of the existential situation of Africans throughout the diaspora coupled with a rhetorical strategy designed to "make plain" the hopes and desires of those in the African diaspora for the fulfillment of the universals that stood at the heart of Freemasonry. As the French Revolutionaries linked "Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!," Hall reorganized these ideals in his performance of a ritual of race to underscore his recognition that those in the African diaspora must have true "Fraternité!" in society and in the Lodge in order for all to achieve "Liberté! Egalité!"

The diffusion of the universalist ethics of European Freemasonry further expanded the opportunity for African American Freemasonry to signify the rituals of Freemasonry as a ritual of race. It was quite fashionable in the midst of Empire – with its attendant inequalities, injustices, and persecutions of those people and cultures on the periphery – for European masons to espouse the selfless duty of Freemasons to spread

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[88] Julius Scott, "The Common Wind," 5.

their honor and virtue to the "profane." The new man of masonry, it was upheld, must adhere to the strict guidelines of personal integrity in order to become a beacon for those around him. As one Masonic tract put it:

> The sacred Laws of the Masons; it is to you that this work is reserved; it is up to you to eliminate crime, to strike the criminal, to defend the innocent, to prop up the weak, to force men to become happy. Oh, the disgrace of nature! Oh, the confusion of humanity! which makes it that a man cannot be free without being a criminal. Must he be rendered a slave in order to be virtuous? Yes, my brothers, that is our condition; our passions require laws, our unjust and reckless desires must be restrained.[89]

Freemasons were thus charged to be vigilant carriers and promoters of the sacred bonds of trust, charity, benevolence, and love that characterized the order. The extension of these ideals to other geographic locales was an essential obligation of members of the fraternity. Indeed, it can be argued that such a sentiment was carried and held in high esteem by the members of Minden Lodge, No. 63 even as they "traveled south to Santo Domingo and Jamaica, where [they] helped to quell an insurrection 'among the disaffected Negroes and brigands' in 1796."[90]

For African American Freemasons, however, the sacred bonds of justice, love, and equality were more than obligations of the initiated member. The extension of the egalitarian rhetoric of Freemasonry transcended the sacred confines of the Lodge and the

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[89] Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6.

[90] Jessica Harland-Jacobs. "Hands Across the Sea," 241.

promotion of Freemasonry to those outside of its hallowed halls. With the growing influence of European nations in the Atlantic world and the dispersion of Africans and their descendents throughout the diaspora, the activity of expanding the membership base in African American Masonic circles took on an *extra*-Masonic character. In performing this ritual of race, African American Freemasons held in a constant dialectic the competing universal aims of the fraternity – benevolence, justice, and love – with the particularities of the condition and experiences of those in diaspora – slavery, discrimination, and alienation. Thus, the spread of Freemasonry among Africans and their descendents in America was intimately connected with the spirit of uplift that marked their Masonic and societal efforts.

In an address in which he called his brethren to task for failing to "have money to educate our rising generation," Prince Hall set forth a challenge to those gathered to hear him on June 25, 1792: "Make you this beginning and who knows but God may raise up some friends or body of friends, as He did in Philadelphia, to open a school for the blacks here, as that friendly city has done there."[91] The authority of masonry obligated these men to adhere to the "higher" virtues of life and Hall connected these principles with those of bettering the race, in this instance through the founding of a school similar to the efforts of the African Society of Philadelphia. Hall's exhortation was a follow-up to his October 17, 1787 petition to the Massachusetts legislature requesting the assistance of the lawmakers in establishing a system to educate African American children.[92]

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[91] William Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry*, 88.

[92] Harry E. Davis, "Documents Relating to Negro Masonry in America," *Journal of Negro History*, 21.4 (October, 1936), 431.

It is interesting that Hall drew on the model of the actions of those in Philadelphia. A few years later, these men would seek the extension of African American Freemasonry to Philadelphia. In a letter dated March 2, 1797, Peter Mantone (Mantore) informed Hall of the Masonic credentials of those wishing to affiliate with African Lodge:

> We give you the names of the Brethern; Peter Mantone, Acting Master, who, notwithstanding the amazing trial and strict examination by Mr. Wilson, was elevated a Super-excellent, and was Arch and Royal Arch Knight Templar of Ireland, Carricfergus Lodge, True Blues, No. 253. Peter Richmond, Jonathan Harding, John Davis, Robert Vendbel, Masters; these are Ancient York Masons. D. Butler, C. Brown, T. Peterson, J. Tucker, J. Daking, J. Henry, who were made in London in the Golden Lodge, No. 222.[93]

Traveling throughout the Atlantic world, these men of African descent represented the sort of diasporic connections that were central to the extension of African American Freemasonry to other parts of the fledging United States. They capitalized on their status as Freemasons to connect with others of similar standing once they settled in the United States. Desiring a dispensation – a document permitting a group of Freemasons to convene as a lodge but does not empower it to initiate any members or conduct business as a "regular" lodge – this group of Freemasons first sought to affiliate with the white masons of Pennsylvania. "The white Masons have refused to grant us a Dispensation," they wrote, "fearing that black men living in Virginia would get to be Masons, too."[94]

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[93] Ibid, 425-426.

[94] Ibid, 425.

Although men of honor and charity were actively sought to be members of this society, European American masons were ever too cautious in extending the privilege of masonry to those who stood outside, or on the lower rungs, of the accepted social hierarchy. The enactment of a ritual of race betrays the spirit and the letter of Steven Bullock's observation concerning the ethics of American Freemasonry in the Early Republic: "By building bonds of affection that moved outward from the innermost circles of benevolence, Masonic brotherhood attempted to expand the 'particular love' of families and neighbors into a 'universal love' that would eventually include the entire world."[95]

Their efforts rebuffed, the men in Philadelphia decided to seek the assistance of African Lodge. Their reasons for doing so provide an excellent example of the transformation of a ritual of Freemasonry into a ritual of race. "We would rather be under you," writes Mantone on behalf of the Philadelphia Freemasons, "and associate with your Brethern in Boston, than to be under those of the Pennsylvania Lodge; for, if we are under you, we shall always be ready to assist in the furtherance of Masonry among us."[96] The rejection by their "fraternal" colleagues in Philadelphia forced the recognition that the universal aims and principles of Freemasonry did not extend across the line of race. The denial of Masonic affiliation performed in the service of continuing the white racial privilege of European American Freemasonry was signified on by the Mantone group as they sought the extension of African American Freemasonry not only through the rituals of Freemasonry – obtaining a dispensation which grants the authority of a group of Freemasons to meet as a lodge of Freemasons – but also through the rituals

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[95] Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 57.

[96] Harry E. Davis, "Documents Relating to Negro Masonry," 425.

of race – "for, if we are under you, we shall always be ready to assist in the furtherance of Masonry among us." The racial solidarity exhibited in this context reminds us that the sword of Freemasonry was double-edged for African Americans. If the space of the Lodge was suppose to dissolve the ties that separated man from his brother, then for African American Freemasons the rituals of race reminded them that this barrier transcending space did not exist in the presence of African American Freemasons who sought to enter the outer door of the Lodge. For African American Freemasons then, the Masonic field was fine tuned to have recourse and resonance to those members of the race throughout the diaspora.

The rituals of race were very much intertwined with the histories and destinies of Africans and their descendents throughout the diaspora. Slavery, discrimination, injustice, and inequality that were central parts of the Atlantic world intertwined with the enlightenment ideals of Freemasonry to create an institution with a living contradiction. African American Freemasons cognizant of these battles between the universal and the particular sought to escape this vicious dialectic by signifying on the performance of the rituals of Freemasonry as a ritual of race. This performative difference was made necessary by the very conditions unleashed in the moment of European imperialist expansion and its attendant racial ideologies that created a hierarchy of all humanity. When celebrating the arrival of their Masonic charter from London in 1787, Prince Hall was forced to correct a Boston newspaper by informing the publishers, "I take the liberty to inform you that our title is not Saint Black Lodge, but 'African Lodge'. . . ."[97]

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[97] Ibid.

Situating the African Lodge within other African American institutions that "included the designation 'African,' Hall and his brethren announced that the rituals of Freemasonry, however universal in aims, were intimately connected with the rituals of race – both of fraternity and of society.[98] It was not the negative valuations associated with the mark of race that united these Freemasons, but the layered images and meanings of Africa and the disapora that marked the African American Freemasons' presence in the United States and the Western world.[99]

IV

In 1923, the famed sociologist Robert Park remarked, "The American Negro no longer conceives of his destiny as bounded by the limits of the United States. He is seeking alliances and creating loyalties that transcend the boundaries of our American commonwealth. The Negro, in his racial relationship at least, is internationalist. He is becoming a citizen of the world."[100] The phenomenon that Park noticed during the period of heightened Pan Africanist sentiments emanating from the ideologies and the exploits of W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey are hardly peculiar to this moment in African American history. From its inception, a pronounced global awareness was consistent with and an extension of the ideas and ideals of African American Freemasonry. In the process of adopting, adapting, and transforming European

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[98] James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 178-179.

[99] On the negative qualities of associated with black in American racial ideology, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black*, esp. chapters I and XIV.

[100] Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan & China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 31.

Freemasonry to the realities of the experiences and conditions of the African diaspora,

African American Freemasons developed and promoted an idea of a *supranational*

citizenship. Recognizing that the Founding Fathers of the Early Republic held a less than

inclusive vision when they wrote the words "We the People," African American

Freemasons were cognizant of their limited, if not nonexistent, social and political status

as Freemasons and as citizens in the United States. To create a space in the national

imaginary, they negotiated the contested terrains of European Freemasonry and the

Atlantic world by opting for a *supranationalist* concept of citizenship – one that included

as well as extended beyond the boundaries of the United States.[101] The use of this form

of citizenship is dialectically determined by their marginal status in the matrix of the state

and the cultural ideals articulated by the politics of race. Intimately interwoven in this

citizenship ideal is the recognition that Freemasonry provided its African American

adherents a particular vocabulary and structure to access the egalitarian and universalist

streams of Enlightenment thought and connect them with the peculiar situation of life in

an anti-black racist society. Thus, for African American Freemasons the challenge was

to lay claim to the principles of this global fraternity while extending an equal claim for

citizenship within the polity of the United States.

I use the terms *supranationalist* citizenship to denote the complex processes by

and through which African American Freemasons staked a claim to the structures and

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[101] In his recent assessment of the literature of American identity in the Early Republic, Andrew W. Robertson notes, "American historians have recently paid close attention to the Atlantic context in which American political culture was formed. . . . J. R. Pole and Jack Greene have pointed out that American colonists saw themselves in an Atlantic world that included not only England but the 'offshore colonies' of the West Indies, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and Nova Scotia." Andrew W. Robertson, "'Look on This Picture . . . And on This!' Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1787-1820," *The American Historical Review* 106.4 (October, 2001), 1264.

processes of democratic liberalism as practiced in the United States. This is a historically constructed concept predicated on the rationale that African American Freemasons in the period of the Early Republic negotiated – through the rituals of Freemasonry and the rituals of race – the competing claims for a universalist reading of "We the People" with the particularities of the conditions of injustice, inequality, and domination experienced by Africans and their descendents throughout the diaspora. Although the term implies a citizenship ideal that transcends the boundaries of a particular nation-state, I have chosen to use this term in a more complex and reflexive manner.[102] By holding in tension the particular location in which the claims for citizenship are made with the universalist language and cultures of Freemasonry that transcend the nation-state, I think we are forced to rethink the manner and method by which African American Freemasons developed a complex ideology that strategically placed them at the center of the nation's margins while employing a rhetorical discourse that placed them at the center of Enlightenment ideals that structured the Atlantic world.

The intersection of the cultures of Freemasonry and citizenship are necessarily entangled with the larger relations of culture and the politics of national identity. It is important that we are aware of the cultural sphere in order to gain an insight into the political strategies and movements of various people as they attempt to position themselves in the politics of national identity. To pay critical attention to this contested terrain is not to just decipher the mysterious "hidden transcripts" of particular subcultures, but it is an exploration geared towards uncovering the varied ways in and

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[102] My use of the term "reflexive" draws on the sociological method of Pierre Bourdieu. See Pierre Bourdieu. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, with Loïc Wacquant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

through which particular cultural formations encode and decode particular political

movements, strategies, and structures. As Max Weber has argued, "Culture, in the

modern state and in capitalist economy, increasingly becomes the arena of opposition, at

times political."[103] The approach to the conjuncture of the cultures of Freemasonry and

the politics of the nation involve examining the ways in which this cultural formation

serves to reinforce and legitimate the functions of the political sphere. In other words, we

must attempt to grasp the large functions and structures of the political sphere as they are

shaped by the culture of Freemasonry and, in turn, shape the culture of Freemasonry.

Thus, this reflexive reading will not only help us uncover the *supranationalist* dimension

of African American Freemasons claim to a national identity, it will also highlight the

manner in which a "culture's products and processes have often been part of the

legitimizing *world-views of dominant political structures*."[104]

The imbrication of Freemasonry with the political culture of the Early Republic

is evident by the social and political position of Freemasons and Freemasonry relative to

the development of the United States national imaginary.[105] With public processions,

universalist themes, and ritual investment of sacredness, order, and reason bestowed upon

the public buildings of the nation's Capital, Freemasonry assumed a role in the nation far

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[103] Quoted in Seyla Benhabib, "The Liberal Imagination and the Four Dogmas of Multiculturalism," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12.2 (1999), 401.

[104] Seyla Benhabib, "The Liberal Imagination," 401.

[105] On popular political culture in the Early Republic see for example, Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); and David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

exceeding the rote functions of a social fraternity. In articulating this new dimension of Freemasonry after laying the cornerstone of the United States capital on September 18, 1793, Steven Bullock astutely offers:

> The fraternity's position on Capital Hill, one of the many such consecration ceremonies over the next generation, provided a powerful symbol of Masonry's new place in post-Revolutionary America. No longer an expression of the honor and solidarity of a particular social class, the fraternity increasingly identified itself with the ideals of the nation as a whole. The order, brothers argued, represented, taught, and spread virtue, learning, and religion. Masons thus did more than lay the Republic's physical cornerstones; they also helped form the symbolic foundations of what the Great Seal called "the new order for the ages."[106]

Just as Freemasonry was a handmaiden and defining institution of the British Empire, it also served a similar role in the construction of the United States. In helping to shape this "new order for the ages," the culture of Freemasonry created a space where the ideals of the nation and the fraternity came to be played out. The traditional prohibition against discussing politics in the Lodge was subjected to a severe test as politics and culture, far from being antithetical, came to be intimately intertwined with one another. "If, as Thomas Jefferson argued, the Capitol represented 'the first temple dedicated to the sovereignty of the people,' then the brothers of the 1793 ceremony served as its first high priests."[107]

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[106] Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 137.

[107] Ibid.

If European American Freemasons were the "high priests" of the republican

political culture of the United States, then African American Freemasons were the

Gnostics. As such, they utilized the culture of Freemasonry in the political field of the

Early Republic to quite different ends. Utilizing the languages, ideals, structures, and

forms of European American Freemasonry aided African American Freemasons to

highlight the lasting legacies of the contradictions in political realities of the United

States. Indeed, African American Freemasons were painfully aware of the paradox as

noted Quaker David Cooper described:

> If these solemn *truths*, uttered at such an awful crisis, are *self-evident*: unless we
>
> can shew that the African race are not *men*, words can hardly express the
>
> amazement which naturally arises on reflecting, that the very people who make
>
> these pompous declarations are slave-holders, and by their legislative conduct, tell
>
> us, that these blessings were only meant to be the *rights* of *white-men* not of all
>
> *men*.[108]

Appropriately enough, African American Freemasons employed the fraternity – its

symbols and rituals, structure and form – in the cause of a distinctly African American

supranational citizenship. The egalitarian rhetoric along with the class and status

transcending possibilities available in the culture of Freemasonry were central in

articulating a new conception of United States citizenship – one that would place an

ethical and moral demand before the United States to recognize an unqualified adherence

to the principle "all men are created equal."

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[108] Cited in A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race & The American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 385.

The principle of a *supranational* citizenship as articulated by African American Freemasons sought to integrate African Americans in the political texture of the United States. Drawing a distinction with her work and that of Renato Rosaldo, Aihwa Ong provides an interesting framework for understanding this process. Employing the phrase "cultural citizenship," Ong defines the process of negotiating the contested terrain of citizenship in the following manner:

> I use "cultural citizenship" to refer to the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory. Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society. Becoming a citizen demands on how one is constituted as a subject who exercises or submits to power relations; one must develop what Foucault calls "the modern attitude," an attitude of self-making in shifting fields of power that include the nation-state and the wider world.[109]

Ong's production of "cultural citizenship" draws our attention to the critical processes of cultural adaptation, adoption, and transformation that are used by various political actors in negotiating the often conflicting and conflicted landscape of political institutions and systems. This notion of "cultural citizenship" is deeply indebted to a dialectical movement between the production of a self-identity and a political identity commensurate with the goals and expectations of one who is a constituent member of the

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[109] Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," *Current Anthropology* 37.5 (December, 1996), 738.

national polity. In this process of employing the languages of the nation-state with commensurate cultural practices that legitimate one's position within the national imaginary, "cultural citizenship" produces a new citizen – one that is enmeshed "within the webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society."[110]

For African American Freemasons, this complex negotiation took place in the flux of the Atlantic world. Having been initiated for over a half decade, Prince Hall and the rest of the members of the group of African American Freemasons in Boston took aim at organizing themselves into a regularly constituted lodge. As such, they endeavored to obtain the necessary papers to become a recognized and legitimate lodge of Freemasons. Writing to the leader of the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge in England, Prince Hall communicated, "We have had no opportunity tell now of applieing for a Warrant though we were prested upon to send to France for one but we refused for reasons best Known to ourselves."[111] In opting for an English dispensation, Prince Hall and his brethren not only decided to go to the "fountain of Freemasonry," but also opted for a route that would firmly ensconce them within the English traditions and customs of colonial America and the Early Republic. In the state that was home to both Plymouth Rock and the Boston Tea Party, the "reasons best Known to ourselves," can be understood as a double appeal by Prince Hall. Understanding the cultural capital carried by an English affiliation as not only being significant in the Masonic world, but equally significant in a former English colony which still drew from this heritage, Prince Hall negotiated the terrain of Freemasonry and citizenship by maximizing his efforts in the

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[110] Ibid.

[111] Harry E. Davis, "Documents Relating to Negro Masonry," 415.

cultural sphere cognizant of its resonance in the political arena. Moreover, by securing a dispensation from England, Hall superseded the existing structure of Freemasonry in the United States that excluded Africans and their descendants from membership. This move into the Atlantic world better positioned Hall and his followers to meet the challenges of American Freemasonry and United States political culture by acquiring an equal heritage and legitimacy – as offered by the cherished fountain of European Freemasonry as well as the heritage of the former colonial power of the young nation. With recourse to Europe for resonance in America, Prince Hall navigated the complex currents of the Atlantic world in order to lay the foundation for the claim of an African American to be both a citizen and a Mason. In this act, Hall linked the culture of Freemasonry with the political culture of the United States by placing African Americans within the English tradition of United States political and civil society and the culture and institution of Freemasonry.

In this newly opened space, African American Freemasons were able draw upon the languages and structures of the culture of Freemasonry in an effort to articulate the conditions and possibility for citizenship. Prince Hall's letter of 1786 to the Governor of Massachusetts, James Bowdoin, displays this intimate balancing act:

> We, by the Providence of God, are members of a fraternity that not only enjoins upon us to be peaceable subjects to the civil powers where we reside, but it also forbids our having concern in any plot or conspiracies against the state where we dwell; and as it is the unhappy lot of this state at the present date, and as the meanest of its members must feel that want of a lawful and good government, and as we have been protected for many years under this once happy Constitution, so

we hope, by the blessing of God, we may long enjoy that blessing; therefore, we, though unworthy members of this Commonwealth are willing to help support, as far as our weak and feeble abilities may become necessary in this time of trouble and confusion, as you in your wisdom shall direct us. That we may, under just and lawful authority, live peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, is the hearty wish of your humble servants, the members of the African Lodge. . . .[112]

The offer of assistance by the signatories of this letter is projected in and through the culture of Freemasonry. Instead of their services being employed as a condition of their citizenship, Prince Hall and the members of African Lodge based their action on their membership in Freemasonry. Their *supranational* citizenship as Freemasons, a cultural citizenship with an allegiance that transcends the boundaries of the nation, is invoked as the foundation for sending this request. As *supranational* citizens, they are bound by both the rituals and obligations of this international brotherhood "to be peaceable subjects to the civil powers where [they] reside. . . ." The non-nation specific context of their citizenship coupled with their membership in the Lodge and their residence in the United States empowers Prince Hall and the others to intercede on behalf of the state in this dispute – in this case Shays' Rebellion – in order to restore order to civil society. Although the formal parameters of the political culture do not include them as citizens, by virtue of the standing as Freemasons, this group of African Americans is able to articulate a *supranational* citizenship in this dispute, thus becoming *de facto* citizens of the United States.

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[112] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History*, 81.

As Freemasons, bound by their Masonic obligation from acting against the law and customs of the state, Hall and the others were willing to go along with the norms and dictates of United States civil society. Forgoing having a formally recognized status within the civic polity, their willingness is demonstrated to an almost hyperbolic degree by the extreme humble language employed by Hall. The letter seeks to reassure the civil authorities that the "secret society" of Africans is not seeking to act against the state in any way, shape, or form. Indeed, they are willing to take up arms against those who fail to comply with the wishes and desires that Hall and the others "have been protected for many years under this once happy Constitution." With Divine Providence and the guidance of Governor Bowdoin, Hall voluntarily submits the skill and lives of the members of African Lodge to the service of the state.

Although Hall and the others highlighted their truncated position in the eyes of the state – "we, though unworthy, members of this Commonwealth" – the members of African Lodge nevertheless sought to fulfill the requirements of citizenship through service. the language of this letter may be deemed by contemporary standards as somewhat excessive, but what it conceals is a formidable political strategy designed to obtain favor from the political elite on behalf of those willing to submit to the dictates of the state. In return what this group of African American Freemasons sought was "to live peaceable lives," but only under the conditions of "just and lawful authority." This subtle political strategy was not oblivious to everyone as Sidney Kaplan reminds us:

> It is not surprising that at the end of the summer Abigail Adams should write to her husband: "There has been in town a conspiracy of the negroes. . .They drew

up a petition to the governor, telling him they would fight for him provided he

would arm them, and engage to liberate them if he conquered."[113]

It is quite interesting that Hall and the others did not seek a return to the way things were

or to a return of the laws of the past. The conditions of "just and lawful authority" set the

preconditions for this group of African American Freemasons to posit a claim against the

state for full citizenship, hence the recourse to a description of the sort of social

functioning that should govern their lives. It is a quite ingenious move on behalf of this

group of Freemasons because by invoking the universals that were ever present in the

ideals of the Early Republic as well as those available in the rhetoric of Freemasonry,

they were able to develop a multifaceted argument that satisfies the claim for a national

citizenship through an appeal to non-nation specific ideals – what I have termed a

supranational citizenship.

The claims for a *supranational* citizenship come into full relief in the context of

the experiences and conditions of the African diaspora. In a world increasingly fractured

along the lines of race and the expansion of the involuntary migration of millions of

Africans, African American Freemasons invoked this form of citizenship to counter the

horrors of those held in bondage. Their status as Freemasons and free blacks did not

dissolve the bonds they maintained with their enslaved counterparts. George

Frederickson is instructive in highlighting the inextricable linkage between free and

enslaved blacks:

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[113] Sidney Kaplan, "Blacks in Massachusetts and the Shays' Rebellion," in *American Studies in Black and White: Selected Essays*, Allan D. Austin, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 36.

After that time [1680] the shift to a slave-based economy took place very rapidly, largely as a result of the expansion of British slave-trade activity, which meant that slaves were offered in larger numbers and at better prices than previously. Although there was undoubtedly a prior trend toward the degradation of all blacks because of the enslavement of most of them, the final decision to relegate all free blacks to lower-caste status was probably stimulated principally by the growing fears and anxieties of what was now a slaveholding society. Certainly one of the main justifications presented for discrimination against free blacks and for the effort to prevent growth of this class by restricting manumission was the belief that Negroes who were not slaves would provide an unfortunate example for those in servitude and would use their freedom of action to encourage insurrections.[114]

Frederickson rightly informs of the inverse relationship between free and enslaved blacks. The (il)logic of the system of chattel slavery recognized the status of free blacks in so far as it was derived and dependent on the maintenance of the boundaries of slavery. For African American Freemasons, the specter of slavery and the destiny of the enslaved were linked with their duties, obligations, and rituals as members of the lodge. To this end, they could ill afford to ignore the plight of those enslaved Africans and descendents throughout the diaspora. African American Freemasons fused the resources and arsenal of Freemasonry in general and the political culture of the United States in particular in an effort to instantiate a *supranational* citizenship not only for themselves, but for Africans throughout the diaspora.

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[114] George M. Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 198-99.

In a petition to the Senate and House of Representatives of Massachusetts, Prince Hall along with the members of African Lodge lodged a formal complaint against the kidnapping and selling of free blacks in the slave trade.[115] Their February 27, 1788 petition documents the random kidnapping and enslavement of free blacks in Boston. The writers of this appeal invoke both the universals of humanity and the particulars of citizenship in the first sentence: "That your petitioners are justly alarmed at the inhuman and cruel treatment that three of our brethren, free citizens of the town of Boston, lately received."[116] In unambiguous language, they invoke both claims to humanity and claims to citizenship in announcing their outrage at these acts. They go on to document their anxiety over the apparent lack of recourse for such an unjust action. In words that echo the inalienable rights of every citizen of the United States – "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" – the petitioners rhetorically asked, "What then are our lives and liberties worth, if they may be taken away in such a cruel and unjust manner as this?"[117] Instead of inhabiting the margins of the national imaginary, Prince Hall and other African American Freemasons placed themselves squarely in the heart of the rhetoric of national belonging. Since they did not question their ability to appropriate the language of the nation – hence the phrasing of the question concerning the value of their "lives and liberties" – they were able to articulate their extreme displeasure with those who were able to perpetrate such unjust actions. Furthermore, as Freemasons, they occupied a

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[115] On the kidnapping and (re)enslavementof free blacks in Boston, see Peter P. Hinks, "'Frequently Plunged Into Slavery': Free Blacks and Kidnapping in Antebellum Boston," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 20 (1992), 16-31.

[116] William H. Grimshaw, *Official History*, 81-82.

[117] Ibid, 82.

sacred space that empowered them in adopting and transforming the philosophical universals of Freemasonry to the ends of the abolition of such inhumane and unjust acts.

The petition goes on to intimately link the destinies of free blacks and those enslaved:

> One thing more we would beg leave to hint, that is, that your petitioners have for some time past, beheld with grief, ships cleared out of this harbor for Africa, and they either steal our brothers and sisters, fill their ship-holds full of unhappy men and women, crowded together, then set out for the best market to sell them there, like sheep for slaughter, and then return here like honest men, after having sported with the lives and liberty of their fellow-men, and at the same time call themselves Christians. Blush, O Heavens, at this![118]

Hall and his Masonic colleagues used this moment not only to address the issue of the kidnapping and selling of free blacks in the slave trade, but also to issue a scathing critique of the atrocities of the slave trade. In addition, recognizing the tension between the universal and the particular, they highlight the lasting contradictions of a self-professed Christian nation and the existence of African slavery. The connection explicitly drawn out here by Prince Hall and others points to a set of complex negotiations that are taking place in the text and by the petitioners. The experiences and conditions of diaspora come to the forefront as the protests transcend the boundaries of the nation to take on a global context. The members of African Lodge drew on their sense of belonging to a larger cultural and civic world in launching their complaint against the African slave trade. The contradictions of those who profess to be Christian

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[118] Ibid.

and yet engage in the slave trade are brought under critique in this argument. Once again, by method of exposing the inadequacy of the universal in the particular, African American Freemasons were able to justify their questioning of the lasting "inconsistencies" of those who were considered full citizens of the United States. They also go a step further by placing these "honest men" on the same level as with those who are enslaved – "the lives and liberty of their fellow-men" – thus enacting a transcendent conception of citizenship that is not limited by the geo-political confines of the United States. The universals of life and liberty transcend the boundaries of the nation-state and inhabit the space opened up by a *supranational* citizenship. In this vein, the language of citizenship in the United States is elevated to a global level. This citizenship binds all to protect and preserve the life and liberty of all persons, particularly those who were caught in the web of the Atlantic slave trade.

One of the members of African Lodge was kidnapped in this particular incident. After being sold in the French West Indies, he was able to draw on the customs and rituals of Freemasonry to appeal for his freedom. In a letter from a member of Portland Lodge No. 1 of Maine, a fellow Freemason details this turn of events:

> I have one good piece of news to tell you. The Negroes who were kidnapped from here last winter have returned. They were carried to St. Bartholomew's and offered for sale. One of them was a sensible fellow and a Freemason. The merchant to whom they were offered was of this fraternity. They soon became acquainted. The Negro told his story. They were carried before the Governor, with his shipmaster and the supercargo. The story of the Negroes was, that they were decoyed on board, under pretense of working. The story of the others was,

that they were purchased out of jail, where they were confined for robbery. The Governor detained them. They were kept within limits, in which a gentleman of the Island was bondsman for them for six months, in which time they sent proofs, which arriving, they were liberated.[119]

The utility of a *supranational* citizenship offered through the culture and institution of Freemasonry is underscored in the manner in which this individual was able to draw on his Masonic reserves in challenging his place in the slave trade. Thus, the *supranational* citizenship ideal as expressed by African American Freemasons set the foundation upon which this member was able to (re)gain his freedom. Such a conception of citizenship empowered African American Freemasons to draw on the culture of Freemasonry and United States civic culture in their attempt to acquire full citizenship within the United States as well as liberation for Africans and people of African descent throughout the diaspora.[120]

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The translation of European Freemasonry in the new spaces and places opened up in the developing Atlantic world made possible the adoption, adaptation, and transformation of the institutions, structures, and rituals of this fraternal order by Africans and their descendents. When we reinvestigate what it meant to be an African American Freemason

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[119] Ibid, 83.

[120] Winston C. Babb has noted:
> Lavasseur, who served as Lafayette's secretary on the tour of the United States in the 1820's, said that he was told by a Frenchman that there was a connection between Masonry in the West Indies and in America. It seemed that mariners in those waters were in constant danger of falling into the hands of pirates who, while they might "rob and hang all without distinction of religion, have a particular respect for Free masons, whom they almost always treat like brothers."

Winston C. Babb, *French Refugees from Saint Domingue to the Southern United States: 1791-1810*, 363.

in this context we must understand the intense negotiations, contestations, and transformations that occurred as the peoples of Africa decided to become members of this fraternity. The global dimensions of the experience and conditions of diaspora were at the heart of the African American encounter with European Freemasonry. Far from being an esoteric institution, the symbols, rituals, language, and structures of Freemasonry enabled African Americans to navigate the tumultuous currents of the Atlantic world.

Translating European Freemasonry into this diasporic context entails highlighting the various points of contact of Africans and their descendents with this cultural formation. This point is not just an exercise to negate the epistemological foundations of the founding narrative of African American Freemasonry. By developing such a cartography, we begin to realize and re-envison the expansive horizon in which the cultures of Freemasonry and of Africans and their descendents interacted. From Asia to Africa to Europe and the Islands of the Caribbean, European Freemasonry was part and parcel of the civilizing impulse that throbbed in the heart of European imperialist expansion. As Jessica Harland-Jacobs astutely observes:

> In encouraging an imperialist identity among its members, Freemasonry was a
> discrete institutional force that consolidated British imperialism. Both practical
> and ideological, its vast network fostered the intracultural connections that held
> the British Empire together. The Masonic network not only served to connect
> imperialists on both sides of the Atlantic; it also extended throughout the empire –
> from "Ko'at to Singapore," as Rudyard Kipling put it. With its tolerant,

cosmopolitan ideology, Freemasonry was a seemingly logical site for intercultural contact and the formation of networks that included men from various cultures.[121]

The zones of inter- and intra-cultural contact in the Atlantic world assisted in the spread of the culture of European Freemasonry. As these networks were opened and as they encompassed Africans and their descendents, European Freemasonry was transformed in an effort to meet the existential realities of the African diaspora. Forced migration, cultural alienation, and political marginalization were but some of the conditions faced by Africans in a world where familiar surroundings were replaced by strange cultural formations. The realities of diaspora were very much a part of the translation of European Freemasonry in the African diaspora in that although European Freemasonry was open to adoption by others, its universals were not equally applied. The performance of the ritual of Freemasonry, when read in this diasporic dimension, became a ritual of race as African American Freemasons signified upon the very symbols of the fraternity in order to craft a cultural identity that transcended the Freemasonry. In a world ingrained with a virulent anti-black racism, the performance of Freemasonry as a ritual of race allowed African Americans to engage in an act of forging a cultural identity within the realities of the Atlantic world. Although the ideal of Freemasonry was the brotherhood of (European)Man, it nonetheless harbored and reflected the inability of the fraternity and of society – particularly United States society – to spread these ideals to all of humanity. Thus, African American Freemasons sought to instantiate these ideals by continual and sustained reference to the experience and conditions of diaspora.

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[121] Jessica Harland-Jacobs, "Hands Across the Sea," 25 .

African American Freemasons also attempted to traverse the gulf between idea and reality by holding the universal to the test of the particular. The constant tension created by this dynamic act allowed African American Freemasons to critique the shortcomings of United States civil and political society while holding up an uninstantiated universal as the true marker of citizenship and humanity. Freemasonry, through its culture, symbols, and language, provided African Americans with a malleable framework through which they could articulate a different form of citizenship than the limited form articulated in the United States. This *supranational* citizenship points to conditions beyond the boundaries of the United States while appealing to the structures and institutions of the nation for recognition in the national imaginary. In this vein, we come to realize the significance of John T. Hilton's 1828 statement: "The day of our enrollment in the list of Lodges of the Grand Lodge of England was to us, as Masons, as great an event as the Declaration of Independence was to the people of the United States."[122]

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[122] William H. Grimshaw. *Official History*. 100.

CHAPTER II

"THE HUTS OF AMERICA": THE METAPHORS AND MEANINGS OF
FREEMASONRY

The white Cubans charge the Negroes with still maintaining in their midst the dark Vudu or Hudu mysteries of West Africa. There seems to be no doubt that the black people of Cuba (not the mulattoes) do belong to a number of secret Masonic societies. . . .They originated in a league of defence against the tyranny of the masters in the old slavery days.[1]

Nineteenth-century African American ideas and articulations of the nation were forged in

a cultural and political context powerfully shaped by the internal gaps and contradictions

of American democracy. In a situation that featured an enslaved population and a

nominally free black population, each occupying the center of an emerging national

order, European Americans were forced to confront the ambivalent and ambiguous social

and political location of African Americans. Defining the place and position of African

Americans in the order of things was a critical component in the political, intellectual.

and ideological construction of the United States. William Paterson effectively

demonstrated this point in his 1787 argument over Congressional representation:

> [Negroes] are no free agents, have no personal liberty, no faculty of acquiring
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> property, but on the contrary are themselves property, and like other property
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> entirely at the will of the master . . . and if Negroes are not represented in the
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> States to which they belong, why should they be [counted as a basis for
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> representation].[2]

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[1] Cited in Julio Finn, *The Bluesman: The Musical Heritage of Black Men and Women in the Americas* (New York: Interlink Books, 1992), 6. I am grateful to Jerry Walker for bringing this source to my attention.

[2] Cited in A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *Shades of Freedom: Racial Politics and Presumptions of the American Legal Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), xxiv.

Paterson's position was echoed throughout the nation. As property, African Americans faced a political order that deemed them less than human and denied them any recognition within the national order. American jurisprudence and social practice confirmed and effectively reinforced the cultural and political negation of the very person and being of African Americans. Thus, the American experiment with democracy clearly demarcated the boundaries of the nation – who was considered a citizen, who had a voice in the public sphere, and on what terms and conditions could one pursue "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The thoroughgoing nature of these determining measures did not prevent fissures in the national order. The system was not absolute and ruptures occurred. Significant points of departure from the national norm exposed moments when African Americans occupied a less regulated and regimented position in the national order. At these moments, African Americans became *subject* to the laws and regulations of the United States just as their European American counterparts. They were called to testify in court, tried according the laws of the nation, and, in certain instances, acquired property.[3] Indeed, the legal position of enslaved African Americans was an integral component in American jurisprudence. "The slave codes," as A. Leon Higginbotham astutely observes, "were both substantive and procedural.

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[3] Property ownership among free African Americans is a widely known fact. However, among the enslaved African American population, this phenomenon is less well known. On this point, the recent work of Dylan Penningroth is a welcomed addition, particularly in light of his work on social networks and their relation to the material reality of African Americans. See Dylan Craig Penningroth, "Claim Kin and Property: African American Life Before and After Emancipation," (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2000).

The substantive statues defined the parameters of slavery, regulated the behavior of slaves, and regulated the behavior of free people interacting with slaves. Procedurally, they set up a separate judicial system for slaves, defined their punishment for various crimes, and turned them into a commodity in the economic system. No aspect of the lives of slaves and free African Americans was too sacred or mundane not to be regulated by the codes. From the time slaves were born, until their death, the codes directly or indirectly regulated where they lived, how and where they worked, what God they worshipped, to whom or whether they "married," with whom they had children and whether they were able to raise them, what sort of clothes they wore, and what kind of foods they ate.[4]

With these legal proscriptions, enslaved African Americans were effectively subject to the legal system of the United States while at the same time outside of the boundaries of the nation. In other words, African Americans were both subjects to the law and objects of the law. African Americans were both slaves and, in a qualified sense, *citizens*. James and Lois Horton have observed:

> Despite the strength of their African memories, blacks claimed America too. Not only had they provided much of the country's labor, they had fought for its independence and, white dismissals notwithstanding, blacks understood their

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[4] A. Leon Higginbotham, *Shades of Freedom*, 30. On the relation of African Americans and the legal system of the United States in the nineteenth century, see for example, Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. chapter 4; Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and the collected articles and responses in "Bondage, Freedom & The Constitution: The New Slavery Scholarship and Its Impact on Law and Legal Historiography," *Cardozo Law Review*, 17.6 (May, 1996).

contributions to the building of the nation. Yet their status was ambiguous. Free

blacks still voted in several states, and Congress safeguarded African-American

seamen in foreign ports by issuing them protection certificates that declared them

"Citizen[s] of the United States of America." On the other hand, they were

excluded from the federal militia, and the Constitution explicitly limited

naturalization to white immigrants.[5]

In a situation in which African Americans were the objects of the law in certain instances

and subjects to the law in others, they preeminently exemplify the status being, in Donald

Pease's apt phrase, "not yet not citizens."[6]

In order to combat their "not yet not citizen" status and to instantiate their vision

of "a more perfect Union," African Americans marshaled their critical and cultural

resources in an attempt to articulate their particular ideas and images of the nation. In her

February 27, 1833, speech at the African Masonic Hall in Boston, Maria Stewart argued

that, "African rights and liberty is a subject that ought to fire the breast of every free man

of color in these United States, and excite in his bosom a lively, deep, decided and heart-

felt interest."[7] Stewart's call to arms for African Americans to develop and articulate a

conscious desire for the rights and duties of citizenship was a preparatory step in her

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[5] James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 170.

[6] See Donald Pease, "Doing Justice to C. L. R. James's Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways, *boundary 2*, 27.2 (2000). 1-19.

[7] Maria W. Stewart, "An Address Delivered At The African Masonic Hall," in Marilyn Richardson, ed., *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). 56.

sustained articulation of what the nation should mean to African Americans. She continued:

> It is of no use for us to wait any longer for a generation of well educated men to arise. We have slumbered and slept too long already; the day is far spent, the night of death approaches; and you have sound sense and good judgment sufficient to begin with, if you feel disposed to make a right use of it. Let every man of color throughout the United States, who possesses the spirit and principles of a man, sign a petition to Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and grant you the rights and privileges of common free citizens; for if you had had the faith as a grain of mustard seed, long before this the mountain of prejudice might have been removed.[8]

The desire that Stewart sought to implant in the hearts and souls of African Americans was that notion which infected the minds of some of the century's most able speakers on the destiny of African Americans in the period – the idea and ideal of nation. As Stewart so eloquently stated, one of the foundational pillars in African American nation philosophy and ideology was the crafting of an oppositional strategy to counter the nefarious effects of the American racialist and racist economy. From Stewart to David Walker to Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, the idea of the nation was critical in aiding these political actors define the goals and interests of African Americans within the social, political, and economic order of the United States. As the United States expanded its physical boundaries in an effort to enact its Divine destiny and cultivated a public culture of civic pride and citizenship founded on a racialist and anti-black racist

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[8] Ibid. 62.

ideology, African Americans necessarily confronted many formidable obstacles in navigating the models and ideas of nation in the journey from slavery to freedom. In the face of such hurdles, how did African Americans articulate their versions of the nation idea? What languages, stories, rhetorical strategies were employed to convey an African American understanding of the concept of nation?

In this chapter, I explore these intriguing questions by examining the intertwined histories of African American conceptions of the nation and the culture, language, symbols, and institution of African American Freemasonry. At particular moments and periods, I argue that African American Freemasonry is a critical optic through which we can unravel the social memory, political history, and public language of African Americans navigating the ideas and ideals of the nation in the United States. By examining the ways in which the culture and institution of Freemasonry is used by African Americans – whether literally or metaphorically – we can (re)cover a critical dimension of African American public life and political vocabulary. In this respect, Eddie Glaude, in his recent work *Exodus!: Religion. Race. and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, directs our attention to the manifold ways in which African Americans employed the Exodus narrative as "a source for a particular use of nation language among African Americans as well as a metaphorical framework for understanding the middle passage, enslavement, and quests for emancipation."[9] It is my contention that Freemasonry, similar to the Exodus narrative, provided African Americans with a system and a language that could be adopted and adapted to the

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[9] Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!: Religion. Race. and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 3.

existential and political exigencies of African American existence in nineteenth century United States and was an integral component in the explication of African American ideas and ideals of the nation. In all, Freemasonry in this mold is cast as a critical mediating institution in the attempt by African Americans to make real the promises of American democracy.

This examination into the uses of African American Freemasonry in relation to African American thoughts and expressions of the nation highlights three significant moments in the evolution of the United States – the opening years of the Early Republic, the tumultuous decade prior to the Civil War, and the early moments of the postemancipation period. The selection of these particular conjunctures brings into great relief the tensions and contradictions as well as the promises and opportunities of the American experiment with democracy. By investigating the intersection of African American articulations of the nation with the culture and institution of Freemasonry at critical points in the life of the United States, we will gain a crucial insight into how the African American refusal to utilize languages, symbols, and rituals in a manner strictly analogous to their European American counterparts highlights the cultural divides and political gaps that not only separate black America from white America, but also defines the struggle over the identity of the nation.[10]

This chapter begins by revisiting one of the central dramas opening nineteenth-century Virginia and United States public life: Gabriel's Rebellion. In the Age of Revolution, this moment of African American resistance and rebellion against the rule of

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[10] In this regard, the example of Robin D. G. Kelley is particularly instructive. See Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *The Journal of American History*, 80.1 (June, 1993), 75-112.

the southern slave regime was a pivotal moment in African American nation building. In viewing this event through the lens of African American Freemasonry, I will (re)read a brief and often overlooked passage in the trial record of Gabriel's Rebellion to underscore how the participants in this struggle fashioned a political identity and articulated their idea of the nation in and through the culture of Freemasonry.[11] The reevaluation of this facet in African American and American public life draws our attention to the manner in which African Americans utilized certain aspects of the culture of Freemasonry in their "nation" call. Gabriel and his co-conspirators echoed the nation building efforts of their counterparts in Haiti and in the French Republic as Edwin Holland suggested, "Let it never be forgotten, that our Negroes are truly the Jacobins of the country."[12] Just as the Jacobins employed the signs and symbols of Freemasonry to bring about the Revolution, so to did Gabriel and his army in their effort to reorganize United States social and political life.[13]

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[11] This (re)reading is inspired by the work of Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt. Reflecting on the work of the late Joel Fineman, Gallagher and Greenblatt argue:

> The miniature completeness of the anecdote necessarily interrupts the continuous flow of larger histories: at the anecdote's rim, one encounters a difference in the texture of the narrative, an interruption that lets one sense that this is something – the "real" – outside of the historical narrative. The anecdote thereby exposes history. . . .[T]hese openings provoke their own contextualizations inside new teleological narratives, which strive for completeness, themselves becoming summarizable ("formally small") and therefore once again separable from the unending sequence of events.

I am harnessing the power of an "anecdote" in the trial record of Gabriel's Rebellion not as an anomaly or rhetorical gesture, but as a critical key in uncovering new dimensions of historical understanding of the intersection between the culture of Freemasonry and African American ideas of the nation. See Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 50.

[12] Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!*, 68.

[13] J. M. Roberts notes that the Illuminati in revolutionary France was "the first society to seek to use for political subversion the machinery of secret organisation offered by Freemasonry." See J. M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 124. See also Steven Luckert, *Jesuits, Freemasons, Illuminati, and Jacobins: Conspiracy Theories, Secret Societies and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghampton, 1993).

In the tenuous decade leading up to the American Civil War, Martin Delany's serialized novel *Blake, or The Huts of America* appeared on the pages of the *Anglo-African*. I will argue that through the lens of African American Freemasonry we gain a new appreciation and insight into Delany's masterful synthesis of African American ideologies and philosophies of the nation at a pivotal moment in the history of the United States – one deeply indebted to the architecture of Freemasonry. Although Delany's work has received relatively scant scholarly attention, his mid-nineteenth-century literary effort is an ideological *tour de force* in articulating an African American conception of the nation. Delany's *Blake* is a critical point of departure in African American literary articulations of the nation in its invocation of multiple locales, revolutionary ideology, social and political commentary, and reflection on the diasporic realities of African American life and culture prior to the Civil War. In conveying a new conception of the principles and images of the nation, Delany relies on a subversive textual strategy that appropriates the culture and logic of African American Freemasonry.

The chapter concludes by exploring the changing conception and meaning of the nation as articulated through African American Freemasonry in the postemancipation context. From the experience of African American Freemasonry in Charlottesville, Virginia, we will come to understand the evolution of the concept of the nation in the new spaces and places inhabited by African Americans in the years following the upheavals of the Civil War. This central Virginia town serves as the orienting locale for connecting the national and global dimensions of African American nation thinking – as

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There are *hints* of connections between Freemasonry and the Haitian Revolution. See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L 'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; New York: Vintage, 1989).

demonstrated by the explorations of Gabriel's Conspiracy and Delany's *Blake* – with the fluid and contested situation of life in postemancipation society. In this encounter, the culture, institution, and symbols of African American Freemasonry are utilized and deployed in an effort to (re)construct a concept of the nation. This conception of the nation parallels the general ideas and images of the nation present in the postemancipation context, but makes the necessary allowances for the particularities of the local situation. In this regard, Michel Foucault is particularly instructive:

> In the very first place, it seemed important to accept that the analysis in question should not concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations, with the general mechanisms through which they operate, and the continual effects of these. On the contrary, it should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions.[14]

Extending Foucault's insight to the area of nation thinking in African America highlights the manner and method in which the ideas and ideals of the nation are worked out in the contested space of everyday life in a specific locale. Through African American Freemasonry, African Americans were able to articulate new meanings and new trajectories in their (re)production of ideas and images of the nation. In this light, African American Freemasonry is shown to be a malleable and responsive associational form that is able to articulate and develop new dimensions in conceptions of the nation in

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[14] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977.* Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 96.

light of the evolving politics of race, place, space, class, and gender in the

postemancipation context.

The famed French commentator on early American democracy, Alexis de

Tocqueville, reminds us of the importance of voluntary organizations and associations in

American public life:

> Nothing, in my view, more deserves attention than the intellectual and moral
>
> associations in America. American political and industrial associations easily
>
> catch our eyes, but the others tend not to be noticed. And even if we do notice
>
> them we tend to misunderstand them, hardly ever having seen anything similar
>
> before. However, we should recognize that the latter are as necessary as the
>
> former to the American people; perhaps more so.[15]

Extending Tocqueville's observation to African American public life and political culture

offers us a new glimpse into the possibilities of interrogating and assessing the

importance of associational life in African American public life. Moreover, since

nationalist projects are often articulated through cultural sensibilities, examining moral

and intellectual associations offers us an opportunity to (re)examine familiar cultural

formations in new and dynamic ways. Thus, an exploration of African American

Freemasonry will aid in understanding how African Americans articulated certain

political philosophies and ideologies of the nation in and through this cultural form.[16]

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[15] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. J. P. Mayer, ed. and George Lawrence, trans. (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 517.

[16] For a recent study of the relationship between voluntary associations and political culture see Albrecht Koschnik, "Voluntary Associations, Political Culture, and the Public Sphere in Philadelphia, 1780-1830" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2000).

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Needless to say, the concept of "the nation" is a complex and vexing one.[17] The idea is

an extremely contextual one, reinforced by the particular political, social, and economic

conditions of a given geopolitical area all the while being sensitive to the worldviews of

its exponents. In this tradition, Ernest Renan offers us this understanding of nation:

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one,
>
> constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present.
>
> One in the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is
>
> present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of
>
> the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. . . .The nation, like the
>
> individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and
>
> devotion.[18]

The awareness of the cultural and social forces that deeply inform the politics and

productions of the nation is a critical factor in understanding this complex concept.

However, the nation is more than just a bundle of "spiritual" forces informed by the

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[17] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1983); Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (1983; London: Verso, 1991); Russ Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Neil Larsen, *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative, and Nation in the Americas* (London: Verso, 2001); Prem Poddar, ed., *Translating Nations* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2000).

[18] Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?" trans. Martin Thom, in Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 19.

collective social memory of a group and the promotion of such a heritage to succeeding generations.

To this end, a corrective is offered by Kwame Gyekye who offers a multidimensional analysis and explication of the concept. In the first moment, the nation is organically defined according to its etymological origins. "Its etymology provides it with the meaning of 'a birth group,' 'a blood-related group.'"[19] N_1, as Gyekye denotes this understanding, connects the concept of nation with "the most outstanding feature of a nation: The feeling or consciousness of belonging to a group that shares certain common sociocultural elements."[20] Such a "culturalist" understanding of the nation is augmented by the recognition that the geo-political entity of the nation – the nation-state – is not a homogenous cultural or ethnic grouping. Shot through with fractures along cultural, ethnic, gender, and class lines, the nation-state precipitates an additional dimension to the nation. Gyekye's second position, denoted as N_2, recognizes the heterogeneous nature of the nation embodied in the nation-state. Thus, N_2 is the totality of the culturalist understandings of the nation in a given geo-political entity. Gyekye offers the following equation to explain this new and comprehensive meaning:

$$N_2 = \Sigma\, N_1 a + N_1 b + N_1 c + N_1 d \ldots + N_1 n^{21}$$

In other words, when taking into account the realities of the geo-political boundaries and institutions of the nation-state, the concept of the nation is equated with the sum of the multiple, culturalist understandings of the nation in the first moment denoted as N_1. The

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[19] Kwame Gyekye. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 78.

[20] Ibid, 79.

[21] Ibid, 82.

culturalist nodes of the first position can be configured along the lines of race, sex, ethnicity, and/or regional affiliation. Standing alone, none of the N_1 positions encompass the totality of the complexities of the concept of a nation. Instead, the nation, in its nation-state configuration, is correctly comprehended by the sum of these multiple positions. Also, it should be noted that in this symbiotic relationship, neither of the two positions is mutually exclusive, nor does one position negate the relative import of the other. Indeed, both are needed to accurately comprehend how the concept of the nation can be mobilized to the peculiar goals and objectives of a particular social actor or group.

My particular production and usage of the nation in the context of the following discussion of the various meanings and metaphoric appropriations of Freemasonry by African Americans builds upon the insights of Renan and Gyeke in advancing the notion that discourses of the nation are derivative discourses. In other words, conceptions of the nation are necessarily related to and critically informed by other cultural, social, economic, and political discourses. In a recent study on meaning of Haiti in African America, Chris Dixon has argued:

> Analyzing black American attitudes toward Haiti serves also to connect African American history to the notion of American exceptionalism. Implicit within that notion, and encapsulated within the African American experience, were deep-seated assumptions regarding "civilization" – which, in turn shaped constructions of "the nation."[22]

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[22] Chris Dixon, *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 8.

In this vein, African American appropriations and transformations of the culture and symbols of Freemasonry recognized the relative worth of the universalist sentiments deeply woven into the fabric of this fraternal movement. By privileging certain Enlightenment ideals such as universality, equality, and morality, the culture and ideology of Freemasonry was compatible with the sentiments of the American Republic enshrined in such sacred national documents as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. As such, African American adoption of this cultural form recognizes the import of this facet of Freemasonry in providing a framework compatible with the ideals of the nation. It is the universal recognition and application of the *spirit* of these national ideals that African Americans sought to affect in adopting and adapting the cultural form of Freemasonry and is deeply embedded in the African American conception of the nation.

In as much as this universalist pole is present in the African American concept of the nation, there is also the need to recognize that in its configuration as a nation-state, a homogenous, universalist cultural and political ethos did not and does not pervade the United States. In this regard, African American rhetorical and political strategies in articulating a conception of the nation brought critical attention to this act of difference. Thus, African American recourse to the culture, institution, symbols, and languages of Freemasonry *encode* this difference in a metaphoric play on the very fabric of this fraternal movement. Instead of articulating a universal condition relative to all people, African American Freemasonry enacts a form of cultural solidarity and political meaning in an effort to create a place for African Americans in the public realm of United States civic and social life. "This solidarity," Eddie Glaude notes, "often brought a sense of

self-respect repeatedly denied in antebellum America and, for the most part, provided a ballast for African American's sense of their own moral and national identity: the sense of being a person and community of a particular kind, who lives and exists by some values rather than others."[23]

In this configuration, African American negotiations of the nation in concert with the languages and images of Freemasonry drew on the common languages and cultures of United States civic life as derived from the collective spirit of the image and language of "We the People" and "inalienable rights" enshrined in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. But at the point where African American life and culture was negated by the very "intractable gap between [the dominant American] form of life – one hostile to black Others – and African Americans' desire for freedom," Freemasonry provided African Americans with the structure, culture, and language to encode African American rejection of the negation of African American claims to citizenship.[24] Freemasonry also provided a cultural and institutional resource to frame and articulate a thoroughgoing critique of the inability of the United States to instantiate the ideals expressed at the founding of the nation. Furthermore, Freemasonry offered African Americans a crucial opportunity to posit a counter-expression of the meaning of the concept of the nation – one grounded in the collective experience of those who found themselves ambivalently and ambiguously placed in the midst of an anti-black racist and violent social order. In this dialectic of universal expression and particular negation, the concept of nation finds acute form in the culture and language of Freemasonry.

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[23] Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!*, 110.

[24] Ibid.

II

A *spectre* was haunting the Early American Republic – the *spectre* of a black nation. As

Americans struck a blow against the tyranny of British colonial rule in the quest to

become a self-determining nation, they were ever cognizant of the parallel aspirations of

their enslaved African American populous who also desired to strike a similar blow

against the oppressive rule of the American slavocracy. After learning of a secret

meeting of enslaved Afro-Virginians intent on selecting a leader "who was to conduct

them when the English troops should arrive—, which they foolishly thought would be

very soon and that by revolting to them they should be rewarded with their freedom,"

James Madison noted in his report to William Bradford that "it is prudent such things

should be concealed as well as suppressed."[25] The haunting presence of an African

American nation coming into being was an ever present fear in the American psyche.

The *spectre* of such a black nation was for the Founding Fathers, to borrow from Jacques

Derrida, "what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects – on an

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[25] Sylvia Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 53. See also Paul Finkleman, ed., *Slavery, Revolutionary America, and the New Nation* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989); Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); L. P. Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* 27.3 (July, 1942), 247-287; Sidney Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1973); Sidney Kaplan, "The 'Domestic Insurrections' of the Declaration of Independence," *Journal of Negro History* 61.3 (July, 1976), 243-255; Duncan J. MacLeod, *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Gary Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison: Madison House, 1990); and Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (1961; New York: Norton, 1973).

imaginary screen where there is nothing to see."[26] The *spectre* of the coming black

nation is best captured through the imagery communicated by John Adams in his

February 3, 1821 letter to Thomas Jefferson:

> I have seen [slavery] hanging over [this country] like a black cloud for half a
>
> Century. . . .If I were as drunk with enthusiasm as Swedenborg or Westley, I
>
> might probably say I had seen Armies of Negroes marching and countermarching
>
> in the air, shining in Armour. I have been so terrified with this Phenomenon that I
>
> constantly said in former times to the Southern Gentlemen, I cannot comprehend
>
> this object; I must leave it to you.[27]

For Adams, the visible yet invisible "Armies of Negroes" was a continual haunting

conjured by the presence of the "black cloud" of slavery that was part and parcel of the

new Republic. It was a phantasm that left Adams unable to comprehend the full scope

and nature of the *spectre*. But the *spectre* that haunted the mental skies of individuals

such as Adams, was called forth by those snared in America's unique system of chattel

slavery. Indeed, it was the "Armies of Negroes" led by Gabriel that made this *spectre* a

living reality. Gabriel's Rebellion incarnated this *spectre* in his effort to bring about for

African Americans "a more perfect union" – the overthrow of chattel slavery and the

(re)construction of the nation. And at the heart of this Rebellion were the symbols and

signs of Freemasonry.[28]

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[26] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 100.

[27] Cited in Kenneth O'Reilly "Armies of Negroes," *Reviews in American History*, 24.3 (1996), 495.

[28] Derrida's commentary on Marx's use of "specter" in *The Communist Manifesto* was instrumental in my production of this concept. See Ibid, 96-102.

While the whirlwinds of Revolution were decreasing in the atmosphere of the Early Republic, they were gaining force and momentum in the communities of enslaved and free African Americans. "Blacks, slave and free, urban and rural, artisan and field hand, literate and illiterate, were swept up by the force of ideological energy."[29] Silencing these revolutionary outbursts was a constant duty of those in power in the United States – whether by physical force or by forbidding the dissemination of news concerning the insurrectionary actions of African Americans.[30] African American rebellion against the new nation was a continuation of earlier insurrections against slave rule. Joining those who battled on the slave ship *Estrella* and the twenty "Angolan" slaves in the Stono Rebellion, enslaved and free African Americans struck violent blows against chattel slavery in the opening years of the Early Republic in a sustained effort to call forth a particular African American understanding of the nation.[31] In Virginia, Thomas Prosser's Gabriel articulated his notion of the nation by drawing on the culture and institution of Freemasonry.

Gabriel's Rebellion revealed the depth of resentment harbored in the minds and hearts of Virginia's enslaved and free African American communities. The memory of

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[29] Sylvia Frey. *Water From the Rock*, 49.

[30] On this point, see Joyce Tang, "Enslaved Africans Rebellions in Virginia," *Journal of Black Studies* 27.5 (May, 1997), 598-614.

[31] See Harvey Wish, "American Slave Insurrections Before 1861," *Journal of Negro History*, 22.3 (July, 1937), 299-320 and John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *The American Historical Review*, 96.4 (October, 1991) 1101-1113. See also Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943; New York: International Publishers, 1993); John H. Bracey, et. al. eds., *American Slavery: The Question of Resistance* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1971); Joseph Carroll, *Slave Insurrections in the United States, 1800-1865* (1938; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968); and Eugene D. Genovese, *Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

the Easter Insurrection of 1710 may not have been well known by whites in Gabriel's

Virginia, but the spirit of freedom and liberty engendered by this and subsequent actions

was a prevalent sentiment in Afro-Virginia.[32] With stark contrast, Gabriel's Rebellion

revealed the expanding gulf between the universal freedoms espoused by the Founding

Fathers in 1776 and the life faced by an African American boy born on a Henrico County

plantation in that same year. Being "born into a lie," forced Gabriel and his band of

revolutionaries to attempt to reconcile the contradictions of their experience with the

egalitarian rhetoric made explicit in the founding of the new nation.[33] They acted with a

seriousness and zealousness that echoed the remarkable feat of their Haitian counterparts.

Governor Monroe's observation of the effect of the Haitian Revolution was indeed

correct: "The scenes which are acted in St. Domingo must produce an effect on all the

people of colour in this and the States south of us, more especially our slaves, and it is

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[32] On the 1710 slave uprising and a critical assessment of the literature of this event, see Terrence W. Epperson, "'To Fix a Perpetual Brand': The Social Construction of Race in Virginia, 1675-1750" (Ph.D. dissertation: Temple University, 1990), 220-232, 236.

In response to the 1775 "suspicion of the Negroes having formed a conspiracy" in and around the Williamsburg, Virginia area, Woody Holton notes:
> Were the white Virginians that suspected a connection among the various slave conspiracies in the James River watershed in April 1775 in fact correct? Certainly a conspiracy this extensive was possible. Twenty-five years later, in 1800, organizers of Gabriel's conspiracy managed to recruit clusters of supporters in counties throughout the tidewater and piedmont sections of Virginia.

Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 143.

[33] Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800-1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 3. On Gabriel's Rebellion see also Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); James Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Philip J. Schwarz, "Gabriel's Challenge: Slaves and Crimes in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* XC (1982), 283-309. For fictional treatments of Gabriel's Rebellion see Arna Bontemps, *Black Thunder* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1936) and Mary Spear Nicholas Tiernan, *Homoselle: A Virginia Novel* (New York: R. F. Fenno, 1899).

our duty to be on our guard to prevent any mischief resulting from it."[34] As news of a new black nation emerging in the Caribbean became known throughout Afro-Virginia, the effort and determination to replicate the actions of this black nation within the United States became an insatiable desire. One Virginia slaveholder, cognizant of the inability to squelch this desire once it took hold in enslaved and free African American communities, warned, "If the modern doctrines of liberty and equality and the right's of man have obtained a general currency among the slaves, they cannot be eradicated."[35] Inspired by his Black Jacobin counterparts, Gabriel set a course for freedom and self-determination that crossed with the culture of Freemasonry.

The September 19, 1800 testimony of Ben Woolfolk, one of the central conspirators in Gabriel's Rebellion, presents the intersection of the culture of Freemasonry with the insurrection:

> That the first time he heard anything of a conspiracy and insurrection among the blacks was from the prisoner [George], that he came to his house at dusk or dark where he was cutting wood, and asked him if he would join a free-mason society; this deponent [Ben Woolfolk] replied no, because all free-masons would go to hell; upon this, the prisoner [George] said it was not a free-mason society he wished him to join, but a society to fight the white people for their freedom, [Ben] who replied he would consider it; . . . .[36]

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[34] Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 47.

[35] Ibid, 42.

[36] W. P. Palmer and H. W. Flournoy, eds., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond*, 11 vols. (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1875-1893), 9:150-152.

This statement in Woolfolk's deposition is significant because it mentions an aspect of Gabriel's Rebellion that can be easily overlooked. His remarks direct our attention to an underexplored, yet potentially significant facet of the rebellion – the adoption, appropriation, and transformation by African Americans of the culture and institution of Freemasonry in their resistance to the oppressive conditions of the American slave regime. Moreover, we are drawn into a cultural world where actions, words, and images are overlaid with multiple meanings as African Americans began to speak and act out alternative narratives and ideologies of the nation. In launching this plan for African American freedom and by implication asserting a new national identity in and through this rebellion, Gabriel and his co-conspirators endeavored to place Freemasonry into service for social and political ends that were heretofore beyond the aims and goals of this fraternal order. Unraveling the manner and method in which those involved in Gabriel's Rebellion conjured the insurrection with Freemasonry provides a glimpse into how African Americans articulated a conception of the nation through an appropriated European American cultural form.

In Ben Woolfolk's deposition, it is interesting to note that when first approached, George inquired if Ben was interested in joining a "free-mason society." Why did George employ the phrase "free-mason society?" What could he have meant and what was Ben to have understood through his usage of this phrase? Douglas Egerton reminds us that in the years leading up to the Rebellion, the term was already associated and "identified with intrigue."[37] In their exhaustive study of white American Freemasonry in

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[37] Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 52.

Virginia, Richard Rutyna and Peter Stewart substantiate Egerton's observation with the

following account:

> In November 1799, Robert Brough, "from Lodge No. 16," defended the Lodge
>
> against some "calumnies which have been uttered against the said Lodge in a
>
> pamphlet lately published." He was doubtless speaking of a scathing attack upon
>
> French revolutionary ideas delivered by Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826), a
>
> Congregationalist pastor in Charlestown, Massachusetts (1789-1819), about April
>
> 25, 1799. Morse, who was the father of the inventor, painter, and reformer
>
> Samuel Finley Breese Morse, castigated "professed enemies of God, and the
>
> insidious destroyers of men" by whom he meant French Masons of the Grand
>
> Orient in general and the men of Portsmouth Lodge No. 16, to which he made
>
> reference, in particular. Morse condemned *secret societies*, which he termed
>
> "subversive of our religion and government". . . .The pastor blamed assorted
>
> political evils on these "secret enemies," including "the Pennsylvania
>
> insurrection, the industrious circulation of baneful and corrupting books, and the
>
> consequent wonderful spread of infidelity, impiety, and immorality."[38]

Although Rutyna and Stewart's attempt to vindicate white American Freemasons by

blaming "French Masons," the words of Morse provides a telling clue of how some

perceived the fraternity as subversive of the national and moral order. To some,

Freemasonry, regardless of the national origins of its members, was viewed as the very

antithesis of the expressed goals and ideals of American democracy. If we take Egerton's

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[38] Richard A. Rutyna and Peter C. Stewart, *The History of Freemasonry in Virginia* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1998), 94.

observation and extend it to African Americans, a "free-masonry society" could serve *extremely* subversive ends.

White Virginians were well aware of the potential threat a group of African American Freemasons presented to the national order. Some even went so far as to express a distinct concern over African Americans becoming Freemasons. In their correspondence to the African Lodge in Boston, a group of African American Freemasons in Philadelphia communicated as much when they wrote, "The white Masons have refused to grant us a Dispensation fearing that black men living in Virginia would get to be Masons, too."[39] The opinions of the Philadelphia group of African American Freemasons may be indicative of the interest white Virginia leaders took in black men becoming Freemasons. St. George Tucker, the author of the tragically flawed plan for gradual emancipation *A Dissertation on Slavery,* carried on an extensive correspondence with the Boston based clergyman Jeremy Belknap. Belknap conveyed information and published pamphlets on the activities of the group of African American Freemasons in African Lodge in Boston. In an inscription dated March 7, 1795, in the cover of one pamphlet entitled *A Charge Delivered to the Brethern of the African Lodge on the 25th of June, 1792 at the Hall of Brother William Smith in Charlestown by the Right Worshipful Master Prince Hall,* Belknap skeptically informed his Virginia colleague, "This Lodge consists of about thirty brethren and great care is taken to admit none but persons of good moral character – so saith the Grandmaster Prince Hall."[40] Belknap not only provided

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[39] Harry E. Davis, "Documents Relating to Negro Masonry in America," *Journal of Negro History,* 21.4 (October, 1936), 425.

[40] Prince Hall, *A Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge on the 25th of June, 1792 at the Hall of Brother William Smith in Charlestown by the Right Worshipful Master Prince Hall* (Boston: Bible

what can be considered surveillance about the composition of African Lodge to the

Virginia based Tucker, he also informed him of critical biographical information on

members of the fraternity. As to the Reverend Marrant, Chaplain of African Lodge and

speaker at its 1789 Masonic celebration, Belknap reported:

> This Marrant was a native of New York – went to England at the conclusion of
>
> the Revolution War. Got a kind of education in a school of the Late Countess of
>
> Huntington and was sent out as a Methodist Preacher to the blacks in Nova Scotia
>
> from whence he came to Boston and was made a member of African Lodge – he
>
> is since dead.[41]

Belknap's report on Marrant highlights the extensive travel network of African

Americans in the Atlantic world. Moreover, his report could serve as a signal to Tucker

the existence of extensive communication networks available to members of African

American Masonic organizations. These networks could be employed for political ends

that could destroy the tenuous fabric holding the fledging United States together. For the

conspirator George to employ the language of Freemasonry underscores the critical

import that he and other African American revolutionaries in Gabriel's Rebellion

invested in the subversive potential of employing such language and imagery. Although

Prince Hall had earlier reminded his fellow Freemasons to have "no hand in any plots or

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and Heart, 1792), inside cover. This pamphlet is #12 in the St. George Tucker Collection housed at the Swem Library, The College of William and Mary in Virginia. I am grateful to the archivist for bringing these holdings to my attention.

[41] Reverend Brother Marrant, *A Sermon Preached on the 24th Day of June 1789, Being the Festival of St. John the Baptist, at the Request of the Right Worshipful, the Grand Master Prince Hall, and the Rest of the Brethren of the African Lodge of the Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in Boston* (Boston: Bible and Heart, 1789), inside cover. A pamphlet in the St. George Tucker Collection, Swem Library, The College of William and Mary in Virginia.

conspiracies or rebellion, or side or assist in them," the conspirators in Gabriel's

Rebellion utilized Freemasonry in a quite different political manner in order to bring into

being a new black nation. [42]

The awareness of this political dimension of Freemasonry was not at all a totally

transparent phenomenon. To be sure, the political uses of Freemasonry were not readily

apparent to individuals like Ben. When first approached by George to join a "free-mason

society," Ben responded, "No, because all free-masons would go to hell." His response is

quite telling in that it is certainly obvious that Ben was well aware of the religious

controversy surrounding the activities of Freemasonry. Ben must have had some

knowledge of the religious sentiments of individuals like Reverend Morse and others who

challenged the legitimacy and authenticity of the moral claims of the brotherhood and

viewed the secret society as a harbinger of ill will towards the religious enlightenment of

society. In order to convey a new political understanding of Freemasonry in constructing

a new nation, the participants in Gabriel's Rebellion needed to translate the language of

Freemasonry into a language readily accessible to those who were approached to enlist in

the Conspiracy. Thus, George redirected his inquiry to Ben to highlight how he was

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[42] It is quite interesting to note Prince Hall's admonition *against* using Freemasonry in any conspiratorical or subversive projects:

> Again we must be good subjects to the laws of the land in which we dwell, giving houour to our lawful Governors and Magistrates, giving honour to whom honour is due: and that *we have no hand in any plots or conspiracies or rebellion, or side or assist in them.* . . (emphasis added).

The full context of Hall's remarks raises a number of intriguing questions: In light of the publication of his charge, is it possible that Hall was aware that his audience was far larger than those assembled in the hall celebrating St. John's day? With such a recognition, is it plausible that Hall was enacting a "politics of respectability" in order to gain favor with those outside of the African American community who may come across the pamphlet? With the usage of the term "again" is it possible that Hall was aware that under the guise of Freemasonry some members of African Lodge were engaging in subversive and revolutionary activities? Did Hall's "politics of respectability" make it necessary for him to remind the members of African Lodge of their Masonic obligation against taking part in such subversive behavior? Prince Hall, *A Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge on the 25th of June, 1792 at the Hall of Brother William Smith in Charlestown by the Right Worshipful Master Prince Hall,* 1.

signifying on the phrase "free-mason society" in order to convey the general thrust of the Conspiracy – the freedom and self-determination of African Americans. We learn from the deposition the manner of this translation, "The prisoner [George] said it was not a free-mason society he wished him to join, but a society to fight the white people for their freedom." Thus, Ben's first impression in taking Freemasonry in a literal sense is redirected in order to bring to light the hidden goals towards which this metaphoric language and imagery was directed.

For George to approach Ben with the idea of joining the insurrectionary effort by making reference to a "free-masons society" may be more than just a casual turn of phrase. It may be indicative of an expanded zone of contact between African Americans and the culture of European Freemasonry. Throughout the record of Gabriel's Rebellion is the shadowy presence of "Frenchmen." Gabriel's plan "for his Country" included the prominent admonition that no "Frenchmen . . . were to be touched."[43] Who were these Frenchmen? Why should their lives be spared? How did Gabriel come to interact with these individuals? Although it is beyond the scope of this discussion to provide a full, detailed explication of the role of these "Frenchmen" in Gabriel's Rebellion, it is interesting to consider the connection between this aspect of Gabriel's Rebellion and the culture of Freemasonry.[44]

With the backdrop of the Haitian Revolution, the ideas of emancipation, freedom, and nation were gaining a material grounding in the Afro-Atlantic world. The actions of Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Toussaint L'Ouverture alarmed those in the former British

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[43] Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 65.

[44] Douglas Egerton provides a cogent assessement of the history and historiography of "The Frenchmen" in *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 182-185.

colonies and the presence of French émigrés in the young nation was the cause of much

concern and anxiety for authorities intent on maintaining white rule despite the uprising

in Haiti. In Norfolk, "the Grand jury was prodded into action in 1795 because of concern

caused by the large number of French blacks in the borough who had witnessed the slave

uprising in Haiti."[45] Often the egalitarian rhetoric present in the "common wind" of

African America was blamed on the presence of French persons from Haiti. Julius Scott

notes: "Citing a Charleston source, a Boston newspaper reported in November 1793 that

South Carolina officials had apprehended some French 'emissaries' from Saint-

Domingue with papers in their possession outlining 'plans for a general insurrection of

Negroes in the southern states.'"[46] For Gabriel and his revolutionaries to incorporate the

language and culture of Freemasonry in their revolutionary plot along with the high

esteem with which they held the two Frenchmen reportedly joined the Rebellion forces us

to re-evaluate the role of Freemasonry in aiding his revolutionary cause.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the presence of French Freemasons was an

accepted fact in the coastal areas of Virginia. In the Richmond area, the presence of a

French lodge and the manner in which Gabriel and his band employed the language and

imagery of Freemasonry coupled with the insistence that the French would help in their

insurrectionary efforts possibly point to a critical point of contact between the culture of

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[45] Tommy Bogger, *Free Blacks in Norfolk, Virginia 1790-1860: The Darker Side of Freedom* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 135.

[46] Julius Sheppard Scott, III, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986), 278.

Freemasonry and this act of African American nation building.[47] Richard Rutyna and Peter Stewart's study of white Freemasonry in Virginia offers this interesting vignette:

On November 24, 1797, a group of "foreigners, residenters or sojourners in Petersburg" petitioned the Grand Lodge of Virginia for a Lodge charter. They wished to establish *"La Loge de l'Amitie a l'Orient de Petersburg en Virginie"* (translated in the petition as "the Lodge of Friendship in the East of Petersburg in Virginia") under dispensation from Portsmouth Lodge No. 16, which they held to be their "mother" Lodge. They stated in their petition that the Lodge in Portsmouth was a Provincial Lodge on this continent, under *"le grand Orient,"* being "the Grand Lodge of France as per her charter to us bearing date [March 1, 1797] & which was delivered to us the 28th day following by the R.W. Master of Portsmouth Lodge." The petition was signed by John Cartara, V. March, P. Nouvel, and others. The petition was rejected by the Grand Lodge of Virginia without recorded comment or explanation.[48]

Given the presence of this French Freemason lodge, it is possible that the "Black Jacobins" in Gabriel's Rebellion use of the culture of Freemasonry may have derived from contact with this group of "foreigners, residenters or sojourners in Petersburg."

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[47] The oldest European American Freemason lodge in Richmond, Richmond Lodge #10, recorded minutes reflects a gap from December 28, 1799 until June 24, 1805. In the *History of Richmond Lodge. No. 10, A. F. & A. M.*, David K. Walthall notes, "There is no further record in the minute book until June 24, 1805, as the minutes for the intervening years have been *cut out*. Doubtless, if we had them, they would tell a tale of discord and strife" (emphasis added). Walthall reference to "a tale of discord and strife" is ambiguous. See Rev. David K. Walthall, Ph.D., *History of Richmond Lodge, No. 10. A. F. & A. M.* (Richmond: Ware & Duke Printers, 1909), 53.

[48] Richard A. Rutyna and Peter C. Stewart. *The History of Freemasonry in Virginia*, 92. After two visits to the library of the Grand Lodge in Richmond that houses this information, I was unable to gain access to this material, thus I must rely on the words of the authors.

When compared to the actions of other French Freemasons in the South, this possible connection is not so unusual. "French Freemasons from New Orleans, in addition to those from Haiti," Patrick Minges writes, "not only admitted Blacks into the brotherhood but actively worked to oppose the interests of slavery and slaveholders."[49] With the actions of French Freemasons in New Orleans as a point of reference, the connection of the French Lodge in Petersburg with the French Lodge in Portsmouth gains in importance. Indeed, the Portsmouth Lodge would have been of particular importance in recruiting members for the insurrection from Norfolk and the surrounding areas; in addition, the secret Masonic network could readily be employed to such subversive interests. Although we are unaware of their Masonic affiliation, the legitimate framework of secrecy offered by the fraternity may have been instrumental to the efforts of the "two Frenchmen [who] had been very active in [Norfolk]."[50]

The enormous geographic scale of the rebellious plot underscores the importance of possible Masonic dimensions of Gabriel's Rebellion. In his study of the rebellion, Egerton informs us: "Somebody – perhaps Gabriel – posted letters to Beddenhurst 'in Philadelphia, as well as [to] the towns in Petersburg [and] Norfolk.'"[51] With the French Lodge in Petersburg, Gabriel would have had a manner in which to connect with Philadelphia through the French Lodge, *La Parfaite-Union*. Although the names listed in

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[49] Patrick Minges, "The Keetoowah Society and the Avocation of Religious Nationalism Within the Cherokee Nation, 1855-1867" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1999). . On African American life in New Orleans, see Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisana State University Press, 1992).

[50] Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 67.

[51] Ibid.

the 1798 *Tableau des Membres* cannot be readily connected to the Rebellion, it is not out of the realm of speculation that this component of the French Freemasonic network was used by Gabriel in communicating his insurrectionary plans northward.[52] In all, the tenuous connection with the mysterious "Frenchmen" of Gabriel's Rebellion, the language and symbols of Freemasonry employed in the revolutionary venture, and the manner in which this cultural form was utilized in the planning of this uprising suggest that the use of Freemasonry by Gabriel and his cohorts is not without foundation. Indeed, it may be attributed to the presence of "foreigners, residenters or sojourners in Petersburg" under the name *La Loge de l'Amitie* came into contact with the culture of Freemasonry and employed it to the goal of achieving African American freedom and self determination.

By paying particular attention to the alternative ways in which the concept of the nation is constructed through the culture of Freemasonry in Gabriel's Rebellion, we come to understand the cultural processes of appropriation and transformation that marked the African and European encounter in the Americas. In his study of the Rebellion, James Sidbury argues, "This process of appropriation through which Gabriel and his followers reconstituted the meanings associated with powerful symbolic structures that they shared with other Virginians provides a key to understanding the ways in which enslaved Virginians were at one with the dominant culture yet crucially apart from it."[53] For

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[52] See *Tableau des Membres qui Composent La R. L. française de Saint-Jean de Jerusalem, sous le titre distinctif, La Parfaite-Union, Orient de Philadelphie, en Pennsylvanie, États-Unis de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Philadelphia: de l'Imprimerie du Parent, 1798).

[53] James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57.

Gabriel and his band of conspirators, Freemasonry offered some of the necessary prerequisites for an effective execution of their revolutionary plan for freedom. As an act of resistance in the midst of a politically and socially oppressive regime, Gabriel's Rebellion necessarily relied on the cloak of secrecy – a distinguishing aspect of the culture of Freemasonry. With its system of signs, secret handshakes, language, and gendered rights, Freemasonry was commensurate with the strategic tactics Gabriel and the others felt was needed in their massive effort to fatally cripple and bring to an end America's slave regime.

"The boys," as the members of Gabriel's Rebellion referred to other members of this "free-mason society" signified on various aspects of the culture of Freemasonry as demonstrated throughout the recruitment and planning of the uprising.[54] Douglas Egerton details:

> Gabriel had no intention, however, of endangering his dream by revealing too
>
> many secrets to field hands like Martin. . . .[R]ecruits "were made acquainted
>
> with the plot, wholly or in part, according to their rank." As neighborhood slaves
>
> joined, they were sworn to a strict oath of secrecy and fidelity. At one typical
>
> early meeting, Ben and Gabriel attended a Sunday "Barbecue" and then casually
>
> asked George Smith and William Burton's Isham to accompany them home.
>
> "[A]fter being some time at Gabriel's house," the blacksmith "explained to
>
> [Isham] and George, for what purpose he [had] asked them to join him." Both
>
> eagerly agreed to serve, "and each shaking the other by the hand exclaimed, 'here

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[54] Ibid, 92.

are our hands and hearts, we will wade to our knees in blood sooner than fail in the attempt.'"[55]

Just as Freemasons are exposed to the secrets of the order by proving their knowledge and worthiness to the brotherhood and advancing in degrees, Gabriel only exposed part of his insurrectionary plans to those whom he felt have met the necessary proscriptions for attaining such knowledge. The oaths and handshakes that bound the conspirators together so that they were willing to "wade to our knees in blood sooner than fail in the attempt" are reminiscent of Masonic oaths and obligations that bound men to the fraternity and its ritual culture of secrecy. The power of such a culture of secrecy to African American insurrectionary ends was not wasted on one Anti-Masonic observer who condescendingly opined, "Now under the clause of the oath, with the negro's superstitious dread of the horrible Masonic penalty for violating it, *conspiracies* without number may be *hatched* and *matured*."[56] What this writer unwittingly stumbled upon was the strategic necessity of a culture of secrecy in the African American attempt to construct a nation that recognized the worth, value, and dignity of African American life and culture.

The secret culture of Freemasonry with its system of oaths of allegiance was not wasted on the rebels in Gabriel's Rebellion as Egerton informs:

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[55] Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 53.

[56] A Member of the Suffolk Committee of 1829, *Catalogue of Books on the Masonic Institution, in Public Libraries of Twenty-Eight States of the Union, Antimasonic in Arguments and Conclusions, by Distinguished Literary Gentlemen, Citizens of the United States* (Boston: Damrell and Moore, 1852), 106. I am thankful to Professor Ernest Allen of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst for sharing this source with me.

Just as Woolfolk and Thornton began to leave the bridge and return south, "two Negroes who were at the meeting" denounced the plan as foolish talk and "threatened to communicate the insurrection to the white people." Nancy Leftwich's Randolph and several other bondmen surrounded the two and threatened them with "death" if they broke the silence. Blacks could join or not as they saw fit, Randolph snarled, but any who turned on their brothers would die.[57]

It was not "superstitious" beliefs that held African American allegiance to the culture of secrecy, but the possibility of death – either by blacks involved in the planning of the rebellion or by whites if the conspiracy was discovered – that bound them together in this "free-mason society." And it was on the basis of such a "free-mason" oath that aided in the plotting of one of the largest conspiracies of enslaved persons in the United States. To this end, it may not be just an aberration that the rebel George distinctly used the phrase "free-mason society" in recruiting Ben. Although there are no extant records acknowledging the existence of a formal lodge of African American Freemasons in the area at the time, the record of Gabriel's Rebellion intimates that there was some working knowledge of this fraternity in Gabriel's Virginia. By placing this account in a wider context, we can see the possibilities of how this cultural formation was integral to the political ends of the Rebellion.[58]

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[57] Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 67.

[58] I disagree with the observation of Rutyna and Stewart who write:
> What is most intriguing about the testimony of Ben Woolfolk here is the reported suggestion by George that he wanted to talk to Ben about joining "a free-mason society," *which can only have meant* that Prince Hall Freemasonry was known among blacks in Virginia well before the Civil War and thus much earlier than anyone has ever thought previously. (emphasis added)

The culture of Freemasonry was shared by African and European Americans in Gabriel's Virginia, but forged within radically different contexts. Faced with an oppressive slave regime, the revolutionaries in Gabriel's army enlisted the culture of Freemasonry to radically different ends than their white counterparts. This fraternal form was reconfigured to achieve the goals of African American freedom and self-determination. Gabriel utilized the culture of Freemasonry and invested in it a new and profoundly revolutionary meaning in the effort "to fight for his Country." "In the struggle for their country, the slave conspirators claimed for themselves the symbols of gentility and authority with which local masters had traditionally legitimized the exercise of power."[59] Gabriel's Rebellion highlights the appropriation of the culture of Freemasonry by African Americans in their effort to communicate and articulate their understanding of the nation. The possible effects of the appropriation of Freemasonry by African Americans were not lost on some observers who sought to maintain white hegemony. As one writer later offered, "Let Freemasonry once spread its baneful influence thoroughly amongst the slaves of our Southern and Western States, and the scenes of St. Domingo would be sunk into insignificance, compared with those which would follow."[60]

The fear and trembling over the possible appropriation of Freemasonry by African Americans would not end with the revelation of Gabriel's Rebellion. If anything,

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Their line of argument highlights some of the pitfalls of scholarship dealing with African American Freemasonry I commented on in the Introduction and Chapter 1 of this study. Also, it is interesting to note how the authors distinguish "Prince Hall Freemasonry" in this account. See Richard Rutyna and Peter Stewart, *The History of Freemasonry in Virginia*, 101-102.

[59] James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 72.

[60] A Member of the Suffolk Committee of 1829, *Catalogue of Books on the Masonic Institution*. 105.

suspicions over the possible collusion of the culture of Freemasonry and African

American acts for freedom and self determination gained momentum with the actions of

David Walker and Nat Turner:

> That such apprehensions are not idle, we refer to the following facts: -- In the
> Boston Free Press of March 14, 1832, it is stated, – "The fact is well known that
> *Walker*, the author of the famous incendiary pamphlet that produced so much
> disturbance at the South, was a member of the *African Lodge*. . . .It has also been
> stated that 'General Nat,' who headed the massacre in Southampton, was a black
> Mason. Who knows how much of the machinery then used has been left among
> the blacks, both *free* and *slaves*, at the South, to be re-produced after the lapse of a
> certain number of years. like their own periodical locusts?[61]

"The American Revolution marked a major turning point in the history of slavery and of

the South."[62] The revolutionary spirit of this era was not lost on enslaved African

Americans in Virginia. As some of their colleagues were manumitted because of, among

other circumstances, the conflicts between the egalitarian rhetoric of American

independence and the existence of chattel slavery, Gabriel and his band of revolutionaries

sought to eradicate the living contradictions in this universal rhetoric. At a critical

moment in the life of the United States, Gabriel's Rebellion triangulated American

independence, slavery, and citizenship in an effort to redraw the contours of the nation.

The culture of Freemasonry provided a critical medium in this attempt to eliminate

chattel slavery and fashion a new identity for the nation. The commingling of

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[61] Ibid. 106.

[62] Sylvia Frey, *Water From the Rock*, 326.

Freemasonry and African American conceptions of the nation would once again resurface at another crucial point in American life – the tumultuous decade leading up to the Civil War.

III

The September 1, 1852 edition of the Norfolk, Virginia based newspaper. *The American Beacon*, contained the following notice under the headline "In a Quandary":

> A gentleman of this city, was applied to a few days since for advice by a negro, who declared himself a member of the colored Lodge of Masons, of this city, which according to his account, was organized some months since. He stated that the Treasurer had robbed the funds amounting to some $37 and that they could not bring him to a settlement, and as they were aware that their association was contrary to Law, they were afraid to bring the matter before the Mayor, for fear he would break it up. In this dilemma he was at a loss how to act and therefore craved the gentlemen's advice.

> We understand that there are other secret societies in existence here among the negroes. They have their meetings regularly and have adopted secret signs and tokens. We have not heard their names the others have taken, one may be the order of the *Lone Star* for all we know. But we think in these times of impudence and insubordination among this class of our population, that these societies, should be ferreted out and broken up.[63]

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[63] *The American Beacon*, September 1, 1852. See also Tommy Bogger, *Free Blacks in Norfolk, Virginia 1790-1860*, 153.

The acknowledged presence of an African American Lodge of Freemasons was cause for concern in the anxious years leading up to the Civil War. For white Americans in the antebellum South, the thought of African Americans meeting in secret conjured memories of the infamous slave rebellions of Gabriel and Nat Turner. In the neighboring state of Maryland, outrage over the existence of a Lodge of African American Freemasons lead the Grand Jury of Baltimore to "recommend the passage of a law to suppress its existence."[64] With a system of "secret signs and tokens," African Americans were strategically positioned to launch various assaults on the existing social and political order. The culture of secrecy of Freemasonry and other secret orders opened opportunities that, if exploited, could lead to a new order of things. This distinct possibility was not all lost on the publishers of *The American Beacon* who followed up their September 1 article a few weeks later with the following caution:

> We should also again call attention to those secret Societies. Who can tell what their object is, and what they are accumulating funds for? They should at least be examined into, and if suffered to continue, they should be compelled to have a white person or persons among their managers. If they are benevolent as they pretend to be, there are a number of benevolent white persons in the city who would willingly superintend their affairs for them.[65]

This follow up article admits of the dangers white Virginians felt in light of the existence of African American Freemasons and other secret orders. Their concerns ranged from

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[64] Eventually the state Legislature of Maryland banned African American Freemason Lodges and other African American secret assemblies with the passage of an act in its December 1842 session. A Member of the Suffolk Committee of 1829, *Catalogue of Books on the Masonic Institution*, 100, 107-108.

[65] Norfolk, *The American Beacon*, September 21, 1852.

the financial activities of these secret orders to suspicions that these secret societies were more than just benevolent organizations. In the secret spaces of Freemasonry and other orders, the presence of "a white person" was needed in order to ascertain the true workings of the order and to ensure that these orders do not disrupt the prevailing social and political regime. In Norfolk and in other places in the South, the existence of African American Freemasons among other secret societies was viewed as a critical threat to the political and social order that had to be contained by white observation, oversight, and control.

The conceptions of the nation by African Americans in mid-nineteenth century America played on the fears expressed by white Americans over African American secret societies. With Freemasonry a crucial contender in the challenge against oppressive white rule, one of the leading African American spokespersons for African American freedom and self-determination utilized this cultural formation to articulate an African American vision of the nation. Martin Delany was well equipped to employ the structure and culture of Freemasonry to politically subversive ends. Along with Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany wrote extensively on the nature and object of African American freedom and political empowerment. Arguing from the interstices of assimilationism and nationalism, Delany occupied an especially crucial location in the history of African American political philosophy and articulations of the nation. As Robert Levine has demonstrated in his study of Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass, Delany was a complex figure who was able to weave competing and contesting lines of thinking in his

effort to bring about African American liberation as well as to establish himself as one of

the "heroic deliverers of the race."[66]

Delany's ideas of the nation were critically informed by his travels throughout the

African disapora – particularly his visits to Africa – and the cultural formations of

African America.[67] The commingling of his concept of the nation with the culture of

Freemasonry followed this trajectory and was fueled by his membership in the Masonic

order. Indeed, his 1853 oration, published as *The Origin and Objects of Ancient*

Freemasonry, captures the interweaving of culture of Freemasonry with his nationalist

aims for African Americans.[68] Delany's pamphlet places the history of Freemasonry in

Africa in an oppositional strategy arguing for the presence of Africans and their

descendents in the historical narrative of Freemasonry and, indeed, as forebearers of

Western culture. Delany's nationalistic approach is highlighted in his rhetorical flourish,

"Was it not Africa that gave birth to Euclid, the master geometrician of the world? and

was it not in consequence of a twenty-five years' residence in Africa that the great

Pythagoras was enabled to discover the key problem in geometry – the forty-seventh

problem of Euclid – without which Masonry would be incomplete?" By positioning

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[66] Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 13.

[67] On the life and travels of Martin Delany and the relation to his evolving conceptions of the nation, see Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream: Martin R. Delany and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975); Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robinson Delany, 1812-1885* (1971; New York: Da Capo Press, 1996); Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). A critical account of Delany's thought can be found in Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

[68] M. R. Delany, *The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry; Its Introduction into the United States and Legitimacy Among Colored Men* (Pittsburgh: W. S Haven. 1853).

Africa at the center of the cultural formation of Freemasonry while alluding to the contributions of Africa and the peoples of Africa to Western civilization, Delany was empowered to assert the visibility and legitimacy of African American claims to the social and political order of the United States and to present Freemasonry as "a fraternal base on which black community and black leadership could be built."[69] For Delany, cultural forms, particularly African American Freemasonry, were crucial in putting forward alternative visions of an African American nation while highlighting the deficiencies of American democracy.

In his *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Fredric Jameson argues for the primacy of "the political interpretation of literary texts." Jameson continues:

> It conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today – the psychoanalytic or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural – but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.[70]

Jameson's argument directs us to recognize the *always already* political horizon for interpreting literary texts. His remarks provide us with a powerful reminder that a political interpretation of literary texts is not optional, but integral to a strategic reading and interpretation of their content. In this line of thinking, we become aware of the political dimensions inherent in the literary devices and strategies of writers and critics.

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[69] Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*, 8.

[70] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 17.

Applying Jameson's critical interpretive method to Delany's *Blake* points us to what may be the obvious political dimensions of his text. But, and I would add more importantly, it also directs us to examine the methods and strategies that Delany employs in order to articulate his political message. Claudia Tate has superbly demonstrated the power of this method in presenting the connection between the production of domestic novels by African American women writers and the latent political desire for "the steady growth, development and advancement of the colored American in the very teeth of all kinds of obstacles."[71] In reading Delany's narrative, the cultural forms represented in the text become critical clues for (re)covering the political (un)conscious of the novel just as the overriding theme of slave revolt as presented in the life and travels of Henry Blake is crucial for interpreting and analyzing the ideological aims of the text. To this end, Jameson's method empowers us to examine the manner in which Delany simultaneously appropriates the cultural form of Freemasonry while articulating his nation idea for African Americans in and through this cultural form.

In *Blake, or the Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*, we witness the apotheosis of Delany's appropriation of Freemasonry for the project of constructing the African American nation. As part of his literary and publishing effort "to uphold and encourage the now depressed hopes of thinking black men in the United States," the editor of *The Weekly Anglo-African* and publisher of *The Anglo-African Magazine*, Thomas Hamilton, included Delany's text on the pages of his weekly and monthly periodicals. As a serialized novel published

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[71] Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

between 1859-1862, Delany's *Blake* was a critical literary intervention in the tumultuous early years of the Civil War.[72] With the hope of having the novel published in book form, Hamilton's introduced Delany's project when the first installment appeared in the January 1859 issue of *The Anglo-African Magazine*:

> This work differs essentially from all others heretofore published. It not only shows the combined political and commercial interests that united the North and South, but gives in the most familiar manner the formidable understanding among the slaves throughout the United States and Cuba. We commend these chapters to our readers and hope that the author may place the work into the hands of a publisher before he departs to Africa.

The serialization of *Blake* occurred during the period which Wilson Jeremiah Moses has called the "first peak of black nationalism in the United States." Wilson describes this as a "period, [when] almost every recognized spokesperson, from separatist Martin Delany to the usually assimilationist Frederick Douglass, threw some ideological ingredients into the seething cauldron of African American nationalism."[73] Contesting Harriet Beecher Stowe's portrait of the "loyal slave" in her 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly*, and extending on the literary effort of Frederick Douglass, whose 1853 short story, "The Heroic Slave," presented the rebellious Madison Washington as a hero in the liberation efforts of African Americans, Delany's text presents his sustained call

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[72] *The Anglo-African Magazine* "was praised as the first literary journal by and for black people." See Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robison Delany 1812-1850* (1971; New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 184-185. On the publication history of *Blake*, see Floyd Miller, ed., *Blake, or the Huts of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), xi-xxix.

[73] Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed., *Liberian Dreams: Back-to-Africa Narratives from the 1850s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xxiii. See also Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978).

for African Americans to rebel against an oppressive slave regime and to work towards

establishing some form of an African American nation.[74] "Unconvinced at the time of

the novel's serialization that even with a Union victory blacks would become part of the

nation's 'ruling element,' Delany presents in *Blake* a Pan-African vision of black

nationalism that means to combat and expose the limits of U.S. nationalism espoused by

blacks aligned with Douglass."[75] His internecine battles with Douglass notwithstanding,

Delany's presentation of his nation idea for African Americans is articulated through his

metaphorical appropriation of African American Freemasonry as the critical architecture

for planning, organizing, and carrying out his nationalist vision.

Blake presents Delany's conception of the nation that recognized the political

potential of the culture of Freemasonry for the liberation of enslaved African Americans

and Africans throughout the Western hemisphere. Frederick Douglass, Delany's

colleague and sometime nemesis, however, viewed African American Freemasonry in a

less austere manner. Douglass criticized African American Freemasons for what he saw

as their unnecessary extravagance. Douglass complained:

> It cannot be said that we are too poor to patronize our own press to any greater
>
> extent than we now do; for in popular demonstrations of odd-fellowship, free-
>
> masonry and the like, we expend annually from ten to twelve thousand dollars. If
>
> we put forth a call for a National Convention, for the purpose of considering our

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[74] On the relation between Stowe's text and *Blake*, see Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis and Ulysses Lee, eds., *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes* (New York: Dryden Press, 1941), 138-139; Floyd Miller, ed., *Blake, or the Huts of America*, xix-xxi, and Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American*, 180.

On Frederick Douglass, see Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 269.

[75] Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*, 190.

wrongs, and asserting our rights, an adopting measures for our mutual elevation and the emancipation of our enslaved fellow-countrymen, we shall bring together about *fifty*; but if we call a grand celebration of odd-fellowship, or free-masonry, we shall assemble, as was the case a few days ago in New York, from *four to five thousand* – the expense of which alone would be from seventeen to twenty thousand dollars, a sum sufficient to maintain four or five efficient presses, devoted to our elevation and improvement. We should not say this of odd-fellowship and free-masonry, but that it is swallowing up the best energies of many of our best men, contenting them with the glittering follies of artificial display, and indisposing them to seek for solid and important realities.[76]

Douglass highlighted what he perceived as a crucial flaw and critical shortcoming of the existence and organizational aims of African American Freemasons. Douglass viewed the fraternity in a less than sympathetic manner. He felt that those involved in African American Freemasonry seem more engaged and intent on public display than on working on carving out a crucial space for African Americans in the public sphere of the United States. Douglass did, however, hold out a redemptive vision for the organization in aiding the construction of the African American nation. He softened his rhetoric and urged those African American Freemasons to work for the "nobler" cause of an improved place and position for African Americans within the polity of the United States:

We do not pretend that all the members of odd-fellow societies and masonic

lodges are indifferent to their rights and the means of obtaining them; for we

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[76] Frederick Douglass, "What are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?" in Howard Brontz, ed., *African-American Social and Political Thought 1850-1920* (1966; New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 204

know the fact to be otherwise. Some of the best and brightest among us are

numbered with those societies; and it is on this account that we make these

remarks. We desire to see these noble men expending their time, talents and

strength for higher and nobler objects than any that can be attained by the weak

and glittering follies of odd-fellowship and free-masonry.[77]

The possibilities that Douglass hints of for African American Freemasonry are placed

into service in organizing Delany's literary depiction of a political revolution of enslaved

Africans in the United States and Cuba. Through his main character Henry Blake, we

witness Delany's literary answer to Douglass' critique of African American

Freemasonry. Delany demonstrated the political potential of this cultural formation. For

Delany, it was not "glittering follies of artificial display," but a critical oppositional

strategy designed to inaugurate his vision of an African American nation.

Delany's appropriation of the culture of Freemasonry is preceded by his

presentation of Blake's radical critique of the religion of the enslaved. His rejection of

the "gospel" is triggered by the sale of his wife "by a man who is one of the leading

members of the very church to which both she and I belong!"[78] In his argument with

Mammy Judy over the validity of the tenets of their religion, Henry declares:

I'm tired looking the other side; I want a hope this side of the vale of tears. I want

something on this earth as well as a promise of things in another world. I and my

wife have been robbed of our liberty, and you want me to be satisfied with a hope

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[77] Ibid, 205.

[78] Delany, Martin, *Blake, or the Huts of America*, Floyd J. Miller, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 16. Further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

of heaven. I won't do any such thing; I have waited long enough on heavenly promises; I'll wait no longer. I – (16).

Blake's rejection is followed by his appropriation of religion for subversive ends. In the course of planning and organizing his insurrection, he admonishes one of his colleagues, "You must make your religion subserve your interests, as your oppressors do theirs! . . .we must now begin to understand the Bible so as to make it of interest to us."(41) Blake's rebellion against the religion of both master and enslaved and his desire for the enslaved to transform religion into an instrument of freedom hints of the sort of cultural appropriation that critically informs Delany's text. This critical appropriation comes into relief in the cultural formation of Freemasonry.

As Blake enters the various "Huts of America," he develops a secret network of initiates intent on enacting his plan for the liberation of the enslaved populous. The "huts," similar to the Freemason Lodge, make it possible for Blake to initiate members into his revolutionary "Freemasonry" and secretly communicate the plans for the insurrection. Furthermore, as these "huts" are located throughout the Americas, Delany hints of the diasporic destinies that connected the United States, the Caribbean and Africa as well as the diasporic dimensions of Freemasonry. Away from the surveiling eye of slave masters and those who may possibly betray the plans, Blake is able to organize various "lodges" of his Masonic society into a network capable of fomenting revolution. The organizing ritual is undertaken in the following manner:

> Clasping each other by the hand, standing in a band together, as a plight of their
> union and fidelity to each other, Henry said, "I now impart to you the secret, it is
> this: I have laid a scheme, and matured a plan for a general insurrection of the

slaves in every state, and the successful overthrow of slavery!" . . .Whilst yet

upon their knees, Henry imparted to them the secrets of his organization. (39-40)

Blake further instructs his initiates on the manner in which to propagate this

revolutionary "Freemasonry:"

> You must now go on and organize continually. It makes no difference when, nor
>
> where your are, so that the slaves are true and trustworthy, as the scheme is
>
> adapted to all times and places. . . .All you have to do, is to find one good man or
>
> woman – I don't care which, so that they prove to be the right person – on a single
>
> plantation, and hold a seclusion and impart the secret to them, and make them the
>
> organizers for their own plantation, and they in like manner impart it to some
>
> other next to them, and so on. In this way it will spread like smallpox among
>
> them. (41)

In effect, in *Blake*, Delany adopted the methods and character of Freemasonry to plan,

organize, and communicate the revolutionary aims of Blake. The decentralized manner

of organizing, the culture of secrecy, the initiatory ritual, and the patterned method of

disseminating the organizational aims signify on the culture of Freemasonry. The power

and potential of such an organizational method is commented on by Eric Sundquist:

"The spirit of resistance (to the slaveholder, the spirit of terror) portrayed in *Blake* is most

effectively embodied in the suggestion left behind by its hero that local units have been

inspired and prepared to act with independent force on their own."[79]

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[79] Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake The Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 198.

Delany structures the emancipatory struggle undertaken by Blake on the institution of Freemasonry and the biblical hero of Exodus, Moses. Such a move was not unprecedented in the work of Delany. His linking of the culture of Freemasonry with the figure of Moses in his 1853 publication, *The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry*, foreshadows Delany's treatment and development of Blake in his later novel. In this speech delivered before an African American Freemason lodge in Pittsburgh, Delany linked Moses and Freemasonry in the following manner: "Are not we as Masons, and the world of mankind, to him the Egyptian slave, may I not add the *fugitive slave*, indebted for a transmission to us of the Masonic Records. . . ."[80] In the serialized novel, Delany utilizes this literary logic in his presentation of Blake. Henry Blake serves as the stand-in for Moses in the narrative in that as a *fugitive slave* he transmits his "Freemasonry" to the various "Huts of America," and serves as the emancipatory figure in the struggle for African American freedom.

Delany's emancipatory novel deviates from the masculine bias of Freemasonry in its adoption and adaptation of this cultural structure. Although the masculine basis of Freemasonry excluded women, Blake opens his "Freemasonry" to all – both male and female. This follows Delany's line of thinking presented in his pamphlet when he presented a gender-inclusive history of the fraternal order:

> All the sovereign and members of the royal families were Masons, because each member of the royal household had the necessity to be educated in the rituals of the priesthood. . . .Among other nations of the ancients, priestesses were common,

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[80] Martin Delany, *The Origin and Objects*, 7.

as is known to the erudite in history; and Candace, Queen of Sheba, was a high priestess in her realm, hence her ability to meet King Solomon in the temple, having passed the guards by the words of wisdom, from the outer to the inner court, where she met the king in all his wisdom, power, and glory.[81]

Henry Blake's willingness to include women in the conspiracy speaks to this inclusive history of Freemasonry that Delany espoused. In keeping with this understanding, Henry prominently organizes his secret network within the huts of women, from Aunt Dilly in Alexandria to Madame Cordora in Cuba. Although a gendered reading of his text presents a conflicted role for women, at best, through Henry's appropriation and transformation of the culture of Freemasonry, Delany was able to maintain his understanding of the gender-inclusive dimension present in the history of the fraternity.[82]

Unlike his counterpart Frederick Douglass, Delany critically presents "the glittering follies of artificial display" of African American Freemasonic cultural pageantry not as a useless mimicry of European American cultural forms, but as a prelude to hemispheric revolution.[83] Delany is careful in plotting the subversive

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Delany's tortured logic with regard to the gendered dimensions of *Blake* is critically explored in Robert Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*, 195-223. See also Robert F. Reid-Pharr, *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House, and the Black American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111-127. A less nuanced understanding of this dimension of Delany's project has been recently offered by Maurice Wallace. What Wallace terms as Delany's "masculinist politics" is fraught with ambiguity and contradiction, a critical trait that Wallace fails to highlight. See Maurice Wallace, "'Are We Men?' Prince Hall, Martin Delany, and the Masculine Ideal in Black Freemasonry, 1775-1865," *American Literary History* 9.3 (Fall, 1997), 396-424.

[83] On the relation of cultural celebrations and assertions of nationalism in nineteenth century America, see for example, Geneviève Fabre, "African-American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century," in Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72-91; Mary P. Ryan, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 131-153; William D. Piersen, "African-American Festive

dimensions of Afro-Caribbean communal celebrations. In Cuba, Henry Blake stands at the threshold of commencing his plan of war against those who held his brethren in bondage. Eric Sundquist contends, "Masquerade and ritual mark the maturing of the black revolution from the beginning. The first step in the conspiracy coincides with the 'gala day' in honor of the nativity of Isabella, queen of Spain. The national fete, in Delany's representation, bears numerous signs of the threat to Spanish rule. . . ."[84] Delany placed Blake in this ritual context to mark the transformations evident in the appropriation of African and European cultural forms used to enact a new African American nationalism that seeks to destroy white hegemony and announce a new black subjectivity.

With this as a backdrop, Delany continued with his literary adoption and appropriation of the culture of Freemasonry as the structure for articulating the emerging black nation. The culmination of Henry Blake's cultivation of his Masonic network and organization occurs in "The Grand Council." Patterned after the formation of a Freemason Lodge, the esoteric titles of the officers of the Lodge such as the Wardens, Deacons, and Worshipful Master are replaced by ones with an overt political cast.[85] Once again highlighting the presence of women in this cultural form, Delany wrote:

Style," in Gena Dagel Caponi, ed., *signifyin(g), sanctifyin ', & slam dunking: A Reader in African American Exressive Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 417-433; David Waldstreicher, "Rites of Rebellion, Rites of Assent: Celebrations, Print Culture, and the Origins of American Nationalism," *The Journal of American History* 82.1 (June, 1995), 37-61; and William H. Wiggins, *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

[84] Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake The Nations*, 213.

[85] On these points, see Albert Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Evert Publishers, 1892).

This evening, according to appointment, the seclusion met in Grand Council at the house of Madame Cordora. But instead of the attic story, the drawing rooms were occupied, each member in his place – Gofer Gondolier post guard, stationed at the door in the hall.

The provisional organization consisted of Placido, Director of Civil Government; Minister of State, Camina; Minister of Justice Carolus Blacus; Minister of Foreign Affairs, Castina; Postmaster General Antonio Blacus; Minister of War and Navy, Montego. . . .Thus organized, the oppressed became a dangerous element in the political ingredients of Cuba. (256)

Delany placed the crux of the revolution – its organization, planning, and enactment – on the supple framework of Freemasonry. Organized around a common goal coupled with specific tasks to accomplish, Blake and his conspirators are now positioned to enact his vision of a black nation. The Masonic symbolism of the gathering of the Council bears the trace of Delany's appropriation. Blake addressed those assembled with these words:

Brethren, sisters, men and women of Cuba! – The like of tonight's gathering, save in a neighboring island years before any of us had an existence, in this region is without parallel; and as the Lord lives and my soul bears witness that he does, I will do all that is in my power lies to carry out the decrees of this Council! (257)

Blake's address strikes a similar tone and style used by Delany in his 1853 oration. Although he addressed a different subject, the style is characteristic of Delany and provides us with a prototype that informs his representation of Blake:

And now, in presence of this vast assemblage, before all the world, in the name of the Holy St. John, calling God to witness, I this day acquit them of all blame in

the matter of that which they did, in admitting the Grand Lodge Visiting Committee, promising it will never be done again![86]

Delany's ingenious development of Blake's conspiratorial activities is indeed indebted to his deft appropriation of the culture of Freemasonry.

Eric Hobsbawm reminds us of this critical fact: "The revolutionary age of 1789-1848 was one in which secret brotherhoods had a significant influence in European social upheaval."[87] Martin Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of America*, provides us with a preeminent example of a literary appropriation of the culture of Freemasonry for revolutionary ends. Delany adeptly utilized and strategically employed the culture and structure of Freemasonry to articulate his nation ideal through his literary production. His development of Freemasonry in this narrative was commensurate with his understandings of the historical legacy of the organization along with his understanding of the revolutionary potential latent in this cultural form. Delany admitted as much in the response Blake directs to an inquiry by Madame Cordora concerning the possible conflict between her Catholicism and the secret society:

> "Our ceremonies, then," continued Blake, "are borrowed from no denomination, creed, nor church: no existing organization, secret, secular, nor religious; but originated by ourselves, adopted to our own condition, circumstances, and wants, founded upon the eternal word of God our Creator as impressed upon the tablet of each of your hearts. Will this explanation suffice, women of Cuba, sisters in

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[86] Martin Delany, *The Origin and Object of Ancient Freemasonry*, 37.

[87] Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake The Nations*, 212.

oppression with us? Are you satisfied to act and do our own way regardless of aping our oppressors indiscriminately?" (258)

From the "huts" of America to Cuba, Delany's *Blake* introduces us to a critical literary production that (re)presents a cultural form in highlighting the political dimensions of African American discourses on the nation. Robert Reid-Pharr notes:

> Delany never finished his novel, never demonstrated the pan-African revolt to which the work alludes, never set down in detail the contours of the government he envisioned. He did, however. accomplish his task. He created a model for how the many disparate peoples of the African diaspora might be produced as black, or more parochially as Black Americans.[88]

To this end, Delany – through the exploits of Henry Blake and his revolutionary ideal – draws our attention to his formulation and production of the nation that is deeply interwoven with the culture of Freemasonry.

IV

Our discussion of Gabriel's Rebellion and Martin Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of America* expands our understanding of the sense in which the culture of Freemasonry informed African Americans' efforts to invoke an ideal of the nation and the literary articulation of the nation. In a sense, we have seen how in each episode the cultural formation of Freemasonry in a given articulation of the nation is at once historical, psychological, strategic, linguistic, and literary. At times, Freemasonry is an almost imperceptible sign

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[88] Robert Reid-Pharr. *Conjugal Union: The Body. the House. and the Black American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125.

in this exchange of culture and ideology, and at other moments, becomes a prominent and integral feature in the construction of a new national ideal. The choice, as I have argued, may not be at all arbitrary. It belongs to a dynamic cultural appropriation informed by the geographies and technologies of the transactions of the Atlantic and the particular production of American democracy. As a redefined nation emerged from the battles of the Civil War, in the space of postemancipation Virginia, we are able to witness how African American Freemasons literally worked through the culture of this fraternal formation in announcing a new conception of the nation.

The years following the conclusion of the Civil War found the social and political landscape of Virginia fractured as a result of the demise of its "slavocracy." The "Planter Elite" no longer wielded uncontrollable political power and newly freed black bodies contested the meanings of freedom and citizenship in this new postemancipation space. The fears of one southern writer announced at the beginning of the war – "The only dangerous element, which must ultimately destroy the harmony and compactness of Southern society, is the free Negro and the mulatto" – were compounded as African Americans sought to position themselves in the polity of the newly emerging social and political order ushered in by the defeat of the rebellious Confederacy.[89] Throughout Virginia, African Americans assembled in the galleries of various buildings, in churches, and in other open spaces to openly discuss and formulate critical responses to their new status as free persons in the nation.[90] (Re)constructing a nation in a state cleaved by the

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[89] A. Featherman, "Our Position and That of Our Enemies," *Debrow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources,* 31.1 (July, 1861), 31.

[90] See for example Tommy Bogger, *Free Blacks in Norfolk, Virginia, 1790-1860: The Darker Side of Freedom* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and

formidable issues of race, land, labor, class, and gender was an arduous task, to say the least.

Regardless of the obstacles, African Americans were intent on formulating and articulating their understanding of the nation in the social and political space of postemancipation Virginia. The argument put forth by a group of African Americans assembled in the City of Norfolk in 1865 highlights the intensity of this desire:

> We do not come before the people of the United States asking an impossibility; we simply ask that a Christian and enlightened people shall, at one, concede to us the full enjoyment of those privileges of full citizenship, which, not only, are our undoubted right, but are indispensable to that elevation and prosperity of our people, which must be the desire of every patriot.[91]

Utilizing all means at their disposal, African Americans in Virginia punctuated the end of slavery with calls for the formal recognition of their relationship to the nation. Although not often recognized, but necessarily implicated in this strategic play was African American Freemasonry.

Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom." in Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 111-150; Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Robert Francis Engs, "The Development of Black Culture and Community in the Emancipation Era: Hampton Roads, Virginia, 1861-1870," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1972); Michael Edward Hucles, "Postbellum Urban Black Economic Development: The Case of Norfolk, Virginia, 1860-1890," (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 1990); Cassandra Lynn Newby, "'The World Was All Before Them': A Study of the Black Community in Norfolk, Virginia, 1861-1884," (Ph.D. diss., The College of William and Mary, 1992); Gayle M. Schulman, "The Gibbons Family: Freedmen," *The Magazine of Albemarle County History* 55 (1997), 61-93; and Dianne Swann Wright, "A Way Out of No Way: Learning the Ways of Freedom in the New South, 1865-1930." (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2000).

[91] *Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, VA., to the People of the United States. Also an Account of the Agitation Among the Colored People of Virginia for Equal Rights.* (New Bedford, MA, 1865), 1.

As was the case with the revolutionary actors in Gabriel's Rebellion and in the literary exploits of Martin Delany's *Blake*, African Americans continued to maintain a connection with the culture and institution of Freemasonry in the postemancipation years. In turn, white Americans continued to maintain and express their apprehensions over this connection. Fears over blacks banding together to thwart the efforts of whites to maintain what they felt was the cultural integrity of the American experiment with democracy was associated with a particular African American production of a sort of cultural freemasonry. In his extensive study of the period, Leon Litwack describes the fears of one leading white Virginian who feared a sort of "curious freemasonry" among African Americans:

> What whites came to notice by the 1880s was the appearance of "a double system of judgment" in the black community. If blacks were victimized by blacks, they condemned the guilty. But in the estimation of Philip A. Bruce, a young Virginia aristocrat and influential writer, no such judgment fell on a black "guilty of a violation of the law, however gross, from which white people alone suffer." Rather than seek out such criminals for prosecution, blacks exercised, he thought, a "curious freemasonry" that rallied around the accused and sought to protect them; indeed, it tended to unite "a whole community of plantation negroes," old and young alike.[92]

As Litwack highlights, the term "freemasonry" continued its close association with a culture of intrigue and suspicion. In the postemancipation context as in the antebellum

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[92] Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 444.

period the word continued to manifest its plasticity in being an apt descriptive for not only a culture of secrecy, but also as a signifier of a multi-dimensional appropriation of this cultural formation for African American interests. Although Bruce employed the term to disparage actions by African Americans whom he felt flouted the rule of law, he usage of the term draws our attention to the fact how this word – with its manifold connotations – announces the rites and rituals whereby African Americans attempted to articulate a conception of the nation in the face of a contentious social and political order. To be sure, African Americans not only used a "curious freemasonry" in this metaphorical manner, they adopted the culture and institution of the square and compass as their own in an effort to unite a community in their freedom journey. In Charlottesville, Virginia, this adoption implicitly carried with it new horizons for envisioning and expressing ideas and ideals of the nation.

In a statewide meeting of twelve African American Freemason Lodges assembled as a Grand Lodge in 1869, a petition from a group of African American Freemasons in Charlottesville was considered for membership. The organization of the Lodge was commented on by the area-wide Masonic authority, Royal J. Morgan, who informed the Grand Lodge of his findings. Morgan, whose official title was District Deputy Grand Master, commented favorably of the Charlottesville group:

On the evening of the 8th of December, I visited Charlottesville, and examined into the records and workings of Jefferson Lodge, U. D., at that place, and am

pleased to State that the brethren were improving very fast, and are anxious for

instruction and improvement. . . .[93]

The favorable condition of the Charlottesville Lodge was also noticed by a group of

African American Freemasons in nearby Staunton, Virginia. The members of Mt. Zion

Lodge recommended that Jefferson Lodge be granted a "warrant" to operate as a

recognized Lodge of Freemasons connected with the Union Grand Lodge. To that effect,

the following action was noted in the published proceedings of the Grand Lodge:

The Grand Secretary then read a petition from Jefferson Lodge, No. 13, for a

warrant, which was, on motion of Bro. Herbert, granted.[94]

With that action, Jefferson Lodge began its journey in becoming a regularly constituted

lodge and member in the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia.

The Union Grand Lodge of Virginia was a statewide organization of African

American Freemason lodges. It was born in the years immediately following the Civil

War as African American Freemasons, no longer sequestered by various laws forbidding

secret meetings or organizations of African Americans, came together to advance their

organization as well as the interests of African Americans in the emerging social and

political order. The group was founded in a meeting of black Freemasons in the City of

Norfolk in 1865. In a brief history published in the proceedings of the 1869 meeting, the

organization claimed a heritage which "emanate from the lodges that Prince Hall

established in 1784, in the state of Massachusetts, and which was recognized by the

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[93] *Proceedings of the Third Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia, A.F.M*
(Lynchburg: Schaffter & Bryant, 1870), 16.

[94] *Proceedings of the Third Annual Communication,* 13.

illustrious Washington and his compeers, and who held lodges and received in their midst men from all nations and every clime."[95] By invoking this long heritage and an inclusive, global history, the group positioned itself to make the claim:

> Indeed, the lodge, in so far as lawful authority is concerned, carries with it unmistakable and irrefragable proofs of its being entitled to receive the right of fellowship not only from every brother no matter how lowly, but from each and all grand bodies upon the face of the earth, no matter wheresoever dispersed.[96]

In this forceful statement, the Union Grand Lodge asserted its claim of Masonic legitimacy not only with the other Masonic bodies in the United States but all Masonic bodies the world over. Furthermore, the claim of Masonic legitimacy is intimately connected with the assertion of the equality with all Freemasons. These bold steps transcend the confines of Freemasonry in that by putting forth such a history and claims to legitimacy and equality, this group of African American Freemasons announce the undergirding thrust of their organization – African American equality. This claim to Masonic legitimacy has recourse to other forms of social and political legitimacy. To be sure, the need to forcefully articulate this message was not to simply reinforce this sentiment among those in the brotherhood. The printed history of the organization, along with its published proceedings, and, more importantly its name – Union Grand Lodge – serve as markers of a new and legitimate African American presence and claim to the American public sphere.

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[95] *Proceedings of the Third Annual Communication*, 17.

[96] Ibid.

In the June 21, 1870, semi-annual meeting of the Union Grand Lodge, the Grand

Master Royal J. Morgan informed those assembled in Staunton of his actions with regard

to Jefferson Lodge:

> I consecrated Jefferson Lodge No. 13 and installed the officers on the 28th day of
>
> March, in the town of Charlottesville. We had a very cordial reception, and left
>
> the lodge in good and careful hands.[97]

Jefferson Lodge in Charlottesville was the thirteenth lodge of African American

Freemasons to join the statewide organization. Although Jefferson Lodge was not unique

in being African American Freemasons, it was unique in the manner in which its name

symbolized more than just a designator of its status as a lodge of black Freemasons. The

lodges that made up the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia had names inspired by the place

where they were located such as Pocahontas; some Masonic signifier of importance such

as Rising Sun, Saint John's, and Mt. Zion; or some other aspect of significance for the

group such as Social and Covenant.[98] The Charlottesville group stood alone in naming

themselves Jefferson Lodge. Just as the Grand Lodge in its official history articulated its

claim to public and Masonic legitimacy, the members of Jefferson Lodge, particularly by

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[97] *Proceedings of a Grand Semi-Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia, Held in Staunton, on the 21*[st] *day of June, A. L. 5870 A. D. 1870 and the Grand Annual Communication, Held in Alexandria, on the 12*[th] *day of December, A. L. 5870 A. D. 1870* (Lynchburg: Evening Press Printers, 1871), 7.

[98] According to the official history of the Union Grand Lodge, the member lodges of this body at the time of Jefferson Lodge's affiliation consisted of the following lodges: Universal #1, Alexandria; Rising Sun #2, Norfolk; Morning Star #3, Portsmouth; Eastern Light #4, Norfolk; Saint Johns #5; Social #6, Richmond; Pocahontas #7, Petersburg; Covenant Lodge #8, Lynchburg; Eastern Star #9, Hampton; Zeredatha #10, Norfolk; Warren #11, Richmond; Mt. Zion #12, Staunton. *Proceedings of the Third Annual Communication*, 4, 18.

virtue of its name, claimed not only a place in the Masonic world, but also squarely placed themselves within the heritage of the nation.[99]

It is quite significant that this group of African American Freemasons assembled in Charlottesville, Virginia, chose the name Jefferson as its lodge moniker. With the spirit of Jefferson extremely prominent and pervasive in this small central Virginia town – from his mountaintop retreat at Monticello to the University of Virginia at the outskirts of the town – for a group of African Americans to name their Masonic organization that memorialized the nation's third president is a fact that cannot be easily overlooked. By invoking the name of Jefferson, African American Freemasons in Charlottesville place themselves within the pattern consistent with other naming patterns for African American organizations in the Charlottesville area. Gayle Schulman offers an insight into this area with regard to the Freedmen's schools that were set up in Charlottesville after the war: "Teachers of the Freedmen's School named their classes. Anna Gardner called hers 'The Jefferson School'; Miss Carkin, 'The Lincoln School'; Paul Lewis, 'The John Brown School'; and Isabella Gibbons, 'The Major Savage School.'"[100] For a group of African American Freemasons to name their organization Jefferson Lodge can be read as a critical attempt to navigate the treacherous terrain of the postemancipation landscape by claiming a heritage distinctly American. Moreover, as black members of an all-black body named after a white individual, Jefferson Lodge enacts a strategic reversal with the adoption of this name. With a universal logic undergirding the fraternity in its espousal

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[99] My reading and interpretation of the naming of this lodge has been influenced by Dana L. Cloud, "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2.2 (1999), 177-209.

[100] Gayle M. Schulman. "The Gibbons Family: Freedmen," *The Magazine of Albemarle County History* 55 (1997), 86.

of an inclusive "brotherhood of man" permeating its rites and philosophy, this name

could serve as a critical marker of a belief in the positive possibilities of interracial union

for the new nation. Indeed, Sidney Kaplan, in his extensive article on the issue of

miscegenation, reminds us of the national implications of the question of interracial union

and its impact on debates over African American freedom and citizenship.[101] In this vein,

the members of Jefferson Lodge can be seen as intervening in this national debate by

asserting the worth, value, and dignity of African Americans and also informing the

nation that there are other alternatives for interracial union than the negative diatribes that

characterized the national discourse on this issue.

Locally, the conspiracy of silence surrounding "Mr. Jefferson's notorious

example," as John Hartwell Cocke commented on the interracial liaison between Thomas

Jefferson and Sally Hemings, (re)emerged with the founding of Jefferson Lodge, albeit

without the intrigue or political scandal.[102] With the creation and founding of Jefferson

Lodge, the subject of interracial relations was once again open for public inspection and

consumption. Although there are no extant records attesting to this observation, given

the history of the Jefferson – Hemings liaison. it is quite probable that the functioning of

this fraternal group elicited some suggestions of the continuation of love, sex, and

familiar bonds across the color line. Indeed, the legacy of this phenomenon has fueled

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[101] Sidney Kaplan, "The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864," *Journal of Negro History* 34.3 (July, 1949), 274-343. For an extensive discussion of miscegenation in South and Virginia, see respectively, Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) and Joshua Daniel Rothman, "'Notorious in the Neighborhood': Interracial Sex and Interracial Families in Early National and Antebellum Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2000).

[102] Cited in Joshua D. Rothman, "James Callender and Social Knowledge of Interracial Sex in Antebellum Virginia," in Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 108.

the oral history of Jefferson Lodge. In a recent interview, 81 year-old Wilbur Tinsley, a

fifty-year member of the Lodge and its unofficial historian, recalled hearing a story

recounting the interracial origins of Jefferson Lodge. Speaking of the entangled histories

of the white Masonic lodge in Charlottesville, Widow's Sons, and Jefferson Lodge,

Tinsley recalled:

> I remember hearing by word of mouth that Widow's admitted and made a Master
>
> Mason of a colored man and his friends wanted to be masons; applications were
>
> accepted and they were made and Widow's helped set up Jefferson.[103]

Tinsley's memory is commensurate with what Loretta Williams uncovers in her

investigation of African American Freemasons in the South. In her study of African

American Freemasonry, she writes:

> A few black individuals have been initiated into freemasonry by local white
>
> subordinate lodges, but it appears that they were expected to form black lodges
>
> rather than maintain active membership in the white lodge. The first is said to
>
> have been Paul Drayton of Charleston, South Carolina, in the early nineteenth
>
> century. Drayton later organized a black lodge which leads one to suspect that the
>
> process of acceptance differed for Drayton than for his white fellow initiates.[104]

She comments that the assistance black Freemasons received from white Freemasons in

organizing their lodges has, as her "informants suggest a logical explanation: the reality

of genuine kinship ties. Many white Masons knew that some of their blood relations

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[103] Wilbur Tinsley, interview by author. Cismont, Virginia, July 18, 2000.

[104] Loretta Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 95.

were black Masons, which perhaps accounts for the willingness to ease things for relatives who could not otherwise be recognized."[105] Far from the hyperbole and innuendo that characterized the earlier public record of this relationship between Jefferson and African Americans in the beginning of the century, Jefferson's connection with this lodge of African American Freemasons served as a proxy for what was common knowledge, but still unspoken – the reality of the intermingled history of whites and blacks. What was until then an "unspoken" reality was now (re)organized into a new configuration that would rehabilitate the negatives associated with interracial interaction. Jefferson Lodge (re)presents this historical episode with the dignity, character, and value of African American humanity. These Freemasons stake a claim to a once hidden (and extensive) heritage of racial intermixture and reclaim their black ancestry in the process. Equally, the name of this African American Freemason Lodge serves as a pointed reminder that this legacy could not be erased. Thus, the name Jefferson Lodge not only cements the bond of African Americans with the memory of Jefferson, but also it is a critical revision of this historical memory of interracial relationship from one of denigration to affirmation, from one of absence to one of presence, and from one of silence to one that is acknowledged.

The naming of Jefferson Lodge could also signal a formal announcement of a racial consciousness that informs the projection of an African American place and position in the national polity. The intertwined destines of black and white Americans date from the founding country. However, the founding was explicitly racially exclusive. With emancipation, a new nation was being formed. Unlike before where African

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[105] Ibid.

American recourse to the self-evident doctrines of freedom and equality was restricted, in the new nation the Jeffersonian legacy would now be adopted by African Americans in their quest to instantiate these universal values. In this reversal of fortune, the Civil War and emancipation was, in a critical sense, the fulfillment of Jefferson's prophecy articulated in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever. . . ."[106] The formation of Jefferson Lodge can be seen as the awakening of the justice Jefferson predicted (and feared) as well as an extension of "my country" to African Americans. Certainly in this respect this group of African American Freemasons utilized his name to symbolize African American legitimacy in adopting the principles and practices of freedom and equality articulated by Jefferson. In like manner, the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge integrated themselves within the history and heritage of the nation-state. They thus incorporated themselves as African (and) American within the tradition and principles underpinning the social and civic order of the United States.[107]

In as much as this group of African American Freemasons staked a claim to the rights and heritage of the nation through the fraternal rites of Freemasonry by adopting the name of Jefferson Lodge, the claims made in and through this naming act are not

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[106] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1993), 227.

[107] In a different context, Frantz Fanon approaches an analysis of the relations between black men and white women within the same frame of reference we have put forward in understanding the manner in which Jefferson Lodge named itself. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon writes, "When my ubiquitary [*ubiquitaire*, translated as restless in other English translations] hands caress these white breasts, I am making white civilization and dignity mine." See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markmann, trans. (1952; New York: Grove Press, 1967), 63.

It is quite interesting to note that the women's organization affiliated with Jefferson Lodge, the Eastern Stars, adopted the name Monticello for their organization when it was founded in 1917.

without their ambiguities. Despite naming their organization Jefferson Lodge, it is quite

prescient that this group of African American Freemasons did not fully articulate their

desire to be connected with Jefferson. In other words, they did not name themselves

Thomas Jefferson Lodge. Perhaps to do so would invoke the wrath of their fellow white

Masonic counterparts and citizens. For African Americans to openly and explicitly make

public their claims on Jefferson – familiarly or otherwise – would be an affront to white

Virginians, and in extension the entire United States. Indeed, Henry Randall, writing in

1868, claimed, "An awe and veneration was felt for Mr. Jefferson among his neighbors

which in their view rendered it shameful to even talk about his name in such a

connection."[108] The precarious postemancipation landscape required African Americans

to carefully negotiate social and cultural norms. The specter of violence and death

hovered near as African Americans engaged in the cultural politics of this period. The

myth and symbol of Jefferson was something that required careful appropriation and

close attention had to be paid to the ramifications of such an adoption. Furthermore, the

relationship of African Americans to the nation was somewhat tenuous at the moment.

African Americans were not fully integrated in American democracy and it would remain

over a century before this lack would be addressed. Indeed, the place and position of

African Americans in the new nation was still under considerable debate in the larger

public sphere. The silence in the name of Jefferson Lodge echoes this marginal location

of African Americans within the polity of the United States. Thus, the hint of ambiguity

and ambivalence sounded in the name, serves as a reminder not only of the critical

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[108] Cited in Joshua D. Rothman, "James Callender and Social Knowledge of Interracial Sex in Antebellum Virginia," 108.

navigations of the postemancipation terrain by African Americans, but also highlights the contested and contingent relationship of African Americans to the nation.

Recognizing a critical linkage between the actions of Jefferson Lodge and the social, political, and economic advancement of the race fueled the economic strain of the national consciousness of the members of Jefferson Lodge. To alleviate and insulate its members from the economic pain and psychological indignities of a tight capital market, a generally depressed national economy, and an economic system that discriminated against African Americans, African American Freemasons sought to develop their own capital market within the institutional parameters of the organization.[109] Such a move would not only create a source of much needed funding in a bleak economic landscape, but was part and parcel of what can be termed an "economic nationalism" that was espoused by leaders and incorporated into the actions of members of the fraternity. In his 1870 address to the Union Grand Lodge, Grand Master Royal J. Morgan emphasized the reciprocal relationship between the Grand Lodge and its member lodges in maintaining the prosperity of the general organization: "The Grand Lodge owes its prosperity to the Subordinate Lodges as the Subordinate Lodges prospers in their work and membership so will the Grand Lodge Body reflect this character of the Order throughout the State."[110] Cognizant of the capital prerequisites necessary for actively engaging in an evolving and

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[109] For an excellent discussion of the tight credit market and its impact on African American labor and economic advancement in the early years of the postemancipaction period see Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862-1882* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 301-316, esp.

[110] *Proceedings . . . Grand Annual Communication . . . 1870*, 17.

transforming capitalist economy, Morgan went on to espouse his Masonic economic philosophy by arguing:

> There is another subject to which I will call your attention, and that is to urge upon the various Lodges a system of economy in their government. When we were younger, perhaps there was some semblance of excuse to desire to show ourselves before the world, and we have wasted, Brethren, a great deal of money in useless display. Let us do away with these things, and try to economize. Let us build up our Treasuries for good, look to the "Widows and Orphans fund," and to the expenses usually attending the internal economy of our household.[111]

Echoing Frederick Douglass who, as we touched on earlier in this chapter, argued a similar point in the years prior to the Civil War, the Virginia Grand Master set this argument for economic frugality as the foundation upon which his economic philosophy for the Grand Lodge was grounded. Furthermore, he opted for an economic strategy that went beyond the sacred confines of the Masonic lodge. He forged an economic vision that took into account charitable efforts designed to aid the wider African American community, thus demonstrating to the entire state the economic prowess of African Americans.

Throughout the postemancipation period, Jefferson Lodge cleaved to the tenets of this economic philosophy.[112] As one of its members, J. E. Farrar, served as the Grand Treasurer in the Grand Lodge in 1870, the standards set forth by the Grand Master had a

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[111] Ibid, 18.

[112] For a recent study of the economic strategies of African Americans in the postemancipation period, see Sharon Ann Holt, *Making Freedom Pay: North Carolina Freedpeople Working for Themselves, 1865-1900* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

ready ally in the confines of this lodge. To this effect, Jefferson Lodge enacted an elaborate plan of economic self-sufficiency in the postemancipation period. Acting as lender for its members, Jefferson Lodge served as a premier source of financial capital for individual members. The records of the organization from the 1870s reveal an intricate system of lending and repayment that not only benefited its borrowers, but also the Lodge. Serving as a critical source of finance capital, the Lodge intervened in a market that was all but none existent for African Americans, indeed, for most Americans. In an emerging capitalist economy experiencing growing pains and coming to grips with the massive destruction of infrastructure in the South, not to mention the collapse of the Freedmen's Bank, this intervention was critical to aiding and advancing the economic interests of members of the Lodge in various business ventures as well as being a crucial demonstration of the worth and vitality of a nationalist economic philosophy.

The minutes of the August 15, 1877, meeting detail this lending arrangement: "The Lodge agreed to loan Bro. Cayton $50.00 on 70 days time with the following security, M. T. Lewis, J. H. Ferguson, and Horace Kinney. The money to be loaned at 6% interest."[113] From this transaction, we learn that relatively large amounts of money could be borrowed by individual members. A corollary requirement that accompanied these transactions was the security arrangements that were necessary for borrowing funds. Only those members who could secure the backing of other members of the Lodge could secure funds from the treasury. To put it another way, those members who sought financial capital traded in on their cultural capital in order to obtain their funds. In

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[113] *Minute Book Dated January 12, 1876 to December 1881.* Jefferson Lodge #20 F. and A. Masons, PHA, Charlottesville, Virginia.

the case of Cayton, he secured the backing of one the more influential members, M. T. Lewis, pastor of the Delevan Baptist Church, the first independent African American church in Charlottesville.[114] Furthermore, the funds loaned were subject to a quite expensive system of interest given the short duration of the loan and the time period in question. With the repayment of the loan and the interest, the Lodge stood to gain from this lending activity and the member was able to utilize the funds to advance his particular economic interests.

This lending system was not without its problems however, as the case of S. M. Parker reveals. The Lodge agreed to loan Brother Parker $30.00 after rejecting his request of $50.00 in its June 14, 1876 meeting. Parker failed to repay the loan in the requisite time and a letter was sent to the lodge on behalf of those members who secured the loan on March 23, 1877. In its April 11, 1877, the Lodge immediately called for the loan to be repaid and expelled Parker on account of his indebtedness. Two months later, Parker returned to the Lodge and appealed to the fraternity to reinstate him to the brotherhood and as he "promised to pay up at least by the end of September," the Lodge considered his statement satisfactory and reinstated his membership.[115] Just as in the larger economy, the economy of the Lodge was not without those who were unable to keep pace with the financial arrangements they had previously made. Indeed, throughout the records of Jefferson Lodge we find individuals who are removed from the membership rolls on account of their inability to maintain their financial obligations to

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[114] See Richard I. McKinney, *Keeping the Faith: A History of the First Baptist Church, 1863-1980, in Light of its Times, West Main and Seventh Streets, Charlottesville, Virginia* (Charlottesville: First Baptist Church, 1981).

[115] June 12, 1877 meeting of Jefferson Lodge, *Minute Book Dated January 12, 1876 to December 1881.*

the order. Despite these drawbacks, the accounts of Brothers Cayton and Parker demonstrate an elaborate economic infrastructure in place in Jefferson Lodge that not only aided the organization but also was in keeping with the nationalist economic philosophy espoused by the general organization.

The form of economic nationalism of the fraternity not only manifested itself in Jefferson Lodge's intervention into the financial capital market, but also in the actions of the Lodge in acquiring property and the financial commitments of its members in the larger African American community. In the years immediately following its founding, Jefferson Lodge sought to acquire its own land and building. The Lodge authorized funds to be expended for the acquisition of a meeting hall in its March 8, 1876 meeting. Although the intricacies of this transaction are not revealed in the records of the organization, such a financial undertaking must have proved somewhat strenuous since later in that year the Odd Fellows were enlisted in a venture to purchase the Tobacco Factory building in the Vinegar Hill section of the city for $800.00.[116] The ability and desire to create an economic network to support African American economic interests further attest to the economic philosophy guiding the organization. Since there are no records indicating the consummation of the purchase and in its September 26, 1877 meeting the Lodge considers "renting certain property of Mr. Bibb for $125.00 year," it can safely be concluded that this purchase was not consummated. Regardless of this outcome, the aggressive economic actions and philosophy of Jefferson Lodge may have proved an inspiration for its Masonic counterpart in Staunton, Mt. Zion Lodge #12, who

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[116] November 8, 15, 22 and December 20, 1876 meetings of Jefferson Lodge. *Minute Book Dated January 12, 1876 to December 1881.*

went on to purchase a building in that city for the sum of one thousand dollars seven years later in 1883.[117]

Members of Jefferson Lodge sought a wider audience for their nationalist economic actions. Their philosophy did not preclude them from seeking to touch on other segments of the African American and European American community of Charlottesville. The benefits of such a move were two fold: 1) The ability to raise capital for necessary projects would be more extensive if a larger number of individuals were courted and could reap some financial or other benefit from the undertaking and 2) The members of the Lodge would be able to demonstrate their financial expertise to the larger community if its leadership in other financial endeavors impacted a wider circle of individuals. To this end, some members of Jefferson Lodge took the lead in organizing the "Charlottesville Jubilee Singers." This group was styled in the manner of the famed Fisk Jubilee Singers who translated the culturally rich black spirituals into more than $150,000 in aid to Fisk University.[118] Capturing the momentum of this movement of presenting African American cultural forms to paying audiences, Jefferson Lodge members M. T. Lewis, Jason H. Ferguson, Fairfax Taylor, William Brown, and Thomas Cayton organized and promoted a Charlottesville group who presented this musical idiom to paying audiences in the area.[119] The financial goal of this effort was to aid in raising the necessary funds for erecting a building for Delevan Baptist Church. Integral in this

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[117] Deed of 1883.

[118] Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 167.

[119] Charlottesville, *The Jeffersonian*, April 17, 1878.

undertaking was the financial prowess of the Masonic network of Jefferson Lodge. To be sure, in leading this effort, the pastor of Delevan Baptist Church, M. T. Lewis, explicitly sought the assistance of his fraternity brothers to ensure the financial success of this venture. Commenting on an 1878 performance, the April 17th edition of *The Jeffersonian* contained the following notice:

> Jubilee Singers – We were greatly entertained Monday evening by the "Charlottesville Jubilee Singers." The performance was conducted with remarkable good taste, and we most cheerfully commend them for our citizens. They give another concert this evening. Don't fail to hear them, you will be fully repaid and will aid them in their effort to pay for their church.
>
> Below we give a list of the managers, which will ensure good order: Rev. M. T. Lewis, Jas. H. Ferguson, Fairfax Taylor and Wm. Brown, with Thos. Cayton as stage manager.[120]

This ringing endorsement no doubt aided the church in its building efforts. Moreover, by highlighting the leadership Lewis and others, these members of Jefferson Lodge demonstrated their financial expertise before the African American community and the larger white Charlottesville community.

Jefferson Lodge's articulation of the concept of the nation was expressed in a doubled manner. On one level, by adopting the name Jefferson, the Lodge recognized itself as heir to the heritage of the United States. As such, it inscribed the African American presence squarely in the founding of the nation and articulated the political and social claims to citizenship and equality for African Americans. The idea of the

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[120] Ibid.

Declaration of Independence that "All men are created equal" was thus extended to African Americans in the postemancipation period. In this act, the members of Jefferson Lodge appropriated and transformed the meanings of the rites of Freemasonry into the rights of citizenship. In tandem with this act was an African American nationalist stream of consciousness that was equally prominent in the articulations of nation by Jefferson Lodge. Cognizant of the economic limitations of the postemancipation period, Jefferson Lodge adopted the economic nationalism of the Grand Lodge in developing an elaborate financial infrastructure that was able to meet some of the capital requirements of members of the Lodge. These benefits were also extended to the larger African American community in Charlottesville not only for the possible economic benefits, but also as a demonstration of the vitality of such an economic philosophy in aiding in developing the African American community. In all, the ideas and ideals of the nation in the postemancipation period were part and parcel of the African American adoption and negotiation of the culture and institution of Freemasonry.

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Adopting the last half of Delany's text, "The Huts of America," as the title of this chapter serves as a critical reminder of the signifying practices that are an endemic part of the African American experience in constructing and articulating ideas and images of the nation. Just as Delany's Blake traveled throughout the United States and the Caribbean fomenting revolution in the "huts of America," I have argued in this chapter for a revolutionary interrogation of the enduring and rich system of meanings encoded in the cultural practices and adaptations of Freemasonry by various African Americans in

different times, different places, and different situations throughout the nineteenth century. The cultural formation of Freemasonry was central in these efforts in articulating and conveying a different sense of the nation – one which affirmed the worth, value, and dignity of African Americans. The culture of secrecy along with the symbols, language, and institution of Freemasonry were instrumental in the efforts of Gabriel, Delany, and the members of Jefferson Lodge in creating a framework and vision of the nation for African Americans. The actions of Gabriel and the literary depictions of Martin Delany remind us of the importance of Freemasonry – whether literal or metaphorical – in constructing alternative conceptions of the nation. The example of Jefferson Lodge encapsulates these practices in the literal adoption of the Freemasonry while rearticulating the idea of nation in light of the new social, political, and economic realities of the postemancipation period. Each of these examples can plausibly be read in a number of ways. What I have argued and sought to highlight by bringing these disparate events into a dialogue is the manner in which Freemasonry, in a constellation of various meanings, guises, and appropriations, has been utilized by African Americans in a constant negotiation and renegotiation of the contested terrain of American democracy. Indeed, if "the irony implicit in American democracy" is that African Americans "symbolize its most stringent testing and the possibility of its greatest freedom," an interrogation of the African American appropriation of the culture of Freemasonry can be a critical interpretative lens for understanding just how far the nation has traveled in making true its universal aims.[121]

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[121] Cited in Eddie Glaude, *Exodus!*, 167.

PROLOGUE

In a hushed, conspiratorial tone, Guitar gently slipped into his "race bag" and confessed the existence of a secret society to Milkman:

> There is a society. It's made up of a few men who are willing to take some risks. They don't initiate anything; they don't even choose. They are as indifferent as rain. But when a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by *their* law and *their* courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can. If the Negro was hanged, they hang; if a Negro was burnt, they burn; raped and murdered, they rape and murder. If they can. If they can't do it precisely in the same manner, they do it any way they can, but they do it. They call themselves the Seven Days. They are made up of seven men. Always seven and only seven. If one of them dies or leaves or is no longer effective, another is chosen. Not right away, because that kind of choosing takes time. But they don't seem to be in a hurry. Their secret is time. To take the time, to last. Not to grow; that's dangerous because you might become known. They don't write their names in toilet stalls or brag to women. Time and silence. Those are their weapons, and they go on forever.[1]

A visibly shook Milkman was clearly disturbed by Guitar's confession. The philosophy of "an eye for an eye" as manifested by the Seven Days – even in the face of social tyranny and oppression – offended Milkman's sensibilities. Milkman could not grasp, or rather, would not accept the rationale supporting Guitar's confession. But Guitar's did

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[1] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 154-155

not confess in hopes of receiving some form of psychic or spiritual solace. Nor did he reveal the existence of the Seven Days in order to seek the approval of Milkman. To be sure, the Seven Days was not a group that sought social acceptance or advocated positions or undertook actions to bring about social cohesion or societal transformation. Its existence, owing to a culture of "time and secrecy," is wedded to a larger culture of violence that encapsulates the life chances of African Americans. In the ensuing conversation and debate over the efficacy of the actions and rationale for the existence of the society, Guitar and Milkman, each a firm believer in his position, articulate what is a universal in the human condition – the search for justice in an unjust world.

The uncritical privileging of non-violence and the necessity of violent retribution, each as primary responses in bringing about racial justice in an anti-black racist society, are challenged in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. More importantly however, is the recognition that the conversation and ensuing debate between Guitar and Milkman engages an ever present political discourse on the efficacy of which possible and potential courses of action are most promising for African American social, political, and economic advancement. Morrison's rendering of this debate in her novel is but one moment in an unending quest in the search for an emancipatory politics that presents the possibility for African American cultural and social flourishing.[2] The tensions between the various competing positions in this political discourse are many. However, the constant that connects the disparate positions of individuals like Guitar and Milkman is the generative possibility to enact in African America an effective counterbalance to

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[2] For an incisive reading of the masculinist politics of the Seven Days, see Rolland Murray, "The Long Strut: *Song of Solomon* and the Emancipatory Limits of Black Patriarchy," *Callaloo* 22.1 (1999), 121-133.

assuage the limitations of African American agency. To this end, the debate between

Guitar and Milkman in *Song of Solomon* is one that is continually performed in the

unyielding effort by African Americans – both individually and collectively, in public

and in private, in the open and in secret – to choose their weapons, so that they may "go

on forever."

CHAPTER III

THE MODERNITY OF FREEMASONRY: CONSTRUCTING A POSTEMANCIPATION IDEOLOGY

"The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., and precisely men conditioned by the mode of production of their material life, by their material intercourse and its further development in the social and political structure."

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels[1]

"Every revolution must shake ancient beliefs, sap authority, and cloud shared ideas. So any revolution, to a greater or lesser extent, throws men back on themselves and opens to each man's view an almost limitless empty space."

Alexis de Tocqueville[2]

Anxiety permeated the South as the collapse of the system of chattel slavery and the advent of emancipation brought about the disturbing reality that with the freedom of the formerly enslaved there would be a new order of things. With the demise of the institution of slavery, the South would enter a critical conjuncture whereby the old ideological justifications that rested on the material circumstances of slavery would be fractured with the freedom of millions of African Americans. No aspect of southern (and northern) society would go unchanged in the face of such a massive shift in the political, economic, and social fortunes of the formerly enslaved population.

Certainly with the freedom of African Americans, the fraternal brotherhood of Freemasonry, once the preferred reserve of white Americans, would find it necessary to

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[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, 2 vols. (1845; Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 42.

[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, George Lawrence, trans., J. P. Mayer, ed., 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), II, 432.

(re)construct its ideological foundations in order to take account of this new reality.

European American Freemasons assembled under the Grand Lodge of Virginia were very

cognizant of the implications of this new reality:

> And when we see some of the Grand Lodges teaching that Masonry has politics,
> and her politics teach the equality of mankind and the support of the nationality of
> the United States, we have reason to fear that the canon of Masonry, which limits
> its benefits to the free-born, is through their Lodges to be set aside, and Masonry
> made an instrument to subvert all our social and governmental institutions.[3]

The Virginia Grand Lodge's anxiety over the possibility of Freemasonry being extended

to those other than "the free-born" was a subtle yet significant way of announcing that

with the freedom of African Americans there existed the very real and distinct possibility

that the ancient mysteries of the craft would be opened up to those who were not "free-

born." More importantly, with this transformation in the material condition of African

Americans along with the subsequent ideological import of "the equality of mankind,"

white Freemasons saw a clear and present danger for the old social and political order. If,

as white Freemasonry articulated through its ritual and philosophy, the fraternity united

the brotherhood of man, then the equality of African American men must be admitted if

they were able join the organization. If African American men were deemed as Masonic

equals, an avenue would be opened for other forms of social and political equality, ones

that hitherto had been denied African Americans and served as the foundation for the

existing social hierarchy. Thus, the ideological underpinnings of Freemasonry contained

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[3] S. S. Baxter, *Freemasonry and the War: Report of the Committee Under the Resolution of 1862* (Richmond: Chas. H. Wynne, 1865), .

the very real possibility of undermining the material conditions of the social, political, and economic arrangements of a society that viewed African Americans as unworthy heirs to freedom and equality, not to mention fraternity with European Americans – even in a brotherhood that espoused love for all mankind.

The expressed sentiment of the Virginia Grand Lodge brings into stark relief the relationship between the ideological dimensions of Freemasonry and the material foundations of a social order that denigrated African American life and culture. It was evidently clear to this group of Freemasons that the massive dislocations of society and economy as a result of the Civil War necessitated a revision in the ideological orientation of their fraternity. With millions of black bodies free and challenging the boundaries of white rule, the fundamental relation between the ideological foundations of white hegemony and the social and political organization of the South was forever changed. The Virginia Grand Lodge was forced to take stock of this change since to do otherwise would jeopardize the ability of these Freemasons to respond in a manner that perpetuated their interests in a social order that placed them at its apex. What these Freemasons recognized and took explicit interest in was the reality of the changing material circumstances of life within the United States and its *contradictory* relationship with the ideological foundations of their fraternal order. Although not articulated, what was needed was a (re)organization and (re)presentation of the Virginia Freemasons' ideology that took into account the changed circumstances of the social and political order while preserving vestiges of the main themes and understandings of the brotherhood.

The dialectical relationship between ideology and the material conditions of society touched upon by the Virginia Grand Lodge is an excellent example of how a

particular ideological discourse is informed by the conditions of existence. In her much celebrated essay "Ideology and Race in American History," noted historian Barbara Fields argues against the tendency to treat ideology as static and unchanging. Instead she posits a nuanced understanding of how ideology moves in the flux and floatsum of history: "There would be no great problem if, when things changed, the vocabulary died away as well. But far the more common situation in the history of ideologies is that instead of dying, the same vocabulary attaches itself, unnoticed, to new things."[4] Fields' argument highlights the enduring character of ideologies and the manner in which they travel in history. She continues her argument with the prescient observation highlighting the ability of ideologies to graft themselves onto new formations and configurations all the while sustaining the basic principles they uphold and employing the same language.

In the conjuncture of the postemancipation South, various racial, social, and political ideologies took stock of the fact that the institution of chattel slavery was no longer a part of the fabric of the United States. To realize this radical transformation of United States social and civic life was, in effect, to reorient oneself to a fundamental and thoroughgoing change in American social relations and political economy. As Fields astutely reminds us, new ideological positioning must be critically informed by new material realities:

> Take the case of an antebellum planter whose sense of racial superiority over the
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> slaves embraced the belief that they could not survive – would literally die –
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> outside the tutelage of the master class. Emancipation was bound to change such

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[4] Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 153.

an individual's ideology fundamentally, even if it failed to change the language in which he expressed that ideology. He could not fail to notice that the freedmen were not dying out, either figuratively or literally. Whether or not he took explicit cognizance of the fact, his consciousness would reflect the reality that what had once seemed a necessary and immutable relation – slavery – had now in fact changed. . . .If ideology is a vocabulary for interpreting social experience, and thus both shapes and is shaped by that experience, it follows that even the "same" ideology must convey different meanings to people having different social experiences.[5]

Averring the historical tendency to see ideology as qualitatively distinct from the material conditions of existence, Fields' argument privileges an understanding of ideology as a historically contingent discursive context. Such a relationship was not lost on the Virginia Grand Lodge. By highlighting the connection between the ideological underpinnings of the fraternity and the material conditions that were being transformed in light of the Civil War, the Virginia Grand Lodge avoided the tragic fallacy of collapsing the ideological and the material. But what was the relation of those African American Freemasons who were on the threshold of freedom and delighted to witness the emergence of a new order of things? What was their response to the postemancipation context? In other words, with the collapse of the slave regime, how did the material conditions of emancipation shape the ideological positioning of African American Freemasons?

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[5] Ibid, 153, 155.

The questions raised by connecting material conditions of existence to the ideological articulations of African American Freemasons present a crucial opportunity for interrogating how and in what manner ideological production is related to the material circumstances of a particular group. By linking ideology and materiality, we develop a critical connection that hedges against the tendency to abstract ideology from social, political, and economic forces. We also avoid producing portraits of static and reified streams of thought non-responsive to external stimuli. In a sense, the evasion of such a critical interrogation allows such thought systems to be articulated as if they are self-evident and natural. Historical actors thus become the human embodiment of pre-configured, already existing ideological positions. Ideology in this configuration is able to transcend the mundane boundaries of the world and exist on the level of a Platonic ideal – unscathed by the "dirtiness" of history. The implications for an approach that relates the material and the ideological has crucial significance for understanding the manifold ways in which African American Freemasons staked out particular ideological positions. Moreover, by relating them dialectically, we are better positioned to incorporate seemingly disparate expressions without diminishing the relative import each may have in aiding us in grappling with the contingencies and ironies of history. To undertake such a rigorous process is necessarily complex and, at times, a convoluted task. But in order to grasp the intricacies of the ideological dimensions of African American Freemasonry, it is a journey well worth the effort.

My primary aim in this chapter is to present an analysis and interpretation of the ideological dimension of African American Freemasonry in the postemancipation period by closely examining several aspects of the actions and historical record of the members

of Jefferson Lodge. This presentation reads these actions and historical records as texts in and through which the ideological positions of the fraternity were articulated and maintained. I will argue that the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge construct an ideology deeply informed by a desire to redeem the black body from a history of denigration. Such a position is dialectically related to the conditions of postemancipation society that sought to continue the practice of policing and controlling the black body all the while scripting and associating negative meanings to the black body. The argument advanced in this investigation integrates the ideological articulations of Jefferson Lodge and the material conditions of postemancipation Virginia in a dialectical relationship so as to expose the relative impact of each on the other. In this respect, running parallel to my argument is a discussion of the context of the social, political, and economic reorganization of postemancipation society in the South in general and Virginia in particular.

This chapter highlights three aspects of postemancipation society that, in my opinion, are crucial to understanding the ideology of the African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge in this period: 1) Violence – both physical and symbolic; 2) Surveillance; and 3) Modernity. By emphasizing these themes, I opt for an interpretive strategy that underscores the influence of these particular forces on the ideological articulations of African American Freemasons in the postemancipation era. I do not intend to present a determinist logic whereby violence, surveillance, and modernity dictate Jefferson Lodge's ideology. Instead what I seek to offer is a nuanced understanding of how these forces are inseparable from the ideological positions taken by the organization in an emerging societal order that marginalized African American life

and culture. In the end, what I hope to offer is a new understanding of the relationship

between the ideological and the material as expressed and understood through the

expressions of African American Freemasons assembled at Jefferson Lodge.

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The relationship between the ideological articulations of African American Freemasons

and the material conditions of postemancipation Virginia that deeply informs this

analysis draws on the work of noted literary and cultural theorist Raymond Williams. In

his extended meditation on ideology in his classic *Marxism and Literature*, Williams

presents a broadly conceived conception of ideology:

(i)   a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group;

(ii) a system of illusory beliefs – false ideas or false consciousness – which can

be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge;

(iii) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas.[6]

Recognizing the relative worth of ideology on Marxist discourse, Williams frames his

understanding of ideology broadly by referencing its social dimensions and determinants.

This move enables him to point to the manner in which ideological production is part and

parcel of other social processes and not a speculative, detached metaphilosophical

discourse. Williams' particular production of ideology as distinguished by this collusion

of the material and the ideological is critical for our investigation. His work provides us

with an orienting framework through which we can relate ideology and materiality. By

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[6] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 55.

undercutting the basis for ideology to be viewed as unscathed by the cultural and social

processes of a given context, Williams offers us a new perspective to view and

investigate the plethora of ways in which the ideological and material reinforce one

another. Moreover, he provides us with the requisite tools to interrogate how these two

areas relate particularly as they pertain to our analysis of African American Freemasonry

in Charlottesville, Virginia. In this regard, what is of chief importance for our purpose is

what can be termed as Williams' first and third positions. Thus, our exploration will be

marked by an intense focus on how this group of African American Freemasons created

certain ideological positions that enable and empower them to confront the complexities

of the postemancipation period.

By focusing on the process whereby ideological meanings are produced and

articulated by a particular group we have to be especially cognizant of the context in

which these articulations develop. In the postemancipation context, African Americans

faced a multifaceted assault on their assertion of rights and privileges opened up to them

in light of their freedom and their recognition as citizens within the political economy of

the United States.[7] The various manifestations of anti-black violence that occurred in a

web of passive acceptance and aggressive conflict that characterized the

postemancipation landscape – lynching, rape, mob action, white supremacist literature,

denial of rights and duties of citizenship for African Americans – effectively legitimated

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[7] See Donald G. Nieman, ed., *Black Freedom/White Violence. 1865-1900* (New York: Garland, 1994); Michael Perman, "Counter Reconstruction: The Role of Violence in Southern Redemption," in Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., eds., *The Facts of Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of John Hope Franklin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); George Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); Stewart E. Tolnay, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

and codified the moral and social efficacy of violence as an acceptable form of social control of the millions of black bodies that now were free.

Stephen Kantrowitz offers an insightful description of the boundaries of violence that defined this era:

> In any case, armed collective action, with or without formal legal sanction, had been a crucial aspect of white men's responsibilities as citizens. . . .If abolition were forced upon it, this society would immediately collapse: former slaves would wander the land, idle except to plunder. This, however, would provoke a reaction among "the people" that would, for [James Henry] Hammond, again demonstrate white southern superiority. "'[A]rmed police' . . . would immediately spring into existence" through a sort of social spontaneous generation. They would know and do their duty as citizens without the need of formal sanction because they were defending their social order as surely as any officially constituted patrol. Before long, "the African race would be exterminated, or reduced again to Slavery."[8]

Kantrowitz reminds us that violence was a ubiquitous component in the postemancipation period. As Kantrowitz and other historians make clear, violence was not ancillary to the postemencipation order but an integral component in the philosophy and everyday practice of a system intent on extending white hegemony.[9] To make this observation

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[8] Stephen Kantrowitz, "One Man's Mob Is Another Man's Militia: Violence, Manhood, and Authority in Reconstruction South Carolina," in Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, eds., *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 68.

[9] The theme of violence is found in most literature concerning the postemancipation period. The approach adopted here of making violence *central* to the story of Reconstruction is most critically informed by my

does not negate the efforts of African Americans to carve out a space in this order and

articulate the worth, value, and dignity of African American humanity. Nor does it seek

to "go imperial," if you will, over other equally legitimate facets of the postemancipation

order. What I seek to do by highlighting and emphasizing the pervasiveness of violence

in the postemancipation order is to begin to write violence back in – not in a trite fashion

as the occasional lynching or rape that is an anomaly to the "promise" of biracial

democracy – as a systematic and complex apparatus central to the maintenance of a

racialist and racist social order. Indeed, the position I am advancing resonates with the

argument posited by Gilles Vandal in his comprehensive study of violence in Louisiana,

"A thorough examination of the patterns of violence and the various factors underlying

that violence is important if we are to reach a better understanding of social changes

affecting Louisiana during the troubled post-Civil War era."[10] By adopting an approach

that emphasizes violence, we begin to recognize the extensive effects of violence as it is

(re)organized during this historical conjuncture and the manner in which this

(re)organization conditioned particular ideological responses from African American

Freemasons.[11]

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reading of W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (1935; New York: Touchstone, 1995); and Leon Litwack, *Trouble In Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

[10] Gilles Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866-1884* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 5.

[11] Scott Nelson situates Klan violence "in the context of the reshuffling of markets and masculinity" in the postemancipation era. See Scott Nelson, "Livestock, Boundaries, and Public Space in Spartanburg: African American Men, Elite Women, and the Spectacle of Conjugal Relations," in Martha Hodes, ed., *Sex. Love. Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 313-327.

Closely related to the issue of violence is the recognition of surveillance as a crucial strut in the emerging postemancipation order. Frank Donner has recognized the importance of surveillance in the political sphere of twentieth century America. He argues, "The surveillance of dissent is an institutional pillar of our political order, a mode of governance."[12] Utilizing his insights in the postemancipation period, we realize that the contours of a violent anti-black racist and racialist societal order were controlled and patrolled by a surveilling civil and political system that rationalized white hegemony on the basis and distinction of proper racial order. In this nexus, racial markers of difference were not only inscribed on the body but were reinforced through the national, state, and local legislative and juridical apparatuses. This process was instrumental in creating an ontological Othering that forced an understanding of African American humanity as completely different than European American humanity. In this vein, surveillance became a vital and necessary coercive force in the cultural and political fields of the postemancipation South. Through a complex surveillance apparatus the ontological Others produced through the racial markers of difference could be effectively accounted for and appropriate measures could be undertaken to curtail actions that were deemed subversive or out of bounds in the emerging socio-political order. The newly freed African American body was subject to the continual surveilling gaze of white America. Surveillance was vital in the postemancipation period to effectively account for the presence or absence of the newly freed African American body.

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[12] Frank Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York: Knopf, 1980), xii. See also Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *"Seeing Red": Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998).

To assume that surveillance is a neutral enterprise and operates purely on the level of observation and documentation is to lose a critical dimension of the term. In contrast to this commonplace understanding, I will argue throughout this chapter for a renewed attention to and highlight the significance of the manner in which surveilling practices and modes of operations were crucial in the transformation and (re)invention of an anti-black racialist and racist social order. In his influential study *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault argues:

> The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce *effects of power*, and *in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible.*[13]

What Foucault touches on are the mechanisms that extend the social reach of legitimate and legitimating institutions that seek to normalize social actors who express ideas, attitudes, and behaviors that are deemed illegitimate. Foucault's position provides a significant perspective for our understanding of surveillance in the postemancipation United States in that it allows us to understand how in the absence of the disciplining and coercive institution of chattel slavery with its elaborate system of surveillance – slave patrols, legislation and juridical coding of the institution, social and economic marking of slaves, plantation management, etc. – a new surveillance regime is (re)organized in order to maintain the limits and conditions of African American life in the face of the massive shift from enslaved to free. The argument put forward by Vincente L. Rafael with

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[13] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alex Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 170-171.

reference to the colonial context of the Philippines is applicable to the situation of

African Americans in the postemancipation South:

> Whether it was in the area of public order or public health, education or elections,
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> incarceration or commerce, surveillance sustained the articulation of colonial rule
>
> on both the ideological and practical levels. By rendering visible the subjects of
>
> colonization, surveillance set the limits of their identities within the borders of the
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> colonial state.[14]

By recognizing the technologies, practices and logics of surveillance, we are also

provided with the ability to understand in light of this coercive regime, how and why

African American Freemasons embed critical counter meanings and values in a

postemancipation corporeal ideology designed to combat anti-black racialist and racist

practices while simultaneously projecting conditions of possibility for African American

cultural flourishing. Moreover, it attunes our attention to the logics and operations of

power and its effects on the various ideological expressions scripted onto the black body

as adopted and promoted by African American Freemasons.

If violence and surveillance are taken as essential factors in understanding the

ideological productions of African American Freemasons in the postemancipation period,

then the wider context in which these two factors must be ensconced is modernity.

Conceptually, modernity is a rather slippery notion that is variously and vigorously

contested along lines of chronology, geography, gender, race, class, and status. "The

complexity," philosopher Kwame Gyekye opines, "seems to spring from, among other

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[14] Vincente L. Rafael, "White Love: Surveillance and Nationalist Resistance in the U.S. Colonization of the Philippines," in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 187.

things, the fact that modernity is essentially a cultural phenomenon, culture itself being a

complex and all-engulfing concept. . . ."[15] These differences and complexities

notwithstanding, to enter the postemancipation landscape and interrogate the ideological

production and articulation of a group of African American Freemasons is to necessarily

grapple with this critical construct. To this end, my understanding of modernity – loosely

defined as "the ideas, principles, and ideals covering a whole range of human activities

that have underpinned Western life and thought since the seventeenth century" – stems

from the recognition of several essential features of this phenomenon.[16] These features

include the racialization of human populations, the construction and emergence of the

individual, constructions of moral prescriptions of gender, social, political, economic

status associated with the division of land, labor and capital, the constitution of sacred

and secular spaces, and most importantly the underlying principle and fundamental value

placed in the idea of being modern.[17] These features and others cohered in particular

configurations in the postemancipation South to shape various cultural formations and

institutions that aided or impeded African Americans in navigating this contested terrain.

In this regard, I think it is extremely important to place the forces of violence and

surveillance within the larger context of modernity to suggest and analyze how and in

what manner the material conditions of the African American Freemasons in Jefferson

Lodge reveals the ideological proclivities of this group of men as they sought to position

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[15] Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 264.

[16] Ibid.

[17] James Brewer Stewart makes a significant contribution to the discussion of modernity within the racialized political economy of the United States. See James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790-1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (Spring, 1998), 181-217.

themselves as modern, as civilized, and as humans in the postemancipation world. By

fleshing out the relationship between the ideological and the material in this context, I

think we will open up new understandings that will illuminate how this group of African

American Freemasons exercised their personal and collective will in asserting African

American membership in a newly (re)constituted American democracy.

This account of the ideological perspectives of a group of African American

Freemasons in Charlottesville in the postemancipation era does not depict and analyze the

ideal relations of this historical moment so prominently captured in the heuristic "New

South." The model adopted here does not privilege the perspective of the period

following the Civil War as a *tabla rasa* for social, political, and economic

(re)construction. The idealism underpinning the phrase "New South" fails to recognize

and give voice to the *always already* violent social, political, and economic relations

allied with an elaborate system of surveillance that policed the modern, racialized

political economy of the South. Indeed, as one Southern newspaper opined, "This 'New

South' which is creating such a furor in the North is but the old South redeliver[ed] and

equipped with the modern *weapons* suitable to its present circumstances."[18] To be sure,

this line of investigation is not premised on a brash rehearsal of Wilbur Cash's "proto-

Dorian convention" thesis nor does it seek to present the South as an unchanging social

landscape. This attempt is marked by its pivotal tendency to problematize the stark "Old

South – New South" binary by suggesting possible points of correspondence and the

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[18] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, April 10, 1891. Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Knopf, 1941). See also Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970). For an overview of the historiography investigating the Old South – New South dichotomy, see James C. Cobb, "Does *Mind* No Longer Matter? The South, The Nation, and *The Mind of the South*, 1941-1991, *Journal of Southern History*, LVII.4 (November, 1991), 681-718.

response of African American Freemasons to these *contingent* continuities. To this end, noted philosopher Charles Mills offers the most succinct and instructive theoretical articulation informing this position:

> [A] visitor might conclude that all people have generally tried to live up to the norm but, given inevitable human frailty, have sometimes fallen short. But this conclusion is, in fact, simply false. Racism and racially structured discrimination have not been *deviations* from the norm; they have *been* the norm, not merely in the sense of de facto statistical distribution patterns but, as I emphasized at the start, in the sense of being formally codified, written down and proclaimed *as such*.[19]

By investigating the ideological positions of African American Freemasons within the context of the material conditions of society, we are better positioned to understand why certain positions were advanced, why others receded, why some options were more available than others, and more importantly, why certain influences and tendencies emerged in light of particular power arrangements and hierarchies. As David Theo Goldberg reminds us, "Particular conceptual systems signify in specific ways, encode values that shape thought in giving voice, even silently, to their speakers."[20] More significantly, the analytic apparatus employed in this endeavor is, in my opinion, better able to articulate the influences of violence, surveillance, and modernity are not marginal to African American ideological production. What this process develops and

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[19] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 93.

[20] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 9.

deploys is a conceptual scheme that highlights a group of African American Freemasons

power to command their world even in the face of some of its most formidable and

pervasive obstacles and forces. It places their social subjectivities within a complex

nexus that highlights the conditions and possibility for responding to and resisting the

overdetermining aspects of an anti-black racist and racialist order. By mapping the

interstices of the relationship between the issues of violence, surveillance, modernity, and

the ideological constructions of the African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge we

will thus reveal, to appropriate the words of Michel de Certeau, "the infinitesimal

procedures that have remained unprivileged by history."[21]

II

Three years after the conclusion of the Civil War another call to arms was announced by

the editors of the Charlottesville based newspaper *The Chronicle*. After detailing three

illegal acts by persons unknown but *believed* to be black, the editors rhetorically asks its

readers, "Is it not time that a Vigilance Committee, or a Committee of Detection and

Protection was formed by all orderly citizens?[22] The task of maintaining law and order

was, in the opinion of the editors, a matter of general concern for "all orderly citizens."

By encoding race and respectability in the language of citizenship, the editors entrusted

the white public with the rights and duty to organize itself in order to curtail future acts of

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[21] Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 191.

[22] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, September 1, 1868. My reading of this event was influenced by Stewart W. Tonlay, Glenn Deane, E. M. Beck, "Vicarious Violence: Spatial Effects on Southern Lynchings, 1890-1919," *American Journal of Sociology* 102.3 (November, 1996), 788-815.

aggression that transcended the strict boundaries of law and custom. Such an organization could claim legitimate access to police powers in curtailing the black public menace. Indeed, a prominently placed news item two columns over from the editorial opinion reinforced the necessity of such an action. Running under the title "The Rains in Georgia – The Campaign – Negroes Drilling," the newspaper recites a disturbing turn of natural, political, and social events from Augusta, Georgia:

> The heavy and continuous rains are injuring the cotton in this State.
>
> The negroes are arming and drilling in this and other sections of the State
>
> The Democrats are making a vigorous campaign and seem confident of carrying the state by a large majority.
>
> The negroes are extremely indignant at the effort being made to unseat the colored members of the Legislator.[23]

With "negroes" arming and drilling and taking such an "indignant" stance at what is rightly the property and preserve of whites only, it was taken to be as unnatural a sign of the order of things as the "heavy and continuous rains" that were destroying the cotton crop. The campaigning of the Democrats in Georgia is linked in this article with the site of "negroes" arming and drilling and acting "indignant" at efforts to "oust colored members of the Legislator." By linking the "disturbing" images of African Americans "arming and drilling" and legislating over whites throughout the entire state of Georgia, the publishers of *The Chronicle*, whether consciously or unconsciously, were able to subtly communicate the consequences of not taking action in light of the events that

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[23] Ibid.

prompted their call for a "Viligance Committee." Readers were thus empowered to contemplate the question, "Are the actions of the negroes of Virginia just the fulfillment of what was predicted in the decade preceding the Civil War that black "freedom was but the license to be as brutal as their nature dictated?"[24] What would happen in Charlottesville if, in the absence of a "Vigilance Committee," negroes of the town continued to flout the law and plunder at will? Such actions, such an unnatural order of things disturbed the sensibilities of self-professed law abiding white citizens. To be sure, the ideology underpinning the exhortation of the editors of the Charlottesville newspaper did not fall upon deaf ears.

In postemancipation Virginia, the idea that certain ideological positions like the one advanced by the editors of the *Chronicle* had a stake in the material conditions of the emerging societal order was one that was equally held by the African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge. Opposed to the interests that coalesced around and fueled the caustic editorial, these African American Freemasons had a critical stake in extending an African American presence in prominent positions throughout all facets of the emerging Southern order. Just as the editors assembled their resources to combat what they felt was an affront to their dignity and honor, African American Freemasons mobilized their cultural, political, and economic reserves to counteract the calls for "Vigilance Committees" and other popular mobilizations intent on restricting African American life chances. It can be said that they welcomed the ideas espoused and expressed by the Lincoln University graduate and Albemarle County based African American lawyer and poet R. C. O. Benjamin who argued in verse:

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[24] Norfolk, *The American Beacon*. September 4, 1852.

Oh! Ye men of color, wake to glory!

Too long have you been the serfs of wealth;

Too long have you been their willing slaves,

And the fruits of your toil they've got by stealth.

Oh, ye noblemen of nature, claim your own,

And no longer submit to tyrant's rule;

'Tis your labor and your strength that made the wealth;

Yet you starve in adversity's cold school.

Then awake to your rights, and don your armor,

And ne'er longer be trampled in the dust

By the rings and bosses who rob you

To gratify their taste and sensuous lust.

They misnamed this place a land of freedom,

Yet command you to submit to your cursed lot;

But the coward who bows down to class oppression

Is a dastard in your ranks, and should be shot.

Oh! Ye men of color, do your duty;

The wretches who oppress you fear your might;

If you stand like men, and fight the battle,

Grand victory will crown your noble fight.[25]

Benjamin's poem challenges the "disturbing" image of blacks arming and drilling with the image of black men as armor clad warriors fighting for dignity and respect. In this "noble fight," only those who refuse to fight are worthy of scorn and ridicule. It is a dramatic reversal of the sentiments expressed in the pages of *The Chronicle* and suggests a confrontation between competing ideologies of the place, position, and person of the newly freed African Americans. Benjamin complicates the particular production of the "negro as problem" as presented in *The Chronicle* by referencing the "duty" of black men to fight against tyranny and class oppression while advancing African American interests. While the actions of Jefferson Lodge were generally less than the martial ones articulated in Benjamin's poetry, the black Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge nevertheless advocated and embodied an ideological posture that sought to promote their interests in the postemancipation world. Accordingly, they charted a course through the contested postemancipation terrain that would enable them to confront authority and resist the deleterious effects of a social hierarchy predicated on black subordination.

The pronouncement by *The Chronicle* and the subsequent response by the members of Jefferson Lodge are linked not only on an abstract level relating the ideological to the material, but on the level of the competing and contesting ideologies of corporeality. In other words, what unites and separates these two discourses is the

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[25] Robert C. O. Benjamin, *Poetic Gems* (Charlottesville: Peck & Allan, 1883), 2-3. The March 30, 1883 edition of *The Chronicle* provides the following biographical information and report on Benjamin:

A COLORED LAWYER FOR ALBEMARLE – R. C. O. Benjamin, a young colored man, referred to in complimentary terms in the Wheeling papers, as "lawyer, orator and poet" has been in Charlottesville for several weeks, and announces his purpose to located permanently with a view to the practice of law and the publication of a newspaper. He will apply for license next Monday. The young barrister says he is a graduate of Lincoln University, and has for some time past been teaching in the Southern States.

contested nature of the black body. What the editors of *The Chronicle* feared was, in essence, the presence of uncontrolled black bodies. *The Chronicle* scripts the black body as the virtual embodiment of lawlessness, thus creating a basis for advocating external – understood as white – control. *The Chronicle* pursues a line of reasoning that posits black bodies as possible, potential, and probable sources of violence and unlawfulness that must be put under the control of the proper authorities. In this case, the entire body of the white community of "orderly citizens" was formally charged with this duty. As in slavery, so to would it be in freedom that the ultimate control of the black body would be vested in white hands, albeit organized in a new form that evolved from the "Slave Patrol" to the "Vigilance Committee."

For African American Freemasons in Jefferson Lodge however, the (re)scripting of the black body was developed and reinforced in concert with an ideology of redeeming the black body. The men who came together and formed Jefferson Lodge must have understood that the culture and institution of Freemasonry offered a highly prized vehicle to promote such an ideology of redemption through its rituals, organization, and principles. As a fraternal form with a long history in the United States and the larger Western world, it was an order that would have easily resonated within the larger, white Charlottesville community. As Stephen Bullock has so ably demonstrated in his work on Freemasonry in the Early Republic, this fraternal order long held a place of prominence in the social order of the United States.[26] With such a legacy, the culture and institution

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[26] See Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

of Freemasonry presented a prime opportunity to counter the *spectre* of uncontrolled and uncontrollable black bodies.

The members who formed Jefferson Lodge offered a counter script for the black body – one of the controlled, principled, moral, and upright black body. The black body that underwent the fraternal ritual in Freemasonry could provide solace to the anxiety ridden white psyche. As Freemasonry was employed in the post-Revolutionary setting by European American men to (re)present the ideal embodiment of the exemplary citizen, African Americans would employ this cultural form to (re)present the black body as a member of the social and civic polity invested with "honor as well as the larger values that upheld society."[27] As male bodies became ritually pure and upright through the initiation and membership in the order, black male bodies assembled in this fraternal order could counter the prevailing sentiment of the black body as a social and political problem. Through Freemasonry, the black body could be seen in a positive light – as a contributing and respectful member of a new social and civic order.[28]

In projecting this ideology of redemption and communicating a public meaning commensurate with this new understanding of the black body, Freemasonry offered African American men a strategic opportunity to engender this postemancipation ideal of the black body as masculine. In undergoing a ritual death and rebirth through the degrees

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[27] Steven C. Bullock, "'Sensible Signs': The Emblematic Education of Post-Revolutionary Freemasonry," in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 181.

[28] On the relationship of rituals of Freemasonry and the body see Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

of Freemasonry, the members of Jefferson Lodge were able to invest in themselves and subsequent African American initiates the authority to reproduce representative black bodies as upright black men. These representative black male bodies were produced and (re)produced in and through the ritual space of Jefferson Lodge to serve as surrogates for and to counter the problematic status of all other black bodies. The representative black male body of Freemasonry would now stand as the normative ideal for all African American bodies. The singular black male body of the Freemason would stand in place of, for example, the deviant and lascivious black female body, the criminally prone black male body, and/or the unwise and subservient black body.

The ideology of redemption underpinning this process would also produce an additive effect – the control over and (re)production of representative black bodies would now be invested in the black Masonic male.[29] The defective body produced in the womb of the woman was replaced by the upright body produced in the corrective womb of the Lodge. This process was an integral component in the (re)formation and (re)production of African American patriarchal authority in postemancipation African American society. By regulating the "reproductive" authority of African American women, the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge were positioned to exert patriarchal power in determining and legitimating who could be a representative black body. Moreover, with a selective process of membership, African American Freemasons were also positioned to claim authority for their "reproduction rights." In short, placed within the social body of

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[29] My argument here draws a number of works, particularly Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Robert F. Reid-Pharr, *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House, and the Black American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Claudia Tate, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Freemasonry, the African American Freemason Lodge became the reproductive organ

that could produce a redeemed black male body. The initially flawed black male body

born of a woman would now become the redeemed black male body born of a man. To

go in tandem with the new life offered by emancipation, there was a (re)scripting of the

processes of life itself – from woman to man, from deviant to normative, from flawed to

redeemed – through the rituals and institution of African American Freemasonry.[30]

In constructing this bodily ideal predicated on the notion of redemption, African

American Freemasons connected with larger public affirmations of a nineteenth century

social logic that held "personal regeneration as an antidote to the disharmony that

characterized their society."[31] The appeal of this new bodily ideal would strike a cord

throughout the fraternity in Virginia. As a critical rhetoric such leading Masonic

spokesmen as R. J. Morgan, Worshipful Master of Covenant Lodge in Lynchburg,

Virginia would employ this ideology of redemption. In a gathering of African American

Freemasons from across the state, Morgan employed this ideology to appeal to an

audience of African Americans assembled on the Masonic celebration of St. John the

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[30] See Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, 2–13 and 119-126. I must state, despite my points of agreement with Carnes on this aspect, I reject his perspective denying the validity of psychoanalytic theories for historical investigations. His assertion, "Either psychoanalytical explanation is credible; because neither can be disproved or confirmed, however, they are of little use for this study," hints of a overdetermining "scientism" and quest for an objective regime of truth that validates, and to a critical degree, places his historical investigation on the level of history as science. Moreover, it fails to highlight the speculative theoretical aspects that pervade his historical narrative. See Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, 12-13. On my argument, see for example Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Thomas S. Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[31] Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 72.

Baptist on June 24, 1869. In his brief opening remarks, Worshipful Master Morgan

welcomed those gathered with the following words:

> Brothers, Ladies and Gentle, -- You see before you the representatives of the
>
> Union Grand Lodge of the State of Virginia, of Ancient, Free and Accepted
>
> Masons, and the visiting brethren, belonging to the Craft. They are the guests of
>
> Covenant Lodge, No. 8, and of our wives, daughters, brothers and sisters, who,
>
> through me, extend to them a cordial welcome. Covenant Lodge was dispensated
>
> in June, 1867, and warranted in October of the same year. We commenced with
>
> seven, as pioneers of the glorious principles of Masonry amid the hills of
>
> Lynchburg, and among the people who had long been in darkness, and who with
>
> the mellow light of freedom, and with minds unclouded, eagerly asked for that
>
> light which alone could come from the East; so that now, obeying all the ancient
>
> land-marks of the Craft, we can safely and proudly point to the Covenant as a
>
> monument of prosperity and the care which has been taken with material
>
> composing it.[32]

With these opening words, Morgan inscribes on the body of the African American

Freemason the redemption ethic that lies at the heart of the ideology of redeeming the

black body. Morgan invests in the body of the African American Freemason the singular

ability to rescue black Lynchburg from its period in "long darkness." With heroic flair,

the body of the African American Freemason – "with the mellow light of freedom, and

with minds unclouded" – becomes the beacon of hope and inspiration for the entire

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[32] *Masonic Addresses delivered at the Celebration of the Anniversary of St. John the Baptist before Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A.F. & A.M. at Lynchburg. Thursday, June 24, 1869* (Lynchburg: Schaffter & Bryant Printers, 1869), 6.

African American community in Lynchburg. As such, the African American Freemason redeems the black body of slavery and now through the culture and institution of Freemasonry stands as the embodiment of the black corporeal ideal.

The ocular metaphors interspersed throughout his remarks highlight the emphasis on the necessity for the visual manifestation of an ideology of redemption to gain critical cultural capital within the postemancipation world. In a social economy where appearance equaled meaning, it was crucial for African American Freemasons to reorganize this equation to expose a new meaning of the black body. The formerly enslaved sought recognition as human in this economy of sight. This is a critical reversal of their status as vehicles of work in the slave economy and as property as defined by the juridical and legislative apparatus of the nation-state. The new corporeal ideal announced by African American Freemasons' ideology of redeeming the black body and the transformation they sought to effect was predicated on the ability of other African Americans and the wider society to see its benefits in constructing new black male bodies. Morgan underscores this by acknowledging "the care which has been taken with material composing it." In recognizing the proper materials needed to construct the new black body facilitated by the culture and institution of Freemasonry, African American Freemasons become the veritable architects in constructing a new bodily ideal – one that was sensitive to the exigencies pervasive in the larger society about black bodies and corrective of the negative connotations that fueled these anxieties. The new black body produced through African American Freemasonry would traverse the various impositions of the postemancipation order in an effort to empower representative African American bodies to inhabit all social, political, and economic spaces in society.

To enact and project this ideological perspective to the wider public required more than just grafting the text of Morgan's speech over the text in *The Chronicle*. What was needed was not solely a textual counter to the message of *The Chronicle* but much more importantly, a physical manifestation of this counter ideology that demonstrated a new black body commensurate with the new social, political, and economic spaces that would be inhabited by African Americans in the context of postemancipation. The ideology of redemption of the black body required the assembling of a cadre of individuals who would accept the charge of organizing and sustaining an African American lodge of Freemasons. Through the ritual performance of this new script, the black body could be redeemed not only on the stage of the Lodge, but also in the wider theatre of social and civic society in Charlottesville. In this regard, those who came together to form this Masonic organization embody this ideological perspective. They would not only become representative black bodies, but they themselves would be representative of the progress and potential of black bodies in this new social landscape. The *spectre* of uncontrolled black bodies would be countered by the *reality* of the controlled and principled black bodies of Freemasonry.

III

Projecting and promoting this ideology of redemption in Jefferson Lodge would fall to a class of black men who were variously businessmen, artisans, builders, service workers, and religious leaders.[33] According to the 1870 Census, the founders of this Lodge hailed

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[33] An excellent analysis of the status dynamics of a southern African American community is Orville Vernon Burton, "African American Status and Identity in a Postbellum Community: An Analysis of the Manuscript Census Returns," *Agricultural History* 72.2 (Spring, 1998), 213-241.

from all parts of Albemarle county and represented a wide cross section of the black male

population – from field hands to artisans, illiterate and literate, black and mulatto,

formerly enslaved and free.[34] The first to lead this group of representative black bodies

was William Brown. At 26 years of age, Brown was a relatively young man to be chosen

to lead Jefferson Lodge.[35] Holding the position of Worshipful Master from 1869-1875,

Brown was a well-known barber at the University of Virginia. Although the 1870

Census shows that he could read but not write, it can be inferred that his position at the

University conferred a level of prestige and status on him that was beneficial to the

organization. The connection of the leader of an African American lodge of Freemasons

with an educational institution held in high esteem locally, not to mention its legacy with

Jefferson, no doubt added a necessary gloss to an ideology of redemption for the black

body. The connection of a black body with this institution of education designed for

personal and communal improvement would augment an institution with an ideology

predicated on the improvement of the self. Holding such a position, along with being

For a description of Charlottesville, see William Edward Webb, *Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Virginia, 1865-1900* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1955). On African American life during this period, see John Hammond Moore, *Albemarle Jefferson's County, 1727-1976* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), esp. 214-238; 423-432.

[34] The aggregate population for the town of Charlottesville in 1870 stood at 2838, of which 1473 or 51.9% were "colored." The township of Charlottesville in 1870 had a total population of 7145 of which 4246 or 59.4% were "colored." Francis A. Walker, *Ninth Census – Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States embracing the Tables of Race, Nationality, Sex, Selected Ages, and Occupations* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 278.

The permeability of class and/or status lines within Jefferson Lodge reflects a heritage of blurring such distinctions as seen in the case of Freemasonry in London in the 1700s. See Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 320-325.

On the surveilling function of the census, see Vincente L. Rafael, "White Love."

[35] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Decennial Census: Fredericksville Parish, Albemarle County, Virginia* (1870), 31.

married with two children, brought the ideology of redemption to life in the body of

William Brown. Although the passing of most African Americans went unnoticed and

unremarked by the white press, Brown's death elicited a fond note of remembrance in

The Daily Progress:

> William Brown, the well-known colored barber at the University, died at his
>
> home on Ridge street Saturday night, of consumption of the bowels. He had been
>
> sick for over three months. His funeral took place from the First Colored Baptist
>
> church at 4 o'clock this afternoon, and was largely attended.[36]

William Brown's embodiment of an ideology of redemption was equally

exemplified by other African American men who helped in organizing Jefferson Lodge.

Each contributed in their own way to challenging the prevalent notion of the black body

as problematic. There was no "monolithic class" of African American men who elected

to join Brown and others in forming Jefferson Lodge.[37] They all did not possess the

social status of William Brown, nor did they all receive the public attention as the first

Worshipful Master of the Lodge. One such example was an aging 60 year-old farm hand

by the name of George Buckner. Despite his advanced years, Buckner joined the effort

to establish a black lodge of Freemasons in Charlottesville.[38] Buckner could neither read

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[36] Charlottesville, *The Daily Progress*. July 20, 1896.

[37] In *Enterprising Southerners: Black Economic Success in North Carolina, 1865-1915* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), Robert C. Kenzer notes, "My findings about black Masonry on the state and local level largely support Muraskin's interpretation" (148). The example of Jefferson Lodge presents a needed corrective to the model of middle-class membership so readily adopted by Kenzer and produced by William Muraskin, *Middle-Class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) and Loretta Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980).

[38] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Decennial Census: Fredericksville Parish, Albemarle County, Virginia* (1870), 121.

nor write; however, by encouraging the education of his three sons and one daughter ranging in age from 17 to 11, Buckner shared in this ideology of redemption as exemplified by his joining Jefferson Lodge as well as his actions toward redeeming the next generation of black bodies in the educational opportunities he granted his children. Buckner provides a stunning compliment to the young William Brown. Each, in their own way, embodied this ideology of redemption – whether personally as in the case of Brown or by their actions as Buckner demonstrated.

Other farm hands joining in the Freemason effort were the 42 year-old Phil Cobb and the 40 year-old James Brooks.[39] The 1870 Census lists both Brooks and Cobb as unable to read or write and with nothing of value in both real estate and personal estate holdings. This lack of capital did not inhibit their ability to join a society that depended on regular economic investments by both men. Indeed, although they could not list individual real estate or other assets of value, the collective economic value of Jefferson Lodge could serve as a surrogate for this personal lack. Thus, the collective body of Jefferson Lodge empowered them to claim the status of a representative black body by accessing the symbolic capital of being a member of an African American organization with the economic reserves they lacked personally.

Although Brooks and Cobb did not possess significant economic capital, they did possess a critical connection with others who joined in forming Jefferson Lodge. They shared with other founders such as Spot Farrar, James Sammons, James Ferguson, Fairfax Taylor, John Coles, and Thad Mayo the common thread of being married men.

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[39] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Decennial Census: St. Ann's Parish, Albemarle County, Virginia* (1870), 111 and 79, respectively.

Redeeming the black body, as stated earlier in this chapter, was a heavily gendered

ideology. In countering dominant white racial ideologies that construed unions between

black men and black women as illegitimate, the representative black male body of

Freemasonry would create and project a model of the black family predicated on the

notion of black male representativeness of the family in society and black female

domesticity. This is not to deny the agency of African American women in challenging

these dynamics emerging in postemancipation society, nor is does it deny the cleavages

and fractures in this idea of domesticity. As Elsa Barkley Brown and Leslie A. Schwalm

have superbly demonstrated, the ideas surrounding the politics of domesticity and the

politics creating a dichotomy of public and private were intensely contested in African

American life and culture of the period.[40] However, what the case of Brooks and Cobbs

and the others named above – each listed in the 1870 Census as being married with the

occupation of their wives as "keeping house" – goes to show is the centrality of the

notion of African American women in the domestic sphere as a crucial social and

physical location augmenting the ideology of redeeming the black body as articulated by

African American Freemasons.

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[40] See Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7.1 (1994), 107-146 and Leslie A. Schwalm, "'Sweet Dreams of Freedom': Freedwomen's Reconstruction of Life and Labor in Lowcountry South Carolina," *Journal of Women's History* 9.1 (1997), 9-38. See also Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Michelle A. Krowl, "Dixie's Other Daughters: African American Women in Virginia, 1861-1868 (Ph.D. diss., University of California Berkeley, 1998); Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); and Karin L. Zipf, "Reconstructing 'Free Woman': African-American Women, Apprenticeship, and Custody Rights during Reconstruction," *Journal of Women's History* 12.1 (2000), 8-31.

In accordance with the masculinist tenor of this ideology of redemption, the presence of African American women had to be maintained within the domestic sphere. Although "keeping house" was a labor intensive occupation, it functions on a symbolic level signifying a new social order in which the black male body as capital producer for the household also served as the primary representative of the family to a wider public. Consequently, this ideology of redemption activated and promoted model of African American family life that countered the reality of antebelleum black family life in Virginia slave communities. As Brenda Stevenson has argued, "The lives of Virginia slaves were too precarious to guarantee the complete and the constant success of any social institution, including marriage and the family."[41] In keeping these patriarchal notions of domesticity and by encouraging this form of familial arrangement, the ideology of redemption placed African American patriarchal power on an analogous foundation as white patriarchal power, thus equating the black male (patriarchal) body with the white male (patriarchal) body.

A critical, but often *understated* factor equally playing into this arrangement was the ever present fear of white violence against the black female body.[42] By creating such a domestic arrangement, black males were able to limit the interaction of black female bodies with white male bodies, thus interrupting the power arrangements that enabled white men to rape and commit other sexual and non-sexual violence against black women

[41] Brenda Stevenson, "Distress and Discord in Virginia Slave Families, 1830-1860," in Carol Bleser, ed., *In Joy and In Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 124.

[42] See for example Hannah Rosen, "'Not That Sort Of Women': Race, Gender, and Sexual Violence During the Memphis Riot of 1866," in Martha Hodes, ed., *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 267-93 and *The Gender of Reconstruction: Rape, Race, and Citizenship in the Postemancipation South* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1999).

at will. Although this social arrangement produced other deleterious effects – mainly the extension of black male structures of patriarchal power – it served as a counter in a social landscape with an extensive legacy that connected black women's bodies and sexuality in pathological ways. As Hazel Carby argues, "The links between black women and illicit sexuality consolidated during the antebellum years had powerful ideological consequences for the next hundred and fifty years."[43] In short, by having partners represented by in the occupational category "keeping house" and maintaining an orientation of the domestic sphere commensurate with an ideology of redemption, African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge, as representative black male bodies, were continuing a process of socially constructing patriarchal regimes of authority, albeit to somewhat different ends than their white male counterparts.

The list of Jefferson Lodge founders also includes two prominent African American men who were free prior to emancipation. James L. Sammons was a carpenter who in 1850 had real estate holdings valued at $1000.[44] By 1870, the value of his real estate portfolio was reduced to half of its original assessment, standing then at $500.[45] Being a propertied African American male along with having acquired freedom prior to

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[43] Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39. See also, Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Southern Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in Virginia Bernhard, et. al., eds., *Southern Women: Histories and Identities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992).

[44] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Decennial Census: St. Ann's Parish, Albemarle County, Virginia* (1850), .

[45] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Decennial Census: St. Ann's Parish, Albemarle County, Virginia* (1870), 71. John Moore notes: "In 1870 only fifty-six blacks in the county owned real estate, sixteen of whom had total resources of $1,000 or more. . . . Ownership of real estate may have doubled during those years, but the census taken on the eve of war reveals nearly as much wealth in the hands of a few hundred free Negroes as all of their brethren had ten years later." John Hammond Moore, *Albemarle Jefferson's County, 1727-1976* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 217.

emancipation necessarily taught Sammons the strategic importance of the ideology of redemption. Having a personal history and acquaintance with the process of acquiring freedom and the spectacle to which the black body was subjected in this process, Sammons may have played a crucial role in communicating with others in the Lodge the power of vision in constructing and maintaining the black body as object requiring white control.

Robert Vernon has detailed this regime of vision by compiling the most comprehensive text on free African Americans in Albemarle County. In capturing this hidden history, Vernon systematically culls from the historical record the juridical process whereby African Americans legally obtained recognition of their status as free men and women of color in Albemarle County. The detailed entries in the Albemarle County Court Order Book spell out how the black body was marked as free in a social order that privileged sight of the black body as marked and recognized by the eye of the white power structure. A July 5, 1826 entry records:

> Anderson Butler a Man of Colour personally appearing in Court & producing satisfactory evidence of his freedom. It is Ordered that the following be entered as his register toWit, aged 20 years, 5 fee 7 inches high of dark complexion, no scars or marks perceivable, all of which is Ordered to be certified.[46]

A September 7, 1835 entry records:

> Armenenus Spears, son of William W. Spears personally appears in court and producing satisfactory evidence of his having been born free – It is ordered that

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[46] Robert Vernon. "The Free Black Population of Albemarle County, Virginia. 1744-1865." unpublished manuscript, 32.

the following be entered as his register towit: aged four years 3 feet 2 inches high

Light complexion, no scars or marks perceivable.[47]

A June 2, 1851 entry records:

Amy a free woman of Color personally appearing in Court and producing

satisfactory of her having been born free, the following is ordered to be entered as

her Register to wit: Aged 52 years – Five feet high – dark Complexion no scars

or marks perceivable – All of which is ordered to be certified.[48]

These samples confirm the hegemony of vision in a social order that marked black bodies

in order to establish and maintain power and control over the flesh. Whether young or

old, male or female, all black bodies were placed under the objectifying gaze of white

society in order to register this power arrangement. African Americans who were

entombed in this tyranny of the body were forced to oblige to these dictates as they were

well informed that their freedom depended on the recognition from the white power

structure. In all likelihood, Sammons welcomed the opportunity to counter the lingering

effects of this regime and promote an ideology that redeemed the black body from

experiencing this spectacle. It is also probable that Sammons saw within the culture and

institution of Freemasonry at Jefferson Lodge, an opportunity to share with a younger

generation of African American men, the tactics and strategies he employed to transgress

the strict boundaries that attempted to circumscribe the social and physical places the

black body could inhabit. Through it all, Sammons was immersed in a culture and an

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[47] Ibid, 46.

[48] Ibid, 66.

institution composed of like-minded men, who sought to challenge and change this

regime over black corporeality.

Sammons' counterpart in undertaking a role in the formation of Jefferson Lodge

and promoting an ideology of redemption was the 50 year-old shoemaker Fairfax Taylor.

Taylor was a prominent leader in the free black community of Charlottesville prior to the

establishment of Jefferson Lodge in 1869. Acquiring his freedom sometime prior to

1850, Taylor's notoriety was due in no small part to his leadership role in helping to

establish the Delevan Baptist Church, the first independent African American religious

institution in Charlottesville.[49] Taylor was a vocal member of a group consisting mainly

of free blacks in separating from the white First Baptist Church in 1864. The church

minutes records Taylor's argument seeking to establish an independent African American

church:

> Brother Fairfax Taylor answered that the minority of the church referred to had
>
> been regularly overruled, that a division had thus arisen. That the minority,
>
> mainly free persons, determined to withdraw and organize a new church, having
>
> been advised that that would be the proper course. . . .[50]

Taylor's political activism did not stop with the establishment of Delevan Baptist Church.

Taylor's leadership in the politics of establishing the church added to his stature as he

was a noted voice articulating the concerns of African Americans in the aftermath of the

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[49] In a brief biography of James T. S. Taylor, Luther Porter Jackson writes about Fairfax Taylor, "His father, once a slave, bought himself and later moved to Charlottesville." Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Office-Holders in Virginia 1865-1895* (Norfolk: Guide Quality Press, 1945), 41.

[50] Cited in Richard I McKinney, *Keeping the Faith: A History of the First Baptist Church 1863-1980 In Light of Its Times* (Charlottesville: First Baptist Church, West Main Street, 1981), 42.

Civil War.[51] Seeking to chart a course of action that he believed in the best interests of

African Americans, Taylor would go so far as to oppose the nomination of his son, James

T. S. Taylor, as a state constitutional convention delegate. He publicly backed the

candidacy of a white radical whom he felt possessed the necessary requirements for

effective representation of African American interests at the Constitutional Convention of

1867.[52] The elder Taylor's effort went unsupported by the majority and his son

represented Albemarle County at the Convention.[53] Despite this political setback, Fairfax

Taylor continued to share in the political affairs of the African American community

personally and vicariously through his son, James T. S. Taylor.

Redeeming the black body from a history of bondage and (re)presenting it in the

new space of Freemasonry must have appealed to Taylor as he joined others in

establishing Jefferson Lodge. With a history of political activism on behalf of African

American political and institutional independence in the antebellum and postbellum eras,

Fairfax Taylor embodied an ideological ethic that sought to reconstruct the black body in

a manner commensurate with the ideals of liberty and self-determination. In the role of

the patriarch in Jefferson Lodge, Taylor was no doubt in the midst of a receptive audience

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[51] Fairfax Taylor's name was supplied to Brevet Brig. Gen. Orlando Brown as a qualified black Virginian for the new reconstruction government in Virginia in 1867. See Gayle M. Schulman, "The Gibbons Family: Freedmen," *The Magazine of Albemarle County History* 55 (1997), 70. See also Richard Lowe, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Local Black Leadership," *The Journal of American History* 80.3 (December, 1993), 989-998.

[52] Richard I McKinney, *Keeping the Faith*, 65-66. See also Joseph C. Vance, "Race Relations in Albemarle During Reconstruction," *The Magazine of Albemarle County History* XII (1953), 38-39.

[53] J. T. S. Taylor was a "radical" member of the 1867 Convention. For an analysis of his voting record, see Richard L. Hume, "The Membership of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868: A Study of the Beginnings of Congressional Reconstruction in the Upper South," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 86 (1978), 484.

intent on redeeming the black body. His example and history of navigating and contesting the dominant ideology scripting the black body would prove beneficial in the efforts of this group of African American men.

On a personal level, there must have been some tension between Fairfax and his son James as a result of the elder's opposition to his son's nomination to the state constitutional convention. Although James followed in his father's footsteps in taking up the shoemaker trade and embodied the redemption ethic of his father, the emotional strain of such a public and personal rejection would necessarily have damaged their relationship. Fairfax probably looked on at a distance as the local Charlottesville newspaper took aim at the political actions of his son:

> There was a meeting of Black Republicans in the Courthouse yesterday at 1 o'clock, in which Hons. (?) Thompson & Taylor figured most conspicuously. The speech of Taylor (Negro) had a smattering of sense in it, but that of Thompson his Colleague was extremely absurd.
>
> Taylor said among other things that there were a great many who were Republicans in Washington, and not Republicans at home. A remark that would strike a reader of the Newspaper as being very true.
>
> Taylor read the Petersburg platform and a motion was made at the suggestion of Thompson to adopt it in this County, but Taylor opposed the motion and while squabbling over it the bell was run for the evening session of the Court. . . The meeting then adjourned to the open air, a motion which was cheerfully

approved by the lawyers with sensitive olfactories who had to stay in there all evening.[54]

Although they opposed one another in the political arena, it must have fractured the proud Fairfax to see in print the questioning of his son's political strategies and philosophy. More importantly, the manner in which his son's body is scripted – the hesitation and ambiguity surrounding the reference to James as the Honorable, racially marking his son's body while leaving his counterpart unmarked and "unraced," and the derogatory reference to the smell of black bodies – would have stung the older Fairfax who attempted to insulate his son from such spectacles. In this instance, the Lodge could have served as a critical medium through which Fairfax could redeem not only the body of his son, but also his relationship with his son. Unlike his father, James Taylor never undertook the initiation into the rites and rituals of Freemasonry and never became member of Jefferson Lodge. Through Jefferson Lodge and the rituals of Freemasonry, Fairfax Taylor may have, like other elders in the Lodge and in Freemasonry, "found a replacement for emotional ties to [his] own children . . . ."[55] Moreover, the veneration of the father by the son that was strained in the case of Fairfax and James would have been replaced in the sacred space of Jefferson Lodge, as Fairfax probably enjoyed the veneration he received as a result of his place and position as an elder statesman in Jefferson Lodge. Serving as a surrogate for the contested and strained emotional bond between father and son, Jefferson Lodge may have provided a healing space for both the body and mind of Fairfax who, despite his best efforts, was reminded of the intense work

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[54] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, April 6, 1869.

[55] Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, 123.

that was required in not only redeeming the black body, but also establishing a relationship with his son.

Taylor's example in taking a leading role in establishing Delevan Baptist Church may have been the impetus for others, such as the younger Horace Kinney to join him not only in the Church, but also in the Lodge. Joining the white First Baptist Church on February 8, 1861, Kinney was no doubt impressed by the authority and leadership embodied by Fairfax Taylor.[56] On January 10, 1864 at the age of 27, Kinney would structure his family life along the lines of the example of set by Fairfax by marrying the 25 year-old Mary F. Cole.[57] The example of the aging Taylor would continue to strike Kinney as an admirable one and he would join the elder African American gentleman in establishing Jefferson Lodge. In the body of Fairfax Taylor, Horace Kinney and other young members of the Lodge would have encountered a corporeal instantiation of the ideology of redeeming the black body.

A cadre of young African American men joined others in Jefferson Lodge in the ever complicated task of redeeming the black body. Faced not only with the violence and hysteria over the appearance of freed black bodies, this younger generation demanded recognition of the black body as a social, political, and economic equal in society. As such, through the establishment of Jefferson Lodge and the careful cultivation of Masonic and extra-Masonic networks, they challenged an obstinate social hierarchy with their variations on the ideology of redeeming the black body. James Ferguson, 29, and John

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[56] Papers of the Charlottesville Baptist Church. "First Baptist," 188, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. I thank Gayle Schulman for sharing this source with me.

[57] Robert Vernon, "The Free Black Population of Albemarle County," 97.

Coles, 32, the former a barber and the latter a carpenter, were young African American men who each had accumulated $500 worth of valuable real estate by 1870.[58] According to the 1870 Census, the wives of both men did not work outside of the home and each man could read and write. With their wives in the domestic sphere, Ferguson and Coles were in keeping with a key tenant of the ideology redeeming the black body.

Ferguson and Coles augmented this ideological construct in that each of these two Freemasons obtained the ability to read and write.[59] By possessing literacy, both Ferguson and Coles were able to link the redemption of the black body to the progress of the race through their acquisition of signs and symbols of being educated. Royal Morgan, the Grand Master of African American Freemasons in Virginia in 1870, was a staunch proponent of linking education and racial progress through the culture of Freemasonry:

> Let us no longer grope about in darkness, but emulate those who have gone before
>
> us and seek light while it is day, and in our power to obtain it. "Let our hands and
>
> hearts be every ready" to aid in the cause, from whatever source it may come, so
>
> that the work be in the cause of morality and human love, and in this connection, I
>
> would suggest to our Subordinate Lodges to foster and care for the educational

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[58] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Decennial Census: Fredericksville Parish, Albemarle County, Virginia* (1870), 27 and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Decennial Census: St. Ann's Parish, Albemarle County, Virginia* (1870), 84, respectively.

[59] A total of 133 "colored" persons – 52 male and 81 females – attended school in Albemarle County according to the 1870 Census. The "colored" population 21 and over who could not write was 5928, of which 2822 were males and 3106 were females. See Francis A. Walker, *Ninth Census – Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, 432.

interest in their midst, both as Lodges and as individual Masons, remembering

that to cast your bread upon the water, and may days it shall be returned to you.[60]

Morgan intimately linked education with the uplift and advancement of African

Americans. Through Freemasonry, Morgan thought it necessary for African American

Freemasons to be exemplars in this effort. In the case of Ferguson and Coles, we find

two African American Freemasons who are well within the paradigm in African

American culture that connected freedom and progress of the race with literacy.[61]

As Freemasons, these two individuals could stand as representatives of not only

the progress of the race, but also as the living embodiment of an ideology of redemption

that advanced the freedom of the black body from disparaging stereotypes. By being

educated, Ferguson and Coles were in a strategic position to bulwark the basis of their

representative claims by possessing the ability to articulate their message in the literate

forms that controlled the social, political, and economic space of postemancipation

society. As Jacqueline Jones Royster argues, "[Literacy] is the ability to gain access to

information and to use this information variously to articulate lives and experiences and

also to identify, think through, refine, and solve problems, sometimes complex problems,

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[60] *Proceedings of A Grand Semi-Annual Communication and Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.* (Lynchburg: Evening Press Print, 1871), 6.

[61] On this point, for example, Eric Foner argues that for African Americans "[a]ccess to education for themselves and their children was . . . central to the meaning of freedom." See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 96. See also the specific studies by Grey Gundaker, *Signs of Diaspora, Diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979); and Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroines Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

over time."[62] Ferguson and Coles could in turn transform their literacy to a critical

literacy that would enable them to "transform the social and political structures that

imprison[ed] [African Americans] in [a] 'culture of silence.'"[63] These two African

American Freemasons were thus uniquely positioned to enter the social and political

fields of postemancipation society and utilize these legitimate literate forms in order to

subvert negative connotations ascribed to the black body.[64]

By engaging in a system of conventional literacy, Ferguson and Coles enacted a

performance of literacy that marked their representative black bodies as modern members

of the American polity.[65] This act was not just a case of engaging the tools of "the

master." As Martha J. Cutter has persuasively argued in her reading of Harriet Jacobs'

act of literacy, "One cannot overcome oppression by using the master's tools, and if

language is an instrument of oppression, simply taking hold of it will not lead to

liberation, nor will it lead to a dismantling of the master's house."[66] Indeed, the reversal

enacted in and through this ideology of redeeming the black body not only encoded a

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[62] Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 45.

[63] Cited in Martha J. Cutter, "Dismantling 'The Master's House': Critical Literacy in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *Callaloo* 19.1 (1996), 209.

[64] My argument here has been influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Specifically his comment:
> The constitution of a linguistic market creates the conditions for an objective competition in and through which legitimate competence can function as linguistic capital, producing a *profit of distinction* on the occasion of each social exchange.

Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language," in Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, John B. Thompson, ed., Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 55.

[65] In line with this observation is the work of Anne Ruggles Gere. In her study of women's clubs, she argues, "Within the intimate social spaces created by shared religious beliefs and common goals, club members carried out cultural work that aided a refashioning of the nation." See Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 8.

[66] Martha J. Cutter, "Dismantling 'The Master's House,' 209.

new and (re)presented black body, but it also operated more subversively to move the

black body on a temporal continuum from ancient to modern. The ideology of

redemption functioned corporeally and temporally to shift the redeemed black body from

ancient Other to a modern, civilized member of the polity of postemancipation society.

In this connection, the black body no longer served as the physical manifestation of the

pre-modern, savage Other. Instead, the black body was now the instantiation of the idea

of being modern and progress – both central aspects of modernity.

To fully function as a member of postemancipation society required the

possession of one of the major signs of modernity – the ability to read and write. By

engaging these literate forms, Ferguson and Coles were better equipped to challenge a

regime that heretofore denied the means of literacy to African Americans. Literacy

enabled them to blur the lines of the social hierarchy and as a result they were able to

contest those in positions of power who attempted to control the script and messages

written on the black body.[67] This literate regime had its historical antecedents, to be sure,

as examples of literate African Americans litter the period prior to the one under

discussion. Indeed, the example of Ferguson and Coles can be viewed as a continuation

of the literacy legacy of the African American Masonic heritage beginning with Prince

Hall. Nevertheless, in the postemancipation period the heightened visibility of the

redeemed black body of Freemasonry was not only to be marked in and through the

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[67] In another context, Anne Ruggles Gere and Sarah R. Robbins observe, "The printed text itself. . .helps to redefine for European- and African-American women readers the points of overlap and of distinction between the two groups and their club associated practices." See Ann Ruggles Gere and Sarah R. Robbins, "Gendered Literacy in Black and White: Turn-of-the-Century African-American and European-American Club Women's Printed Text," *Signs* 21.3 (Spring, 1996), 660.

culture of this fraternal organization, it was also marked by members of the order who scripted the message of the redeemed body through acts of writing and reading

Collectively, Jefferson Lodge also "embodied" the representation of the new black body as literate and modern. This new black body ideal was exemplified by the examples of Ferguson and Coles. The social and cultural capital of literacy was not individualized within the confines of the Lodge. In other words, the literacy of Ferguson and Coles was transformed as a sign and symbol of the collective literacy of Jefferson Lodge. "In pointing out the social dimensions of communication, [Dell] Hymes recognizes that in order for people to use language as an act or tool of communication (in this case, to engage in an act of literacy), they need knowledge and understanding of how this language is used in the midst of a particular set of sociocultural norms, norms that also include political dimensions."[68] In this dimension, Jefferson Lodge served as a critical medium to transmit and reproduce the literate abilities of these new black bodies while creating a cognitive reservoir whereby illiterate members could be instructed in the manner as to how to manipulate the literate structures of society for personal and collective advantage. The limitless possibilities and cultural potency of such a model of literacy extension is articulated by Royal Morgan who asserts, "My word for it, brethren, the charity given for educational purposes will be returned ten fold in the well-being of the thousands who surround us."[69]

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[68] Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream*, 46.

[69] *Proceedings of A Grand Semi-Annual Communication and Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.*, 6.

This "communicative competence" – to borrow Dell Hymes apt phrase – and the transformation of literacy in the confines of Jefferson Lodge are signaled by the written record of the minutes of the Lodge.[70] The nineteenth century minute books of the organization provide a crucial insight into the nature and value of reading and writing to the fraternal order and its projection as a sign that the group possessed the requisite attributes to participate as equal members in the polity of the postemancipation order. To be sure, all Freemasons did not place a high value on written modes of communication within the sacred confines of the Lodge without question or contest. Indeed, some white Freemasons held this form of literacy to be a violation of the ancient landmarks of the fraternity. Specifically addressing written rituals and instructions in the order, an older Freemason from Iowa communicated his disdain for such methods to R. T. W. Duke, a prominent white Charlottesville Freemason:

> I was made a Mason in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1838 and learned my Symbolic masonry from the grand lecturer of the state, and learned it in the good old way of our father's, by word of mouth, hard study, dint of labor, with a tax upon memory. We had then no short methods used in the violations of sacred pledges and when we once learned the ritual, we knew it and appreciated it and retained it. I have a perfect contempt for all modern methods of communicating it.[71]

For the Iowa Freemason, the organic connection between the oral nature of learning the rituals of the organization and the essence of the fraternity was self-evident. Not only did

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[70] See Jacqueline Jones Royster. *Traces of a Stream*, 46.

[71] Letter from Theodore S. Parvin to R. T. W. Drake, Esq. dated October 3, 1894. *Duke Family Papers*, Miscellaneous Letters to R. T. W. Duke, Jr., Box 4, #9521-h, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

this privileged form of communication connect one with the heritage of the craft, it also

enabled the initiate to create a fondness and sympathy with the aims and values of

organization. For Freemasonry to take up the mantle of modern methods of

communicating – indeed to privilege the written text – was, for this Freemason,

blasphemous.

The idea of literacy for the group of African American Freemasons in

Charlottesville carried a different meaning. As stated earlier in the case of Ferguson and

Coles, a literate black body would be better positioned to counter vitriolic assaults on

black bodies that were deemed unintelligent, unenlightened, uncivilized, and unfit to

possess the necessary prerequisites to become members of the civic polity. While *The*

Chronicle howled, "We maintain that the Negroes are unfit for suffrage," the presence of

a group of representative black bodies would counter with a demonstration of their fitness

not only for the right to vote, but for the rights and obligations of full citizenship in the

new postemancipation era.[72] The recorded minutes of Jefferson Lodge disclose a crucial

dimension of this counteroffensive. Written minutes, far from just being a chronicle of

the events of meetings of the fraternity, embody communal evidence countering

assertions challenging the validity of African American incorporation into the body

politic.[73] By demonstrating orderly conduct in the course of carrying out their meetings

along with an expressed proficiency in appropriate parliamentary behavior and forms,

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[72] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*. February 11, 1868.

[73] My argument here is inspired by the work of Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

these minutes suggest that the struggle and contestation over the place and position of the black body could no longer be argued on the grounds of unfitness for citizenship or civic involvement as demonstrated by a lack of or inability to possess the requirements of what can be termed "civic literacy." Through the tools of literacy as revealed in the minute record of Jefferson Lodge, the members were enacting the requisite "rites" of citizenship by writing themselves into the polity of the United States.

The minutes of Jefferson Lodge adhere to a strict formula of (re)presenting a form of literacy that acclimated and acculturated the black body to the norms and prescriptives of engaging civil society in the language and customs that were normative for inter-cultural, political, and economic interaction. With respect to Jefferson Lodge, what this entailed was constructing a systematic record of the organization detailing the events of the group thereby demonstrating control, proper meeting conduct, organized and deliberate actions, and an operational set of governing principles that enable the orderly conduct of their meetings. Such actions could then be translated into other social, political, and economic spheres to demonstrate that the members of this fraternal order had acquired civic literacy. The minute books of Jefferson Lodge in this regard follow a distinct formula as outlined here:

> **HEADING**: *Introduction listing the type of meeting – whether Special, Called, or Regular, the name of the lodge, the place of the meeting, and the meeting date*
>
> "The Regular Communication of Jefferson Lodge #20 was held in their hall on January 11, 1882"

OFFICERS AND MEMBERS PRESENT: *A formal listing of the officers and their positions at the meeting along with a supplemental listing of other members present, if applicable.*

"Bro. John Dickson, W.M. (Worshipful Master)

" George Buckner, S. W. (Senior Warden)

" George Brown, J. W. (Junior Warden)

" Thomas Cayton, Treas. (Treasurer)

" W. L. Brown, Sec. (Secretary)

" E. L. Parago, S. D. (Senior Deacon)

" H. Kenny, J. D. (Junior Deacon)

" George Kinney, St. (Chaplain)

" Thad Mayo, Tyler

MEETING MINUTES: *A record of the purpose and events of the meeting such as motions passed, topics debated, correspondence received, and/or initiations. This record always begins with the manner in which the lodge was opened, revealing the ritual knowledge of the members and the organization, and with a notice on the procedural action on the reading of the last minutes of the previous meeting of the Lodge. Equally, the record also always ends with a statement on the closing of the lodge with the signature of the secretary, attesting to the authenticity of the record.*

"The Lodge was opened on the 3 degree in due form. Minutes of he last meeting were read and approved. . . .There being no further business the Lodge was closed in due form."[74]

The minutes of Jefferson Lodge reveal a complex construction of civic literacy that was deeply interwoven into the texture of the ideology of redeeming the black body. These minutes mount a sustained attack on notions of black intellectual inferiority and unsuitability for membership in the polity of postemancipation society. As a practical means, these minutes enabled the organization to maintain an accurate record of its organizational business – from dues payment history for members to initiation records. However, to read them in just this dimension, neglects the intervention and interruption of discourses on the black body that these minutes perform. To fight negative constructions of the black body, the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge deliberately and repeatedly presented the black body as literate, modern, and possessing the ability to effectively participate in the debates and actions of society. As a collective body, even those members who did not individually possess the ability to read or write were, nevertheless, able to make the claim that based upon their membership in Jefferson Lodge, they embodied the attributes necessary to enter and become a contributing member of postemancipation civic and social society.[75]

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[74] January 11, 1882 meeting of Jefferson Lodge. *Minute Book Dated 1881-1884*.

[75] A corollary to this interpretation is that through such an "informal" literacy apparatus such as minute taking and reading, those members of Jefferson Lodge who did not possess the ability to read or write could acquire literacy in a formal sense through these activities. An example of this is the secretary recording and signing the 1882 meeting minutes used to detail the system employed by Jefferson Lodge is the same William L. Brown who, according to the 1870 Census, could read but not write. On the context of acquiring literacy in various settings in African American life and culture, see Grey Gundaker, *Signs of Diaspora, Diaspora of Signs*, esp.33-61.

To assume that this act of literacy was uncontested as it sought to articulate the ideology of redeeming the black body would neglect the violent dimension of postemancipation society. Access to literacy and connecting it with political empowerment were intimately interwoven in African American desires to acquire literacy. As Jacqueline Jones so forcefully argues:

> After emancipation, going to school became a political act as well as a means of personal edification. Black people joined together to establish schools and hire teachers for old and young alike, and their collective efforts represented both defiance to white authority and an expression of community self-interest.[76]

These literate practices were subject to various forms of violence in the postemancipation period. As African Americans fought and struggled to increase universal education, whites countered by first attempting to stop this effort then by carefully circumscribing these educational endeavors in the latter years of the nineteenth century.[77] These challenges to black literacy were coupled with a constant surveillance practice that constantly reminded African Americans of their ambiguous assimilation into the American polity at the conclusion of the Civil War.

Cognizant of these realities, the minutes of Jefferson Lodge reveal an awareness of these realities by employing a politics of concealment in its recorded minutes. Such a politics opted for a presentation of the minute record that avoided deep description of the actions and activities of the Lodge. The avoidance of a richly detailed account lessened

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[76] Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream*. 123. On African American education in the South, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[77] See Ibid, esp. ch.1.

the possibility that these written records could be used against them in some manner. Moreover, while these minutes stressed a systematic presentation as outlined above, an active politics of concealment advanced the strategy that they never go beyond providing a surface account of the events of the meeting. In some cases the politics of concealment advocated the revision of the recorded account. For example, the expulsion of S. M. Parker from the Lodge on April 11, 1877 was requested "to be stricken from the record" in the May 30, 1877 meeting.[78] Within a highly charged context of racial violence and surveillance, the revelation of Parker's expulsion could have possibly exposed the Lodge to a virulent criticism. The ideology of redeeming the black body through the culture and institution of Freemasonry would have suffered a serious blow if Parker's actions – what the minutes record as his inability to "keep his Masonic oath" – would have added fuel to character attacks on the African American body. Moreover, a revelation of written record of the Lodge would expose the economic operations of the Lodge to an unsympathetic audience. With widespread knowledge of their economic practices, Jefferson Lodge could have easily become the object of violent retribution in a moment when the economic condition of Virginia was generally in depression. Thus, literacy proved to be a complex dialectic – where on one pole the benefits for personal and social rewards were numerous, but in an anti-black racist and racialist society the consequences of its antithesis harbored a pernicious and dangerous downside.[79]

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[78] *Minute Book Dated January 12, 1876 to December 1881*, Jefferson Lodge #20 F. and A. masons, PHA, Charlottesville, Virginia.

[79] The dangers involved in the written record of Jefferson Lodge would become manifest in the 1960s when the leaders of the Lodge were told to meet with the Charlottesville Attorney. Wilbur Tinsley informed me that the Charlottesville Attorney told the Lodge that its practice of loaning monies had to cease in order for the organization to remain classified as a tax exempt fraternal order. Moreover, they were informed that

The economic activities of James Ferguson provide yet another example of the notion of being modern and the idea of progress that was grafted on and woven into the ideology of redeeming the black body. To signify the progress of the black body in the era of postemancipation, required the (re)presentation of the black body in the new economic spaces of the emerging societal order. The black body could no longer stand as the physical incarnation of unpaid wage labor to be used and exploited by white economic interests. In its place there needed to be the black body engaged in adequate wage labor and paying the requisite dues of a member of society, although the society into which these dues were to be paid was hesitant, to say the least, in seeing the black body in other economic forms and contexts. Peter Rachleff records this sentiment as expressed by a group of African American female tobacco workers:

> The whites say we will starve through laziness. That is not so. But it is true we
> will starve at our present wages. They say we will steal. We can say for
> ourselves we had rather work for a living. Give us a chance.[80]

The opportunity these tobacco workers desired was fundamental in enabling African Americans to (re)construct the black body along new lines – lines of economic independence in the economically differentiated spaces of postemancipation society.

Serving as the treasurer for Jefferson Lodge throughout the mid to late 1880s, James Ferguson had a reputation for conducting business affairs in an efficient and

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they were in violation of the law and a suit could be brought against them individually and against the Lodge as an institution. When the members inquired as to how City officials discovered this practice, they were informed that they had *written* and verbal confirmation of the network. Wilbur Tinsley, interview by author, Cismont, Virginia, July 18, 2000.

[80] Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 38.

economical manner. His business was one of the few African American businesses mentioned in *Early Charlottesville: Recollections of James Alexander, 1828-1874*: "On Main street, next to this old house, is a small wooden building in which James Ferguson, the barber and hairdresser, carries on his business. . . ."[81] Although this observation does not provide intimate details of the business dealings of Ferguson, it does underscore that Ferguson's business was in the public eye and prominent whites took notice of his business location not to mention his business activities. Ferguson's business acumen no doubt added to his stature as a "respectable negro" in the eyes of whites. As treasurer of Jefferson Lodge and through his personal business conduct, he no doubt augmented and uniquely embodied the ideology of redeeming the black body as it entered new economic spaces in the postemancipation order.

To this end, Ferguson – capitalizing on this aspect of his cultural capital and an extensive African American Masonic and African American social and civic organizational network in Virginia – was one of the first members of the board of directors of Grand Fountain United Order of True Reformers bank. The opening of the bank was heralded in public ceremonies with banners proclaiming "In 1860 slaves, in 1890 bankers." The officers of the bank produced a publication entitled *1619-1907 From Slavery to Bankers*."[82] Such pronouncements underscore the ideology of progress interwoven into a deep and thoroughgoing process of (re)scripting the meaning of black

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[81] James Alexander, *Early Charlottesville: Recollections of James Alexander, 1828-1874*, Mary Rawlings, ed. (Charlottesville: The Peoples National Bank, 1942), 84.

[82] Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," *Journal of Urban History* 21.3 (March, 1995), 316.

body as it inhabited the new economic spaces of the postemancipation period. Indeed,

Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg Kimball are particularly instructive in this regard:

> It would be a mistake to read the celebrations of economic mobility as merely part
> of the late nineteenth-century Horatio Alger-type emphasis on individualism and
> progress: black Richmonders often represented individual achievement as
> collective prosperity, not only removing the logic behind their social
> subordination in the larger society but also providing for each other "a new visual
> landscape of possibility."[83]

In tandem with this sentiment of progress was an ideology of redemption that, at

times, was signaled with acceptance by a white audience. *The Chronicle* recorded the

selection of James Ferguson to the board of directors of this financial institution in their

pages:

> Mr. James H. Ferguson, of this place, is one of the directors, and if all the other
> directors are as respectable and responsible, that the bank will be well officered in
> that respect.[84]

As the publisher of the Charlottesville recognized the manner in which Ferguson

embodied an ideology of redemption, a title is conferred on him along with adjectives

attesting to his respectability. The article makes several references to Ferguson's

respectability with the title "Mr." and also with the adjectives "respectable" and

"responsible." The additional comment attesting to the desire for others to embody the

characteristics exemplified and embodied by Ferguson adds to the legitimacy of his

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, May 22, 1891.

(re)presentation of the black body. With the presence of this representative black body as a director, the bank, in the eyes of whites, is felt to be in good hands.

The (re)presentation of the black body in these economic configurations was not uncontested. The article in *The Chronicle* goes on to remind of the constant surveillance practices and technologies employed by whites in the postemancipation period. These activities include detailing the actions of the recently freed black bodies while at the same time harboring an (un)conscious desire to maintain control over all black bodies. *The Chronicle* informs its reading audience of the activities of African Americans and serves as a communication medium for disseminating information to a broad white public about the affairs and events occurring in African America. These reports could be used to bulwark and justify the necessity of white control over "problematic" black bodies. Reporting serving as surveillance is not at all benign, however. Such reports served an important role and were critical components in a complex societal policing apparatus, one particularly geared to observing and controlling black bodies. In this vein, these reports served to inform and warn if needed, an already hostile public of actions or ideas of African Americans that were viewed as unacceptable. Through such reports African Americans, both individually and collectively, could be readily identified and curtailed from continuing these actions.

The example involving the economic activities of James Ferguson highlights this issue of surveillance by providing a eloquent example of the problematics accompanying the projection and translation an ideology of redeeming the black body and the reactions and lingering perceptions of whites as to the proper position and place of the black body in the postemancipation order. To this end, after commenting on the respectability of

James Ferguson in connection with being appointed to the board of directors of the bank in Richmond, *The Chronicle* observed and commented:

> But we warn our colored friends outside Richmond to look well before them before they trust their money so far from home. We do not wish to discourage this enterprise of the enterprising colored men of Richmond; but we must say the bank is based on a wrong principle. If its scope is confined to Richmond we would have nothing to say, but the idea seems to be to scoop in the negro's money from all parts of the State – if not he country. It seems to be a race movement, and proposed to appeal to the instincts and prejudices of race. But of all things finance is not and should not be controlled by considerations of "race, color or previous condition."
>
> If such men as Mr. Ferguson (and such seem to have been appointed to the directorate throughout the State) could look after the deposits of their friends and neighbors the case might be different. But can they?
>
> The middle-aged, among our colored friends will recollect, no doubt, the widespread distress occasioned by the Freedman's Savings Bank, established (as pretended) for the peculiar benefit of the negro race.[85]

The article provides a detailed report on the infrastructure of the bank and the scope of its activities. It also observes and notes the underlying philosophy encouraging and propelling this movement. Through its observations and conjecture, the article demonstrates that the equation of the ideology of redeeming the black body did not

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[85] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, May 22, 1891.

translate unilaterally across the color-line. As Michel Foucault has argued, "Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body."[86] Although James Ferguson was deemed a respectable "negro" – even to the point of having a title preface his "unraced" name – the publisher of the Charlottesville based newspaper used his respectability against him. The authenticity of his "respectability," and hence his representiveness, served as the foundation in encouraging the view that despite his redeemed body, he nevertheless was a black body that could not be fully trusted. The representiveness of his black body could not and would not assuage fears and doubts by whites about black bodies coming together and inhabiting new economic spaces in new, economically collective formations. The newspaper comments at length over its hesitancy, if you will, to endorse this collective economic enterprise – even to the point of linking and freezing such collective economic actions to the failed Freedman's Bank. These disparaging remarks, to put it mildly, vividly express white anxiety over the continual attempt by African Americans to (re)script the black body. Furthermore, these comments reveal a continual tendency for black bodies – collectively and individually – to require the control and oversight of better informed, more knowledgeable whites. *The Chronicle* dictates the actions that black bodies *must* take: "Keep your money in sight. If you have not deposited, don't. If you have deposited, draw out while it is yet time." As in times before, this control is couched in a paternalistic context; always geared to the benefit of African Americans – "This advice we give in all good faith and we would give the same to white people under the same circumstances." Thus, the white public failed to

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[86] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 56.

fully recognize the new black body that was being advanced in this activity and counters the Masonic ideology of redemption as embodied in person of James Ferguson.

As members of Jefferson Lodge engaged the social and political fields of postemancipation Virginia, the boundaries of their ideology of redeeming the black body expanded as the scope of the interactions expanded. These zones of intersection where the fraternal ideology of redemption overlapped with other actions and social locations of members in the postemancipation order are highlighted by the lives of M. T. Lewis and Jesse Herndon.[87] Lewis and Herndon served as the pastors of the two leading African American churches in nineteenth-century Charlottesville – Delevan Baptist Church and Mt. Zion Baptist Church, respectively – and both were early members of Jefferson Lodge. In addition, Lewis not only lead the Delevan Baptist Church, he served as Worshipful Master of Jefferson Lodge in 1878 and in 1880.

As sacred and secular leaders, Lewis and Herndon embodied the ideology of redemption so pervasive in the Lodge and embodied by its members. A white worker among Freedmen at the conclusion of the Civil War commented upon their representative stature:

Returning to the subject of religion most of the Freedmen of Charlottesville professed the Baptist faith and supported two churches, the 1st and 2nd Baptist. There were also some Methodists enough to form a small society, which was presided over by a very ignorant colored man, well stocked with piety but sadly lacking in moral qualities. In the earlier years of our life among these people, the ministers who were supposed to proclaim the word of God from the {unreadable}

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[87] On M. T. Lewis, see Richard I. McKinney, *Keeping the Faith*, 55-56.

of the two Baptist churches were much like their Methodist brothers in character,

but sometime in the early seventies, each of these churches secured the services of

a young man of good moral character and fair education.[88]

The leadership qualities and character of Lewis and Herndon, both in their respective

churches and in the Lodge, bear out this observation as both men enjoyed successful

careers as pastors and Freemasons.

As exemplars of the ideology of redeeming the black body, M. T. Lewis and Jesse

Herndon were able to perform this (re)scripting and to have the new meaning recognized

and acknowledged by the white public. This is not to say that these two individuals were

totally successful in having their representative bodies produce wide-ranging effects on

various regimes of power in postemancipation Charlottesville. However, they were able

to affect a symbolic change by embodying this ideological posture which in and of itself

suggests a degree to which this ideological construct was able to (re)arrange some

relations of power. Throughout the pages of Charlottesville newspapers, their names

were prefaced by the title of either "Rev." or "Pastor." Whether in connection with the

activities of their church or with the Lodge or any other activity, such an action can be

read as indicative of a recognition that the relations of power that sought to (re)claim and

control these black bodies may no longer hold sway and thus, this new understanding of

these black bodies was recognized by proper titles being affixed to their name. A May

13, 1887 article in *The Chronicle* reads:

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[88] Philena Carkin, *Reminiscences of my Life and Work among the Freedmen of Charlottesville, Virginia, from March 1ˢᵗ 1866 to July 1ˢᵗ 1875, Vol. 1*, unpublished manuscript, 106 in "1866-1875: Philena Carkin: Reminiscences and (e.c.) Commission 11,123," *Papers of Philena Carkin 1866-1902*, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

Pastor Herndon, of the Mt. Zion Baptist church will administer the ordinance of

baptism at Cochran's pond next Sunday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock.

The June 15, 1879 edition of *The Jeffersonian* relates:

At a regular communication of Jefferson Lodge No. 20, F. and A. A. A. Y. M.,

held on Wednesday evening, June 11th, the following officers were elected for the

ensuing year – viz: Thomas Cayton, W.M.; Antonio Buckner, S.W; G. W.

Buckner, J. W., **Rev**. M. T. Lewis, Treasurer; W. L. Brown, Secretary; E. Parago,

S. D.; W. J. Jones, J. D.; Thaddeus Mayo, Tiler; Horace Kinney and Robt. Rives,

Stewards; J. H. Ferguson, Chaplain.

The Chronicle of August 18, 1882 offers:

ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF ST. LUKE'S SOCIETY. – This organization,

composed of colored citizens, delegates from the various counties of the State,

met in the capacity of a State Lodge, in the hall over the Gem Saloon, on Tuesday

last, R. W. Foster, of Richmond, VA., Worthy Master. This lodge represents

about one thousand members. It was organized in 1879, and its object is

benevolence – "to help the sick and bury the dead." The Grand Lodge is

entertained by the local Lodge No. 82, of this place. It will be in session until

Friday, when a street parade and a sermon at Mt. Zion church by **Rev**. Jesse

Herndon, will close its labors.

The function of affixing titles to the names of Herndon and Lewis worked to the degree

that these textual modifiers signal a new corporeality of these individuals. They were

something different, something new. Despite this fact, even as an ideology of redeeming

the black body manifested by Herndon and Lewis highlights the possibilities and

potentials of this new black body ideal, these two individuals nonetheless stand as unique individuals on this continuum. Moreover, even as they seek to become more representative and symbolic of a whole group of people by embodying this ideological position, by affixing titles to their name, the newspapers – as proxies for the white social and political power structure – mark them as singular and unique. Thus, even as Lewis and Herndon have their status recognized and acknowledged it is constantly negotiated and translated in ways that they themselves were unable to control.

The status of Lewis and Herndon also elicited another response from the larger Charlottesville community. Because both men were leaders in religious institutions with a legacy of challenging the inequities of American democracy from its beginnings and throughout the postemancipation period, there was the necessity, indeed an imperative for the activities of these two individuals as well as their institutions to come under constant surveillance. The need for such a course of action was highlighted early with the founding of Mt. Zion Baptist Church. As leading forums for political debate, African American churches were viewed with suspicion. This suspicion, along with a veiled threat that this institution would be under surveillance, was reflected in a strongly worded column in *The Chronicle*:

> One word to our colored friends. Keep politics out of the church; and above all things, have nothing to do with strolling political preachers who go about the country teaching infamous doctrines, pretending to be your friends, and succeed only in making the whites your enemies.[89]

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[89] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, May 1, 1869.

As leaders of institutions that possessed a history of subversive activity, Lewis and Herndon symbolized more than just pastors of religious organizations. As educated and articulate leaders, they both were possible political agitators who could disturb the social and political hierarchy that privileged whites. They could also serve as conduits for "strolling political preachers" who "succeed only in making whites your enemies." The potential subversive import of these two individuals was augmented by their membership in a "secret" African American fraternal order. With the Church and the Lodge, they could exploit their Masonic and Religious networks and connections in a coordinated effort to challenge the political hierarchy.

Recognizing that Lewis' and Herndon's cultural, political, and economic capital derived from their mutually reinforcing networks of Church and Lodge, it was necessary to observe and monitor these new black bodies emerging in these new spaces in the postemancipation order. The Charlottesville newspaper provided detailed *reports* when these two networks converged. On the occasion of the cornerstone laying of the Delevan church, *The Chronicle* observed:

> LAYING THE CORNER STONE OF THE DELEVAN BAPTIST CHURCH –
> On Monday at 2 o'clock the following orders formed on Water street, in this place:
>
> The Jefferson Lodge, No. 20; Mount Zion Lodge, No. 18, of Staunton, Fairfax Taylor Lodge, No. 1455, Charlottesville; King Hiram Lodge, No. 1463 Staunton; South River Lodge, No. 1301 Waynesboro; Piedmont Lodge; of Gordonsville, headed by Johnson's Band of this place, who rendered most excellent music. The procession proceeded to the site of the colored Delevan

Baptist church for the purpose of laying the corner stone. On their arrival at the site of the church they delayed the ceremony until the pastor of the church Rev. M. T. Lewis, could take up a collection for building the said church, we could not learn what amount was collected but judge it was quite large, after the collection the ceremony of laying the corner stone was performed by James H. Jones of Petersburg, Virginia. An oration was delivered by Rev. J. Herndon, also excellent remarks were made by James H. Jones, and Thomas Cayton.[90]

This finely detailed account provides a critical insight into the depth and breath of the fraternal and religious networks available to both Lewis and Herndon. With fraternal orders from throughout central Virginia represented along with collaboration of the two leading African American ministers in Charlottesville, it would prove wise to keep a cautious eye on these individuals and their institutions. Furthermore, in order to ensure that they heeded the advice of not using the larger institution of the church for political matters, surveillance would have been required to ensure that the structured parameters in which these two individuals could safely operate and negotiate were maintained. Thus, the problematic status of the black body was not erased with the emergence of these representative black bodies. The meanings attributed to and represented by the black body were (re)scripted to a new context of power relations that sought to mark and surveil the still contested presence (or absence) of African Americans within the postemancipation order.

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[90] Charlottesville, *The Jeffersonian*, November 21, 1877.

IV

The ideology of redeeming the black body as embraced and promoted by members of

Jefferson Lodge was not without its internal tensions and contradictions. As with all

ideologies, some of its tenets could not be reconciled with other aspects especially within

a social order that often purposively mis-recognized the attempts to (re)define the black

body. These inconsistencies were also a result of internal disagreements within the

African American community. To be sure, the posture embodied by some members of

Jefferson Lodge was not one that was held by all members within the Charlottesville

African American community. As one of a number of ideologies, its adherents often

confronted situations where their social or political positions that were informed by their

adherence to this ideology of redemption was not commensurate with the political

positions and views held my others in the community.

One of the foremost proponents of this ideology, James H. Ferguson, encountered

extreme opposition in his decision to back the Democratic ticket in the 1892 elections.

According to *The Chronicle*:

> Many of the most worthy and prominent colored men of the city have expressed
>
> their intention of voting for Cleveland and Stevenson. Among the most
>
> influential of these are John West and James H. Ferguson. The latter has long
>
> been a leading member of the Delevan church, and a teacher in its Sunday school.
>
> Soon after it became know[n] that he would not support the Republican candidate,
>
> John A. Brown, superintendent of the Sunday school, informed him that his class

wished him to resign, and threatened to leave the school unless he complied with their desire. Ferguson promptly tendered his resignation.[91]

Although Ferguson's action was supported by the white public, his political position was not widely shared by other African Americans who viewed his desire to back the Democratic ticket as incompatible with the interests of African America. Moreover, his decision was read and understood as a betrayal of the interests of the group of African Americans in his Sunday school class. Their desire to have him resign from his position reveals the level of disconnect between his political actions and the political sentiments of his group. Although he embodied this ideology of redemption and was a leader in the African American community, his political pronouncement also served as a symbol of the contradictions and limitations of his ideology. As he sought to be representative of the new black body, his actions exposed the gap between his representative ideology posture and the position of the African American community. Even as the white publisher of *The Chronicle* applauded Ferguson's intention and highlighted his redeemed body – signaled by such adjectives as "most worthy," "prominent," and "leading" – his body became a sign and source of a visible contradiction – one that was a betrayal of black interests. Thus it became necessary for his body to leave the Sunday school. The contradictions exposed in the example of Ferguson forces the recognition that the ideological tensions and ambiguities inherent in this position were not without some consequence. The case of Thomas Cayton presents this point in great relief.

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[91] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, November 4, 1892.

Thomas Cayton came to Charlottesville to head the Jefferson School in the mid 1870s. Growing up in Hampton, Virginia and in Connecticut, Cayton fondly, if not romantically, remembered his childhood:

> I enjoyed so much reading your letter. It again carried me back to my happy boyhood days in East Brookfield. As I sat for an hour in my room after I received your letter, I had a mental picture of those years. I lived my life over again. I pictured Mr. & Mrs. Forbes. They were grand people and such thorough Christians. I could imagine myself sitting next to Mr. Forbes in church, as I always did every Sunday in the second pew from the front. I was again in the Sunday school, at the Church festivals, at the Sewing Circles. I was ice skating, sleighing, horseback riding and a hundred and one other things a New England boy enjoyed who lived in a good wholesome Christian atmosphere.[92]

From his memory, we gather that Cayton enjoyed a rather privileged childhood. His privilege was extended as he attended and graduated from Hampton Institute. As an 1872 graduate of Hampton Institute, Cayton possessed educational credentials that were more advanced than most of his counterparts he would eventually join in Jefferson Lodge.

In Charlottesville, Cayton took immediate interest in and became a contributing member to the African American community. Having been instilled with the ethic of "race work" at Hampton, encountering an ideology of redeeming the black body as embodied by the members of Jefferson Lodge would seem a logical outgrowth of his

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[92] Letter from Thomas Cayton to M. J. Sherman dated December 19, 1914, "Cayton, Thomas X-73, Elizabeth City Co., Va.," University Archives, Hampton University.

educational and social endeavors.[93] With his fraternity brothers, he took an active role in promoting the Charlottesville Jubilee Singers. As principle of the Jefferson School, he held a prominent position in the eyes of African Americans who sought to better themselves through education. He contributed to the fraternal life of Jefferson Lodge by serving in various capacities – from securing loans for eligible members to serving as Worshipful Master. Drafted on November 14, 1877, along with William Brown, M. T. Lewis, and C. R. Foster, Cayton would provide the necessary structure for Jefferson Lodge by writing the by-laws of the organization.[94] This action not only provided a framework of the organization, it also served as a further sign that the black body was now modern and fully capable of governing and controlling itself. For Cayton, taking part and embodying this ideology of redemption was not a foreign idea. Indeed, he became intimately aware of the various manifestations of this ideological construct.

Cayton's Masonic involvements were not confined to the boundaries of Charlottesville or Albemarle County. Indeed, he took his Masonic obligations and connections seriously. It was not long before the wider Masonic public took notice of his ascension on the Masonic ladder. In 1882, he was elected to statewide office. *The Chronicle* briefly made note of his election:

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[93] See Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 66-103.

[94] November 14, 1877 meeting of Jefferson Lodge. *Minute Book Dated January 12, 1876 to December 1881.*

Mr. Thomas Cayton of this place was elected Deputy Grand Master of Masons of the colored Masons of the State at the recent meeting of their Grand Lodge in Richmond.[95]

Cayton's presence and prominence was marked not only by the brief mention of his election, but also by the title that accompanies his name. Cayton continued his Masonic ascendancy, culminating in his election as Grand Master for the Grand Lodge of the State of Virginia. In the December, 1883 session held in Charlottesville, Cayton's climb to the top was complete as he was elected to the office of Grand Master.[96] With his friends and fellow Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge looking on, Cayton captured the highest Masonic credential of any other African American Freemason in Charlottesville and Virginia. Coupled with his principleship of the Jefferson School, Cayton was arguably the most striking and well positioned individual embodying and exemplifying the tenets of the ideology of redemption as articulated by the members of Jefferson Lodge.

Despite his successes in Charlottesville and his numerous connections with the African American community there, Cayton resigned his position at the Jefferson School and left the area. A January 18, 1911 letter provides the reason for his action:

I resigned the principleship of the Colored Grade School of Charlottesville, Va at the request of Gen. Armstrong to take up the agency of the "Workman" and to solicit contributions and scholarships in the North.[97]

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[95] Charlottesville. *The Chronicle*, December 20, 1882.

[96] Petersburg, *The Lancet*, December 22, 1883.

[97] Letter from Thomas Cayton to Rev. Dr. H. B. Frissell dated January 18, 1911, "Cayton, Thomas X-73. Elizabeth City Co., Va.," University Archives, Hampton University.

His work for the Hampton Institute based journal, *Southern Workman*, placed Cayton in a national position of prominence. No doubt his embodiment of the ideology of redeeming the black body played a role in General Armstrong's request for him to come to work for Hampton Institute and its flagship journal. Indeed, his highly visible presence in African America would bring him into the circle of one of the late nineteenth-century's leading African American figures – Booker T. Washington. In a letter to General Armstrong, Washington would speak glowingly and fondly of Cayton. Commenting on what he felt was the inappropriate conduct of a teacher at Tuskegee Institute thus making him an unsuitable candidate as an agent for the *Southern Workman*, Washington informed the General:

> I was greatly disappointed in him. Aside from this I am sure it would be against Tuskegee for him to take Mr. Cayton's place. Mr. Cayton and I have always helped each other in many ways that you do not know of. Bird would be in a position to do us harm.[98]

Washington reveals a level of friendship and closeness to Cayton that was reciprocal. Cayton and Washington's relationship would have beneficial to both men as they each attempted to carve out a place and position in postemancipation society. Needless to say, Cayton masterfully capitalized on his connections and character in negotiating the varied terrain of the postemancipation South. It was this maestro like agility that would enable him to continue his careful navigation of the social and political terrain of the

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[98] Letter from Booker T. Washington to Samuel Chapman Armstrong dated March 15, 1890. Booker T. Washington, *The Booker T. Washington Papers, Volume 3*, Louis Harlan, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 36-37.

postemancipation period, but with a critical difference – Cayton would opt to complete his journey as a white man.

In the late nineteenth century, Cayton eventually left the South to reside in New York City. It remains unclear how and under what circumstances Thomas Cayton decided to move and reside in New York. Several biographical sources point out the fact that at one time or another, he served an appointment in the U. S. Revenue Service at Newport News and later as the traveling agent with the Virginia Colored Concert Company, accompanying them on tour to England, South Africa, and Australia.[99] In New York, Cayton began a new career in the phonograph industry. A 1903 letter provides the details of his business activities:

> For eight years, as you may know, I was manager of one branch of business of
>
> The New York Phonograph Co. of 57 Fifth Ave. I remained in this position until
>
> this company consolidated with the North American Phonograph Co. when my
>
> branch of the business was discontinued. At the suggestion of officers of the
>
> Company I went into business for myself. For the last five years I have been in
>
> business under the above name at this address.[100]

Cayton headed a business under the name "Long Island Phonograph Co." based at 1131 Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, New York. From his correspondence, Cayton must have made quite an impression during his tenure with the company as the officers of the

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[99] See the entry on Thomas Cayton in *Twenty-Two Years' Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia* (Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893) and Booker T. Washington, *The Booker T. Washington Papers, Volume 3,* Louis Harlan, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 37.

[100] Letter from Thomas Cayton to M. J. Sherman dated December 27, 1903, "Cayton, Thomas X-73, Elizabeth City Co., Va.," University Archives, Hampton University.

company suggested that he go into business for himself. But Cayton's business would soon suffer as larger economic forces impacted his operation. In the same letter we learn about his business downturn:

> Until two years ago, I did an excellent business. About that time however, Department stores took up the sale of phonographs, supplies, etc. and by the installment system, the payment of a nominal sum down, the have forced small dealers in greater New York to the wall. This they can do very easily because of their large capital. The result is, during the last two years I have lost very heavily and am forced under.[101]

What started out as a promising opportunity turned to tragedy as bigger and better capitalized businesses took aim at Cayton's market. With his business in tatters and his market niche eroded, Cayton turned south again – not physically, but through a continual stream of letters to various individuals at his alma mater, Hampton Institute.

To renew old ties would not be a great obstacle for Cayton. He was a man who was so much a part of African American life and culture in Virginia and throughout the South. He was an individual who was so thoroughly interwoven into the fabric of African American life and culture in the postemancipation period. As Grand Master of the Virginia Grand Lodge, Principal of the Jefferson School in Charlottesville, Worshipful Master of Jefferson Lodge, and representative for the *Southern Workman*, Cayton was an individual possessing character traits and attributes that were no doubt viewed positively by both blacks and whites. But in the moments between this re-connection and his earlier business success in New York, Cayton *embodied* a

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[101] Ibid.

contradiction to the ideology of the redeeming the black body. In a newspaper clipping with the title "As to 'Passing For White'" we find this report on Thomas Cayton:

> To return to the subject, I met an old Hampton schoolmate of the long, long ago the other day in a public café in Brooklyn. He can, WAS and perhaps SHOULD pass for white. He was with two young white men, who were young enough to be his sons, and who, from their looks and dress (although you cannot always tell a book by its cover), were far below the company, white, black, or "yaller" he should keep. Our eyes met; he knew me, I knew him. It was the Tom Cayton and Gus Hodges of thirty-odd years ago at "old Hampton." He took a second look to be sure; excused himself from his white friends and – fled.
>
> There was no need for so doing, all he had to do was say: "Hello, Gus," and wink the other eye and I would at once knew he was "passing for white" and should have let him "pass," not for white, but pass my notice.
>
> Tom Cayton was an octaroon, a native of the village of Hampton, a graduate of the class of '73 of the Hampton College (or Institute) just one class ahead of "us." Tom, beyond a doubt, was "passing for white" – a white Jew – we will let him pass.
>
> B. Square[102]

The assertion of a redeemed black body in the face of an anti-black racist and racialist society was not absolute. To be sure, the actions of James Ferguson highlight the fractures and cleavages that were part and parcel of this ideological construct. In the

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[102] Undated newspaper clipping, "Cayton, Thomas X-73, Elizabeth City Co., Va.," University Archives, Hampton University.

case of Thomas Cayton, we are presented with another example demonstrating the fact that even those who chose to embrace and embody an ideology of redeeming the black body in and through the culture and institution of Freemasonry never cleaved to this position in an absolute manner. Cayton's example presents us with what is perhaps the ultimate contradiction. To consciously undertake a course of action interpreted along the ideological lines of redeeming the black body would not have been a simple task. Perhaps Cayton sought to escape the constant surveillance of these new black bodies that sought to determine and limit the possibilities for African American identity. Reading the Charlottesville newspapers, Cayton would have become intimately aware of the constant surveillance practices and techniques that observed and ultimately attempted to fix the place and position of the black body in an anti-black racist and racialist order:

> A large number of colored persons excurted [sic] from Charlottesville last
>
> Sunday, spending the day in the metropolis, and returning at night.[103]

> An excursion of colored people arrived here from Newport News and
>
> intermediate points, Sunday evening and remained several hours. Some of the
>
> excursionists behaved very badly. They created a row with some of our resident
>
> colored population, who avenged themselves by going down to the coal-bins and
>
> stoning the train as it passed. The excursionists, we learn, stoned the No. 3
>
> express as it passed Keswick coming this way. There is no good in the Sunday

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[103] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, May 12, 1882.

excursions, and we think our local authorities have the power, and should exercise

it to prohibit their landing in the town on Sunday.[104]

Cayton was probably critically aware of the technologies and logics of this surveillance

regime. In such an order, African American leisure activities were disturbing to the white

psyche. The presence of black bodies – redeemed or not – were problematic to a regime

that sought to (af)fix the identity and meaning of these "objects." However, in a social

order constructed on the surveillance of the body of African Americans, Cayton's act of

"passing" reveals a crucial point of slippage in this regime. In other words, the act of

passing reveals the inherent fluidity in reading and fixing the black body by the markings

of race. In this vein, a social hierarchy predicated on a reign of sight that observed and

coerced had within it the seeds for its own betrayal. To this end, in passing for white

Cayton's act "jeopardize[d] the very notion of race as a biological essence, foregrounding

the social contexts of vision by calling into question the 'truth' of the object in question .

. . [and] challenge[d] the very notion of the visual as an epistemological guarantee."[105]

Even as Cayton was so immersed in African American culture throughout

Virginia, he also possessed the necessary "epidermal capital" that could enable him to

capitalize on this asset in an economy of vision and pass for white in another social

location. As the writer of the account of Cayton's passing acknowledges, "He can, WAS

and perhaps SHOULD pass for white." Cayton's passing reveals the inconsistencies of

contradictions embedded in the social logic that equates the visual with the essence. But,

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[104] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, July 15, 1887.

[105] Amy Robinson as cited in Phillip Brian Harper, "Passing for What?" Racial Masquerade and the Demands of Upward Mobility," *Callaloo* 21.2 (1998), 381.

even in this act – which can simultaneously be acknowledged and rejected as subversive – Cayton remained dependent on the hegemony of vision and the surveilling technologies and practices of a social order characterized by its binary marking and encoding of racial difference. As Phillip Brian Harper argues, "In other words, the passer's ability to register as white depends on precisely the binary structure of black/white racial difference whose constructed character the practice of passing is itself meant to reveal."[106]

Perhaps the constant violence against the black body that transcended the place and position of African Americans forced him to reconsider his conceptualization of the black body and adherence to an ideology of redemption. Cayton may have contemplated this during his election to the office of Grand Master of Virginia at the 1883 Grand Lodge session in Charlottesville. Right after this session, a call was issued for a Convention in Norfolk, Virginia to respond to the massacre at Danville. A group of "prominent gentlemen" proclaimed:

> In view of the unlawful, and unjustifiable, inhuman and cruel butchery of our race
>
> at Danville, for no other reason than that they claimed the right to exercise those
>
> rights guaranteed us, as American citizens, by the Fifteenth amendment of the
>
> constitution; and in our view of the fact that the Bourbon party and press continue
>
> to misrepresent the true history of that disgraceful affair in order to deceive the
>
> people of the country for political effect; and in order that the true history of the
>
> massacre may be given to the public and the facts set forth in their proper light
>
> and that country may know the methods employed by the Bourbon party to defeat

---

[106] Phillip Brian Harper, "Passing for What?." 382.

> Liberalism in this State, we, the undersigned, call upon our people to elect delegates to a State Convention to be held in the city of Norfolk, Thursday December 13th 12 M, the representation to be as follows: two delegates from each county and one delegate from each ward in cities.[107]

Maybe Cayton's action was the logical conclusion of an ideological posture that advocated (re)presenting the black body in a manner consistent with the modern aims of being a part of United States social and civic society. In a racialized society that placed a premium on whiteness, since Cayton, as the writer of the article suggests, "he can, WAS and perhaps SHOULD pass for white," he possibly reconciled this racial political economy with his embodying of the ideology of the redemption of the black body in his concluding act to (re)present the black body as white. Perhaps, just perhaps, his "passing" was the ultimate sign of Cayton's agency in that he so truly embodied an ideology of redeeming the black body that his redeeming act no longer required his body to be marked as black. Perhaps Cayton decided that life as a white man in a society that positioned white men at its pinnacle was just more advantageous that living as a black man in an anti-black racist and racialist society. Or, and more significantly, maybe Cayton just decided that he wanted to live life otherwise. Whatever the reason – of which we can never be sure – Cayton's passing reminds us that the embodiment of an ideology of redeeming the black body not only faced external obstacles, but was contested even in the most internal and intimate of spaces.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

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[107] Petersburg, *The Lancet*, December 1, 1883.

The ideology of redeeming the black body was indeed represented by an amalgam of different strains and ideas each intent on (re)constructing and (re)presenting a gendered black body in postemancipation society. In the decades following the Civil War there was a new and pronounced contestation over the scripting the meaning of the black body. Claudia Tate offers a clear and succinct summary on this discourse in United States society:

> Academic scholarship, print media, plastic arts, manufactured goods, and colloquial speech of the post-Reconstruction era all reflected the ideology of retrogressionism and characterized black people not merely as intellectually inferior but as lazy, ugly, intemperate, slothful, lascivious, and violent, indeed bestial. Racist delineations of coons, mammies, and sambos were so heavily interwoven into the texture of American life during this era that they became stock decorative features of the mass-produced items that the Industrial Revolution efficiently furnished for broad consumption.[108]

For African American men, the scripting of the "Sambo" or other derogatory texts on the black body needed to be countered in light of African American freedom and membership in the social and civic order. The system of forced labor bulwarking the ideology advanced by those like the Reverend Joseph Henry Allen of Massachusetts who held the opinion that African Americans as "a race [take] kindly to domestication, and receives its crumbs of a higher culture with grateful submissiveness" no longer provided

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[108] Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10.

the material backing to suppress African American challenges to such doctrines.[109] The paternalism and condescension that was "written" across the black body and characterized European American discourse on the nature of black being was countered by African American Freemasons who sought to redeem the black body.

African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge (re)organized conceptions of the body by undergoing the rituals and initiation rites into an order that scripted a new and more profound meaning to the black body. No longer was the black body a reservoir for an exploitative labor system. The black body was transfigured into a noble specimen capable of representing the virtues of honor, charity, love, and brotherhood. Through Freemasonry, the black body gained access to the level of the universal. And as part of the social body of Jefferson Lodge, African American Freemasons were now positioned to take an active role in challenging the hierarchies of United States social and civic society. The ideology of redeeming the black body was encoded in the rituals that served to invest in African American men who undertook Masonic initiation and membership with the vestments of honor, integrity, and principle that were highly prized social commodities in society. When translated to the group, these forms of social capital were capitalized into material power – be it collective economic strategies or challenging a hostile public intent on maintaining white hegemony. This investment in the body when transcribed in the domestic sphere supported patriarchal structures in African American life and culture.

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[109] Cited in George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 169.

Thus, the ideological production of redeeming the black body was linked to the

material conditions of a postemancipation order marked by violence, surveillance, and

modernity. What the members of Jefferson Lodge sought through this ideological

position was to (re)present the black body and, in turn, (re)arrange the relations of power

that attempted to circumscribe the contours of the black body to a more amenable accord

– one that offered the opportunity for African American cultural and political flourishing.

CHAPTER IV

SECRET RITES, PUBLIC POWER: THE POLITICAL USES OF RITUAL AND

SECRECY

When a man or a party suffers injustice in the United States, to whom can he turn? To public opinion? That is what forms the majority. To the legislative body? It represents the majority and obeys it blindly. To the executive power? It is appointed by the majority and serves as its passive instrument. To the police? They are nothing but the majority under arms. A jury? The jury is the majority vested with the right to pronounce judgement; even the judges in certain states are elected by the majority. So, however iniquitous or unreasonable the measure which hurts you, you must submit.

Alexis de Tocqueville[1]

"Why can't you dress like a woman?" He was standing by the stove. "What's that sailor's cap doing on your head? Don't you have stockings? What are you trying to make me look like in this town?" He trembled with the thought of the white men in the bank – the men who helped him buy and mortgage houses – discovering that this raggedy bootlegger was his sister who had a daughter but no husband, and that daughter had a daughter but no husband. A collection of lunatics who made wine and sang in the streets "like common street women! Just like common street women!"[2]

A few weeks before Appomattox, a still divided nation celebrated the second

inauguration of a President whose career in office would be forever linked with the

divisive battles of a Civil War. After a hurried morning of signing legislation, a stoic

President Lincoln stood guard over a processional celebrating his re-election. As a cold

and steady rain soaked the crowds assembled to witness a spectacular display trudging

along the mudded streets of Washington City, President Lincoln and other dignitaries

looked on as various military, government, and civilian personnel marched pass in his

honor. Among the organizations involved in the processional on that rain drenched

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols., George Lawrence, trans. and J. P. Mayer, ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 252.

[2] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 20.

March morning, a writer for the *New York Herald* caught glimpse of an odd assortment of

fellows in the associations paying honor to the President. Singling out this group for

particular mention in the published account on the inaugural activities, the writer

observed:

> A lodge of colored freemasons was noticed among the Masonic and Odd Fellows'
>
> lodges in the procession.[3]

In a parade that featured members of the armed forces of the United States, the Vice-

President and Vice-President elect, the diplomatic corps, and the judiciary among others,

the visual impression of "a lodge of colored freemasons" indeed left a lasting imprint on

the reporter of the *New York Herald*. In a thorough and detailed account, the writer did

not fail to notice the appearance of a group of African American men parading in honor

of the re-election of a President under whose tenure many of their enslaved brethren

acquired their freedom.

By including the reference to the group of African American Freemasons in this

newspaper account, the writer facilitates the connection of African Americans – through

the visual display by this secret society of "colored freemasons" – to larger political

drama of the social and political (re)configuration of the nation. Freemasonry has a long

standing relationship with United States civic and political culture. This lodge of

"colored freemasons" continued this relationship by placing the culture and institution of

Freemasonry in the service of the nation. By parading in the inaugural parade they also

announced the presence of a new group to the national polity. Taking their place in this

national procession honoring the President of the United States, an unnamed lodge of

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[3] New York, *New York Herald*, March 5, 1865.

"colored freemasons" presented to the nation their presence and symbolically the presence of all African Americans as citizens of the United States.

The merging of the culture and institution of Freemasonry with the political and civic culture of the United States was a well established phenomenon prior to the actions of the lodge of African American Freemasons in Lincoln's second inaugural parade. In fact, with the Masonic ritual performed at the cornerstone laying ceremony of the United States Capitol, Freemasonry and the political and civic culture of the United States have been intimately intertwined with one another since the early days of the Republic.[4] As George Washington – both as President and as Freemason – wedded the political culture of the United States with the secret rites Freemasonry in the Capitol ceremonies, the African American Freemasons in Lincoln's second inaugural extended this union with their presence in the parade. The social and symbolic significance of this public gesture by the lodge of African American Freemasons would have a different meaning than the actions of the first President less than a century ago. Whereas the ceremonies by Washington and his fellow Freemasons at the Capitol on September 18, 1793, conferred a sense of awe at the founding of the nation while "spotlight[ing] the Freemasons who, along with their most illustrious member, occupied center stage in the proceedings," the members of the unnamed "lodge of colored freemasons" in Lincoln's second inaugural

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[4] On the relation of Freemasonry to early American political culture, see Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Steven C. Bullock, "'Sensible Signs': The Emblematic Education of Post-Revolutionary Freemasonry," James Stevens Curl, "The Capitol in Washington, D. C., and Its Freemasonic Connections," and Len Travers, "'In the Greatest Solemn Dignity': The Capitol Cornerstone and Ceremony in the Early Republic," in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 155-267.

signaled the emergence of a new nation whereby the political presence of African

Americans was signified in and through the culture and institution of Freemasonry.[5]

The African American adoption and appropriation of the culture of Freemasonry

for political ends did not cease with the processional display in Lincoln's second

inaugural. African American Freemasons throughout the postemancipation period

engaged the secret culture and institutional rituals of Freemasonry to advance various

political projects. The wedding of the political and civic culture of the United States and

the secret rites and rituals of Freemasonry would be taken up by African American men

who became part of the fraternal order in the postemancipation era. At a significant

moment in the evolving drama of American democracy, African American Freemasons

utilized and deployed the culture and symbols of their fraternal order to underscore the

newly legitimated presence of African Americans in the public sphere of the United

States. Such a cultural practice and adoption was not arbitrary or a novelty to be sure.

Lynn Hunt has perceptively observed:

> The exercise of power always requires symbolic practices. There is no
>
> government without rituals and without symbols, however demystified or
>
> unmagical government may seem. Government cannot take place without stories,
>
> signs, and symbols that convey and reaffirm the legitimacy of governing in
>
> thousands of unspoken ways. In a sense, legitimacy is the general agreement on
>
> signs and symbols.[6]

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[5] Len Travers, "'In the Greatest Solemn Dignity': The Capitol Cornerstone and Ceremony in the Early Republic," 157.

[6] Lynn Hunt, Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 54.

Following this logic, the legitimacy of African Americans in the political culture of the United States was predicated not only in affirming the legitimacy of the symbols of government but, more importantly, by also employing symbolic practices that resonated in the public sphere and undergirded the presence of African Americans in the political realm. To this end, the culture and institution of Freemasonry was a significant component in the "exercise of power" by African Americans in consenting to the basic tenets of American democracy. This political use of a cultural formation predicated on ritual and secrecy in turn, aided in affirming the legitimacy of African Americans in the political arena.

This chapter explores the contours of the political appropriation of the culture and institution of African American Freemasonry in postemancipation Virginia. Specifically, what follows is an interrogation of the manner and method by which the members of Jefferson Lodge appropriated the rituals and culture of the institution of Freemasonry as a strategic political practice in articulating the political aspirations of African Americans in the postemencipation period. I will argue that by examining the public performances of African American Freemasons in Jefferson Lodge we can uncover a fertile political discourse in which this group of African Americans challenge and contest the emerging social and political boundaries of the post-Civil War world.

The argument advanced in this chapter is based on the observation that through the cultural practices of African American Freemasonry we are able to witness the degree to which African American Freemasons adjudicated the battles and political contests over the place and position of African Americans in the postemancipation world. I will present an analysis of two emergent political discourses of the African American

Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge that draws on the performance of a cultural politics integral to, and coextensive with, Freemasonry: the politics of masculinity and the politics of respectability. Each of these political strategies suggest how and why this group of African American men chose the vehicle of Freemasonry to articulate their political aspirations as well as how cultural practices are transformed to potent weapons in a political discourse that forces itself on the political field and directly challenges other political actors who seek to negate the political assertions of African Americans. In the end, the cultural practices and politics of African American Freemasonry proclaim the presence of new political actors on the postemancipation landscape.

*   *   *

This effort in charting the political claims advanced by African Americans in and through the ritual and public performances of African American Freemasons draws on the extensive history of cultural appropriation in African American history.[7] To suggest an investigation of African American Freemasonry in connection with this legacy is to recognize that African American appropriation of Freemasonry was a crucial component in a complex political strategy that did not strictly dichotomize the political and the cultural. Inevitably, African American Freemasonry was part of a larger political strategy – what can be termed the "politics of culture" – that employed various cultural formations

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[7] The literature on the relation between culture and politics in African American history is too extensive to list in full here. Two articles by Robin D. G. Kelley contain an excellent beginning bibliography on this subject. See Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *The Journal of American History* 80.1 (June, 1993), 75-112 and "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk'," *The American Historical Review* 97.5 (December, 1992), 1400-1408.

in an ever expanding arsenal of political weapons designed to aid African Americans in articulating their discontent with a political system that marginalized their political choices and opportunities. William D. Piersen has instructively highlighted the historical legacy and political conscious of African American satire:

> Just as African Americans used African-style oral narratives to develop a
>
> communal understanding of the enslavement process and its meanings, so too
>
> have they maintained patterns of aggressive humor which had been used in
>
> African to defuse hostility and check antisocial behavior. Across the Americas
>
> the shortcomings and abuses of the powerful were lampooned in song just as they
>
> had been in Africa. Of course, in America, it was whites in general and
>
> oppressive masters in particular that became the favorite targets of satire.[8]

The political import of such cultural practices and traditions was not a limiting factor in the African American challenge to the existing social and economic arrangements of the society. Through a variety of cultural forms, African Americans were able and empowered to contest the evolving boundaries of an anti-black racist and racialist social and political order. Culture and politics were not separate spheres unresponsive to one another. On the contrary, African Americans utilized their cultural forms in articulating their political critiques, ideals, and aspirations. Indeed, through parades, festivals, community celebrations, and social and cultural organizations, "African Americans were not," as Geneviéve Fabre argues, "simply performing culture, they were performing

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[8] William D. Piersen, "A Resistance Too Civilized to Notice," in Gena Dagel Caponi, ed., *signifyin(g), sanctifyin ', & slam dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 348.

crucial social and political acts."[9] In recognizing the encoding of political responses in cultural forms and guises, we can begin to decipher the intense cultural politics of African Americans in general and the political cast of the cultural formation of African American Freemasonry in particular.

In adopting such a strategy, African Americans had to practice the art of carefully navigating and negotiating the boundaries circumscribing the usage of cultural acts and formations in their political assertions and demonstrations in the postemancipation period. To be sure, the recognition of the political potential of the cultural practices of African Americans was evident to European Americans since the Colonial period. As early as 1680 there were attempts to curtail African American cultural celebrations out of fear that they served as cover for politically subversive activities:

> Whereas the frequent meetings of considerable numbers of Negro slaves
> under pretense of feasts and burials is judged of dangerous consequence, it is
> enacted that no Negro or slave may carry arms, such as any club, staff, gun,
> sword, or other weapon, nor go from his owner's plantation without a certificate
> and then only on necessary occasions; the punishment twenty lashes on the bare
> back, well laid on. . . .[10]

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[9] Geneviéve Fabre, "African-American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century," in Geneviéve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History & Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 75. See also William H. Wiggins, *O Freedom!: Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

[10] Jane Purcell Guild, ed., *Black Laws of Virginia: A Summary of the Legislative Acts of Virginia Concerning Negroes from Earliest Times to the Present* (Afro-American Historical Society of Fauquier County, Virginia, 1996), 45-46. I am grateful to Scot French for bringing this source to my attention.

As a means of curtailing politically explosive activity under the guise of cultural celebrations, the 1680 act legitimated violence as a tool in thwarting African American rebellion against the social order.

In the postemancipation period, the suspicions over African American celebrations continued unabated. With their freedoms won as a result of the demise of the slave regime, African Americans engaged in various cultural celebrations that were still subject to the *spectre* and reality of violent acts by whites whenever and wherever they met or congregated:

> Quite a serious riot occurred in Southampton on Sunday, between white people and the negroes. Armed bodies of negroes paraded the streets and a good deal of firing was done. A party of fifteen whites, at least got together and dispersed the negroes under the threat of firing on them. No one was killed, and two negroes wounded.[11]

The scene in Southampton reminds us of the continual antagonisms and contestations that surrounded African American celebrations in the postemancipation period. With African Americans celebrating and exercising newly gained civic power expressed in the cultural form of the parade, whites of Southampton sought to enforce and limit such a display of social and political freedom. The use of violence in their response served as a critical weapon in an enforcement reserve for whites intent on maintaining control over the place and position of African Americans in the postemancipation world. The necessity for African Americans to finely and creatively navigate the contours of the political and the cultural arises from the ever present possibility of violent retribution. Grounded in

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[11] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, April 1, 1869.

colonial era legislative social control methods and techniques, the celebration by African

Americans in Southampton County and the violent reactions by whites attest to the

intensity over the conflicted interpretations of African American cultural politics.

The example from Southampton stands as one of the numerous and repeated

violent assaults on African Americans throughout the post-Civil War period – from

lynchings to rapes to beatings to mob violence. Indeed, part of the resolution adopted at

the conference of African Americans meeting in response to the Danville Massacre of

1883 provides stunning evidence of the reality and tenacity of this regime of violence:

> Whereas similar outrages have frequently occurred since the emancipation of our
>
> people, and the law seems powerless to protect and defend us on account of the
>
> seeming approval of the massacres by public sentiment in the South, as indicated
>
> by the very few arraignments and rare punishment of [those] guilty. . . .[12]

In a context sufficiently saturated by wonton acts of violence, African Americans were in

a position where they had to recognize the legitimacy of violence as a tool of social

control in the postemancipation world.[13] As the demonstration of the legitimacy of the

recourse to violence in Southampton goes to show, whites were invested with the

authority and privilege to utilize violent means to enforce their understanding of the

proper social order. African American challenges to this violent political authority in this

period were often cloaked in the symbolic acts and public ceremonies of various cultural

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[12] Petersburg, *The Lancet*, December 22, 1883.

[13] My reading of the centrality of violence in the postemancipation world draws on the work of Leon
Litwack, *Trouble In Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
1998).

formations.[14] As a critical political strategy, certain political meanings and messages had to be subtly encoded in cultural phenomena so as to avoid a violent retaliation from the white majority. However, the political message contained in the cultural form could not at the same time loose its potency nor fail to connect with its larger, intended audience. The fine line between the political and the cultural did not necessarily negate the political actions and articulations of African Americans. By engaging the cultural sphere in the political strategies for African American political advancement, African Americans were able to develop complicated strategies to contest the political status quo.

The complicated nature of this form of cultural politics reveals the manner in which African American cultural formations in the postemancipation era challenged the boundaries of what is traditionally considered the sphere of the political. This suggests that the symbols and rituals attached to these cultural activities and institutions were deployed in a political practice that attempted to define the presence and place of African Americans in the United States polity. Analogous to the employment of cultural phenomenon by particular nation-states in articulating the political positions and aspirations of the ruling order, African American cultural demonstrations highlight African American claims to the rights, duties, and obligations of citizenship.[15] In their

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[14] My emphasis on violence as a primary force impacting African American cultural politics builds on the prescient observation by Robin D. G. Kelley:

> Daily acts of resistance and survival have had consequences for existing power relations, and the powerful have deployed immense resources in response. Knowing how the powerful interpret, redefine, and respond to the thoughts and actions of the oppressed is just as important as identifying and analyzing opposition.

See Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition," *The Journal of American History*, 80.1 (June, 1993), 78.

[15] On cultural politics of the nation, see for example Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; London: Verso, 1991); Homi Bhabha, ed., *Natin and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993);

rich study of the landscape of Afro-Richmond, Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg Kimball

highlight the convergences of the political and the cultural:

> Symbolic acts and public ceremony had deep meaning for North Americans in the
>
> nineteenth century. Social historians point to the reliance on public discourse,
>
> rhetoric, and ceremony in an age when literacy and mass communication were
>
> limited. Perhaps even more important, historians have begun to accept the idea
>
> that common people understood the complex meanings of political and artistic
>
> performances and events . . . Tracing the history of celebrations and parades and
>
> one of their constitutive elements – militias – in the Richmond streets provides a
>
> venue for looking at black rights, citizenship rites, and ritualistic negotiations of
>
> manhood and womanhood.[16]

What Brown and Kimball highlight is the startling fluidity that was a central

characteristic of the political culture of nineteenth century America. The boundaries

circumscribing cultural practices and performances from political practices and rhetoric

were very much permeable. By focusing on the cultural rituals and public performances

of African Americans in Richmond, these authors pinpoint the areas of convergence

between cultural productions and political articulations. Through the architecture of such

cultural dramas African Americans engaged and contested the structural mechanisms of

power in the postemancipation world. These cultural practices reveal complex political

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and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[16] Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," *Journal of Urban History* 21.3 (March, 1995), 304-305.

arguments and contests over the (re)construction of the nation, the meanings and boundaries of freedom, and public articulations of the self.

The political warfare concealed as well as revealed in and through African American cultural forms reminds us that the political strategies of African Americans were always in a state of constant flux.[17] This continual movement, or rather oscillation between moments of concealment and revelation, directs us to the suggestion that through cultural forms, African Americans were able to stage a number of *direct* political assaults on the postemancipation order. Such a suggestion is a slight modification of the argument advanced by noted scholar James Scott who contends, "Most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites."[18] To revise and augment Scott's thesis as it pertains to the recognition and analysis of the political content of African American cultural phenomenon, forces us to question the polar construction supporting his thesis. By this I mean that Scott's argument forces a false dichotomy between what can be loosely termed the cultural and the political. In so far as the polarities of his structure are to be softened by the "in-betweeness" lying inside of these poles, we are still reminded of the fact that each of these points have the potential to strongly correlate to one pole or the other. In

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[17] Black British cultural studies theoreticians, most notably Hazel Carby, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall, have most forcefully articulated the dynamic character of contemporary African American cultural politics. See for example, Hazel Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999); Paul Gilroy, *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[18] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 136. For a cogent assessment and critique of Scott's work see Robin D. G. Kelley, "An Archaeology of Resistance," *American Quarterly*, 44.2 (June, 1992), 292-298.

other words, although Scott seeks to "direct [our] attention to the manifold strategies by which subordinate groups manage to insinuate their resistance, in disguised forms, into the public transcript," he nevertheless falls into the binary trap of strongly demarcating the boundaries of the political and the cultural.[19] Ultimately what we are left with is a epistemological privileging of the political and a testing of the political efficacy of cultural productions by what can be read and understood by a narrowly constructed "public transcript."

In order to begin to grasp the delicate and (c)overt manner in which African Americans intertwined the cultural and the political, such a polar structure needs to be revisited and revised. This is not to suggest that there is an essential structure capable of grasping the intricacies and dynamics of African American cultural politics. The thrust of the suggestion being advanced here is the recognition that when dealing with cultural forms and productions in specific historical contexts there is a need to develop particular frameworks that address a multiplicity of meanings conveyed simultaneously in the cultural-political sphere. What this suggestion opens up is the possibility that a framework that posits an inherent privileging of one pole or the other or some point in between may not be subtle or nuanced enough to grasp the historical realities of cultural politics. What is needed, I believe, is a more elaborate architecture that reads the *imbrication* of political messages in cultural formations and productions. In this conceptual scheme, neither the cultural formation nor the political articulation gains epistemological priority. What is posited is a supple and malleable framework whereby each is read and understood in and through the other. Such an analysis will hopefully

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[19] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 136.

yield a picture of the cultural politics of African Americans as inseparable from the formal and institutional political arrangements of society. Moreover, instead of privileging some particular site to test the political validity or efficacy of these cultural workings – Scott's concept of the "public transcript" serves as the testing source in his conceptual schema – the cultural production itself becomes the basis of analysis for understanding and interpreting its political potency. Lastly, what this conceptual mapping of the *imbrication* of the political and the cultural seeks to underscore is that *always already* challenge to social, political, and economic hierarchies that these cultural formations engender whenever and wherever they erupt on the historical landscape.

By tracing the cultural politics of African American Freemasonry in a manner commensurate with the conceptual scheme outlined above, we are better positioned to account how, through the rituals and institution of Freemasonry, a group of African Americans contested the political structures, institutions, and philosophical orientations of the postemancipation world. The cultural formation and ritual production of African American Freemasonry in the postemancipation period is necessarily imbricated in the political aspirations and articulations of African Americans. Cognizant of the ever present *spectre* and reality violence, a continual denigration of African American life chances, and an incessant desire to articulate the worth, value, and dignity of African American life, African American Freemasonry was imbued with political meaning. In this manner, the relations of power and the social arrangements of postemancipation society were subject to constant challenge and contest in and through this fraternal order. African American Freemasons utilized, among other available options, two critical strategies that were embedded in the cultural formation of African American

Freemasonry: 1) the cultural politics of masculinity and 2) the cultural politics of respectability. These two trajectories were particularly resonant with the historical example of Jefferson Lodge and its constant (c)overt battles with the social, political, and economic order of postemancipation Virginia.

II

With the passing of an elderly African American man in Charlottesville, the publishers of *The Chronicle* lamented:

> Spencer Kelly, one of the oldest colored citizens of the community, died on Friday last, after a short illness. Spencer was a character. In his young days he was the slave of the late Twyman Wayt. He was a brick mason by trade and when he worked at it could always make a living. After the war he secured a piece of land northeast of the town where he build him a house, and settled down, in the locality known as "Kelleytown" . . . Spencer was an honest man, kind and obliging, and ever ready to do a good turn to those who treated him kindly. He would come through heat or cold, fair weather or foul, to perform his kindly offices for "gentlemens" whom he took a fancy to, asking no return for his services. Personally, Spencer was a ludicrous object . . . He was one of the land-marks denoting a rapidly disappearing era, and as such we regard him.[20]

For *The Chronicle*, Spencer Kelly was representative of more than a "rapidly disappearing era." His life, or rather, through the interpretation of his life by whites, Kelly came to serve as an icon of a historical moment whereby black deference and

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[20] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, July 1, 1887.

acquiescence to the status quo was viewed as a sign of the proper order of things. Rather than an individual, Kelly is taken as an "object" whose presence on the landscape of Charlottesville reassures whites that possible challenges to the social and political order would not come from negroes who conducted themselves in a manner like Kelly. As a quiet, unassuming, and unpolitical actor, Kelly is elevated to the honorary status of "citizen of the community." However, his citizenship was not predicated on political acts or legislative or juridical proceedings, but on the basis of Kelly being viewed as a "land-mark denoting a rapidly disappearing era, and as such we regard him." The ultimate irony is not the non-political foundation of Kelly's citizenship status and his membership in the community, but it is in death where his "objecthood" is transformed into some semblance of humanity.

The report in the pages of *The Chronicle* concerning Kelly's death also reveals a deeper and more complex story. An initial reading makes clear a perspective of Kelly that privileges what he symbolizes to a social order predicated on African American subordination. A closer reading, however, reveals a critical level of political meaning and action that is interwoven into the life of Spencer Kelly. In a cursory manner, the writer notes, "After the war he secured a piece of land northeast of the town where he built him a house, and settled down, in the locality known as Kelleytown." Although Spencer Kelly was elevated to the status of an icon as a result of how whites interpreted his interactions with them, his actions were not circumscribed to these narrow interpretative boundaries. Indeed, Kelly quickly recognized the necessity, indeed the imperative, to create another public and civic community in "Kelleytown." Kelleytown serves as a founding locale and definitive cultural act in an intricate and evolving African

American cultural politics of the postemancipation period. The significant physical and symbolic act of building a house in this newly created space is rich with significant political meaning. By acquiring land on which his house was built, Kelly was enacting the rights of his freedom and membership into the social and civic polity of the United States. This possessive act is also indicative of African American participation and ownership in one of the most prized capital markets in United States economic life – the acquisition of real estate. Through this land acquisition, Kelly also signaled his independence from the land of his former master – personally and economically – thereby instantiating the finality of an economic system of unpaid labor as well as a slave regime that prescribed the parameters of his life choices. In establishing the "locality" of Kelleytown, Spencer Kelly physically and symbolically creates a separate civic space whereby Kelly and those who settled in Kelleytown could perform the requisite obligations of citizenship in the midst of an affirming community. As a Founding Father, Kelly inhabited a particular social space that was generally the preserve of white men. In this reversal, in founding Kelleytown, Kelly embodies a new model of the Founding Father – the Founding "Black" Father. As such he fashions a new black masculinity that emerges as a critical component in his cultural politics ensconced in the space of the postemancipation world. Thus, his non-gendered "object" status conferred to him in the white civic space of Charlottesville was countered by his masculine "subject" status that was endemic in and co-extensive with his founding and settling of the locality of "Kelleytown."

It would be all to easy to assume that the discrepancy between the interpretative strategies of Spencer Kelly by *The Chronicle* and the cultural politics performed by Kelly

are separated by an unbridgeable gulf. A re-reading of Kelly as presented in the

newspaper yields a crucial insight into the recognition of the sort of cultural politics that

were enacted by Kelly and by extension other African Americans. In connection with

Kelleytown, the newspaper records an intimate knowledge of where, when, and how this

African American settlement came into existence. Moreover, its precise location along

with the intimate details about its founder reveals how much critical attention Spencer

Kelly and his settlement drew from a larger white public. To be sure, the challenge that

this presented was not at all lost on the power structure of Charlottesville as his activities

were subject to a constant gaze from its surveillance apparatus:

> From this point about daylight in the morning he would issue, carrying a huge bag
>
> swung from his shoulder. As he passed along the streets he would rake into all
>
> the dirt piles before the stores, and his findings went into the capacious maw of
>
> that bag, or into his bottomless pockets. What Spencer did with the vast
>
> quantities of trash he nightly carried away from town, no one ever knew.[21]

As the response of *The Chronicle* to Spencer Kelly demonstrates his cultural politics is

not so much a "hidden transcript," but a cultural political trajectory whose power and

potential is very much recognized by members of the dominant group.[22] It is the constant

possibility of African American rebellion against an anti-black racist and racialist order

that fixes the surveilling attention of those members of the dominant social order.

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Here I seek to subtly nudge Scott's "hidden transcripts" thesis in the direction that underscores the ways in which those in power acknowledge even the most subterrainean cultural-political strategies of marginal groups. In this vein, I think much more attention needs to be placed on the complexities and imbrications of cultural actions and political meanings. See James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. See also the excellent bibliography found in Robin D. G. Kelly, "'We Are Not What We Seem'," particularly Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17.1 (1990).

Despite this (mis)recognition of the political import of Kelly's actions by whites in

Charlottesville, Spencer Kelly as an apolitical object is not so much a reality, but more of

an interpretative strategy that is promulgated to the public at large. In other words, *The*

Chronicle engages Kelly's cultural politics by attempting to (af)fix his identity to a

nostalgic and romantic remembrance of "a rapidly disappearing era." Such a strategy is

inevitably connected to the larger politics of maintaining and extending white hegemony.

To this end, it becomes critical to see Kelly not as an anomaly on the southern landscape,

but to place him within a complex nexus of African American cultural politics that

continually presents various challenges to a dominant social and political order. In other

words, Kelly can be seen as emblematic of the continual evolution of the sometimes

subtle and sometimes overt political trajectories of African American cultural practices.

The intense cultural politics played out in the pages of *The Chronicle* highlight

the multitudinous strategies and responses of African and European Americans to the

fluid situation of postemancipation life. A significant aspect of this constant, tenuous

struggle was the challenge presented by the emancipation of millions of black male

bodies to a social order that viewed these bodies with contempt and disdain. As

pathological objects, the freedom of African American men was an important component

in precipitating a crisis of (white) masculinity in the postemancipation period. As a

response to this general crisis in (white) masculinity that pervaded the postemancipation

period as detailed by Ann Douglass and others, African American males confronted,

engaged, and contested the various images of black masculinity that labeled them

pathological, sexual predators, and a general menace to society.[23] The anxiety over free

black male bodies dominated the white psyche and led to the expansion of surveillance

techniques and repressive measures to maintain control over the freedom of black male

bodies. To combat these multiple assaults on black male bodies and black masculinity,

African American Freemasons elaborated, in public and through the ritual spaces of

Freemasonry, an intricate web of meaning that invested power and authority in black

masculinity. This cultural politics of masculinity relied on a strategic employment and

deployment of African American male presence and power in the public spheres of

postemancipation society.

Cognizant of the potential violent response from an anti-black racist and racialist

order, African American Freemasons also sought a private, domestic grounding for this

cultural politics of masculinity. In this connection, African American Freemasons sought

to construct their black masculinity not only through the performative dimensions of

African American Freemasonry, but also in response to the *presence* of African

American women. Although women were not members of the fraternity and were

forbidden from the inner spaces of the lodge, women were very much a part in the

construction and articulation of black masculinity through the culture and institution of

African American Freemasonry. More importantly, in a social, political, and economic

order that privileged white patriarchy, the cultural politics of masculinity as performed by

African American Freemasons created a counter patriarchal structure so as to challenge

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[23] See Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Ann Douglass, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978); Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur, eds., *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Judy Hilkey, *Character is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

white male dominance in society. In a thoroughly racist and sexist political economy that

devalued and denied freedom and autonomy to black women and their bodies, the

cultural politics of masculinity as promoted by African American Freemasons

"redeemed" black womanhood by unleashing a masculine ideal that projected a

pejorative and oppressive ideology of black femininity.

In his recent study of African American Freemasonry and the black masculine

ideal, Maurice Wallace argues, "There is hardly a more original experiment in the social

(re)-production of the black masculine ideal than in the ritual formalizations of identity

and ideality in African-American Freemasonry. Probably no other cultural movement

before the Civil Rights campaigns of the twentieth century has been more emblematic of

the social and psychic drama of black masculinity in the American cultural context."[24]

Although Wallace overstates his case, he does effectively draw our attention to a crucial

aspect of the culture of African American Freemasonry. By creating a space for African

American men to come together in an organizational forum geared towards common

goals, African American Freemasonry proved to be an instrumental medium in charting

the contours of black masculinity. In the postemancipation context, the pronounced

emphasis on this masculine principle within the culture of African American

Freemasonry would be of critical use in an anxious historical moment fueled by the

reality of millions of freed black male bodies. The multiple ruptures of the social,

economic, and political fabric would necessitate a reworking of the societal links in the

postemancipation world. The very act of African Americans performing the requisite

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[24] Maurice Wallace, "'Are We Men?': Prince Hall, Martin Delany, and the Masculine Ideal in Black Freemasonry, 1775-1865," *American Literary History*, 9.3 (Fall, 1997), 396.

obligations as Freemasons would engage the residuals of a anti-black social logic that viewed African Americans in general as subhuman and African American men as pathological.

In the opening years of the postemancipation era, the Virginia Grand Lodge of white Freemasons took stock of the changes underway in society while at the same time asserting its privilege to cleave to certain tenets that it felt supported the proper order of social, civic, and fraternal life. In his 1869 address before the Grand Lodge assembly, the Most Worshipful Grand Master William Terry argued:

> In this utilitarian age, progress is the boast of the outside world. In the arts and sciences, in material development, in the sciences of government, the genius of man has accomplished much, and in these as living men of the age we take a lively interest, and greatly rejoice. We participate in their benefits and enjoy their rewards, but, as Masons, it is our pride to follow the well-beaten track of our fathers – we seek no change or reforms, but give to those who follow us the moss-covered Landmarks as we received them. When we seek for light in Masonry, we look to the past; and when we are satisfied with its antiquity, we are satisfied with its wisdom and its adaptation to the ends and objects of our Order. We claim to have had no revolutions, no exploded theories in the principles of our Order; and it stands to-day, as it was in the morning of its institution, unchanged, and endorsed by the approval of the ages. And it behooves us, in these days of

change, to see that we do not, in Masonry, fall into the spirit of the times, and be drifted upon the dangers which changes involve.[25]

Grand Master Terry constructs a rigid duality between the man of postemancipation society and the Masonic man in his Masonic oration. As "living men" in postemancipation society, they welcome the advances in science and technology that are afloat in this emerging world. The advances in the mental and material world are reasons to celebrate the progress of American civilization. However as Masonic men, Terry constructed the Freemason as one strictly adhering to the ways of old. Intimately linking the son with the father, Terry argued against changes to the order or its ritual understanding of what it means to be a mason. He fixed the culture and institution of Freemasonry in an idealized past whereby the universals exposed in and through the ritual and culture of the fraternity are always commensurate with the proper conduct and decorum of Freemasonry and the Masonic man. The Grand Master then rejected the *Zeitgeist* that he perceived was rapidly changing the conduct and order of society and sought to enter the sacred domain of the Lodge. As a result of the changes afloat in society, William Terry thus articulated a split approach to society for white Freemasons. As members of the body politic, he proposed a celebratory embrace of the technological advances that were creating certain efficiencies in the social fabric. Despite these advances, in the intimate confines of the Lodge, the cultural and institutional fabric of Freemasonry must hold fast to the doctrines, practices, and orientations of the past in order to maintain the purity and solemnity of the fraternity.

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[25] *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Virginia. A. F. and A. M.* (Richmond: Virginia Grand Lodge, 1869), 8-9.

Terry's attempt at striking a delicate balance between a societal culture of change and a fraternal culture of continuation may logically and theoretically seem incompatible. The strict dichotomy he attempted to create between the man of society and the man of Masonry may not have been able to hold in the face of such massive changes. Indeed, to suggest that the changes afloat in the social world cannot and should not affect the fraternity may sound more like wishful thinking than a complex strategy to maintain the integrity of Freemasonry in a world where, to use Marx's apt phrase, "all that is solid melts into air." However, the dichotomous arrangement between man and Mason that Terry advanced in this speech revealed a subtle yet potentially resonant political philosophy. Terry advocated that the members of the Virginia Grand Lodge welcome advances and changes in the technological arrangement of society while rejecting social and/or cultural changes that could impact the organization and function of the Freemason brotherhood. In other words, the changes in society that were the result of large, abstract, and inhuman forces that only affect the material and technological aspects of American civilization were to be welcomed while their impact, if any, in the cultural and social organization of society should be forcefully and thoroughly rejected. Thus, Terry was able to create a cultural politics that advocated the status quo in its nostalgic and romantic invocation of the past while heralding a new age of material and technological innovation and societal change.

The thrust of Terry's argument and its dangerous undercurrent come into stark relief later in his speech. The charge against change in Freemasonry served as a prelude to his challenge to the presence and position of African American Freemasons in Virginia. Terry continued:

> Masonry has the inherent right to protect itself not only against the introduction of new theories, but also against the admission of new elements which may disturb the peace and harmony of our Order. It is our right to exclude, not only individuals, but classes or races; and in the exercise of the rights and privileges of exclusion, we must have regard to the feelings and opinions of those who, by our acts, have already acquired vested rights among us.[26]

Terry's invocation of the solemnity and dignity of the institution of Freemasonry evidenced by its continuity from fathers to sons foreshadows his turn in rejecting changes in and to the organization that may result in the admission of other, less desirous individuals into the fraternity. The conservatism of Freemasonry advanced by Terry did not function as a benign aspect of the order. In the postemancipation order, this cultural conservatism was activated and functioned for specific political purposes, primarily as a means to exclude those newly emancipated African American bodies from joining the Freemason body. To be sure, Terry continued his argument with specific and sustained reference to African American Freemasons in Virginia:

> And these peculiar relations, existing not only among brethren themselves, but also extending into family connections well known and recognized among us, lead me to call your attention to a subject that in other Grand Jurisdictions has been agitated, and we may expect ere long to be called on to take action upon it. I allude to the subject of colored organizations, claiming to be Masons. In several of the Grand Lodges of the United States this subject has already been discussed, but so far as I am informed, there has been no recognition of colored Masons. I

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[26] Ibid, 9.

am induced to refer to this matter, at this time, because it was mentioned to me during the recess of the Grand Lodge, and the inquiry made whether I was willing, as Grand Master, to receive and consider a petition from colored persons, claiming to be Masons, to allow their Lodges representation upon the floor of this Grand Lodge, provided that their representatives were duly recognized white brethren.[27]

Terry's introductory remarks and the goals to which they were articulated converge on the presence and body of the African American Freemason. The agitation that precipitated Terry's more bland and philosophical remarks in his oration is the vocal protests and stirrings in the postemancipation order caused by African American Freemasons seeking to unify the entire body of Freemasonry. As a result of the tectonic shifts in southern society and as an assertion of the equality of all people, African American Freemasons sought to meet their white counterparts on equal footing. Such an assertive action on the cultural front was not unconnected with the climatic changes that were occurring in the political arena of the post-Civil War world. In light of their collective status as freemen, African American Freemasons initiated the desire for their new status to be recognized in all aspects of society – in this case in the sacred confines of the Lodge. If white Freemasons granted recognition to their African American counterparts, it would force deleterious effects on the proper social and political order as Terry cautioned:

Should such a petition be presented to the Grand Lodge, it will be for you to dispose of it as in your judgment the good of Masonry requires. I shall dismiss

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[27] Ibid.

the subject with the simple remark, that there can be no half-way ground. To grant the right of representation; in any form or upon any conditions, is a clear recognition of their legal Masonic existence, and would be the entering wedge to a complete and final breaking down of all distinctions of race or color.[28]

Thus Terry arrives at the critical point of his remarks. Although he ultimately left the adjudication of the issue to the collective body of the Virginia Grand Lodge, he concluded his discussion with a serious caveat. Eschewing the critical dichotomy forged in the initial moments of his speech, Terry underscored the relation with the cultural action of Masonic recognition with the ensuring political reality of African American equality in all aspects of social and civic life. For Terry and the white Masonic family in Virginia, in order to avoid the decimation of racial barriers on other fronts in the postemancipation world – principally the political front – it became an imperative for him to point out that if the continuance of the conservatism of the fraternal order was not vigilantly maintained, the recognition of African American Freemasons would signal "a complete and final breaking down of all distinction of race or color."

The opening of fraternal relations created by the assertion of Masonic recognition by African American Freemasons was not an issue to be taken lightly. As another sign and symbol of the upheaval of the postemancipation world, white Freemasons like Terry felt that regardless of the course of events there must be some strategy or method capable of keeping the general desire for social and political equality of African Americans in the political, and economic spheres of a postemancipation society within bounds. For this

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[28] Ibid.

group of Freemasons, the possibility of recognizing African American Freemasons as equals presented a formidable challenge to the institutional norms of the Virginia Grand Lodge and to a wider culture that viewed African Americans with contempt. Certainly European American Freemasonry, in a socio-cultural landscape forever changed by the emancipation of millions of African Americans, encountered a crucial dilemma that confronted many in southern white society. As Kirk Savage has observed, "The larger society [could not] suddenly shed its tradition of slavery without facing fundamental challenges to its own institutions and identity."[29] The institutional boundaries of Freemasonry were not the only aspects challenged by the potential recognition of African American Freemasons. By coupling recognition with the possible dissolution of all racial barriers in society, William Terry underscores the most pressing and urgent aspect of Masonic recognition – the recognition of African American men as equal to white men. To state it another way, the recognition of African American Freemasons as Freemasons could not be decoupled from their recognition as men. It was this political (un)conscious that was at the heart of Terry's speech and his ultimate comment.

The Masonic politics of recognition were inevitability interwoven with the cultural politics of masculinity. For African American Freemasons to be officially recognized as equals by white Freemasons would not only confer Masonic legitimacy on African American Freemasonry, it would also effectively announce that white men fully recognized African American men as equals. Inevitably with freedom came the opportunity for African American Freemasons to assert their identity as both Freemasons

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[29] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3.

and as men. The construction and projection of the image and presence of the African American Freemason was intertwined with the articulation of a complex politics of masculinity. African American Freemasons sought to engage their white counterparts on the issue of Masonic recognition while simultaneously desiring recognition as men. It was such a dual front strategy – the impulse on the cultural front for Masonic recognition would lead to the political recognition of African American masculinity and its attendant rights, duties, and obligations in the political sphere – that was very much a part of this recognition strategy.

The possible cultural transformation of Freemasonry in Virginia and the political implication that would possibly ensue was precipitated by the actions of the African American Union Grand Lodge and its Worshipful Master William Keeling who informed the group of assembled African American Freemasons in 1869:

> Having been waited on by a delegation of the officers and members of this body, during its recess, and hearing the arguments of the same, urging the necessity and general importance of recognition and affiliation of our grand with that of the White Grand Lodge, and on my own and solemn convictions of the subject matter above referred to, I have thought it proper, and have designated and appointed a competent committee, whose duty it is to prepare a suitable address to lay before the White Grand Lodge of this State as the subject above mentioned.[30]

William Keeling and the African American Freemasons of the Union Grand Lodge viewed with "necessity and general importance" Masonic recognition by the white Grand

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[30] *Proceedings of the Third Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.* (Richmond: Schaffter & Bryant, 1870), 5.

Lodge. The struggles over Masonic recognition and legitimacy were not without

profound political implications. By broaching the subject, African American Freemasons

were contesting not only the boundaries of Masonic culture, but also the boundaries of

who could legitimately be considered a man in United States society.

The question of the legitimacy of African American Freemasons and the

masculine status was without question in the minds of most African American

Freemasons. Indeed, Lewis Hayden, the Grand Master of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge

and one of the founders of the Union Grand Lodge, highlighted the racialist and racist

undercurrents that were at the heart of the failure of white masons to recognize black

masons in his address "Grand Lodge jurisdictional claims, or War of the races."[31] While

highlighting and specifically referencing the racialist practices southern white grand

lodges, Hayden never called into question the status of African Americans as

Freemasons. Throughout his speech, he questioned and critiqued the racial politics

masked in the claims of white masons who refused to recognize black grand lodges on

the basis of the sovereignty of the white grand lodge's for a particular state. Although the

actions of the Union Grand Lodge do not contain the critiques of Hayden's address, the

straightforward approach of Union Grand Lodge in seeking recognition demonstrates

their unquestioning belief in themselves as Freemasons and as men. From the standpoint

of equals, they seized on this historical moment in challenging any residual images or

vestiges of inequality in seeking the opportunity for Masonic recognition. Only as

[31] See Lewis Hayden, *Grand lodge jurisdictional claims, or, War of the races: An Address before Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons for the State of Massachusetts, at the Festival of Saint John the Baptist, June, 24, 1868* (Boston: E. S. Coombs, 1868). On Hayden's role in the formation of Union Grand Lodge, see *Proceedings of A Grand Semi-Annual Communication and Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.* (Lynchburg: Evening Press Print, 1871).

equals, both as Masons and as men, would each Grand Lodge recognize one another. But this path of such equality was fraught with danger and discord. Grand Master Keeling touches on this disharmony in his concluding remarks on the subject:

> I had frank to say that the time cannot be far distant when the now discordant elements between the White and Colored Masons will terminate in a peaceful solution of all existing difficulties and on such general arrangements that the ancient landmarks shall be preserved.[32]

Despite the cultural and socio-political divides engendered by this action, Keeling is optimistic that the racial and masculinist antagonisms between white and black Freemasons could be overcome. Keeling held out the chance that the equality of white men and black men, both as Freemasons and as men, would be instantiated.

The challenge presented by Masonic recognition and its corollary, white and black male equality, proved too much of a gulf to bridge. Following Keeling as Grand Master, Royal J. Morgan informed the brotherhood at its 1870 semi-annual Communication held in Staunton:

> In regard to our memorial to the white Grand Lodge of Virginia, I would state that it was courteously and kindly received, and while declining in general terms as affiliation with us, they do it in a proper manner, and assign among other reasons that the present feverish condition of the country does not warrant any action in the matter.[33]

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[32] *Proceedings of the Third Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M. 5.*

[33] *Proceedings of A Grand Semi-Annual Communication and Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.* (Lynchburg: Evening Press Print, 1871), 7.

Although in the postemancipation era the nation "welcomed" African Americans as members of the polity, recognition of African American Freemasons was not an automatic consequence of this new order of things. The status of African Americans as Freemasons and as men was still a questionable issue in the minds of white Freemasons. The actions and interactions of the white Virginia Grand Lodge and the Union Grand Lodge cannot be removed from the intense cultural politics of masculinity that plagued postemancipation society. By highlighting the "feverish condition of the country" as a critical factor in the rejection of Masonic recognition by the white Freemasons, Morgan (un)consciously placed before the Union Grand Lodge the interconnection between the political and the cultural sphere. As ambiguously assimilated citizens, the status, recognition, and legitimacy of African American Freemasons was a subject of debate – both as Freemasons and as men.

The contest over the recognition of the legitimacy of African American Freemasonry and the more expansive issue of black masculinity was represented on the local level by a complex cultural politics of masculinity. African American Freemasons at Jefferson Lodge utilized the culture, institution, and space of Freemasonry to form a cultural-political front on which they presented a vision of black Freemasonry and black masculinity legitimate and normative. Collapsing the distinction between what could be considered cultural expressions of Freemasonry and the political battles of the postemancipation era, the members of Jefferson Lodge *performed* the abstract principles of egalitarianism and masculinity in and through their public performances and rituals of African American Freemasonry. The conception and the deployment of this cultural politics of masculinity supported the (re)presentation of African American men in the

postemancipation era as legitimate members of the Masonic family and as competent male actors in the public sphere of United States civic life. Emerging alongside of the continual rejection of the legitimacy of African American male presence in postemancipation life and culture – preeminently exemplified by the actions of the Virginia Grand Lodge – the cultural politics of masculinity deployed a counter-script of the meanings of the culture and institution of Freemasonry. Through parades, civic performances, and collective economic actions, African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge utilized Freemasonry as a critical medium to convey African American legitimacy as Freemasons and as men.

Building on Mary Ann Clawson's pioneering text, *Constructing Brotherhood*, Maurice Wallace develops a detailed architecture of Prince Hall Freemasonry that supports the articulation of a black masculine ideal. Wallace "delineates how black Freemasonry in the colonial and Victorian eras helped invent the black masculine ideal philosophically and pictorially."[34] The members of Jefferson Lodge extended this masculine ideal in the postemancipation period through a series of public performances that sought to solidify and legitimate the connection of African Americans with the institution of Freemasonry and with a culture of masculinity.

In the early years of the existence of Union Grand Lodge, members of Jefferson Lodge took a prominent role in this statewide African American male fraternal organization. As early as 1870, three members of Jefferson Lodge held statewide offices in the Grand Lodge: R. A. Perkins served as Grand Secretary with William L. Brown as

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[34] Maurice Wallace, "'Are We Men?'" 396-397.

Grand Steward and C. R. Foster as Grand Sword Bearer. With three members or twenty

percent of its total membership holding office in the Grand Lodge, Jefferson Lodge

enjoyed a presence in the statewide organization that was far in excess of its membership

in 1870.[35] In combating the multiple assaults on African American Masonic legitimacy

and masculine identity, these members invited the Grand Lodge to convene its 1871

meeting in the City of Charlottesville. C. R. Foster forwarded the resolution that was

adopted by the body:

> Resolved, that the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge be, and is hereby invited to hold
>
> its next Grand Communication with us – Jefferson Lodge No. 13 – W. Brown,
>
> W.M., James Perkins, Secretary.[36]

The extension of an invitation to have the Grand Lodge meet in Charlottesville would

serve two critical purposes. Primarily, as a newly constituted lodge of African American

Freemasons, Jefferson Lodge could add to its legitimacy as a Masonic body in the eye of

the wider public in Charlottesville by publicly acknowledging and demonstrating its

connection with a larger, statewide body of African American Freemasons. The

connection of Jefferson Lodge with Union Grand Lodge would go further to demonstrate

the political competence of African American men to organize their organizations along

customary lines. By inserting themselves into a tradition and cultural form traditionally

associated with European American men, African American Freemasons would expand

the boundaries of these cultural forms in establishing an organic link of this cultural

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[35] As of the June 1870, Jefferson Lodge was composed of fifteen Master Masons and four Entered Apprentices. The Lodge remitted a total of $8.50 to the Grand Lodge as an assessment of this membership. See *Proceedings of A Grand Semi-Annual Communication and Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.*, 4.

[36] Ibid, 12.

formation with the new status of African American men. Secondly, by hosting the Grand Lodge session, Jefferson Lodge could connect itself with an operative cultural politics of masculinity through the institution of Freemasonry. In other words, the culture of African American Freemasonry would serve the political ends of projecting and (re)presenting black masculinity that was commensurate with the citizenship goals and ideals of African Americans in the postemancipation period. Such a cultural politics would be presented to the public in a Masonic processional that would announce African Americans as both Freemasons and as men.

With the invitation to hold the next Grand Lodge meeting in Charlottesville the stage was set for the members of Jefferson Lodge to present to the surrounding area a visual display an African American masculine identity through the culture and institution of African American Freemasonry. By claiming a masculine identity through the public display of Freemasonry, the members of Jefferson Lodge were in keeping with a tradition of linking masculinity with Freemason public display since the days of George Washington. There was a strategic difference, however. Challenging the notion of African American male inferiority and African American Masonic illegitimacy, the public processional Jefferson Lodge invited to the streets of Charlottesville was designed to establish in the minds of whites and blacks that masculinity and Masonry were not the exclusive preserves of white males. By connecting Jefferson Lodge with the Grand Lodge, the public display of African American Freemasons in Charlottesville would hopefully serve as a visual reminder of worth, value, and dignity of African American men and African American culture as an earlier display in Deleware had in 1867:

The colored Masonic celebration held here today was a great success. The Order was represented by Commanderies, Chapters and Grand and subordinate lodges, from New-York, New-Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and California. The large and orderly procession, with banners and badges, and with three bands of music composed of colored men, excited great interest. Many persons expressed the belief that the demonstration was the finest which had ever been made in this State, and that it was another credit mark for the colored people.[37]

The masculinist politics interwoven in these public displays sought to invoke images and (re)present the ideal African American man. Through the culture and institution of African American Freemasonry, the members of Jefferson Lodge were performing an active revision of history while redefining a public memory that denigrated, marginalized, and in an extreme, negated black masculinity.

Although the details of the first Grand Lodge visit to Charlottesville are lost to history, by relaying on previous and subsequent accounts of similar Masonic processionals we can surmise that the reception and public expression of African American masculinity through the cultural form of Freemasonry was an impressive one. By accessing civic space in these parades and public displays of masculinity and Freemasonry, the African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge demanded recognition of their social and cultural rights to masculinity and Masonic legitimacy. These impressive displays would serve as a visual reminder of the assertion of these rights. Robert Perkins, a member of Jefferson Lodge and Grand Secretary of Union

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[37] New York, *New York Times*, June 28, 1867.

Grand Lodge, recorded the official account of the procession in Staunton in the proceedings of the Union Grand Lodge from its 1870 semi-annual session:

> It being the anniversary of St. John, the Baptist, arrangements were made for the grand procession, which paraded the streets of Staunton enroute to the grove adjacent to the Deaf. Dumb, and Blind Institute, where a platform had been erected. Addresses were delivered by R. J. Morgan, W. W. Foreman and W. R. Derrick, also Masonic odes were sung, interspersed with instrumental music. On returning, the members of the Fraternity were halted at the Fair given for the benefit of Mount Zion, where a sumptuous dinner was served to the satisfaction of all. The same continued at night, largely attended by the Fraternity and citizens generally.[38]

No doubt the impression left on Perkins by this display and its reception by the citizens of Staunton served as an impetus for him to invite the Grand Lodge to hold its meeting across the Blue Ridge the following year. Further confirmation of the cultural and political utility of inviting the Grand Lodge to Charlottesville would be demonstrated later that year in the Masonic processional in Alexandria. Once again Perkins was witness to the masculine spectacle of the Union Grand Lodge:

> The Grand Commandery, the Grand and Subordinate Lodges of the District of Columbia having arrived, the Grand Lodge was formed in procession, and joined in the order of exercises of the day.

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[38] *Proceedings of A Grand Semi-Annual Communication and Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.*, 12-13.

After marching through the principal streets, addresses were delivered by

Brothers R. H. Robinson, of Washington, and W. B. Derrick, of Staunton.

The visiting Lodges were then escorted to the ferry, whence they took

passage for Washington, and the procession returned to the Lodge.[39]

The cultural politics of masculinity as revealed through the public displays of African

American Freemasonry were instrumental in asserting African American Masonic

legitimacy and in (re)constructing an African American masculine ideal. In this regard,

the members of Jefferson Lodge were in keeping with these claims and affirmations as

their invitation extended to the Grand Lodge to hold its 1871 session in Charlottesville

suggests. A subsequent Grand Lodge meeting in Charlottesville in 1883 provides us with

some clue as to how the earlier public display may have been received:

On Tuesday of last week the Grand Lodge of Masons convened in annual session

in the town of Charlottesville; much business of importance was attended to, and

on Thursday a very large crowd from the surrounding country flocked to town to

witness the great parade of the colored Masons and Knights Templar.[40]

African American Freemasons in general and Jefferson Lodge in particular took up the

aim of (re)constructing their masculinity while asserting their legitimacy as Freemasons

in and through these parades and public processionals. These ritualistic endeavors were

shot through with a cultural politics of masculinity as African American Freemasons

"pronounced their rights to civic space" as well as embodied the power to revise the

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[39] Ibid. 26.

[40] Petersburg, *The Lancet*, December 22, 1883.

public meaning of black masculinity.[41] By inserting and revising a tradition and cultural form that celebrated white masculinity exclusively, African American Freemasons in the postemancipation period took an active role in contesting the cultural and political structures which sought to deny them the social and cultural legitimacy as men and as Masons.

The Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge did not solely employ public processionals in their development and deployment of a cultural politics of masculinity. The strategy of utilizing public parades as a critical component in a cultural politics of masculinity was complimented by an economic assertion of black masculinity. The (re)presentation and political assertion of black masculinity in and through the culture of African American Freemasonry broke through the problematic projection of black male bodies as repositories for unpaid labor and exploitative labor practices emblematic of the antebellum era and its system of chattel slavery. In the postemancipation context, references to and (re)presentations of black masculinity had to be refigured on the process and manner in which African American men were able to project and articulate a new masculinity that complimented their status as free and self-determining individuals in the United States political economy. As such, the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge countered the negative economic associations of black masculinity with a cultural politics of masculinity that undermined "the grotesque and erotically charged interdependency of the master/slave dyad, an interdependency that posed a serious threat to the economic,

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[41] Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," 309.

political, familial, and emotional independence thought necessary for the proper

functioning of a 'free' nation."[42]

In *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House, and the Black American*, Robert Reid-

Pharr presents a complex reading of the image of black masculinity asserted through the

projection of African American economic independence as a contested and conflicted

moment in the appropriation of bourgeois figuration.[43] Reid-Pharr painstakingly points

out that the problematics of the appropriation of the bourgeois formulation for black

masculinity are largely owed to the complexities and ambiguities of the sociological and

ontological status of the black body in an anti-black racist society. In other words, the

contours of the black body make an unreconstructed appropriation of bourgeois

subjectivity and masculinity – with its attendant trajectories toward disembodiment and

universality – untenable in light of the imbrication of United States political and social

economies predicated on the reproduction and consummation of black bodies and the

denial of the worth, value, and dignity of African American humanity. Reid-Pharr's

work presents a critical strategy in unraveling the complexity in which the discourse on

bourgeois subjectivity intersects with the discourse of the black body in the

(re)production of black masculinity. Extending Reid-Pharr's insight to the

postemancipation context and the cultural politics of masculinity may prove particularly

suggestive in understanding the dynamics of the cultural politics of masculinity as

informed by the economic actions adopted and promoted by the members of Jefferson

Lodge. In this regard, I would suggest that through his textual explication and

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[42] Robert F. Reid-Pharr, *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House, and the Black American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 112.

[43] See Ibid, esp. chapter 5.

presentation of black masculinity as revealed through the appropriation of a corporeally informed bourgeois masculinity, Reid-Pharr presents us with an excellent framework on which we can begin to unravel the strategies in which the African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge deployed a cultural politics of masculinity in and through their economic actions and associations.

Members of Jefferson Lodge took charge of their economic destiny in the uneven and uncharted economic terrain of the postemancipation South. Within the sacred spaces of the lodge, these African American Freemasons clung tenaciously to a practice of collective economic uplift. As detailed in the preceding chapters of this study, Jefferson Lodge developed an intricate finance capital functioning arm of their fraternal organization. This economic strategy of lending money propelled not only the image of the upstanding Mason but also the economically independent Freeman who was able to transform his social capital – as demonstrated by his morality and his masculinity – into finance capital. This form of economic self-determination empowered a cultural politics of masculinity that established an organic link between (re)presentation of the man of Freemasonry and of African American society. The production of this critical space within the culture and institution of Freemasonry that empowered the transformation and projection of black masculinity is owed to a particular logic which sought to decouple a nonexistent black masculinity from existing discourses of unpaid and exploitive labor systems and technologies, namely chattel slavery and its reincarnation of tenant farming. Moreover, the economy of Jefferson Lodge served as a critical tool in severing the connection between black masculinity and sexual pathology by (re)presenting black masculinity as a normative masculine ideal. In other words, the cultural politics of black

masculinity as (re)produced through the finance capitalism of Jefferson Lodge is

refracted through the lens of a bourgeois masculinity of capitalist political economy that

idealizes and enshrines the image of the self-made, economically self-sufficient white

man. Indeed, the example of the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge is historically

illustrative of the black masculine ideal contained in the figure of Macon Dead I in Toni

Morrison's *Song of Solomon*:

> Macon Dead was the farmer they wanted to be, the clever irrigator, the peach-tree
>
> grower, the hog slaughterer, the wild-turkey roaster, the man who could plow
>
> forty in no time flat and sang like an angel while he did it. He had come out of
>
> nowhere, as ignorant as a Bible, and a pretty black-haired wife, and in one year
>
> he'd leased ten acres, then the next ten more. Sixteen years later he had one of
>
> the best farms in Montour County. A farm that colored their lives like a
>
> paintbrush and spoke to them like a sermon.[44]

The cultural politics of masculinity as exhibited by the Freemasons of Jefferson

Lodge also took the form of creating economic vehicles in and through which black

masculinity could be (re)presented along the lines of the economically self-determining

masculine ideal. Chartered in April of 1889, the Piedmont Industrial and Land

Improvement Company served as a principle instrument in the effort to (re)present black

masculinity through the culture and system of capitalist political economy. The nine

persons who composed this capital group, five of whom were members of Jefferson

Lodge, opted to challenge the exigencies of the economy by creating a financial

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[44] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 235.

institution that would provide the necessary financial and human capital prerequisites in assisting various African American economic ventures. At a moment when African American men were migrating to different parts of the country in search of economic opportunity, the group of African American men who came together as the Piedmont Industrial and Land Improvement Company not only solidified their connection with the Charlottesville African American community with the formation of this economic collective, but they also contested negative associations of black masculinity that were linked to the image of the wandering black male so prevalent in this historical moment of competing pleas to migrate to Africa as well as to other areas of the United States.[45] To be sure, the normative aspirations of black masculinity were well connected with the idea and image of African American men challenging the economic status quo not with their feet, but with their presence on and in the social and economic landscape of the South. The Petersburg based African American newspaper, *The Lancet*, appealed to this

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[45] Throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s, the pages of *The Chronicle* included a number of stories on black migration. One such article from January 15, 1886 reported:

> THE NEGRO EXODUS: The exodus of negroes from the southern tier of counties in North Carolina never ceases. The majority of them go to Kansas. The number who left Richmond and Anson counties since November is reliably stated to be not less than three thousand. Planters have made it too hot for emigrant agents, but the work is carried on through the aid of colored missionaries. Farmers, however, are now aiding the exodus, aiming to clear the farms entirely of colored labor and to fill the vacancies with New England farmers, of whom, it is said, large numbers are ready to come as soon assured that they will not be brought into contact with colored labor.
>
> From one station, Laurinberg, Richmond county, 521 tickets were in sixty days sold to colored men who were heads of families. The agent estimates that in all 2,000 men, women, and children have left that county alone. It is a remarkable movement. Some of the negroes go to Arkansas. This is entirely distinct from the annual movement of the negroes from this State to South Carolina and Georgia to work in the turpentine forests. Those who go there return each year, whereas [those?] departing either to Kansas or Arkansas go to stay.

On intra-continental African American migration in this period see Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

conception of black masculinity when arguing against the calls for African Americans to migrate to Africa:

> Notwithstanding the fiery hell and as it were the jaws of death, through which the Negro has to pass, in the Southern states, yet if he will only stand up manfully and courageously and fight the enemy, and educate his children, we will not only, in years to come live peaceably and become a very important factor in public affairs but we will finally possess the South . . . Colored men of the South educate! educate ! and contend manfully for your rights. . . .[46]

The editorial in *The Lancet* underscores the prescriptions of stability – both geographical and ontological – over and against mobility as the normative ideal of black masculinity. In advancing this notion of masculinity, an immanent function in this construction of the cultural politics of masculinity is the proper and ideal order of African American familiar life. To briefly address this issue, what I am calling attention to by reference is that by advancing the (re)presentation of black masculinity along the lines of geographical and ontological stability, the (un)stated and (un)conscious rationale for African American women is along similar trajectories with a literal emphasis on the geography and ontology of proper African American femininity. In other words, if the proper place for African American men was in the masculine economic sphere, then the corollary for African American women was in the feminine domestic sphere. This unarticulated dimension of the cultural politics of black masculinity is an *always already* component in this masculinist project that valorizes the self-made economic man. Although the presence of the African American woman is never forcefully articulated, the figure of the

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[46] Petersburg, *The Lancet*, February 3, 1883.

black woman nevertheless is present in the masculinist constructions. Thus, the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge not only seek economic uplift through their collective activity, they are also critical actors in (re)presenting a black masculine ideal that is deeply indebted to the symbolic presence of the African American woman.

W. L. Brown, James Ferguson, Schuyler Saunders, W. C. Gibbons, and Burkley Bullock were five of the nine men who organized the Piedmont Land and Industrial Company. With Charles Goodloe serving as an officer of the company as well, Jefferson Lodge was well represented in this economic and masculinist effort.[47] The cultural politics of masculinity that was pervasive within the economy of Jefferson Lodge could now enjoy a wider audience as this financial services company sought to engage in a wide range of economic activities that would propel the (re)construction of black masculinity through ideals of economic self-sufficiency. Article 2 of the April 9, 1889 Charter of the organization reveals the wide-ranging economic aspirations of the association:

> The objects and purposes for which the said Company is formed are the following: To engage in manufacturing operations; to purchase, hold, lease, rent, improve, sell, exchange, develop and otherwise deal in real estate; to negotiate loans; to buy and sell real estate on commission; to receive moneys on deposit; to borrow, lend and advance moneys, giving and receiving certificates, notes, bonds, and other proper evidences therefore; to act as agent, attorney in fact and trustee for individuals, companies and corporations and as commissioners and receiver

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[47] These individuals were listed as members of Jefferson Lodge in the ledger *Dues Received from Secretary of Jefferson Lodge, No. 20,* June, 1884 to 1885 and June 1885 to 1886, 8-12. The signature of James H. Ferguson is affixed to this financial ledger.

under orders of courts; to extend aid and assistance financial or otherwise, to persons of limited means in purchasing homes; also to extend such aid and assistance to persons, companies and corporations engaged in manufacturing or other enterprises; to engage in any lawful business with other companies or persons; and to undertake and conduct generally all business usually carried on by Land and Improvement companies, except the construction of a turnpike beyond the limits of Albemarle County, Virginia, or of a railroad or canal, or to establish a bank of circulation.[48]

The limited economic capital and capabilities of Jefferson Lodge would be enhanced with the development of this organization. As an extension, the cultural politics of masculinity of the Lodge would in turn transcend the boundaries of this sacred circle. The Piedmont Industrial and Land Improvement Company served as a critical vehicle to widen the circle whereby the masculine ideal embedded in the economic apparatus of this cultural politics of masculinity would become available to more African American men. The members of Jefferson Lodge and the others who joined them in initiating this economic collective would nevertheless remain on the avant-garde in asserting and (re)presenting this masculinist economic strategy. By availing their resources and expertise to others, however, they were engaging in a critical political strategy in spreading the masculinist economic strategy throughout the Charlottesville and

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[48] *Charter of Piedmont Industrial and Land Improvement Co.*, Albemarle County Historical Society. On land companies in Charlottesville, see Jefferson Randolph Kean. *"Forward is the Motto of Today": Street Railways in Charlottesville, Virginia 1866-1936* (Forty Fort, PA: Harold E. Cox, 1984), 12-19.

In 1891, the total value of African American real estate stood at $103,035, ranking ninth in the total real estate value of African Americans in urban areas in Virginia. See Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926). .

Albemarle County African American world. In establishing a wider sphere in linking the cultural politics of masculinity with African American capitalist activity, the members of Jefferson Lodge were advancing their (re)presentation of black masculinity while simultaneously challenging the contours of postemancipation society by making and projecting this form as a ubiquitous form of black masculinity.

The wider sphere of black masculinity that emanated from the actions of the members of Jefferson Lodge in the Piedmont Land and Industrial Company borrowed from the public example of Jefferson Lodge in presenting this masculine ideal to the public. Just as Jefferson Lodge displayed their masculinity through the cultural form of Freemasonry, the Piedmont Land and Industrial Company displayed this (re)presentation of black masculinity through a cultural form of a fair. *The Chronicle* recorded this masculinist cultural exhibition:

> COLORED FAIR — The colored people of Albemarle and adjacent counties are making preparations for an Industrial, Mechanical, and Agricultural Fair to be held at "Carlton," near this city on October 21st, 22nd, and 23rd.

> All of the usual county-fair features will be numbered among the attractions. The products of negro farmers, merchants, carpenters, blacksmiths, wheel-wrights, shoe-makers, painters, brickmakers, plasterers, &c. will be exhibited.

> On the second day the leading feature will be a grand parade of bands, teams, and all the participants in the fair.

Capt. Micajah Woods and Mayor S. B. Woods will deliver addresses of welcome. Addresses will be made by James H. Hayes, (colored), of Richmond, and Rev. G. W. Lee, (colored) of Washington, D. C.

The Fair is under the auspices of the Piedmont Land and Industrial Company, Robert Kelser, president.[49]

The cultural politics of masculinity operative through the structure of this economic collective drew upon a tradition of public processionals like the parades held by the members of Jefferson Lodge and the Union Grand Lodge in announcing and (re)presenting this new black masculinity. The cultural formation of the "colored fair" employed by the Piedmont Land and Industrial Company did not create a "pure male" spectacle like its Masonic counterpart. However, the masculinist connotations engendered by this public exhibition were underscored not only by the sponsorship of the Piedmont Company, but also by the male orators who addressed the audience. To this effect, the cultural politics of black masculinity in this configuration preserved the role of spokesman and "race leader" on the two invited black male speakers of the event. Furthermore, with the presence of two white men in official capacity also addressing the audience – further solidifying the normative ideal of masculinity – the black male speakers are able to insert the black masculine ideal into an existing masculine cultural tradition. As representative governmental officials and also as representatives of a broader white public, the presence of Capt. Woods and Mayor Woods in effect conferred recognition of the new black masculinity. In all, the (re)presentation of black masculinity in and through the cultural, institutional, and economic actions of the Piedmont Land and

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[49] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, October 16, 1891.

Improvement Company drew on and was organically linked to the extensive archives of

the cultural politics of masculinity demonstrated through the strategies and economy of

the African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge.

III

On a crisp fall day in the foothills of Virginia, a curious sight caught the attention

of the citizens of Charlottesville. The pages of the *The Chronicle* carried a report of the

event:

> The funeral of the wife of David Young, a colored merchant {unreadable}
>
> afternoon last. The funeral *cortege*, which was composed of 15 vehicles,
>
> containing the female members of the order of St. Luke's and the family of
>
> deceased, followed by various orders on foot, presented quite an imposing
>
> spectacle.[50]

Assembled to pay homage to the deceased, the funeral processional for David Young's

wife was quite significant. The spectacle of fifteen vehicles filled with women who

belonged to the order of St. Luke along with a number of other orders parading on foot

suggests that David Young's wife was of some stature in the Charlottesville African

American community. This public processional and display expressed not only the

sorrow and grief of the family and those taking part in the funeral activities, but it was

also a critical performance in the ongoing and evolving contests over race, gender, and

class in the postemancipation South. As the spouse of a recognized colored merchant, it

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[50] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, October 19, 1883.

is quite possible that David Young's wife enjoyed a standard of living beyond a level of mere subsistence. Furthermore, as a woman with access to higher levels of financial capital she necessarily had the opportunity to transform these financial resources into forms of cultural capital thereby establishing herself as a representative of the "better class" of African Americans in Charlottesville.[51] The assembling of such a processional in honor of the life of an African American woman not only exhibited a challenge to a civic space and public ritual dominated by men, it also effectively recognized and displayed the prominence and significance of the life and example of an African American woman in the evolution of the African American community of Charlottesville.[52] Through the public (re)presentation of the life of this African American woman in her death, the "spectacle" of the processional effectively solidified and linked her with a cultural form that was generally the preserve of prominent white men and, to a lesser degree, black men. Although the pages of *The Chronicle* only mentioned the deceased by reference to her husband – thus solidifying a patriarchal order in which women only gain an identity through men – we can safely surmise that David Young's wife was much more than the spouse of the "colored merchant." Her identity and place in postemancipation African American society as witnessed by the "imposing spectacle" of her funeral, suggest that the boundaries of the postemancipation world were consistently being challenged and (re)negotiated.

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[51] The phrase "better class" is adapted from Janettte Thomas Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). On this subject, see also Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990).

[52] On the masculinist undertones of civic parades and displays, see Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond."

The report of the funeral processional in the pages of *The Chronicle* helps in developing a understanding of the place and position of the deceased woman in the postemancipation community of Charlottesville while suggesting and hinting of the intense inter- and intra- cultural politics that are revealed in and through the display of the funeral processional. However, in its next edition, *The Chronicle* revised its report on the funeral processional:

> We erred last week in stating that it was the St. Luke's society that turned out in Funeral procession. It was the Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria. We make this correction by request.[53]

From a perspective that focuses on the public display of the orders assembled in this processional, what is significant about this revision is that the orders that were honoring the life of David Young's wife were seeking proper recognition of their status. By calling attention to its role in leading the processional, the Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria were demanding not only a revision and correction of the previous report; they were also requesting that their status in connection with the prominent deceased woman be properly credited. In essence, the Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria shifted the attention of the "imposing spectacle" away from the David Young's wife and her memory to its organizational prominence in the African American community in Charlottesville. This request dramatizes the enactment of their affiliation with the deceased through their request for a newspaper correction as well as through the funeral processional display. By establishing such a link between the deceased and their organizations, the Good Samaritans and the Daughters of Samaria were in turn linking

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[53] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, October 26, 1883.

themselves with the cultural capital of the deceased. Thus, just as the deceased received the proper attention and recognition of her standing in the Charlottesville black community, so too, the organizations sought their proper recognition of their prominence in the community through their assembly and processional in honor of David Young's wife.

The performance of the funeral processional draws our attention to the importance of the meaning of the members to the standing and status of African American cultural organizations. The bonds between the members and the organization signify a symbiotic relationship – one in which the members as well as the general organization give and receive some benefit from associating with one another. To read the relationship between the individual member and the general organization in only one direction encourages a skewed understanding that elides the more critical view of the reciprocal value each provided one another. The Good Samaritans and the Daughters of Samaria recognized the value of properly recognizing their connection with David Young's wife, hence their request to the publishers of *The Chronicle* for a correction to the initial report of the funeral processional. Considering the fact that persons derive some critical benefits from membership in organizations as well as organizations derive some benefits from their membership demonstrates that the character, position, place, and status of these organizations were not a static dimension of their standing, but an organic and evolving process whereby these attributes are constantly being remade and reshaped. Recognition of this process raises such questions as how do organizations convey this meaning to a larger audience? With specific reference to African American cultural organizations in the postemancipation period, how did they go about defining themselves and their

traditions, values, and orientations in a historical conjuncture that denigrated African

American life and culture? To what ends did the linking of these organizations with

"prominent" African Americans serve?

The example of the Good Samaritans and the Daughters of Samaria opens up a

new frontier in understanding the dynamics of the cultural politics of African American

organizations in the postemancipation era. The opportunity developed in this opening

allow us to examine the manner in which an African American cultural organization

comes to symbolize its political power and have that power carry the potential to be

recognized and capable of articulating political positions in the civic arena. What we are

focusing on in this respect is how through public display and performance African

American cultural organization mobilize their forms of symbolic capital in order to

favorably position the organization or members of the organization as potential actors in

the legitimated spaces of the political field.[54] In adopting such a method with respect to

the African American Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge, just as with the cultural politics of

masculinity, we are reminded that critical attention must be paid to the manner in which

this group of African American Freemasons sought to distinguish them and their

organization in the flux and flotsam of the postemancipation period. In this respect, it

becomes necessary to grapple with the strategies and the cultural politics employed by

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[54] I deliberately employ the term political field in this context borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu who defines it as follows:

> The political field, understood both as a field of forces and as a field of struggles aimed at transforming the relation of forces which confers on this field its structure at any given moment. . .

See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans., John B. Thompson, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 171.

the Lodge as they utilized the culture and institution of Freemasonry in their public

performances in order to challenge the prevailing social and political order of the day.

In her extensive and well research study of the African American women's

movement in the black Baptist church, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham developed the

concept of the "politics of respectability" in relation to the uplift effort of this leadership

class of African American women. This class of black Baptist church women leaders

were drawn from a specific class stratum in African American society and as such

"adhered to a politics of respectability that equated public behavior with individual self-

respect and with the advancement of African Americans as a group." Higginbotham

defined this political position of this group of black women:

> They felt certain that "respectable" behavior in public would earn their people a
>
> measure of esteem from white America, and hence they strove to win the black
>
> lower class's psychological allegiance to temperance, industriousness, thrift,
>
> refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals. . . . The Baptist women's
>
> preoccupation with respectability reflected a bourgeois vision that vacillated
>
> between an attack on the failure of America to live up to its liberal ideals of
>
> equality and justice and an attack on the values and lifestyle of those blacks who
>
> transgressed white middle-class propriety. Thus, the women's pronouncements
>
> appeared to swing from radical to conservative.[55]

Higginbotham defined the political strategy of this select group of African American

women in relation to their gender, class position, racial identity, and the larger racialist

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[55] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14-15.

and racist political economy of United States civic society. By highlighting this matrix of intra- and inter-group associations and identifications, Higginbotham revealed the complex political negotiations, accommodations, and translations that were a part of the political praxis of this group of women. Moreover, she recognizes and underscores the reflective and reflexive relationship between the culture and politics. In other words, the attitudes, positions, and behavior of this group of black Baptist churchwomen activists were critically informed by the manner in which certain cultural attributes could symbolize and convey political presence and power in the dominant public sphere of United States civic life. Equally prescient in this regard is the manner in and through with the politics of respectability is founded on a culturalist foundation – even if it "revealed their conservatism."[56]

With slight modification, Higginbotham's explication of the "politics of respectability" is beneficial to our understanding of how the members of Jefferson Lodge attempted to navigate the contested political terrain of postemancipation Virginia in an effort to articulate their presence in the public sphere. In adapting this construct as a analytical tool in unraveling the cultural politics of this organization, we are first reminded that although Jefferson Lodge was composed of men with similar interests, aspirations, and tendencies, this group of African American Freemasons nevertheless represented a cross section of individuals without a particular class identity defined in an economic sense. As such, it becomes difficult to define the "politics of respectability" in relation to this relatively heterogeneous group of individuals – remembering the fractures and cleavages along the lines of racial classification, occupational and economic index,

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[56] Ibid, 15.

property ownership, and literacy outlined in the previous chapter – as a political ideology revealing the class values and orientations of an economically and socially undifferentiated, monolithic block. Instead, the concept of "social class" may prove more amenable in this regard. Owing to the work of Max Weber, "social class" is defined as:

> The "social class" structure is composed of the plurality of class statuses between which an interchange of individuals on a personal basis or in the course of generations is readily possible and typically observable.[57]

The concept of "social class" critically informs our usage of the concept of "politics of respectability" in that instead of it being a pejorative political position of a monolithic "middle-class," we can begin to understand the class function of a mixed group of individuals coming together and performing a political strategy that advances not their class economic interests but their social class interests.[58] What I mean by this with respect to Jefferson Lodge is that these individuals adopt certain political postures commensurate with the themes subsumed under the construct of the politics of respectability not in hopes of advancing their collective economic class interests – although the possibility and probability of such interests being operative cannot be totally

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[57] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, trans. (New York: The Free Press, 1947), 424.

[58] Kevin Gaines has instructively argued against using the "middle-class" construct in a pejorative sense: Occupations within the black community widely perceived by historians as middle-class, including that of teacher, minister, federal officeholder, businessman, and professional, cannot be regarded as equivalent with the business, managerial, and craft labor occupations among whites from which blacks were largely excluded. The same applies to the occupations that blacks held to service white clienteles throughout the late nineteenth century in the urban North and South, such as barbering, catering, and other personal service and domestic jobs. Calling these service occupations middle-class introduces a false universal standard for class formation that ignores the extent to which the very notion of the black middle class – indeed, of class itself – is built on shifting ideological sands.
See Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996), 14.

rejected – but with an eye towards advancing and improving their place and status within the postemancipation order. To this end, "social class" functions not in direct correlation with the economic interests of the group, but in concert with the aspirations of social capital acquisition and accumulation that can be capitalized on in the public sphere.

The advantage offered by recourse to Weber's conception of "social class" frees us from an economically deterministic model of class along with an attendant ideological constraint that figures the two as synonymous with one another. Weber's conception allows us to underscore the fluidity of class formation, identity, and membership in African American society. In our analysis of the politics of respectability as it pertains to African American Freemasonry, such a conception empowers us to focus on how through this cultural formation African American Freemasons sought to express and perform their desire to be recognized as legitimate actors in the public sphere.

Once again, instead of dichotomizing politics and culture, African American Freemasons sought to engage the political sphere through this cultural formation in order to advance their political interests. The cultural politics that lie at the heart of the actions of African American Freemasons challenged the dominant tendency that distinguished realms of equality. Mark Tushnet has instructively argued:

> The lawmakers who discussed equality during Reconstruction accepted mid-century conceptions that distinguished equality with respect to civil rights, to social rights, and to political rights. The core of each conception was also well defined: The core civil rights included the rights to sue and testify; social rights included the right to select one's associates; voting was the central political right.

However, controversy existed over the grounds for distinguishing each category from the others, and over the relationships among the categories.[59]

The instability with regard to the relations between these complimentary and competing rights discourses could be exploited to the advantage of persons challenging the limitations on African American political activity. In this respect, by challenging the hierarchies and regimes of power in the postemancipation landscape, African American Freemasons had to develop what we can term a cultural politics of respectability that blurred the lines demarcating various discourses. A cultural politics of respectability enabled African American Freemasons to demonstrate and perform their social equality in and through the culture and institution of Freemasonry by adhering to the dominant ideals and constructions of proper civic behavior while simultaneously asserting and challenging dominant prescriptions that sought to negate or deny their political rights. The cultural politics of respectability gains conceptual utility from the idea of "social class" in that this form of cultural politics can be defined in relation to how a particular group of individuals sought to distinguish themselves from others within and without the African American community while promoting its political interests "in a society that relentlessly denied black Americans both the material and ideological markers of bourgeois status."[60]

Just as the death and funeral of David Young's wife revealed to us crucial dimensions into the life of an African American organization, the death and grave of Reverend M. T. Lewis reveals the constant struggle of African American Freemasons for

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[59] Mark Tushnet, "The Politics of Equality in Constitutional Law: The Equal Protection Clause, Dr. Du Bois, and Charles Hamilton Houston," *The Journal of American History* 74.3 (December, 1987), 886.

[60] Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 14.

recognition as well as the manner in which the members of Jefferson Lodge engaged in a

cultural politics of respectability. M. T. Lewis was prominent member of the

Charlottesville African American community having served as Pastor of the Delevan

Baptist Church as well as being an active member in various associations designed to aid

African Americans in the Charlottesville area. His death and funeral was the lead item in

the Local Affairs column of *The Chronicle*:

> DEATH OF A COLORED MINISTER. The Rev. M. T. Lewis, for many years
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> pastor of the Delevan church, (colored Baptist,) of this place, died on Sunday last,
>
> after a protracted illness, of consumption. The deceased was a man of
>
> intelligence, and his ministry to the very large congregation over which he
>
> presided was productive of good results. The funeral took place on Monday
>
> afternoon, and was very largely attended. Many could not get into the church.
>
> The sermon, on the occasion, was preached by the Rev. Mr. Troy, of Richmond.[61]

For the members of Jefferson Lodge, to lose such an esteemed and valuable member of

their fraternity must have been a significant blow. Even in his death, however, M. T.

Lewis would continue to make a significant contribution to Jefferson Lodge.

On May 21, 1883, a special call meeting of the members of Jefferson Lodge was

convened at its regular meeting place. The call meeting of this group of African

American Freemasons was to make the necessary preparations for the funeral of their

fallen brother. As Freemasons, the members of this organization upheld the principles of

morality, charity, and brotherly love. Although their white counterparts did not recognize

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[61] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, May 25, 1883.

African American Freemasons as legitimate Freemasons, the funeral of M. T. Lewis

presented the opportunity for Jefferson Lodge to honor one of its leading members who

embodied these respectable values. Moreover, by taking a leading role in the funeral, the

brotherhood could perform these principles to inform a grieving public that although M.

T. Lewis had departed, the spirit and values he embodied were very much present in the

workings of Jefferson Lodge. As such, the call meeting served as a preparatory place to

instantiate this cultural politics of respectability. The Lodge selected the following

members to serve as pallbearers at the funeral: B. Sammons, Jessie Farrer, J. T. Harris,

and Peter Cables.[62] By connecting having members of the Lodge serve in this capacity,

Jefferson Lodge and African American Freemasonry would forever be connected with "a

man of intelligence, and [whose] ministry to the very large congregation over which he

presided was productive of good results." The public performance by these African

American Freemasons of serving as pallbearers as well as conducting a processional in

the funeral conveyed the principles of order and decorum held by fraternity, thus

reinforcing the respectability of Jefferson Lodge and African American Freemasonry.[63]

"Marching back to the hall" after the funeral, Jefferson Lodge not only honored its

respected departed brother, they also solidified their connection with him and collectively

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[62] May 21, 1883 meeting of Jefferson Lodge. *Minute Book Dated 1881-1884.*

[63] On the relation of Masonic processionals and ideas of respectability, see Len Travers, "'In the Greatest Solemn Dignity': The Capitol Cornerstone and Ceremony in the Early Republic," in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 167.

performed their respectability to the entire Charlottesville community prior to "clos[ing] the Lodge in due form."[64]

Lewis' body was interred in Charlottesville at Zion Cemetery, an African American burial ground owned and operated by the African American women of the Daughters of Zion.[65] Although either Lewis or his family could have petitioned for him to be buried in the "colored section" of the municipal owned and operated Oakwood Cemetery, his burial at this independently owned and operated African American burial ground represents a significant symbolic and political action. By being buried in this cemetery, in death Lewis continued to perform a cultural politics of respectability. Rejecting the law and custom of segregation – one which denied even the prospect of African American respectability not to mention African American social and political equality – Lewis' act crystallizes the undercurrents within his political philosophy of not submitting to the indignities of segregation that represent a hindrance for the advancement of African American political and social interests. Indeed, this action may have been precipitated by the political sentiments he articulated less than a year earlier at what *The Chronicle* recalled as a "Straightout Republican meeting at the court-house."[66] At this gathering, a vibrant Lewis, joined by Congressional candidate J. M. Dawson, John W. Cochran and Henry Clay, may have railed against a creeping Jim Crow in Virginia

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[64] May 21, 1883 meeting of Jefferson Lodge. *Minute Book Dated 1881-1884*.

[65] For a more detailed history and analysis of this cemetery, see Ted Delaney, "Daughters of Zion Cemetery Project: Final Report." The Carter G. Woodson Institute, University of Virginia, unpublished paper in author's possession.

[66] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, January 5, 1883.

politics and culture while articulating a Christian vision of unity for all Americans.[67]

With his death, he clung to such a possible vision by refusing to submit to the dictates of a political and cultural system that denied him the respect he so readily *lived*.[68]

The exhibition of a cultural politics of respectability did not end with the performance of Jefferson Lodge at the funeral of M. T. Lewis. Cognizant of the standing of Lewis in the African American community and to a lesser degree in the white community, considering the respectful obituary appearing in *The Chronicle*, a more significant and lasting association between Lewis and Jefferson Lodge was necessary. Lewis' grave marker is a permanent monument attesting and highlighting his place and position in Charlottesville society. Standing over four feet in height, a headstone inscribed with his name and life span marks M. T. Lewis' grave. Also inscribed on the headstone is the name of the organization that erected the marker: The Young Men's Monumental Society. In the eyes of this group, Lewis came to symbolize the model of the respectable black male and as such they honored him. Lewis' grave is also elaborately entombed by ornate metal fencing, further adding to the luster of his memory. But for the Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge, their association needed to be cemented with the example of Lewis' life. Thus, on the back of his headstone, etched into the stone itself is the Masonic symbol – the square overlaid by the compass with the letter "G" in the middle. M. T. Lewis was thus forever marked, as a respectable man and Freemason.

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[67] On African American Republican political activity during this period, see Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), esp. Chapter 2.

[68] For more on the politics of graveyard segregation, see Angelika Kruger-Kahloula, "On the Wrong Side of the Fence: Racial Segregation in American Cemeteries," in Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 130-149.

In a sense, the life and actions of the respectable M. T. Lewis that endeared him to a

wider public – signified by the inscriptions on the front of his headstone and the ironwork

around his grave – was ever supported by the (un)conscious, but *always already* cultural

politics of Jefferson Lodge, hence their symbol stands alone on the back of the headstone.

Angelika Kruger-Kahloula reminds us:

The inclusion of trips to the cemetery in African-American homecoming rites

underlines the function of family graves in traditions that foster a strong sense of

community identity. The graveyard, *locus memoriae* in the literal sense, provides

the members, of a given community with geographic and historical roots.[69]

With its ornate headstone and ironwork, the gravesite of M. T. Lewis serves to enshrine

the symbol of the life of this esteemed man. The grave of the respectable M. T. Lewis

serves as a *lieux de memorie* for the cultural politics of respectability for the Freemasons

of Jefferson Lodge. In 1891, *The Chronicle* reported, "The Negroes of this city devoted

Tuesday to decorating the graves in the colored burying grounds."[70] When African

Americans in this memorial tradition came across the grave of M. T. Lewis, they saw a

monument to that forever associated the life of a revered and respected man with the

Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge.

The performance of a cultural politics of respectability was interwoven with

Jefferson Lodge's cornerstone laying ceremonies. These Masonic ceremonies have an

extensive history in United States political culture dating back to 1774 "when Virginia

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[69] Angelika Kruger-Kahloula, "On the Wrong Side of the Fence: Racial Segregation in American Cemeteries," 145.

[70] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, June 5, 1891.

Masons laid the 'Foundation Stone' of a new stone bridge at the Capitol Landing in Williamsburg."[71] The visual displays associated with these ceremonies along with the presence of Freemasons at cornerstone laying ceremonies at some of the most influential political and public facilities in the state and nation helped to propel this ritual ceremony to one of the most sacred duties in Freemasonry. The connection of Freemasonry with this form of civic performance not only aided in boosting the respectability of the fraternal order, it also functioned in enhancing the social and cultural legitimacy of the brotherhood. With Freemasons performing the cornerstone laying ceremonies at the Virginia State Capitol as well as the Capitol of the United States, this public performance was transformed into not only a Masonic rite, but a public ritual whereby the principles of love, charity, and brotherhood that were held in high esteem by the organization were ritually transferred to the structure and purpose of the building. Moreover this process reinforced and cemented the ideals of honor and respectability with the order.

In the postemancipation period, with the (re)construction of the nation and the inclusion of African Americans into the polity, cornerstone laying ceremonies gained an increased significance. Continuing the association of white Freemasonry with cornerstone laying ceremonies, these ceremonies gained in prominence as demonstrated by the publication of the "Address Delivered by Hon. R. T. W. Duke, Jr., Grand Junior Deacon, At the Laying of the Corner-Stone of Christ Church" on the front page of the *The Chronicle.*[72] On the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone of the Court House in Staunton, the white Freemasons of Staunton were employed to perform this public ritual.

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[71] See Len Travers, "'In the Greatest Solemn Dignity,' 164.

[72] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, September 27, 1895.

This public ceremony was accompanied by reduced railway rates to facilitate public

attendance in addition to being advertised in a most enticing manner:

A Great Day in Staunton . . .

This is an occasion that will not occur again, perhaps, for 100 years.

The Staunton Masons will have charge of Ceremonies.

There will be fine Music, and there will be Addresses by Distinguished Speakers.

Everybody Come and Have a Good Time. [73]

Such a pronouncement wedded the culture of Freemasonry with a broader civic and

political culture. By granting the "honor" of laying the cornerstone of civic, religious,

and public buildings, white Freemasons extended their identification with the ideas and

ideals of respectability and the nation. African American Freemasons, recognizing this

civic culture and also an opportunity to public perform the cultural politics of

respectability, inserted themselves into this tradition thereby asserting their identity with

the underlying principles of this ceremony. The African American newspaper in

Petersburg, *The Lancet*, carried a detailed account of one cornerstone laying ceremony at

Blandford Chapel by a group of African American Freemasons. In front of an estimated

crowd of 2,500, "the Sheba Lodge of Masons, Mr. Nelson David, Worshipful Master,

was invited to conduct the ceremonies, and were escorted to the place by St. Mark's

Commandery of Knights Templar, Sir Knight Milton Rivers Eminent Commander." *The*

Lancet continues to detail the ceremonial activities:

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[73] "A Great Day in Staunton" Broadside, Broadside Collection, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

By order of the Grand Master, the stone was raised, and the audience listened to a very fervent and feeling prayer by Elder P. R. Berry, after which the usual Masonic ceremonies of depositing matter, etc., in the stone, testing the stone, and public grand honors were performed, after which eloquent speeches were delivered by Senator W. N. Stevens and Hon. A. W. Harris, reviewing the origin of Masonry and speaking of King Solomon's temple, eulogizing the grand purposes of Masonry, showing how closely the order was interwoven with Christ's Church and the appropriateness of the Masons performing this ceremony.[74]

This public display by African American Freemasons reveals the level to which this form of Masonic ritual was integrated into the fraternity. The elegant public display by these Freemasons attests not only their Masonic proficiency in carrying out this ceremony, but also conforms to the ethos and philosophy of respectability that accompanies such Masonic cultural exhibitions. "Symbolic of the majesty of the virtues they guarded," the presence of the Knights Templar in escorting the Lodge in charge of the ceremonies serves to strengthens the association of African American Freemasonry with a culture of respectability.[75] The public performance of this ceremony not only performed a cultural politics of respectability, the respectable standing of African American Freemasons was verbally articulated as "the appropriateness of the Masons performing this ceremony" was discussed. With the presence of such governmental officials as Senator W. N. Stevens and the Honorable A. W. Harris, the Freemasons in Petersburg ceremonial

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[74] Petersburg, *The Lancet*, October 28, 1882.

[75] Len Travers, "'In the Greatest Solemn Dignity,' 169.

cornerstone laying ceremony of a church not only consecrated this sacred site, it also served to announce the political presence of respectable African American men to the wider public.

The Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge conducted cornerstone laying ceremonies of the two major African American churches in Charlottesville – Delevan Baptist Church and Mt. Zion Baptist Church. An association with these two institutions not only enhanced the standing of the organization in the eyes of the general public, it also presented the brotherhood with an opportunity to display its acumen with Masonic ritual while at the same time performing its respectability. With the cornerstone laying of official public institutions off limits to black Freemasons, the invitation to lay the cornerstone of African American churches underscored the long history of the political significance of the African American church. In a significant respect, the African American Church, as the work of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Elsa Barkley Brown shows, served as a critical counter-public sphere for African Americans in the postemancipation period.[76] Thus, for African American Freemasons, cornerstone laying ceremonies at these institutions served to demonstrate not only their competence and respectability in performing not only the ceremonial duties that were a long standing tradition in Masonic and American public life, but also their preparedness to exercise the requisite role, duty, and function of full citizens in the public sphere.

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[76] See Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," in Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 111-150 and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.

Soon after Jefferson Lodge was founded, the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia received a request from an African American church in Charlottesville. The *Proceedings* recorded the request in the following manner:

> An application from Zion Church, Charlottesville, asking that we consent to lay the corner-stone of their Church now being erected at that place.

> On motion of Brother Farrar, the proposition was agreed to. Timed between the arrival and departure of the trains on Saturday morning.[77]

With this request, the members of Union Grand Lodge, including the members of Jefferson Lodge, intervened in this ceremonial tradition one year after the founding of Jefferson Lodge and five years after the conclusion of the Civil War. The motion to accept the application was moved by a member of Jefferson Lodge, Brother Farrar. With this action, the connection between Jefferson Lodge and the second African American baptist church founded for African Americans in Charlottesville was solidified.

Over a decade later, the members of Mt. Zion Baptist Church would make plans to erect a new edifice. Under the leadership of Rev. Jesse Herndon, himself a member of Jefferson Lodge, the church experienced phenomenal growth and it was decided that a new structure was needed in order to better serve the congregation. *The Chronicle* recorded the building effort:

> THE MOUNT ZION BAPTIST CHURCH. – The congregation of this church has determined to erect a new building for worship, the present building having become entirely too small for the use of the church, besides being unsafe. The

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[77] *Proceedings of A Grand Semi-Annual Communication and Annual Communication of the Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. M.*, 12.

contract for the work has been awarded to Messrs. Vandegrift & Walters, for the sum of $10,200. These gentlemen propose to go to work at once upon the new edifice, which is to be placed upon the site of the old one. The officers of the church, while conceding that a cheaper structure would answer, with very commendable public spirit design the present structure to be an ornament to the town, and in keeping with the spirit of the age.[78]

The Officers of Mt. Zion viewed the building of the new church as a contribution to the civic life of Charlottesville as well as a necessity for the continued growth and development of their religious life. In this regard, the new church structure was in keeping with the political thrust coextensive the religious emphasis of the church. The article goes on to detail the "respectable" behavior undertaken by the members – particularly the men – in helping to erect the new structure:

> They very properly argue that the church can be readily built upon the money which the young men of their race would otherwise fritter away, and they propose to try to direct this surplus into a channel to benefit the church and the community. . . .[79]

To further underscore the "respectability" of the actions of the Church and those who belong to it, *The Chronicle* continues:

> The church is under the pastorate of Rev. Jesse Herndon, to whose influence, perhaps, is due its present flourishing condition, and whose exemplary conduct,

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[78] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*. July 28, 1883.

[79] Ibid.

during his nine years of labor here, has won for him the respect of all classes of citizens.[80]

Both the members of the church and the wider public underscore the theme of respectability in his effort. To be connected with this effort would necessarily convey that those who sought to engage in this effort were equally respectable. To this end, *The Chronicle* ended its report with a strong endorsement, "Persons who desire to assist in this work will find it a worthy object, and contributions will be thankfully received."[81]

The extensive social and political capital available in relation to this project and in a larger political economy of respectability would be beneficial to the members and institution of Jefferson Lodge. Reading this project and economy in the other direction, the effort of Mt. Zion Church would be enhanced by the presence of a collection of respectable men in the example of Jesse Herndon. As they had in 1870, Mt. Zion Church requested that the members of Jefferson Lodge take charge of the cornerstone laying ceremony. Due to the significance of this effort and the publicity surround the project, the public performance of the cultural politics of respectability by members of Jefferson Lodge was carefully planned. On September 6, 1883, a special call meeting of Jefferson Lodge was convened in their hall for the expressed purpose of "arranging to lay the corner stone of Mount Zion Church."[82] With a full slate of officers present the recorded minutes detail the limited scope of the meeting:

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[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] September 6, 1883 meeting of Jefferson Lodge, *Minute Book Dated 1881-1884.*

The Lodge was opened on the 3rd degree of Masonry. The Lodge discussed the matter of corner stone laying and was closed in due form.[83]

Before performing this public ritual, the member of Jefferson Lodge first discussed this matter in a special meeting. This discussion probably was directed towards ensuring that everyone understood the importance of the ceremony as well as fine-tuning their ceremony. Recognizing the symbolic significance and the intense politics surrounding this event, this meeting of the brotherhood can be taken to mean that the members did not want to leave anything to chance. "The corner-stone of the new Mt. Zion church," *The Chronicle* reported six days after the meeting, "was laid Tuesday evening last, with Masonic ceremonies."[84] The Freemasons of Jefferson Lodge successfully performed the ceremony. In doing so, they collectively demonstrated the respectability in relation with the respectable Mt. Zion Church and with their ability to conduct this ritual Masonic ceremony. As a result, Jefferson Lodge was well positioned in a political economy of respectability.

Their leading the same ceremony at the Delevan Baptist Church preceded Jefferson Lodge's laying of the cornerstone of the 1,200-member congregation of Mt. Zion Church. As the first African American church organized in Charlottesville, Delevan enjoyed a pride of place and position unparalleled in the Charlottesville area. Just as with Mt. Zion, a "respectable" man and Freemason, M. T. Lewis, led Delevan congregation. Delevan was also the parent church of Mt. Zion, the latter having separated from the former around 1867. In October of 1877, at a regular meeting of Jefferson Lodge, a

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, September 12, 1883.

correspondence from Delevan Church was received. The minutes of the meeting recorded that the Building Committee of Delevan Baptist Church sent a letter requesting Jefferson Lodge to lay the cornerstone of its new building.[85] Recognizing the significance of this occasion, Jefferson Lodge extended invitations of several African American lodges to take part in the procession that would lead to the ceremonial site. Mt. Zion Lodge #18 from Staunton was invited along with different lodges in Lynchburg and Richmond. Such a Masonic processional would be reminiscent of the 1871 Union Grand Lodge processional accompanying the meeting of that statewide body in Charlottesville. Furthermore, with the attendance of a large number of African American Freemasons it would enhance the public display and performance of respectable African American men. As a statement attesting to the status and position of this group of African American men, this display would distinguish and define the power and authority embodied in these individuals. Although this solemn occasion was typically exclusive to the culture and institution of Freemasonry, Jefferson Lodge moved "that the Odd Fellows will not be an objectionable feature in the procession."[86] From a certain standpoint, this action can be read as an inclusive measure on the part of Jefferson Lodge. In another vein, by agreeing to include the Odd Fellows in the processional, the members of Jefferson Lodge could be expressing their desire to create as large a "respectable" spectacle as possible.

Seven years after the laying of the cornerstone, the Delevan Baptist Church was nearly complete. *The Chronicle* reported:

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[85] October 10, 1877 meeting of Jefferson Lodge. *Minute Book Dated Jaunary 12, 1876 to December 1881.*

[86] Ibid.

DEDICATION OF DELEVAN CHURCH. – This splendid church building which has been in the course of erection for several years, has become so near completed as to justify its dedication, which event occurred last Sunday. After devotional exercise, the pastor, Rev. Alexander Truatt, gave a synopsis of the church's history since 1865, showing how great a work the congregation had accomplished.[87]

The cornerstone ceremony over a half-decade before was now connected with a completed edifice that was well received by the Charlottesville community. Echoing the themes of self-reliance, perseverance, and dedication, themes consistent with Jefferson Lodge's cultural politics of respectability, *The Chronicle* applauded the efforts of the Delevan congregation:

> The Delevan congregation deserves much credit for the success {unreadable} has attended their seemingly hopeless struggle to build a decent house of worship. It is an evidence of what perseverance and persistence will accomplish under the most adverse circumstances. The building cost about $10,000. . . . It is gothic in style, and the finish of the audience-room is superior to any house of worship in town. . . . We are strongly impressed. . . .[88]

Notwithstanding the paternalistic undertones of *The Chronicle*, Jefferson Lodge recognized the importance of being connected with this institution. As a church with a history extending back the days prior to emancipation, Delevan was a highly symbolic institution in Charlottesville. With many members of the Lodge holding membership in

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[87] Charlottesville, *The Chronicle*, January 4, 1884.

[88] Ibid.

this church, including the revered leader at the time of the cornerstone laying M. T.

Lewis, this ceremony probably held special meaning to Jefferson Lodge. The finished

church was a testament to the strength, resilience, and vibrancy of the Delevan

Congregation. Assuming the name, "First Colored Baptist Church of Charlottesville" on

February 17, 1884, the cultural politics of respectability performed by Jefferson Lodge in

the cornerstone laying ceremony would forever be a part of this historic institution.

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In response to the growing number and virulence of the calls for the

disfranchisement of African American men, a group of African American men convened

a statewide conference in Charlottesville to address this issue. Meeting at the Odd

Fellows Hall under the auspices of the "Virginia Conference of Colored Men," this body

organized itself in late August, 1900 to challenge the rising tide of white reaction against

black male suffrage that had gained momentum since the Readjuster Campaign of 1883.[89]

Surveilling this gathering of African American men, *The Daily Progress* reported to its

readers in Charlottesville and beyond:

> The Conference developed nothing dramatic. As far as we have been able to
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> gather no incendiary speeches were made, and no dangerous moves or actions
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> were contemplated. Although nothing of importance was done by the
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> Conference, we consider it somewhat significant. There seemed to be an evident

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[89] See Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia.*

realization of the fact that the white man rules Virginia and that he would do so from henceforth.[90]

Although the tone of this account of the meeting is unquestioning in its invocation of the inevitability of white male rule, African American men utilized this conference to continue to challenge the political will of a state intent on maintaining and extending white hegemony.

The actions of this group of African American men were joined by the efforts of the Virginia Educational and Industrial Association. Founded in Charlottesville the same year the Conference was held, this organization was originally an agriculturally oriented economic collective designed "to promote agricultural affairs in all parts of the State for the benefit of the colored population."[91] While the bellicose Carter Glass barked in the chambers of the Constitutional Convention, "Discrimination! Why, that is precisely what we propose; that, exactly, is what this Convention was elected for – to discriminate . . . with a view to the elimination of every negro voter who can be gotten rid of," this organization completed its evolution from a purely agriculturally oriented economic association to a political organization designed to thwart the efforts of white reactionaries intent on disfranchising African Americans.[92] In light of the passage of the 1902 Constitution, the Association embarked on an effort to raise $50,000 to fund a legal battle against the Virginia Constitution. No longer a cultural organization designed to advance African American agricultural interests, this organization harnessed its structure,

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[90] Charlottesville, *The Daily Progress*, August 23, 1900.

[91] Richmond, *The Richmond Dispatch*, August 16, 1902.

[92] Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 164.

network, and capacity to challenge, contest, and hopefully change the political culture, climate, and institutions in the state of Virginia.

The examples of the "Virginia Conference of Colored Men" and the Virginia Educational and Industrial Association highlight the intersection of African American cultural formations and political aspirations and articulations in the space of the postemancipation South. What they demonstrate is the protean character of African American cultural forms in their ability to simultaneously serve the narrow aims of the cultural organization or association and the broader goals of African American political advancement. With the "Virginia Conference of Colored Men," we see how the ritual space of the Odd Fellows' Hall is transformed into a political forum in charting out a political trajectory to combat the assaults on the franchise for African American men. The Virginia Education and Industrial Association presents us with an almost unparalleled example of how an organization initially formed for the cultural and economic advancement of African American agricultural interest is transformed into a political action group prepared to wage a legal battle against the state constitution. Needless to say, a complete analysis of these two groups is beyond the purview of this study. I should also that they both warrant significant scholarly attention. This aside, the congruence of culture and politics in these two examples demonstrate the inextricable intermingling of these two spheres. In this regard, culture and politics are not wholly separate. Nor are they reducible one to the other. Instead, by recognizing the correspondence between cultural formations and political articulations we come to a critical understanding of how and in what manner cultural forms encode complex political philosophies and strategies.

This chapter was organized around a set of critical readings of the cultural responses and actions of African American Freemasons to the political exigencies of the postemancipation period. These cultural responses reveal the intermingling of the culture and institution of African American Freemasonry and the political aspirations and articulations of African Americans in contesting and challenging the social, political, and economic boundaries of post-Civil War society. The members of Jefferson Lodge refused to qualify their standing as men and as Masons in responding to the inability and unwillingness of white Freemasons to extend Masonic recognition to their organization. From this exclusion developed a complex political strategy that sought to (re)define the contours of the culture of masculinity while (re)presenting black masculinity in and through the public presentation of African American Freemasonry. This cultural politics of masculinity shifted the ground upon which the question of the normative masculine was founded. In this regard, such a political strategy (un)masked the particular economy whereby a black masculine ideal could be formed in relation to prevailing economic structures and gender hierarchies. Through a politics of respectability that emphasized the status of African American Freemasons in relation to the larger social world of postemancipation Virginia and the United States, the (c)overt political protests over the place of African American men in the public sphere is effectively revealed.

In 1867, B. R. Wellford, Jr., of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence of the white Virginia Grand Lodge remarked, "[N]ever will Southern Masons acquiesce in the overthrow of ancient landmarks subjecting them to the necessity of 'meeting upon the

level' with their former slaves."[93] Through the cultural politics operative in and through

the practices and performances of the Jefferson Lodge Freemasons, this group of African

Americans men challenged, contested, and defied the sentiment propelling the actions

and articulations of white Freemasons and men like Wellford. Through the cultural

politics of masculinity and respectability, African American Freemasons expanded the

narrow boundaries of postemancipation society and Freemasonry and refashioned a

cultural form into a political weapon.

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[93] *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Virginia. A. F. and A. M.* (Richmond: Virginia Grand Lodge, 1867).

EPILOGUE

This is not hostility; this is not criticism. I am asking a question of brothers. I wonder where do I, an American negro, conditioned by the harsh industrial, abstract force of the Western world that has used stern political prejudice against the society which Senghor has so brilliantly elucidated – where do I stand in relation to that culture.

Richard Wright[1]

There is nothing like distance to create objectivity, and exclusion gives rise to counter values. Men, as Dostoievsky observed, cannot live in revolt. Nor can they live in a state of "reacting."

Ralph Ellison[2]

Addressing members and friends of Staunton Lodge No. 13 on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Lodge, the prominent Charlottesville native and future Grand Master of the white Virginia Grand Lodge R. T. W. Duke, Jr. offered a scathing rebuke of the nascent labor movement:

> Our Order, formed originally exclusively of men who earned their bread by the sweat of their brows, must necessarily view with absorbing interest the beginning and the growth of the labor organizations of to-day. There are some of them worthy of our warmest sympathy, some of our severest reprobation. Borrowing from us – as every secret organization has borrowed – our method of secresy [sic], our manner of having signs and tokens whereby one initiate can know another, and our fraternal spirit, some of them have grafted upon these, methods which all calm and reasoning men must view with concern. Whilst they proclaim the reign of fraternity, they practice the sovereignty of force. Whilst they urge – and with much justice – the grievances of labor, they disarm those who would be friends, by declaring that none shall labor but those whom they permit, and those

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[1] Cited in David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 286.

[2] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (1964; New York: Quality Paperback, 1994), 316.

only, when and as they will. Whilst they hail as a brother those who do their

bidding, they set in motion the hand of Cain for those who seek happiness and

honest labor out of their ranks. Whilst the liberty of man is their watchword, the

slavery of the individual is the result of their machinations. I particularize no

single organization. . . . I have no quarrel with any association which by the

power of organization pursues the means to have justice done to all men, but from

the bottom of my heart I detest, and with God's help, will try to teach others to

detest, and deter from evil any man or set of men who stab in the dark, who bring

the methods of the Thug into the haunts of civilized business, who murder honest

trade whose teachings lay the train of dynamite or fire the deadly bomb, or who

seek to make martyrs of those poor wretches, who, now in darkness and the

shadow of death, await their doom in our western city.[3]

Duke's tirade was directed at what he saw as a menace to southern society. Arguing

against the existence and proliferation of labor organizations, Duke reminded his

audience that the "conservatism" of Freemasonry must contend with the forces of

"revolution" that were spreading throughout late nineteenth century American society.

The apotheosis of this new revolutionary movement was the establishment and

deployment of labor organizations modeled on the culture and institution of Freemasonry.

"To us, as Masons," Duke noted, "there is one of the elements that goes to make

up this revolution now going on around us that has an absorbing interest. That is the

gradual formation and growth of societies akin to ours in some respects, yet differing

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[3] R. T. W. Duke. Jr., "The Conservatism of Free Masonry: An Address Delivered Before Staunton Lodge No. 13, A. F. & A. M.," *Addresses Delivered at the Centennial Anniversary of Staunton Lodge No. 13, A. F. & A. M.* (Staunton, VA: Stoneburner & Prufer, Steam Printers, 1886), 15.

from it in others as widely as the poison of asps differs from the first nourishment of infancy."[4] Although the occasion for his speech was the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Staunton Lodge, Duke offered his harangue as a necessary reminder that the institution and culture of Freemasonry must not be sullied by the "dirtiness" of a labor movement that modeled itself after the fraternity in order to rearrange existing economic relations. Duke sought to undermine the ends to which these labor unions and organizations were working towards by arguing that while these organizations employed the ideals compatible with the fraternal ideals of Freemasonry, by advocating and advancing positions that were not in compliance with the existing economic order they were perverting the very meaning of such universals as freedom, liberty, and justice espoused by the fraternity and American society. Contesting the very meaning and grounds for the existence of these labor organizations while advocating for the continuance and perseverance of a "pristine" Freemasonry, Duke demonized labor organizations not only as a perversion of the culture and institution of Freemasonry, but more importantly, of the social and economic order of the United States.

The rationale propelling Duke's assertion of the cognitive dissonance between labor organizations and Freemasonry is heavily invested in the incongruence announced in his analogy: "[T]he gradual formation and growth of societies akin to ours in some respects, yet differing from it in others as widely as the poison of asps differs from the first nourishment of infancy." Labor organizations and the institution of Freemasonry are incompatible, insofar as labor organizations inject a foreign germ into a healthy economic body that is "civilized business" conducted on the rules of "honest trade." But

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[4] Ibid, 14.

why, we may ask, use the occasion of an anniversary celebration of a lodge to speak of the ills of labor organizations? Why breach the Masonic etiquette of never mingling Freemasonry and politics? Why demonize organizations of a totally different order to exalt the virtues of the fraternity of Freemasonry – a brotherhood based on noble, immutable principles unresponsive to the whims of the world?

To consider the remarks offered by R. T. W. Duke, Jr. as just a tirade against labor organizations in general would be to miss a crucial component of his speech that posits an interminable gulf between labor organizations and Freemasonry. It may not be at all coincidental that Duke's speech coincided with the historic October 1886 convention of the Knights of Labor in Richmond, Virginia. Lying to the east of Staunton, the former capital of the Confederacy would be transformed to a theatre where the spectacle of the politics of labor and the politics of race would be openly confronted by laborer and citizen alike. To be sure, the *New York Times* commented, "The delegates are determined to fight the battle of the color line right in the midst of that part of the country where race prejudice is strongest, and they will insist on carrying on what they claim is a fundamental principle of their order – that the black man is the equal of the white socially as well as politically, and that all races stand upon an equal footing in all respects."[5] The display of interracial unity and solidarity that paraded through the streets of Richmond and on the floor of the convention may have been the impetus that peeked the ire of an old line southern gentlemen like Duke. To flaunt openly southern convention by defying segregation customs and advocating racial equality in the labor market and throughout

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[5] Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker 1619-1981* (New York: International Publishers, 1981), 53.

society was anathema to the racial sensibilities of men from former slave owning families like Duke. Making matters worse, the Knights of Labor readily adopted titles like Master Workman and Grand Master Workman – privileged symbols of Freemasonry – as the preferred style of address for those in local and national leadership positions. Not only had these individuals come and flouted the social norms and mores of genteel southern society, they also "pillaged" the sacred institution of Freemasonry in their attempt to chart a new direction for social and civil society – one predicated on the inherent equality of whites and blacks. The transformation of Freemasonry into a potent weapon of social and political equality did not end with the adoption and adaptation of titles, but extended to the organization and operation of the labor organization. Philip Foner remarked on the borrowing that so offended Duke as a critical weapon in black labor organizing throughout the South:

> Bitter opposition made it necessary for the Southern organizers to conceal their purposes by using names like "Franklin Lodge," "Washington Lodge," and "Protective Lodge"; to post sentries at meetings as a defense against sudden raids; and to take extensive precautions to insure secrecy.[6]

While one might argue that Duke's hostility towards labor organizations may be as a result his staunch pro-capitalist sentiment, he was clearly doing more in his speech than suggesting the foibles of labor organizations.

Duke shaped his argument as a necessary and vital challenge to the attempts of those who sought to place the social order of Southern society in particular and American society in general on a more egalitarian footing. Singling out labor organizations was

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[6] Ibid, 48.

just a prelude in his marshalling of an essential weapon in this task – the culture and institution of Freemasonry. With the title "The Conservatism of Freemasonry," Duke fashioned a political weapon out of this cultural formation. Favoring the possessive phrase, "Our Order," Duke reminded his audience assembled in Staunton that the fight of the (white) Freemason is one that must be waged against the forces of those who attempted to adjust the reigning social order. Echoing the racist sentiment that held that African Americans would die in the absence of the institution of slavery, Duke has nothing but utter contempt for the actions and motives of those who sought to utilize the medium of the labor union to assist those whom he termed "those poor wretches who, now in darkness and the shadow of death." Dukes' contempt is compounded when the challenge to the social, political, and economic order is intermingled with a bastion of conservatism, Freemasonry. For Duke, Freemasonry served as a stronghold against the forces of social and economic revolution. More importantly, the fraternity offered a sanctuary for those who sought to mitigate the changes that ensued from emancipation by creating a place of solace where white racial privilege, among many other privileges, reigned supreme. In effect, the one hundredth anniversary of the Staunton Lodge was a perfect opportunity for Duke to unleash his verbal assault on labor organizations. The romantic nostalgia of the previous century – with its attendant racial violence, chattel slavery, white racial democracy – would easily serve as a counter for the upheavals of the postemancipation period where African Americans challenged the contours of American democracy and even laid claim to the veritable institution of white masculine culture – Freemasonry.

In the end, African American men would lay claim to the culture and institution

of Freemasonry not only as a model for labor organizing, but as a viable fraternal form

commensurate with their goals, aims, and ambitions for the fraternal order and the social,

political, and economic order. The cultural practices of African American Freemasons

are often located within the competing frameworks of citizenship and self-determination.

In the postemancipation era, the members of Jefferson Lodge, along with their Masonic

colleagues in Virginia and throughout the United States, utilized the fraternity to

articulate their conception of what it meant to be a (black) man, a citizen, and human in

an anti-black racialist and racist society. Their actions reveal the interesting territories

where even in the midst of an antagonistic society and cultural form, they were able to

(re)construct a fraternity in their own image whereby the oppositions and contradictions

of fraternity and society could be the generative material for fascinating possibilities for

social, political, economic and cultural flourishing. Thus, African American Freemasons

were able to affirm the sentiment expressed by one African American Masonic orator:

> Such is the universality of Masonry, that in every country we find a Mason and in
>
> every Mason a brother. Neither rank, climate, language, nor color can deny him
>
> the privileges of his Order, no matter what may be the native tongue of the people
>
> among whom he travels, the language of Masonry is always intelligible.[7]

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[7] *Masonic Addresses delivered at the Celebration of the Anniversary of St. John the Baptist before Union Grand Lodge of Virginia A. F. & A. M.* (Lynchburg: Schaffter & Bryant, Printers, 1869), 12.

VITA

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Corey D. B. Walker was born in Norfolk, Virginia on February 12, 1971. He received the Bachelor of Science with Honors in Finance from Norfolk State University in 1993. He received the Master of Divinity with Honors from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, Virginia Union University in 1998. He also received the Master of Theological Studies from The Divinity School, Harvard University in 1999.

While a graduate student at The College of William and Mary, Corey was the recipient of a Stephen J. Wright Commonwealth Graduate Fellowship (1999-2000) and a Ford Foundation Fellowship (2000-2002). He also held research appointments at the Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies at the University of Virginia and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University.