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The Life and Work of James McCune Smith (1813-1865)

Amy M. Cools

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Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Lay Summary and Abstract	v
Abbreviations	viii
Introduction	1
<i>Figure 1. James McCune Smith. Engraving by Patrick H. Reason ca. 1850</i>	<i>8</i>
Chapter One – A New York Story: Early Life and Family History	
Introduction	9
1.1 Parents and Early Childhood	10
1.2 Early Education and Employment: From the African Free School to Blacksmith’s Apprentice to Preparation for University	20
1.3 Marriage and Children	29
1.4 The New Yorker	33
Conclusion	64
Chapter Two – The Power of Words: The Intellectual and the Author	
Introduction	66
2.1 Early Education and Authorship	68
2.2 The Classicist	76
2.3 The Reader	80
2.4 The Aesthete	86
2.5 The Historian and the Biographer	96
Conclusion	106
Chapter Three – James McCune Smith, M.D.	
Introduction	108
3.1 Medical Student and Early Career	110
3.2 Earliest Medical Authorship	116
3.3 Medical Practice and Consultation	120
3.4 Pharmacy	128
3.5 Colored Orphan Asylum	134

3.6 Continuing Medical Authorship	140
Conclusion	145
Chapter Four – James McCune Smith and the African American Press	
Introduction	148
4.1 Overview of McCune Smith’s History with the African American Press	151
4.2 A National Press?	167
4.3 The African American Press and the American Anti-Slavery Society	173
4.4 The Colonization/Emigration Debate	177
Conclusion	185
Chapter Five - Slavery’s Foe	
Introduction	187
5.1 What is Slavery?	188
5.2 This Land is Our Land: Colonization and Emigration	193
5.3 National and International Anti-Slavery Activism	207
5.4 The Fight for Equal Suffrage	217
5.5 Unity in Action: The Colored Convention Movement	223
5.6 A National Council and a Manual Labour School	228
5.7 The Committee of Thirteen and the Underground Railroad	232
5.8 Violence and the Civil War	239
Conclusion	244
Chapter Six – Science, Evidence, and Race	
Introduction	246
6.1 Science and Statistics: The Scholar	248
<i>Figure 2. 'Square Root' by James McCune Smith, 1826</i>	251
6.2 Science and Statistics: In Action	252
6.3 Statistics and the Defence of African Americans	260
6.4 The Unity of the Human Race	267
6.5 Facets of Humanity: Ethnology, Civilization, and Race	274

6.6 The <i>Miscegenation</i> Controversy	286
6.7 'Negro Nationality' and African Americans	294
Conclusion	302
Conclusion	304
Bibliography	307
Appendix: James McCune Smith and Family Map, Lower Manhattan/Five Points, 1811-1864	344

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Amy M. Cools

Lay Summary and Abstract

Lay Summary

James McCune Smith (1813-1865) was the first African American physician to practice in the United States with a medical degree. He was among the most educated African Americans of his day, having earned three degrees at the University of Glasgow. McCune Smith was also the first African American to have work published in European and US medical journals; an early and central leader in the Colored Convention Movement; author of a series of experimental essays foundational to African American literature; and among the most prolific authors in the antebellum African American press. His immense influence is revealed in myriad primary and secondary sources relating to the African American struggle for freedom before and during the US Civil War and to the African American literary tradition. Yet while he is so often cited by contemporaries and later scholars as a leader and major influence in African American intellectual, cultural, and civil rights history, McCune Smith has yet to be the subject of a full-length dedicated biography. This thesis is written with the view that McCune Smith is among the most significant figures in American history to lack a full biography. It seeks, among other things, to remedy this lack, filling in gaps in existing literature on McCune Smith's origins and on major events and themes in his life.

Abstract

James McCune Smith (1813-1865) was the first African American physician to practice in the United States with a medical degree. He was among the most educated African Americans of his day, having earned three degrees at the University of Glasgow. McCune Smith was also the

first African American to have work published in European and US medical journals; an early and central leader in the Colored Convention Movement; author of a series of experimental essays foundational to African American literature; and among the most prolific authors in the antebellum African American press. His immense influence is revealed in myriad primary and secondary sources relating to the African American struggle for freedom before and during the US Civil War and to the African American literary tradition. Yet while he is so often cited by contemporaries and later scholars as a leader and major influence in African American intellectual, cultural, and civil rights history, McCune Smith has yet to be the subject of a full-length dedicated biography. This thesis is written with the view that McCune Smith is among the most significant figures in American history to lack a full biography. It seeks, among other things, to remedy this lack, filling in gaps in existing literature on McCune Smith's origins and on major events and themes in his life. It will do so in a series of six chapters. Chapter One explores McCune Smith's origins and life in New York City and argues that this context is vital for understanding McCune Smith's lifetime of achievement and activism. Chapter Two argues that McCune Smith was the first full-fledged African American polymath as well as the preeminent African American intellectual of the 19th century. Chapter Three argues that the significance of McCune Smith's pioneering medical career may lie more in the holistic nature of the practice he established than in the fact that he broke multiple racial barriers that African Americans faced in that field. Chapter Four argues that that McCune Smith played a more central and enduring role in the history of the African American press than is generally recognized in the relevant literature; that the subtle, complex, and often controversial ideas he expressed in his articles may have caused him to be marginalized by scholars; and that these ideas represent significant

contributions to many arenas of thought. Chapter Five argues that McCune Smith's broad conception of slavery drove his lifelong opposition to it in all its forms, from what he described as the caste system which oppressed African Americans in the North to the legalised system of chattel slavery in the South. Chapter Six traces the origins and development of McCune Smith as a scientific thinker and author. It argues that his thinking in these fields was centered on one foundational theory: that humankind consisted of a single race, classifiable into groups or 'races' only according to mutable characteristics caused by local circumstances. It also argues that among McCune Smith's most significant contributions to what he called the 'dawning science of race-history' was his development of the theory that African Americans had arisen as an indigenous American people.

Abbreviations

- AA *The Anglo-African*
- AAM *The Anglo-African Magazine*
- AASS American Anti-Slavery Society
- ACS American Colonization Society
- AFASS American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society
- AfCS African Civilization Society
- AFS African Free School
- AGSS American Geographical and Statistical Society
- BLA Brooklyn Library Association
- CA *The Colored American*
- COA Colored Orphan Asylum
- CPS College of Physicians and Surgeons
- DAB *Dictionary of American Biography*
- Doggett's Doggett's New-York City Directory* (various subtitles)
- ED Examination Days: The New York African Free School Collection, New-York Historical Society
- FDP *Frederick Douglass' Paper*
- FJ *Freedom's Journal*
- GES Glasgow Emancipation Society
- GMS Glasgow Medical Society
- GSP Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Libraries
- Longworth's Longworth's American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory*
- LRA Legal Rights Association
- Mercein's Mercein's City Directory, New-York Register, and Almanac*
- MSRC Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University
- NASS *National Anti-Slavery Standard*
- NS *The North Star*
- NY New York (State)

NYAF New-York African Free School Records 1817-1832, New-York Historical Society

NYAM New York Academy of Medicine

NYASMR New York African Society for Mutual Relief

NYC New York City

NYJC New York Journal of Commerce

NYMS The New York Manumission Society

NYSPECC New York Society for the Promotion of Education among Colored Children

RPA Radical Political Abolitionists

Trow's Trow's New-York City Directory (various subtitles)

UoG University of Glasgow

WAA *The Weekly Anglo-African*

WSC The William Smeal Collection, Mitchell Library Special Collections/National Library of Scotland (Microfilm)

Abbreviations used in footnotes:

Abbreviations listed above that appear in the footnotes are used from the first instance without using the full name. University presses are abbreviated according to common usage; for example, Oxford University Press appears as 'OUP.' Modifying words such as 'New York' or 'Daily' are omitted from oft-cited major newspapers such as the *New-York Daily Tribune* and *The New York Herald*. 'The' is omitted from the beginning of periodical and journal titles. Many subtitles of books and articles are omitted. See Bibliography for all complete titles, full names of university presses, and access dates for websites.

Introduction

'Homo sum humani nil a me alienum puto.' (I am human, and nothing human is alien to me.)

~ Terence, Roman African playwright, 2nd century BC

'But as a scholar, none led James McCune Smith, and few equaled him.'

~ Robert Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith'

The Anglo-African, 9 December 1865

'He was very active in all measures intended to benefit his race.'

Anon. ~ 'Dr. James McCune Smith'

Portland Daily Press, 21 November 1865

James McCune Smith (18 April 1813 – 17 November 1865) was the first African American physician to practice in the United States with a medical degree.¹ He was among the most educated African Americans of his day, having earned three degrees at the University of Glasgow.² He was also the first African American to have writings published in European and US medical journals; a leading figure in the Colored Convention Movement; author of a series of experimental essays foundational to African American literature; and among the most prolific authors in the antebellum African American press.³ His immense influence is revealed in myriad

¹ 'Colored Men as Physicians,' *Nemaha County Republican*, 19 March 1885; Thomas M. Morgan, 'The Education and Medical Practice of Dr. James McCune Smith (1813-1865), First Black American to Hold a Medical Degree,' *Journal of the National Medical Association* 95, no. 7 (July 2003): 603.

² Simon Newman, 'Scot Free: Dr. James McCune-Smith and the Long Arm of Racism, Pt. I: Runaway Slaves in Britain,' *Runaway Slaves in Britain* (blog), 25 May 2018, <https://runaways.gla.ac.uk/blog/index.php/2018/05/25/scot-free-dr-james-mccune-pt-1/>.

³ James McCune Smith, 'Our Faults – Remedies,' *AA*, 10 December 1864; Irvine Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield: Willey & Co., 1891), 33–34, 40, 98–99; Morgan, 'Education and Medical Practice,' 603; Henry Louis Gates, Jr and John Stauffer in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, ed. John Stauffer (OUP, 2006), xi, xiii; Carla L. Peterson, 'Reconstructing James McCune Smith's Alexandrine Library: The New York State/County and National Colored Conventions (1840-1855),' in *The Colored*

primary and secondary sources relating to the African American struggle for freedom before and during the US Civil War and to the African American literary tradition. Yet while he is so often cited by contemporaries and later scholars as a leader and major influence in African American intellectual, cultural, and civil rights history, McCune Smith has yet to be the subject of a full-length dedicated biography.⁴ This thesis is written to provide one.

Arturo Alfonso Schomburg's 1945 article on McCune Smith represents a notable early attempt to resurrect McCune Smith from the unjustified obscurity he fell into in the intervening decades since his death. In his article, Schomburg writes: 'The writer can offer but a brief biographical sketch of this truly great man, entirely inadequate...' He laments that this was primarily because 'in the time intervening since the death of Dr. Smith, so much has been lost that one might positively point to... as references. So many of his associates have passed away, who might have testified to and put upon record [his] many remarkable achievements and doings...'⁵ In 1868, McCune Smith's lifelong friend, newspaperman, and abolitionist Philip Bell – likewise concerned that McCune Smith's biography be written before information was lost – suggested that Charles Reason and George Downing 'obtain his papers' and write one: 'Both these gentlemen were life-long friends of Dr. Smith, and either is capable of performing the

Conventions Movement, ed. P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson (UNC Press, 2021). The publication of McCune Smith's work in European medical journals is an original discovery presented in this thesis; see Chapter Three.

⁴ *On the use of names*: This thesis will use the two-part last name 'McCune Smith' rather than 'Smith' in referring to James McCune Smith, following W. E. B. Du Bois and John Stauffer. This will avoid confusion with others discussed in this thesis with the surname 'Smith.' This is not a departure from ways in which McCune Smith was referred to in his lifetime: his middle and last names were sometimes combined and used as a compound surname by contemporaries. Indeed, McCune Smith himself did so on occasion; for example, see James McCune Smith, 'J. M'cCune Smith, M. D., 162 South Third St., Brooklyn, E. D. [Calling Card],' George T. Downing Papers, MSRC.

⁵ Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' *Negro History Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (1 November 1945): 41.

work.⁶ For unknown reasons, this was never done.⁷ In any case, Schomburg would surely rejoice to find that many of McCune Smith's associates did indeed 'testify and put upon record' much about McCune Smith's life, mostly in the form of biographical profiles, obituaries, memoirs, and newspaper interviews.

These and a wealth of other sources – lost or difficult to access at the time of Schomburg's writing – have been found, archived, catalogued, and/or digitized in the intervening decades. This thesis is largely made possible by the newfound availability and discoverability of a wealth of sources relating to McCune Smith and his world; it will explore a great many of them, and many for the first time. Initially, the original research for this thesis was intended to be conducted primarily in physical archives and, at first, much of it was. However, the pandemic of 2020-21 intervened and prevented in-person archival research throughout New York City and State. In response, colleagues and scholars generously shared scans and transcripts of original documents they had consulted in their past visits; archivists scanned and shared whatever they could access; and libraries, archives, and other research collections lowered paywalls to digitized sources. Digital libraries such as *Internet Archive* and *Hathi Trust*; genealogy websites such as *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch.org*; and online newspaper databases such as *Newspapers.com*, *Chronicling America*, and *Accessible Archives* also made it possible to do sufficient original research to write this thesis as planned. A variety

⁶ Philip A. Bell, 'Biographies,' *Elevator*, 21 February 1868. Bell was himself a 'life-long friend' and an accomplished writer more than 'capable of performing the work' himself. However, he had long since relocated to California and would not have had ready access to McCune Smith's papers.

⁷ James Stauffer and McCune Smith's descendant Greta Blau offer possible explanations for this historical amnesia in the instruction to *Works*, xvi–xix, including the fact that McCune Smith did not publish a book; that his papers were not collected; that his styles of writing were inaccessible to or unpopular with many readers; and/or that his descendants erased him from their family history to obscure their African ancestry.

of search techniques applied within these websites uncovered an additional wealth of information that has never been discussed in the literature on McCune Smith.

Following Schomburg, a renewed scholarly interest in McCune Smith's life and legacy led him to be prominently featured in several influential historical works. For example, Rhoda Golden Freeman's 1966 thesis, a foundational study of African Americans in antebellum New York City, highlights McCune Smith's role as a major community leader. Jane and William Pease's *They Who Would be Free* (1974) demonstrates the prominence of McCune Smith as an abolitionist. John Stauffer's *The Black Hearts of Men* (2001) explores McCune Smith's deep connections with and influence on three other major nineteenth-century abolitionists: Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Gerrit Smith. Carla Peterson's *Black Gotham* (2011) further cements McCune Smith's role as an intellectual, moral, and business leader among New York City's African American elite.⁸ As rich and invaluable as their contributions to the literature on McCune Smith are, none of these are dedicated to providing the sustained biographical exploration of his life that Bell had called for.

It was forty years after Schomburg's article that the next dedicated biographical work on McCune Smith was published.⁹ David Blight's 1985 article 'In Search of Learning, Liberty, and

⁸ Rhoda Golden Freeman, 'The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War' (PhD, New York, Columbia University, 1966); Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (UIP, 1974); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (HUP, 2001); Carla L. Peterson, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (YUP, 2011). For more examples of works that discuss McCune Smith at length, see David Harbison, *Reaching for Freedom* (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1972); Maurice S. Lee, *Uncertain Chances: Science, Skepticism, and Belief in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (OUP, 2011); David Brion Davis, *The Problem with Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Anna Mae Duane, *Educated for Freedom: The Incredible Story of Two Fugitive Schoolboys Who Grew Up to Change a Nation* (NYU Press, 2020). Many others are referenced throughout this thesis.

⁹ The only known attempt to write a full-length biography of McCune Smith exists in the form of an unfinished draft. See Leslie M. Falk, 'James McCune Smith – First Black American to Graduate from a Medical School:

Self Definition' is a compelling character study of McCune Smith as an accomplished intellectual often frustrated and thwarted by the racial social and political hierarchy of his time. Noting that '[McCune] Smith's career and ideas have never received a serious assessment by historians,' Blight's article provides the beginnings of one, including many biographical details about McCune Smith that had not been published before.¹⁰ Seeking to further remedy the '[striking] absence of James McCune Smith in the historiographic and critical literature' that he had lamented in *Black Hearts*, Stauffer proceeded to edit the only published collection of McCune Smith's works. While Stauffer provides many more previously unknown, key details about McCune Smith's life; presents many of his writings in an elegantly presented and approachable volume; and lays the groundwork for an intellectual history of McCune Smith in his richly detailed notes, *The Works of James McCune Smith* (2006) presents only a partial array – though an illuminating one – of his voluminous output.¹¹ Since Blight and Stauffer, others have published short biographical works on McCune Smith; they will be cited throughout this thesis.

This thesis is also written with the view that McCune Smith is among the most significant figures in American history to lack a full-length biography. It seeks, among other things, to remedy this lack by filling in gaps in the existing literature on McCune Smith's origins and on major events and themes in his life by discussing a wealth of original discoveries about his life and his world. It also identifies and explores many of McCune Smith's writings for the first time. It will do so in a series of six chapters that are conceived and arranged to preserve as

Abolitionist, Suffragist and Feminist' (ca. 1990), Leslie Falk Collection, University of Southern Mississippi Libraries Special Collections.

¹⁰ David W. Blight, 'In Search of Learning, Liberty, and Self Definition: James McCune Smith and the Ordeal of the Antebellum Black Intellectual,' *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 9, no. 2 (1985): 7–26.

¹¹ Stauffer, *Black Hearts*, 5; McCune Smith, *Works*. *Works* might be more accurately titled *Selected Works*.

much of the chronological flow desirable in a biographical study as possible within the argumentative style of a doctoral thesis. The chapters are thematic since discrete topics (as opposed to a single narrative arc that a strictly chronological biography would trace) are more amenable to argument. Each chapter/subchapter attempts to preserve chronological order within them as each topic/subtopic allows. The overall arrangement of chapters is laid out roughly according to the chronology of major events discussed within them, each serving as a rhetorical anchor for the larger points each chapter seeks to make.

Chapter One explores McCune Smith's origins and life in New York City and argues that this context is vital for understanding McCune Smith's lifetime of achievement and activism. It also seeks to remedy significant gaps in the literature by providing previously unknown but key information about McCune Smith's origins, formative influences, and personal life. Chapter Two argues that McCune Smith was the preeminent African American intellectual of the nineteenth century. Chapter Three argues that the significance of McCune Smith's pioneering medical career may lie more in the holistic nature of the practice he established than in the fact that he broke multiple racial barriers that African Americans faced in that field. Chapter Four argues that McCune Smith played a more central and enduring role in the history of the African American press than is generally recognized in the relevant literature; that the subtle, complex, idiosyncratic, provocative, and/or controversial ideas he expressed in his articles may have caused him to be marginalized by scholars; and that these ideas represent significant contributions to many arenas of thought. Chapter Five argues that McCune Smith's broad conception of slavery drove his lifelong opposition to it in all its forms, from what he described as the caste system which oppressed African Americans in the North to the legalised system of

chattel slavery in the South. Chapter Six traces the origins and development of McCune Smith as a scientific thinker and author. It argues that his thinking in these fields was centred on one foundational theory: that humankind consisted of a single race, classifiable into groups or 'races' only according to mutable characteristics caused by local circumstances. It also argues that among McCune Smith's most significant contributions to what he called the 'dawning science of race-history' was his development of the theory that African Americans had arisen as an indigenous American people.

The quotation of the second-century Roman African playwright which opens this introduction was among McCune Smith's favourites. He incorporated it or referred to it regularly in his writings and speeches. On one occasion, he wrote of Terence's words: 'Glorious sentiment! How Godlike in its sympathies, how universal in its grasp!'¹² As this thesis seeks to demonstrate, McCune Smith's lifetime of labour, scholarship, writing, speaking, and activism reveals that he was guided throughout his life by the sentiments of universality and justice which Terence so eloquently expressed.

¹² James McCune Smith, *The Destiny of the People of Color: A Lecture, Delivered Before the Philomathean Society and Hamilton Lyceum in January, 1841* (New York, 1843), 8.

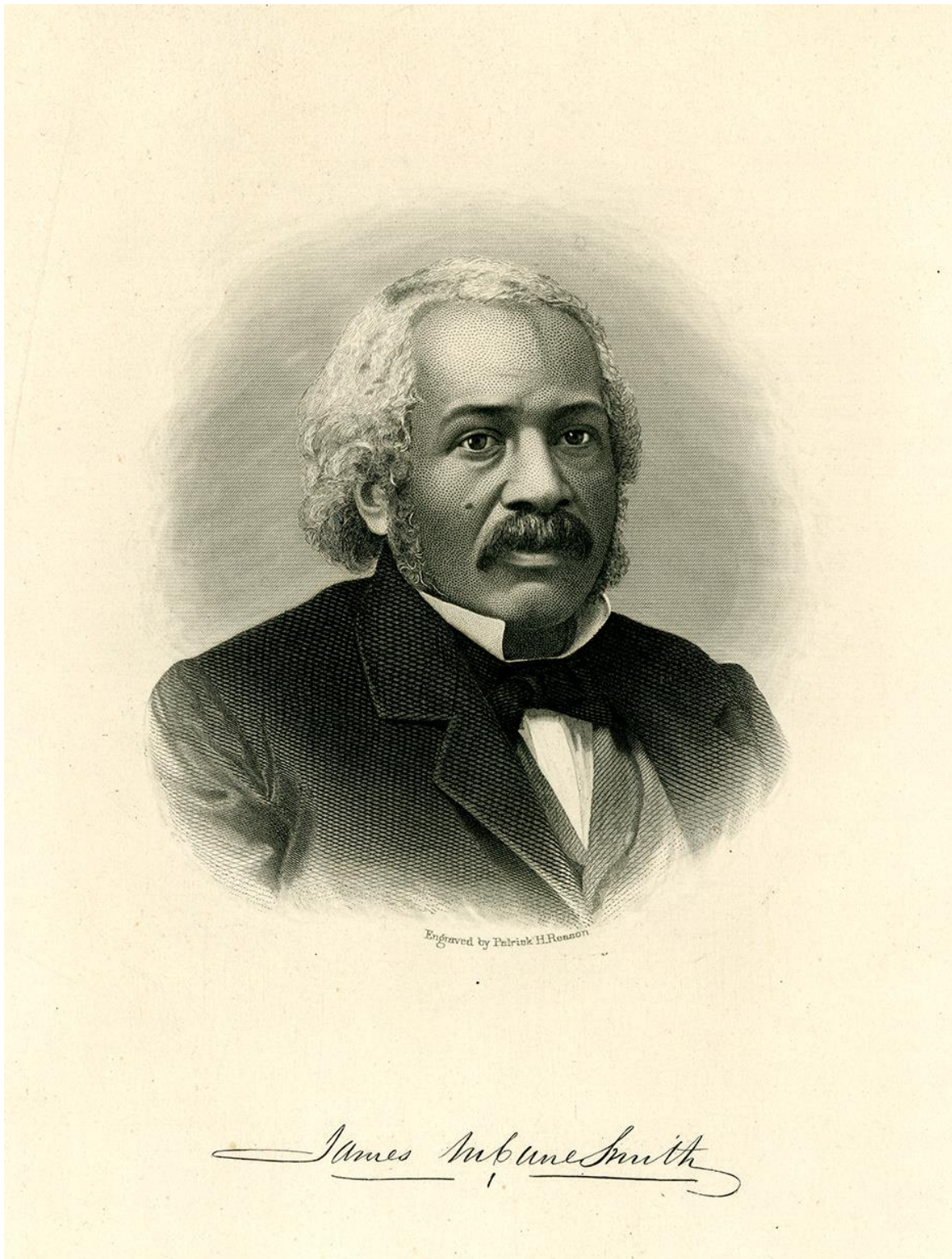


Figure 3. James McCune Smith. Engraving by Patrick H. Reason ca. 1850. Collection of the New-York Historical Society. Used with permission

Chapter One – A New York Story: Early Life and Family History

Introduction

‘It is this energy of character, industry, and labor, combined with great intellectual powers, which has given Dr. Smith so much influence in New York.’

~ William Wells Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, 1855

Except for his five years as a university student and medical student in Europe and the last year or so of his life in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, James McCune Smith lived his entire life in New York City (NYC).¹³ Indeed, he only occasionally left the city; as we shall see, McCune Smith’s professional life kept him so busy that he hardly found time to travel. Throughout McCune Smith’s life, NYC was a centre of commerce; a rapidly growing, ever-more diverse metropolis; home to a dynamic, close-knit African American community; and a key battleground in the national struggle over slavery. As this chapter argues, this context is key to understanding McCune Smith’s lifetime of achievement and activism; in fact, McCune Smith often seems to personify these features of nineteenth-century NYC.

Therefore, this chapter will focus on McCune Smith and his life and work in NYC. He was somewhat unusual among his NYC circles of associates and friends – especially those nearest to his age – in that he was born there and chose to remain there until near the end of his life. Most of his peers – such as Philip Bell, Charles and Patrick Reason, Charles Ray, George

¹³ New York City/NYC will be used throughout this thesis as a synonym or near-synonym for Manhattan since that is how it is used in most of the primary sources referenced throughout this thesis.

Downing, Alexander Crummell, and Henry Highland Garnet – came to NYC from elsewhere or moved elsewhere for significant periods of their lives, often for good. As this thesis and especially this chapter will demonstrate, understanding McCune Smith’s deep rootedness in NYC is key to understanding the arc of his life and the development of his thought.

Much of the research presented in this chapter is original. In part, this chapter seeks to correct or fill in significant gaps in the relevant literature and lay the groundwork for future historical research. First, it will do so by exploring McCune Smith’s early life and family history. Secondly, it will present McCune Smith as an archetypical New Yorker: fired by the city’s energy; influenced and inspired by its history; committed to its interests and especially to those of its African American community; and deeply embedded in its institutions, many of which he supported or helped to form. This chapter argues that the history presented herein will help reveal how McCune Smith became a leader within NYC’s African American community. It also provides background information essential for understanding what this thesis seeks to demonstrate: how and why McCune Smith became the preeminent African American intellectual of the nineteenth century and an important figure in American history overall.

1.1 Parents and Early Childhood

James McCune Smith was born in NYC on 18 April 1813 to Lavinia Smith and a man who may have been named Samuel.¹⁴ As McCune Smith stated in 1851, his mother was a ‘mulatto’ and

¹⁴ UoG, *University Register: Medicine 1822-23 to 1842-43* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1843), 84; *A Roll of the Graduates of the University of Glasgow: From 31st December, 1727 to 31st December, 1897* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1898), 563; 1855 New York State Census, New York, New York County, NY, digital image s.v. ‘James McCune Smith,’ *FamilySearch.org*; Guido Furman, ‘Obituary of James McCune Smith,’ *The Medical Register of the City of New York for the Year Commencing June 1, 1866*, 1866, 201. Furman’s obituary is the one most cited in literature on McCune Smith.

his 'father a descendant of the Puritans, a real Caucasian.'¹⁵ Though censuses, directories, and other sources provide some information regarding Lavinia's full name, occupation, and some personal details of her life, there is nearly nothing known of McCune Smith's father. While a record from the University of Glasgow provides a first name for him – it describes McCune Smith as 'Filius natu maximus Samuelis, Mercatoris apud New York' ('Eldest natural son of Samuel, merchant in New York') – there are no other records yet found that can be definitively linked to this 'Samuel.'¹⁶ On one occasion, McCune Smith indicated that he never met his father and perhaps knew nothing of him besides his name, race, and profession and possibly, not even those. In an 1852 letter to Frederick Douglass, McCune Smith wrote: 'we of doubtful parentage ...cannot look anywhere in particular for "forefathers' day" and "fatherland" ...'¹⁷ John Stauffer suggests that McCune Smith may have provided 'Samuel' to the University of Glasgow as a placeholder name for a father he did not know.¹⁸ Robert Hamilton, McCune Smith's friend and fellow lifelong New Yorker, recalled only that McCune Smith's father 'was a Northern man.'¹⁹

The historical record currently reveals more about Lavinia. Since Lavinia left no known writings or other personal documents behind, details of her life must be gleaned from public records and what others wrote of her. She was born into slavery about 1783 in Charleston,

¹⁵ 'The Poughkeepsie Slave Case,' *Liberator*, 12 September 1851. *On the use of names*: For clarity, Lavinia Smith and other women featured in this thesis who certainly or likely changed their last names after marriage will usually be referred to by their first names. Male and female children will also be referred to by their first – and middle names, if applicable – to avoid confusion with elder family members of the same name(s).

¹⁶ *Roll of the Graduates*, 563. NYC directories around the year of McCune Smith's birth contain multiple entries for 'Samuel Smith' but none who are listed as merchants. They also contain entries for merchants named Samuel with other last names. No links have yet been found between those named Samuel of any last name and McCune Smith. Research is ongoing.

¹⁷ James McCune Smith, 'Letter from Communipaw [4 February 1852],' *FDP*, 12 February 1852.

¹⁸ Stauffer in *Works*, xix.

¹⁹ Robert Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' *AA*, 9 December 1865.

South Carolina and moved to NYC about 1805.²⁰ Hamilton recalled that McCune Smith's 'mother was from Charleston, S.C., whence she came when a young girl, leaving behind a large circle of relations.'²¹ McCune Smith left one description of these relations while also indicating that his mixed-race ancestry was inherited from Lavinia as well as his father: in 1844, he wrote that he had 'kindred in a southern State, some of them slaveholders, others slaves....'²² McCune Smith also provided the one surviving family anecdote about Lavinia's life in the South: in 1854, he recalled 'My mother, dear lady, tells a story which happened in her home, Charleston, S.C. – A Guinea-man, who had risen from slavery to freedom, and the ownership of horse and cart, had his horse run away one day; away followed the Guinea-man, shouting through the streets, "Toppo dat horse! Toppo dat horse! White man stops him I gib him TEN dollar! Black man stop him I gib him FIVE dollar! Toppo dat horse! Toppo dat horse!"'²³ This anecdote also indicates what Lavinia felt about the racial hierarchy of the society of her youth.

Though McCune Smith described Lavinia as 'a self-emancipated bond-woman' – which seems to indicate that she went north of her own volition to escape slavery – he provided no further details about the circumstances under which she left her large family.²⁴ Eric Foner argues that relatively few from states further south than the border states tended to head north to flee slavery: the distance was great; the risk of capture high; and at the time Lavinia

²⁰ 1855 NY State Census, 'James McCune Smith;' James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [1, 8, and 9 December 1854],' *FDP*, 15 December 1854.

²¹ Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith.'

²² James McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery for Africans,' *Tribune*, 20 January 1844. Note that this article will appear as 'Freedom and Slavery 1' in future citations: it was the first letter to the editor of the *Tribune* whose titles begin with the phrase 'Freedom and Slavery' in response to Orville Dewey's 1844 Tabernacle lecture; see Bibliography for the 'Freedom and Slavery' series. See also Chapters Five and Six for further discussion

²³ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [1, 8, and 9 December 1854].'

²⁴ James McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, by Frederick Douglass (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), xvii–xxxi.

would have headed north, there were no organizations yet in existence to assist and shield fugitives – though, as we shall see, many individuals and communities did so. In Foner’s view, it would have been easier and safer to flee slavery by heading south to large cities with substantial free African American populations, to Mexico, or to Native American lands.²⁵ However, David Cecelski indicates that it may have been easier to flee north by sea since large numbers of African American sailors were willing to smuggle fugitives to freedom on their routes ‘up the eastern seaboard:’ ‘Alert to the landscape of opportunity, runaway slaves regularly headed to the coast instead of attempting overland paths out of bondage.’²⁶

Nevertheless, the capture or kidnapping of legally free and legally enslaved African Americans to force them back or into slavery was a very real problem in NYC. The fear engendered by the practice was as well. For example, the family of McCune Smith’s friend Henry Highland Garnet was broken up by a raid of ‘slavehunters.’ Such ‘slave hunts,’ McCune Smith recalled, were not common; yet, he wrote, they were ‘not infrequent’ either. However, due to the abiding fear they instilled in NYC’s African American community – especially those still legally enslaved – African American New Yorkers’ ‘condition ...was one of constant apprehension and jeopardy.’²⁷

Slavery was not yet abolished in New York State when Lavinia arrived about 1805. As Patrick Rael writes, ‘New York, like other Northern states, abolished slavery slowly’ and that

²⁵ Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of America’s Fugitive Slaves* (OUP, 2015), 16, 18.

²⁶ David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman’s Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (UNC Press, 2012), 104–7, 123–26.

²⁷ James McCune Smith, ‘Sketch of the Life and Labors of Rev. Henry Highland Garnet,’ in *A Memorial Discourse; by Henry Highland Garnet, Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, Washington City, D.C. on Sabbath, February 12, 1865* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1865), 25–27.

‘the process took particularly long, from 1777... to 1827...’²⁸ After all, New York – especially NYC – had been heavily dependent on enslaved labour in its early years. However, following the Revolutionary War and a series of religious revivals, a growing number of white New Yorkers opposed slavery. They came to believe that true religion did not permit it or that it contravened principles of liberty which the Revolution was fought to defend.²⁹ Bell later recalled that ‘slavery in [New York] State... had only a nominal existence’ by 1816.³⁰

The New York Manumission Society (NYMS) – which would come to have a profound impact on McCune Smith’s life – expressed these burgeoning anti-slavery sentiments when it declared that slavery was “the reproach of a free people.” Founded in 1785 by prominent white New York abolitionists including George Clinton, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, NYMS’s lobbying efforts helped lead to the passage of the Gradual Emancipation Law of 1799. (Some of the members of NYMS were slaveholders themselves.) Along with African American opponents of slavery – many of whose efforts preceded theirs – the NYMS also helped get laws passed and established institutions to protect and promote the interests of free and enslaved African American New Yorkers. Despite their efforts, the number of enslaved people in New York – especially NYC – continued to grow until at least the late 1790’s. While NYC remained a difficult place to live, attain, and retain liberty for both free and enslaved African Americans when

²⁸ Patrick Rael, ‘The Long Death of Slavery,’ in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York/London: New Press, 2005), 114.

²⁹ Rael, 115–16; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (UCP, 2003), 48–49.

³⁰ Philip A. Bell, ‘Underground Railroad in New York: No. 1,’ *Elevator*, 18 January 1873.

Lavinia arrived, it also was ‘witness[ing] the flowering of African American social and cultural life’ in the communities they were building there.³¹

Research has not yet revealed what – or perhaps whom – took Lavinia to NYC. McCune Smith may have had Lavinia at least partly in mind when he wrote of ‘the best blood of the South, which drifted this way, in search of freedom, or escaping from attempts at insurrection’ to join ‘the sturdy New Yorkers.’³² While she eventually found freedom there, it was not immediately. In fact, McCune Smith may have been legally enslaved when he was born; as he recalled, he was ‘the son of a slave’ who ‘ow[ed his] liberty to the emancipation act of the State of New-York.’³³ Finalizing New York’s system of gradual emancipation, this act went into effect on 4 July 1827.³⁴ However, there is some evidence that Lavinia at least may have been legally emancipated before then. McCune Smith’s goddaughter Maritcha Lyons recalled that Lavinia was a ‘slave who had been given her freedom to make her eligible to testify in a court of justice.’ Lyons provided no further details about the case that helped Lavinia gain her freedom.³⁵

Lavinia apparently first emerges in public records in 1811 and 1812 when a Lavinia Smith, tailor, is listed in NYC directories on Hester St near Norfolk.³⁶ This was in the notoriously dense lower-working-class neighbourhood of Five Points, also home to a sizable, close-knit

³¹ Rael, ‘Long Death,’ 118–19, 121, 123–30.

³² McCune Smith, ‘Sketch,’ 21.

³³ McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery 1.’

³⁴ State of New York, *Revised Statutes of the State of New York, As Altered by the Legislature... Passed from 1828 to 1835 Inclusive*, vol. 3 (Albany: Packard and Van Benthuyzen, 1836), 554. (Title VII, original note to § 16).

³⁵ Maritcha Remond Lyons, ‘Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was - An Autobiography’ (New York, 1929), 77, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. Research on this case is ongoing.

³⁶ David Longworth, *Longworth’s* (New York: David Longworth, 1811), 272; *Longworth’s*, 1812, 290.

African American community.³⁷ As Carla Peterson observes, there is a dearth of ‘contemporaneous accounts of the Five Points written by its black inhabitants.... Instead, it’s [the English author] Charles Dickens who penned the most memorable portrayal of the area.’ He described it as a place ‘rife’ with ‘poverty, wretchedness, and vice.’ Yet, as Peterson points out, ‘certainly those who lived there would never have thought to portray their streets or homes in such contemptuous and abject language.’³⁸ Five Points had indeed long been beset with poor draining and sanitation which caused severe outbreaks of disease; overcrowding and neglect by the neighbourhood’s landlords resulted in slum conditions. Nevertheless, Five Points also underwent several periods of improvement and revitalization from the late 1790’s onwards and was a thriving hub of community and religious organizations, business, and entrepreneurship. While it is certain that those who lived in Five Points suffered widely from the ills of poverty and neglect, its negative reputation may have been at least partly based on prejudice against its working-class, racially and ethnically diverse, and immigrant inhabitants. Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace quote one ‘genteel observer’ who described the people who lived there as “the vilest rabble, black & white, mixt together.”³⁹ As we shall see, McCune Smith was only one of many New Yorkers who recalled enjoying an often happy if not always easy childhood, a supportive and close-knit community, and a quality education in this reputedly wretched place.⁴⁰

³⁷ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City To 1898* (OUP, 1998), 400, 479.

³⁸ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 63–64. McCune Smith’s descriptions of Five Points is discussed below.

³⁹ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 391–92, 475–76, 478–80. All double quotes used in this thesis appear in the original sources.

⁴⁰ At a welcome reception held for him upon his return from Glasgow, McCune Smith said, rejoicing at returning to NYC: ‘Once more upon my native soil, once more in my native city, and amid those scenes which are endeared to me by the thousand happy recollections of boyhood and of youth...’ See James McCune Smith, ‘Address of James McCune Smith at a Welcome Reception in His Honor, 26 September 1837,’ *CA*, 28 October 1837.

Intriguingly, Lavinia Smith is listed in 1811 and 1812 directories as a widow, indicating that she may not have been married to McCune Smith's father; this, in turn, indicates that 'Samuel' may not have been a Smith. (McCune Smith was born 18 April 1813.)⁴¹ As we shall see, some listings for Lavinia Smith (with variations in spelling) can be confirmed – albeit indirectly – as referring to our Lavinia. Two of these place her at 44 Orange in 1820 and 1822.⁴² Also listed at that address in those years was Sarah McCune, a widowed teacher.⁴³ In 1820 and 1821, a Mary or 'Mrs.' Weaver, teacher, is also listed at 44 Orange.⁴⁴ McCune Smith's lifelong friend Philip Bell – who, as he wrote, 'knew him as none but his wife and lamented mother knew him,' a testimony corroborated in McCune Smith's own writings – revealed the connections between these names. In doing so, he provided rare glimpses into McCune Smith's early family life and formative influences.⁴⁵

Writing in 1873, Bell recalled an incident in which Lavinia and McCune Smith's aunt 'Mrs. Sally McCune' – both, as he wrote, from Charleston – sought to deliver a Margaret Green from slavery. According to Bell, Lavinia and Sally brought Margaret to Bell's family home seeking shelter for her in the fall of 1816; they were afraid that since Margaret's 'owners' knew Lavinia and Sally, they would seek for her at their home. The community rallied to keep

⁴¹ While it is possible this Lavinia Smith was another woman of the same name, there are no multiple entries for Lavinia Smith in NYC directories for relevant years, indicating there was only one.

⁴² Thomas Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1820), 406; Thomas Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1822), 414.

⁴³ William A. Mercein, *Mercein's* (New York: William A. Mercein, 1820), 294; *Longworth's*, 1822, 296.

⁴⁴ *Mercein's*, 429; Thomas Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1821), 458; *Longworth's*, 1822, 468. A Mary Weaver, widow, is listed at 137 Collect St in 1822, as is a Mrs. Weaver, teacher, at 44 Augustus. By this time, Orange St was among those in the Five Points that had been revitalized and built over with large wood-frame buildings run by absentee landlords. Burrows and Wallace describe these as 'de facto boardinghouses for the wage-laborers now settling the area.' See Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 392.

⁴⁵ Philip A. Bell, 'Death of Dr. Jas. McCune Smith,' *Elevator*, 22 December 1865.

Lavinia's family safe: 'A watch was kept around Mrs. [Lavinia] Smith's house for weeks, and every visitor was closely scrutinized.'⁴⁶ Lavinia and Sally's efforts to rescue Margaret surely helped inspire McCune Smith's own efforts to assist others fleeing slavery.⁴⁷

In his obituary for McCune Smith, Bell also wrote that a "Grandma Weaver" provided his first tuition.⁴⁸ Significantly, Grandma Weaver's address at 44 Orange St was also that of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief (NYASMR).⁴⁹ This was a beneficial society founded in 1808 to establish a fund for members who could not support themselves due to illness or incapacity as well as for deceased members' widows and orphans.⁵⁰ As founding member and abolitionist John Jay Zuille wrote in his *Historical Sketch*, the NYASMR acquired a property at that address in August 1820 and 'erected a building which was used for its meetings and to accommodate other societies. It was in line with the residences of many of its prominent members.' McCune Smith would become a member himself in 1841.⁵¹

In his obituary for McCune Smith, Hamilton recalled that Lavinia raised McCune Smith alone and supported both entirely by the work of 'her own hands' which 'with the grace of God this means was ever ample and abundant.'⁵² However, as this chapter will continue to demonstrate, the mutually supportive community to which Lavinia and her family belonged also provided them, like so many others, with various forms of assistance and support. The

⁴⁶ Bell, 'Underground Railroad in New York: No. 1.'

⁴⁷ See Chapter Five

⁴⁸ Bell, 'Death of Dr. Jas. McCune Smith.' Research for this thesis indicates that 'Grandma Weaver' does not bear a familial relationship to Bell or McCune Smith.

⁴⁹ *Longworth's*, 1820, 54.

⁵⁰ John Jay Zuille, *Historical Sketch of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief* (New York: New York African Society for Mutual Relief, 1892), 43.

⁵¹ Zuille, 4–5, 16, 31.

⁵² Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith.'

NYASMR, with which Lavinia was connected, likely provided some. As we shall also continue to see, the community also assisted in providing her son with a quality education. Holidays, too, provided occasions for such generosity. In the final year of his life, McCune Smith fondly recalled: ‘But Christmas times in Old New York! Christmas times in Old Saint Philips! We little fellas, well muffled up, and largely provided with pockets, would swarm down town to Auntie Robinsons, Mrs. Downings, Mrs. Hoffmans, Mrs. VanGiesens and others, and towards night fall come safely home, literally stuffed inside and out with doughnuts, crollers, and other sweets too numerous to mention.’⁵³ McCune Smith’s childhood community was one among many in NYC composed of those who, as Peterson writes, were commonly called ‘African’ though most had mixed-race ancestry originating not only in Africa but all over the globe as well. The community was centred on Collect Street (later Centre Street), home of St Philip’s Episcopal Church, of which McCune Smith was a lifetime member and sometimes vestryman.⁵⁴ St Philip’s was central to McCune Smith’s personal life as well: Lyons recalled that he ‘was very prominent in the church... [and] he had a wholesale contract as a godfather, not only sharing with the secular life but also with the spiritual existence of practically most of the children of his personal friends.’ (McCune Smith was godfather to Lyons and all her siblings).⁵⁵ He would maintain close ties with members of this community and with St Philip’s for the rest of his life.

⁵³ James McCune Smith, ‘Christmas!’, AA, 24 December 1864. ‘Mrs. Downing’ likely refers to Rebecca, the wife of Thomas Downing, who then lived at 9 Orange St; McCune Smith maintained close ties with the Downing family throughout his life. ‘Mrs. VanGiesen’ likely refers to the wife of an M. M. VanGiesen, a merchant who lived at 335 Broadway. ‘Auntie Robinson’ likely refers to a widow who lived at 11 Orange St. ‘Mrs. Hoffman’ has not been identified. See *Mercein’s*, 193, 361, 418.

⁵⁴ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 42–44, 46, 64–67, 168–69, 250. For more about McCune Smith’s role as a lifetime member and vestryman at St Philip’s, see John H. Hewitt, *Protest and Progress: New York’s First Black Episcopal Church Fights Racism* (New York/London: Garland Publishing, 2000).

⁵⁵ Lyons, ‘Memories,’ 4, 72, 77, 78.

Along with providing material support, the NYASMR was a beacon of solidarity, hope, and pride for NYC's beleaguered African American community. As McCune Smith wrote, 'The colored people of New York, from an early date, carried themselves with a free air which showed that they felt themselves free, and on more than one occasion alarmed their friends by their bold action.' One of these occasions was a parade organized in 1809 to celebrate the NYASMR's first anniversary. Though their 'white friends called at the meeting of the Society and protested, begged, insisted that they should not attempt anything so fool-hardy,' it proceeded anyway, 'easily thrusting aside by their own force the small impediments which blocked their way.'⁵⁶ A 'grand celebration of the Abolition of Slavery in the State of New York... held July 5th, 1827' also triumphantly paraded from 'the west gate of the Park' past City Hall and proceeding 'down Broadway to the Battery, &c' among cheering crowds, a NYASMR banner prominently displayed as McCune Smith and his friends joined the festivities.⁵⁷

1.2 Early Education and Employment:

From the African Free School to Blacksmith's Apprentice to Preparation for University

McCune Smith began attending the African Free School (AFS) no. 2 on Mulberry St as early as 1819 or 1820; he was certainly enrolled by 1822.⁵⁸ The AFS was founded by the New York Manumission Society in November 1787 to fulfil part of its mission which was, as Rael writes, to 'prepare newly freed New Yorkers for the responsibilities of freedom.'⁵⁹ Prior to attending AFS,

⁵⁶ McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 20–21.

⁵⁷ McCune Smith, 24–25.

⁵⁸ Bell, 'Death;' Furman, 'Obituary,' 201–2; Morgan, 'Education and Medical Practice,' 605. An 1822 examination exercise by McCune Smith and a fellow pupil is preserved in the AFS's records: see Charles C. Andrews, 'A Dialogue: Spoken by Jas. M. Smith and William Hill at a Public Exam in 1822. Written for the Occasion by C.C.A Teacher,' in *Addresses and Pieces Spoken at Examinations, 1818-1826* (NYAF), 45–50, <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15052coll5/id/28491>.

⁵⁹ Rael, 'Long Death,' 119.

McCune Smith may have been educated at home; perhaps by his mother and/or with help from his aunt Sally and “Grandma Weaver” who, as we have seen, were both teachers. McCune Smith excelled at his studies: in his *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, its schoolmaster Charles Andrews listed several of McCune Smith’s productions among examples of the work of his most gifted pupils. One of these was an address delivered to abolitionist, honorary NYMS member, and Revolutionary War hero Lafayette when he visited NYC in 1824. Authored by Andrews, the address was painstakingly handwritten and decorated with calligraphy by McCune Smith.⁶⁰ McCune Smith later recalled that a few weeks after delivering the address he repeated it to passengers on a steamer ship bound for Philadelphia. After receiving some pocket change from the crowd, McCune Smith proudly sent 25 cents home to Lavinia as his first earnings.⁶¹

By 1827, McCune Smith’s scholarly advancement and maturity had qualified him in the minds of Andrews and the AFS’s trustees to entrust the school’s daily operations to his supervision for almost three months that year. As Peterson writes, the AFS’s trustees had, due to chronic understaffing, ‘resorted to the Lancastrian system of instruction under which the more advanced students – supervised by a senior instructor – monitored and taught those less advanced. James McCune Smith served as monitor general and George Moore as monitor in 1827.’⁶² Though McCune Smith struggled at times to maintain discipline, the AFS’s trustees

⁶⁰ Charles C. Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools: From Their Establishment in 1787, to the Present Time* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1830), 61, 148; James McCune Smith and Charles C. Andrews, ‘An Address – Delivered by James M. Smith, Aged 11 Years, in the New York African Free School, to General La Fayette, on the Day He Visited the Institution, Sept. 10th 1824,’ September 1824, ED, <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/africanfreeschool/archive/78742-26.html>.

⁶¹ James McCune Smith, ‘Letter from Communipaw [12 January 1859],’ *FDP*, 21 January 1859.

⁶² Carla L. Peterson, ‘Black Life in Freedom: Creating an Elite Culture,’ in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York/London: New Press, 2005), 188.

were well satisfied with McCune Smith's performance and his leadership over the other monitors.⁶³ McCune Smith took his final exam that summer and fall, graduating at age 14 on 10 October.⁶⁴ Many of McCune Smith's most significant and long-lasting friendships were established at the AFS: Bell, Garnet, the Reason brothers, Ray, Downing, Samuel Ward, and Isaiah DeGrasse were only some of these. Indeed, the AFS educated many of the most famed and influential African Americans of the nineteenth century, most of whom retained deep ties to NYC.⁶⁵

McCune Smith also pursued his education under the tutelage of others. Foremost among these was Rev. Peter Williams, Jr, pastor of St Philip's. Besides being the family pastor, Williams's links to the Smith family were many, and close. Bell recalled that Williams was McCune Smith's 'guardian.' If so, his guardianship of McCune Smith was likely informal: Williams's will and probate documents do not describe him as McCune Smith's legal guardian nor McCune Smith as his ward.⁶⁶ McCune Smith's goddaughter Lyons wrote – apparently referring to Williams – 'It may be referred that the family with which his mother [Lavinia] was connected was his patron.'⁶⁷ NYC directories provide further evidence for this connection:

⁶³ New-York African Free-School, *Reports of the Visiting Committee, 1820-1831*, vol. 2 (New York, NY, 1832), 101, 103–10.

⁶⁴ New-York African Free-School, 2:116, 118.

⁶⁵ Peterson, 'Black Life in Freedom.'

⁶⁶ Bell, 'Death;' 'New York, Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999, New York > Wills, Vol. 81, 1839-1841' digital image s.v. 'Peter Williams (Probate Date 20 November 1840),' *Ancestry.com*; 'New York, Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999, New York > Proceedings, 1840,' digital image s.v. 'Peter Williams,' *Ancestry.com*.

⁶⁷ Lyons, 'Memories,' 77.

Lavinia's address in the late 1820's was 33 Centre St, also St Philip's address.⁶⁸ As we shall see, the connections between the Williams and Smith families would outlive Williams.⁶⁹

Williams's outsize role in ensuring that McCune Smith received an education commensurate with his talents and scholarly dedication is well known. Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, Thomas Morgan, and Stauffer are among the many scholars who describe Williams's early tutelage of McCune Smith and his role in helping him to apply for institutions of higher education in 1831 or 1832. When McCune Smith was denied entry to colleges in the United States on account of race, he applied to the University of Glasgow, again with Williams's help.⁷⁰ In fact, it may have been Williams who recruited McCune Smith to pursue a degree in higher education; in his 1834 address 'To the Citizens of New York,' Williams, Jr. said: 'I selected two lads of great promise [McCune Smith and his friend Isaiah DeGrasse], and made every effort to get them a collegiate education. But the Colleges were all closed against them.'⁷¹ It is also possible that McCune Smith lived with the Williams family for a time: the 1830 federal census reveals that the four members of Peter and his wife Sarah Williams's household included a male between the ages of 10 and 23 – McCune Smith was seventeen at the time –

⁶⁸ Thomas Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1828), 651; Thomas Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1829), 520.

⁶⁹ Williams, born free in NYC in 1786, was a graduate of the AFS. Inspired by his own father's activism, Williams began advocating for African American rights and the abolition of slavery by early adulthood. He entered the ministry and in 1820, he became the first African American ordained by the Episcopal Church; in 1826, he became a priest. Although he called on African Americans to support the War of 1812, by 1816 he was sufficiently disillusioned by their prospects in the United States to throw his support behind emigration (see Chapter Five). He remained pastor of St Philip's until his death in 1840. See Leslie M. Alexander, 'Williams, Peter,' in *Encyclopedia of Emancipation and Abolition in the Transatlantic World*, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez (New York, NY: Sharp Reference, 2007).

⁷⁰ Schomburg, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' 42; Morgan, 'Education and Medical Practice,' 606; Stauffer, *Black Hearts*, 88; Schomburg, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' 42.

⁷¹ Peter Williams, 'Rev. Mr. Williams, to the Citizens of New-York,' *Liberator*, 19 July 1834. Bell indicates that these unnamed 'lads' were McCune Smith and DeGrasse. See Bell, 'Death.'

and the Williams had no son of their own.⁷² Given Williams's leading role in facilitating McCune Smith's education, this would have been a convenient living arrangement.

Living with the Williams family may also have helped McCune Smith continue his studies once he entered the workforce. As the child of a single mother (though, as we have seen, the Smith family may not have been poor), McCune Smith's circumstances may have required that he begin earning wages at a young age. In any case, he would need to support himself in adulthood; learning a skilled trade would be a practical way to ensure he could. McCune Smith began working as a blacksmith's apprentice as a teenager, pursuing his studies in his spare time.⁷³ McCune Smith and those most interested in his prospects appear to have recognized that blacksmithing was not for him. Hamilton recalled that though McCune Smith's scholarly talents were recognized at an early age, he abandoned his full-time studies sooner than he would have 'under more favored circumstances – [Though] he was apprenticed to learn the business of a whitesmith... it was now found that, skilful as he might have become as a mechanic, he had talents for a higher sphere of life, and a studious mind that warranted and demanded it, and his friends encouraged the attempt.'⁷⁴ Bell also recalled that McCune Smith's employer 'cancelled his indenture although he was the best workman in their establishment.'⁷⁵ Neither McCune Smith nor Bell explained why he released McCune Smith from his apprenticeship. It may be that Williams and other influential New Yorkers brought their

⁷² *Longworth's*, 1829, 612; Thomas Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1830), 641; 1830 United States Census, New York, New York County, NY, digital image s.v. 'Peter Williams (Ward 14),' *Ancestry.com*.

⁷³ Furman, 'Obituary,' 202; Bell, 'Death.' McCune Smith named his employer as 'Mr. T. Thomas,' a 'grate and fender maker;' see James McCune Smith, 'Address to the Gentlemen of the Legislature of New-York - Extending the Right of Suffrage (From the Albany Argus),' *NASS*, 8 May 1845.

⁷⁴ Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith.'

⁷⁵ Bell, 'Death.'

influence to bear; Bell wrote that when it came to his education ‘many wealthy and highly influential gentlemen interested themselves in his behalf.’ They may have helped convince McCune Smith’s employer that McCune Smith’s talents were best employed elsewhere.

Though Williams appears to have taken the lead in guiding McCune Smith’s education after his years at the AFS, he was not his only instructor. Several sources name others who played a key role in his education. Philip White, for whom McCune Smith would himself become a teacher and mentor, recalled that McCune Smith ‘mastered the elementary branches of study in the common schools of this city.’⁷⁶ However, the details and timeline of McCune Smith’ education between his graduation from the AFS and leaving NYC for the University of Glasgow are not entirely clear. Sources are often unspecific or partly in error when referring to names, dates, and places; they do, however, provide plenty of clues.

For example, Bell recalled that McCune Smith studied at an ‘Episcopal Seminary’ under principal ‘Samuel Sewall, D.D.’ for about two years – along with his friend and former AFS schoolmate Isaiah DeGrasse – after leaving the AFS and before his apprenticeship. Bell also recalled that this instructor ‘took great pride in his two colored pupils’ and that McCune Smith continued independent studies under him while he was employed as a blacksmith.⁷⁷ ‘Samuel Sewall’ – a name which does not appear in any NYC directory for that period – appears to refer to Samuel H. Turner, ‘Professor of Biblical Learning’ at NYC’s General Theological Seminary of

⁷⁶ ‘Colored Men.’

⁷⁷ Bell, ‘Death.’

the Protestant Episcopal Church.⁷⁸ If McCune Smith attended this seminary, he did not complete his studies there.

Whether at this seminary or elsewhere, McCune Smith's studies post-AFS indicate his continuing ambitions for higher education. According to Furman's obituary for McCune Smith, 'In 1830, he was busily pursuing his classical studies under the guidance of Mr. Curtis, a tutor in Trinity School, probably in the capacity of a private pupil, with the view of entering a then prominent grammar-school. Mr. Frederick Schroeder also, to whom the subject of our sketch appears to have been warmly attached, was in like manner about this time sustaining towards him the relation of preceptor.'⁷⁹

'Mr. Curtis' likely refers to Rev. John W. Curtis.⁸⁰ An anonymous op-ed writer who referred to themselves as 'a friend to ...Dr. Smith' wrote that McCune Smith was 'the first scholar in the Episcopal High School.'⁸¹ Curtis ran a collegiate school in 1831-1832 under the auspices of The New York Protestant Episcopal Public School (commonly known as the Trinity School from its early connection to NYC's prominent Trinity Church).⁸² An ad for Curtis's new

⁷⁸ Edwin Williams, *The New-York Annual Register for the Year of Our Lord 1830* (New York: J. Leavitt, 1830), 294; Edwin Williams, *The New-York Annual Register for the Year of Our Lord 1831* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt and Collins & Hannay, 1831), 295; Edwin Williams, *The New-York Annual Register for the Year of Our Lord 1832* (New York: Printed by J. Seymour, 1832), 194–95.

⁷⁹ Furman, 'Obituary,' 202.

⁸⁰ Lujan and DiCarlo identify him as 'Rev. Joseph Curtis,' but no connection to a man of that name could be found. See Heidi L. Lujan and Stephen E. DiCarlo, 'First African-American to Hold a Medical Degree: Brief History of James McCune Smith, Abolitionist, Educator, and Physician,' *Advances in Physiology Education* 43, no. 2 (1 April 2019): 135.

⁸¹ 'A Friend to Both,' 'Dr. Dewey and Dr. Smith,' *Lewis Tappan: Scrapbook: Slavery (Primarily Newsclippings)* - Clipping from Unidentified Newspaper, January 1844, Lewis Tappan Collection, MSRC. The language of the op-ed, published in a hand-dated but otherwise unidentified newspaper clipping pasted in one of New York abolitionist Lewis Tappan's scrapbooks, seems to imply it was written by one who personally knew McCune Smith.

⁸² Thomas E. Finegan, *Free Schools: A Documentary History of the Free School Movement in New York State* (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1921), 20; Edward Stewart Moffat, 'Trinity School, New York City: 1709-1959' (PhD, New York, Columbia University, 1963), 87, 117–18. Trinity Church was the parent church of St Philip's, of which Williams was pastor and McCune Smith a lifelong parishioner and vestryman. St Philip's was

‘Classical and English School’ announced that it would open on 1 March 1831 and would offer a course of study like ‘that pursued in the most respectable academies and grammar schools, with an especial reference to preparation for Columbia College.’⁸³ There are two other indications that McCune Smith may have studied under Curtis’s direction. As Bell wrote, ‘application was made for [McCune Smith’s and DeGrasse’s] admission to Columbia College, and we believe other colleges and universities...’⁸⁴ Curtis’s curriculum would provide the preparation McCune Smith needed. The advertisement for Curtis’s school lists Rev. John Frederick Schroeder among its board of trustees – who, as McCune Smith’s obituary indicates, was also his ‘preceptor.’

Of all McCune Smith’s tutors besides Williams, sources reveal the most about Schroeder. White recalled that McCune Smith’s ‘talents... attracted the attention of Rev. Dr. Schrbeder [sic], an Episcopalian minister’ who ‘instructed him in the rudiments of Latin and Greek.’⁸⁵ Hamilton also recalled that McCune Smith ‘entered upon a course of study preparatory for college, under the instruction of the Rev. F.T. [sic] Schroeder, assistant minister of Trinity Church.’⁸⁶ Schroeder and Williams cooperated in their roles as mentors to McCune

founded by a group of African American parishioners who resented racial segregation practices at Trinity. See Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 44–46.

⁸³ ‘Classical and English School,’ *Evening Post*, 4 March 1831.

⁸⁴ Bell, ‘Death.’ McCune Smith’s friend Samuel Cornish also identified Columbia as McCune Smith’s intended alma mater; see Samuel E. Cornish, ‘Dr. J. McCune Smith,’ *CA*, 9 June 1838.

⁸⁵ ‘Colored Men.’ See Chapter Three for more about Philip White.

⁸⁶ Hamilton, ‘Dr. James McCune Smith.’ Rev. John Frederick Schroeder (1800-1857) was called as a temporary assistant minister to Trinity Church in 1823. His popularity caused him to be permanently appointed a minister in 1824; he served at Trinity for 15 years. When cholera epidemics swept through NYC in the early 1830’s, he remained when other members of the clergy fled the city. He was also a prolific author of lectures and religious and biographical works. See William W. Manross, ‘Schroeder, John Frederick (Apr. 8, 1800 – Feb. 26, 1857),’ in *DAB*, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943). It is possible McCune Smith was introduced to Schroeder through the New-York Sunday School Society. It was associated with many NYC parishes and religious organizations including Trinity Church, St Philip’s, and the General Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary. Schroeder delivered the sermon for the Society’s eleventh anniversary celebration at St Paul’s in 1828. The devout

Smith. After McCune Smith was accepted to the University of Glasgow, Williams kept Schroeder informed as to his wellbeing and progress. In 1836, Williams wrote a letter to Schroeder from London in which he mentioned his visit with McCune Smith: 'James is well, and is a fine promising young man. He will return with me.'⁸⁷ As Bell recalled, 'Rev. Peter Williams, being in Europe at the time, they [McCune Smith and Williams] visited London and Paris ...'⁸⁸

As Bell's term 'guardian' suggests, Williams took his role as McCune Smith's mentor very seriously. He expended every effort to help McCune Smith achieve his scholarly ambitions. More than anyone besides McCune Smith himself, Williams did the most to secure him a university education. The racial barrier was not the only obstacle Williams helped McCune Smith to overcome; he needed funding as well. As Bell recalled, 'through the influence of our beloved pastor, Peter Williams, means were raised to send [McCune Smith] to Europe, and in August, 1832, he embarked for Liverpool and immediately entered Glasgow University.'⁸⁹ Friend and fellow abolitionist Ransom Wake described the scene of McCune Smith's departure for Britain: 'taking a sorrowful leave of his kind, affectionate, and dearly loved mother [Lavinia], and a large circle of admiring friends and acquaintances, [he wended] his lonely way across the trackless ocean...'⁹⁰ As he recalled in his travel journal, McCune Smith kept up his studies as he crossed the sea to Britain once he had grown accustomed to the ship's movement.⁹¹ McCune Smith's education and training in Glasgow and beyond is explored in Chapters Two, Three, and

McCune Smith would likely have been among the 2,000 students in attendance. See Morgan Dix et al., *A History of the Parish of Trinity Church in the City of New York* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), 454.

⁸⁷ Peter Williams, Jr to John Frederick Schroeder, 30 July 1836, W. E. B. Du Bois Center-Great Barrington: Museum of Civil Rights Pioneers. Images of letter provided courtesy of Randy F. Weinstein.

⁸⁸ Bell, 'Death.'

⁸⁹ Bell. See Chapter Two for more on Williams's visit to McCune Smith in Europe.

⁹⁰ 'Reception of Dr. Smith, By the Colored Citizens of New York,' *CA*, 28 October 1837.

⁹¹ James McCune Smith, 'Extracts from Dr. Smith's Journal [5-8 September 1832],' *CA*, 16 December 1837.

Five, which discuss his intellectual development, medical training and career, and scientific studies and authorship.

1.3 Marriage and Children

McCune Smith embarked on his career as a physician and opened a pharmacy almost immediately upon his return to NYC from Glasgow in late summer 1837.⁹² Probably in 1841 or 1842, an already well-established McCune Smith met Malvina Barnett (variously spelled Barnet or Barnette), the African American daughter of Eliza (née Beaumont, ca. 1807 – 29 December 1889) and James Barnett, a tinsmith (ca. 1800 – 15 April 1872).⁹³ Malvina was about twelve years younger than McCune Smith.

Almost nothing is known of Malvina prior to her education at NYC's Rutgers Female Institute. Established in 1838, Rutgers was later described as both controversial and progressive for providing a comprehensive liberal arts and scientific education for women and girls.⁹⁴ By 1840, Malvina was enrolled and doing well at Rutgers; composition appears to have been her specialty.⁹⁵ Malvina's studies at Rutgers also included several branches of science and mathematics, logic, grammar, rhetoric, theology, bookkeeping, and other subjects.⁹⁶ However progressive Rutgers was in other respects, it is unlikely that they would have knowingly

⁹² McCune Smith's career as a physician and pharmacist is explored in Chapter Three.

⁹³ 1850 United States Census, Williamsburg, Kings County, NY, digital image s.v. 'James Barnet,' *Ancestry.com*.

⁹⁴ 'A Veteran Teacher's Life,' *Times Union*, 16 May 1888; 'Dr. West's Life,' *Standard Union*, 14 January 1893; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 799.

⁹⁵ 'Rutgers Female Institute,' *New World* 1, no. 10 (8 August 1840): 145–47; 'Rutgers Female Institute: Anniversary Commencement,' *New World* 3, no. 5 (31 July 1841): 68–69.

⁹⁶ Rutgers Female Institute, *Third Annual Circular of the Rutgers Female Institute* (New York: Rutgers Female Institute, 1841), 4–5. Works such as Paley's *Natural Theology* and *Evidences of Christianity*, Abercrombie's *Manual of Classical Literature, Intellectual Powers, and Moral Feelings*, Karnes's *Elements of Criticism*; and Latin and 'Biblical Archaeology and Ecclesiastical History' were among her assigned texts.

admitted an African American student. Given that New York's educational institutions were still racially segregated, it is more likely Rutgers assumed the light-complexioned Malvina to be white.⁹⁷ Since Malvina is not listed among the graduating class in Rutgers's annual circulars for relevant years, it is likely her education there was interrupted by her early marriage to McCune Smith.⁹⁸

There is no record of McCune Smith and Malvina's first meeting nor of their wedding day.⁹⁹ In an 1859 essay, McCune Smith recalled that Malvina was still in her teens when they married and that they moved to a new house with two children in arms 'two or three years' later.¹⁰⁰ These children were Amy, born 29 December 1843, and James Ward, born on an unknown date in 1845.¹⁰¹ In May 1847, the Smith family moved from their first home at 29 Leonard St to 15 North Moore St. They would remain there until the mid-1860's.¹⁰² At least eight more children were born to the family at that house: Henry M. in 1847; Amy G. or Anna Gertrude in February-March 1850; Peter Williams in March 1852; Frederick Douglass in April 1854; Mary Maude on 21 September 1855; Donald Barnett in early 1858; John Murray in April 1860; and Guy Beaumont about June 1862.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Malvina was often listed as white in censuses, particularly after McCune Smith's death.

⁹⁸ Schomburg describes Malvina as a 'graduate of Rutgers Institute of New York.' However, this appears to be incorrect. See Schomburg, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' 42.

⁹⁹ In his obituary for McCune Smith, Robert Hamilton recalled that they married in 1842. See Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith.'

¹⁰⁰ James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [23 April 1859],' *FDP*, 29 April 1859.

¹⁰¹ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 6 February 1850, GSP; 1850 United States Census, New York, New York County, NY, digital image s.v. 'James McCune Smith,' *FamilySearch.org*.

¹⁰² John Doggett, *Doggett's* (New York: John Doggett, Jr., 1846), 362; John Doggett, *Doggett's* (New York: John Doggett, Jr., 1847), 378. McCune Smith and Malvina's family were still at 29 Leonard St in early 1847: they invited Gerrit Smith and his family to join them for tea on 26 January 1847 at that address. See James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 25 January 1847, GSP.

¹⁰³ 1850 US Census, 'James McCune Smith;' Martin R. Delany, 'Died,' *FDP*, 6 October 1854; 'Frederick Douglass Smith (1854-1854),' Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/167433077/frederick-douglass-smith>;

The fact that McCune Smith and Malvina may have had two daughters named Amy is a poignant reminder of the family's first known great loss. The existence, the name, and the story of the death of the first of these daughters is only known from two pieces of her father's writing. McCune Smith wrote to close friend and frequent correspondent Gerrit Smith on 6 February 1850: 'Your letter last month found me stricken with grief for the loss of my first born, my dear little Amy;' Malvina was also 'sadly afflicted.' Amy died after a year-long, often painful ailment 'on Christmas eve, and lacked 5 days of 6 years of age.'¹⁰⁴ This places Amy's date of birth on 29 December 1843 and date of death on 24 December 1849. McCune Smith also described the loss of his 'sweet, patient little sufferer' in his 1852 essay 'The Black News-Vendor' about a former sailor who had lost his legs following a Christmas Eve shipwreck. He vowed to set up a shop for the vendor in her memory: 'A little place must be hired. And your first stock in trade shall be purchased from the sum left behind by the little girl who found rest in heaven, while you manfully met and battled with your severest ill on earth.'¹⁰⁵

The next daughter, variously designated Amy G. or Anna Gertrude, was the last of the four children that McCune Smith and Malvina lost to illness in 1853 and 1854. The first, Henry,

'James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 6 October 1855,' GSP; 1860 United States Census, New York, New York County, NY, digital image s.v. 'Jas. M. Smith,' *FamilySearch.org*; 1865 New York State Census, New York, New York County, NY, digital image s.v. 'James M. Smith,' *FamilySearch.org*; 'Guy B. Smith,' *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 15 March 1835. A possible eleventh child, Mary S., would likely have been born after James and before Henry; if she existed, she did not long survive birth. The possible existence of this child is hinted at in two sources: in a handwritten entry for 'Mary S. Smith' in an interment record for the family plot in Brooklyn's Cypress Hills Cemetery, and by an entry in the family bible of a McCune Smith descendant. It refers to Guy Beaumont as McCune Smith and Malvina's eleventh child. See 'Interment Record for Smith Family Plot at Cypress Hills Cemetery,' *Family Bible of Antoinette Martignoni, Great-Granddaughter of James McCune Smith*. She appears in no other sources. Hamilton wrote that McCune Smith and Malvina had five living and five deceased children at the time of his death. See Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith.'

¹⁰⁴ McCune Smith to Smith, 6 February 1850.

¹⁰⁵ James McCune Smith, "'Heads of the Colored People,'" Done with a Whitewash Brush: The Black News-Vender,' *FDP*, 25 March 1852.

died in 1853, probably in late May or early June.¹⁰⁶ While it is uncertain which disease afflicted him, he did not die quickly. As Henry's father mourned in an essay written early September 1853, 'These sketches were sadly interrupted by the long and painful illness of one whose little chair is vacant by my hearthstone, whose little grave is filled on the hillside...'¹⁰⁷ The Smith family lost three more children the next year to the second of the two cholera epidemics that swept NYC in 1852 and 1854.¹⁰⁸ As friend and fellow activist Martin Delany reported for *FDP*, Frederick died on 13 August, less than five months old; Peter on 19 September at nearly two and a half; and Amy/Anna on 19 September at just over four and a half years old.¹⁰⁹ Based on names and dates provided by the three sources which refer to her, 'Amy G.' and 'Anna Gertrude' refer to the same daughter, born about two months after the death of the first Amy.¹¹⁰ The various names given in the sources which refer to her may indicate that McCune Smith and Malvina initially memorialized their lost daughter in the name of another only to later call her Anna to avoid painful reminders or name confusion.

This wrenching season of loss for the Smith family ended with the death of Amy/Anna; all McCune Smith and Malvina's other children outlived them. The arrival of Mary Maude one year and two days after Amy/Anna's death meant there was more than one child in the Smith family again. On 6 October 1855, McCune Smith wrote to Gerrit Smith: 'We have a renewed blessing in our house in the shape of a little girl who with her mother is doing very well.'¹¹¹ Mary

¹⁰⁶ Frederick Douglass, 'We Learn with Sincere Regret...', *FDP*, 10 June 1853.

¹⁰⁷ James McCune Smith, 'Heads of the Colored People - No. VII: The Inventor,' *FDP*, 9 September 1853.

¹⁰⁸ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 589, 595.

¹⁰⁹ Delany, 'Died.'

¹¹⁰ 1850 US Census, 'James McCune Smith;' Delany, 'Died;' 'Interment Record.'

¹¹¹ McCune Smith to Smith, 6 October 1855.

Maude joined a full house: in mid-1855 – two months before her birth – the Smith family household at 15 North Moore St included Peter Williams, Jr’s widow Sarah; Sarah’s widowed sister Matilda Hamilton; a Canadian-born servant named Mary A. Herman, and four boarders along with Lavinia, McCune Smith, Malvina, and James Ward.¹¹² Sarah Williams had been living with the Smith family since at least 1850; she is listed among the household in the census for that year. She would remain with the Smith family as long as McCune Smith lived.¹¹³

Lavinia also remained in the Smith family household for the rest of her life, which was a long one. As the *Anglo-African* reported, she died on 17 January 1863 ‘at the residence of her son in North Moore street’ after a year-long decline in health. She was eighty years old.¹¹⁴

McCune Smith’s wife Malvina and their five living children would all long survive McCune Smith’s death on 17 November 1865.¹¹⁵

1.4 The New Yorker

It was not immediately apparent that McCune Smith would have returned to NYC from Scotland. McCune Smith would likely have thrived in Glasgow, enjoying there as he did a supportive circle of friends and colleagues and a relative lack of racial prejudice. However,

¹¹² 1855 NY State Census, 'James McCune Smith;' Henry Wilson and John F. Trow, *Trow's*. (New York: John F. Trow, 1855), 770.

¹¹³ 1850 US Census, 'James McCune Smith;' 1855 NY State Census, 'James McCune Smith;' 1860 US Census, 'Jas. M. Smith;' 1865 NY State Census, 'James M. Smith.' After her appearance in the New York State census for the Smith family household in 1865, Sarah Williams disappears from the historical record.

¹¹⁴ 'Death of an Aged Lady,' *AA*, 24 January 1863.

¹¹⁵ Furman, 'Obituary,' 201, 204. For a genealogical history of the Smiths' extended family, see Amy M. Cools, 'Roots: Tracing the Family History of James McCune and Malvina Barnett Smith, 1783-1937, Part 1: 43–52; Part 2: 53–62; and Part 3,' *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society* 37 (2020): 63–79. 'Roots' was inspired by and incorporates original research done for the sections of this thesis which explores McCune Smith's origins and family history, much of which did not make it into this thesis for space considerations.

McCune Smith missed his native city and his community there.¹¹⁶ Based on his involvement in several beneficial and improvement societies beginning almost immediately upon his return home, McCune Smith evidently also felt it was his calling to help improve the prospects for advancement and success for NYC's African American community. McCune Smith was undoubtedly acutely conscious of the immense amount of community support that helped make his scholarly and professional achievements possible. He may have felt it was his duty to repay a moral debt by doing the same for others.¹¹⁷

McCune Smith initially believed that such an improvement in the prospects of African Americans in NYC had already begun, both within the community and in general attitudes of others towards them. In his address at a welcome reception in his honour held shortly after his return home in September 1837, McCune Smith said: 'I have reason to rejoice in the changes which have occurred in our circumstances and prospects... I rejoice in being able to say that I have now been three weeks in the land of prejudice, and have not yet been sensible of the fact. I rejoice in the visible desire of improvement, the devotion to the pursuit of knowledge which is everywhere apparent among our youth.'¹¹⁸ Over time, however, McCune Smith would see that 'prejudice' rear its ugly head time and again – and he would fight it for the rest of his life.

Despite often suffering the effects of prejudice, McCune Smith achieved early and lasting professional and financial success in NYC. Much of this was undoubtedly due to his relationships within NYC's close-knit African American professional community. This included

¹¹⁶ 'Reception of Dr. Smith.'

¹¹⁷ McCune Smith certainly felt the need to repay a material debt: Philip Bell recalled that after his return to NYC, McCune Smith – 'so high was his sense of honor' – repaid everyone who funded his Glasgow education. However, some returned the money, insisting it was a gift. See Bell, 'Death.'

¹¹⁸ 'Reception of Dr. Smith.'

clergymen, business owners, skilled craftspersons, property owners, writers and public speakers, and others who had risen to positions of community leadership. This community support would have been especially invaluable given the precarious financial situation in NYC caused by the Panic of 1837. As Peterson writes, ‘Gotham fell into a deep depression’ in the wake of this panic. It was caused by banks ‘[f]reed from federal regulation’ lending more than the value of their assets; inflation caused by extremely low interest rates and easy access to credit; and a drop in cotton prices.¹¹⁹

As he was establishing his medical career, McCune Smith also began to deal in real estate, becoming a substantial property owner over time.¹²⁰ The upheaval in NYC’s real estate market caused by the Panic of 1837 would have opened up opportunities for aspiring property owners like McCune Smith: property values plummeted and swaths of real estate entered the market as many landowners and developers lost their properties to foreclosure.¹²¹ It may be that this situation caused McCune Smith to turn his attention to real estate so early in his career. In any case, his earliest foray into this business was in partnership with other members of the African American professional class. In September 1837, friend and editor-publisher of *The Colored American* Samuel Cornish and his wife Jane conveyed a property in NYC to McCune Smith, Peter Williams, Jr, and Williams’s son-in-law Joseph Cassey – a successful Philadelphia businessman – in trust.¹²² The three trustees were to ensure that the property – which apparently had been brought into the marriage by Jane – and its buildings be properly insured

¹¹⁹ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 93. See also Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 603–16.

¹²⁰ McCune Smith’s medical career will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

¹²¹ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 612.

¹²² See Chapter Four for more about Cornish.

against fire and let 'to a suitable tenant or tenants' for 'as good a rent as can reasonably be gotten.' The residues of these rents, after paying for insurance, reasonable compensation for the trustees' services, and keeping the properties in good repair, were to be paid to Jane, her husband, or the heirs that outlived her.¹²³ This arrangement lasted until the summer of 1845, Jane having died within the previous year and Williams in 1840.¹²⁴

Especially in the 1840's and early 1850's, McCune Smith's deals in real estate continued to involve other leading African American New Yorkers. Indeed, the dry legalese of New York's land records reveal much about the depth of interconnectedness within this community. They also reveal the extent of McCune Smith's rootedness in and commitment to his native city. In March 1841, McCune Smith purchased two properties in NYC from Henry Scott and his wife Ann. Henry Scott, a grocer, was a fellow parishioner and vestryman at St Philip's.¹²⁵ Scott, in turn, had taken over these mortgages from Thomas Jinnings. Jinnings – usually later spelled 'Jennings' – was another close friend of McCune Smith's. According to the stirring 1859 obituary McCune Smith wrote for him, Jennings 'a native of New York, ...in his early youth was one of the bold men of color who, in this then slave State, paraded the streets of the metropolis with a banner inscribed with the figure of a black man, and the words "Am I Not a

¹²³ 'United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1838, Vol. 387,' digital image s.v. 'Samuel E. Cornish to Peter Williams, Joseph Cassey, and James Ewan Smith,' *FamilySearch.org*. Joseph Cassey was a formerly enslaved man (probably from the West Indies) and successful Philadelphia entrepreneur. Cassey married Peter Williams's only child Amy Matilda in 1826. Under Amy's and Williams's influence, Cassey also became an abolitionist and activist. See Janine Black Arkles, 'Philadelphia Periwigs, Perfumes, and Purpose: Black Barber and Social Activist Joseph Cassey, 1789–1848,' *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 82, no. 2 (2015): 142, 145–56.

¹²⁴ 'United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1845,' digital image s.v. 'Samuel E. Cornish, Joseph Cassey, James McEwan Smith, and Samuel F. Cowdry: Annulment,' *FamilySearch.org*; 'Sudden Death,' 23 October 1840. See Chapter Four for more about Samuel Cornish, his newspapers, and McCune Smith's involvement with them.

¹²⁵ Hewitt, *Protest and Progress*, 69–70.

Man and a Brother?’” who also ‘took a leading part in the celebration of the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827.’ These details place Jennings within the New York African Society for Mutual Relief’s celebrations which McCune Smith later described so vividly in his 1865 ‘Sketch of the Life and Labors of Rev. Henry Highland Garnet.’¹²⁶ In 1849, perhaps due to changing circumstances in the Scott business or family finances, McCune Smith – this time with Malvina as an equal party to the transaction – sold these properties back to the Scotts.¹²⁷

In some instances, McCune Smith’s real estate dealings brought valuable NYC property into the African American community. In 1850, McCune Smith purchased four properties at Sixth Avenue and 53rd Street from William V. Brady, former mayor of New York City.¹²⁸ A deed of the same date conveyed one of these properties to ‘Elizabeth A. Gloucester wife of James N. Gloucester.’¹²⁹ James Gloucester was a clergyman, a fellow physician, and a fellow leading African American New Yorker of means. He was also a frequent co-activist of McCune Smith’s, a fellow member of various societies, and a fellow correspondent of the fiery abolitionist John Brown.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ James McCune Smith, ‘Thomas L. Jennings,’ *FDP* 18 February 1859.’

¹²⁷ ‘United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1849, Vol. 525,’ digital image s.v. ‘James McCune and Malvina Smith to Henry Scott,’ *FamilySearch.org*.

¹²⁸ ‘United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1850 Vol. 540,’ digital image s.v. ‘William V. Brady to James McCune Smith,’ *FamilySearch.org*; ‘Obituary: William V. Brady,’ *Herald*, 1 April 1870.

¹²⁹ ‘United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1852-1853, Vol. 619,’ digital image s.v. ‘J. McCune and Malvina Smith to Elizabeth A. Gloucester,’ *FamilySearch.org*.

¹³⁰ ‘Meeting in New York,’ *NS*, 4 May 1849; ‘Anglo African Institute, Sunday, August 17, 1862 (Printed Advertisement for ‘First Annual Exhibition for the Encouragement of Industry and Art’),’ 1862, Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/mal1772200/; ‘The American Freedmen’s Friends Society,’ *AA*, 28 November 1863; Freeman, ‘Free Negro,’ 53–54; W. E. B. Du Bois, *John Brown* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Company, 1909), 98, 248, 258. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner’s obituary for Gloucester describes him as ‘one of the most distinguished men of our race’ and notes that ‘Dr. Gloucester and [his] wife have long been regarded as the most wealthy colored family in the U. S.’ In tribute to his work on behalf of African Americans, Turner ranked Gloucester ‘with Bishop Payne, Douglass, Garnett, McCune Smith, Dr. Bias, Richard Roberson, Stephen Smith, as well as Garrison, Phillips, Gerrit Smith, Beecher, John Brown and many others of anti-slavery fame.’ See Henry McNeal Turner, ‘Notes of Recent Events,’ *Christian Recorder*, 3 April 1890.

The lots purchased from Brady continued to be a significant source of revenue for the Smith family though not all appear to have remained under African American ownership. McCune Smith and Malvina leased or sold various buildings and lots at the old Brady property – often for substantial sums – in the 1850’s and ‘60’s.¹³¹ It appears that McCune Smith retained at least one of the former Brady lots: that adjacent to the Gloucesters’. In 1861, McCune Smith’s friend and co-activist Henry Highland Garnet wrote: ‘A few weeks ago, a gentleman showed me a beautiful mansion on the thriving Sixth Avenue which to your great credit belongs to you. ...As I saw the stately pile, and heard the merry music of the trowel, hammer, and plane, I looked in vain to discover a dark face at work.... By the side of your property, another equally imposing was going up, owned by the Rev. James N. Gloucester....’¹³² Garnet’s accusation that McCune Smith failed to adequately employ fellow African Americans was written in the context of an ongoing disagreement between him and McCune Smith over the best ways to further African American interests. This disagreement was one of many which would mark their long but often contentious relationship.¹³³

Another pair of real estate transactions provides further insights into the Smith family’s connections within NYC’s African American community. In 1852, McCune Smith purchased a

¹³¹ ‘United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1852-1853, Vol. 621,’ digital image s.v. ‘James McCune Smith to Frederick Schrader,’ *FamilySearch.org*; ‘United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1856 Vol 703,’ digital image s.v. ‘James McCune Smith to Abner W. Baldwin,’ *FamilySearch.org*; ‘United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1863, Vol. 874,’ digital image s.v. ‘James McCune Smith to Otto Kohlman,’ *FamilySearch.org*; ‘United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1864, Vol. 889,’ digital image s.v. ‘James McCune and Malvina Smith to Jacob Bookman,’ *FamilySearch.org*.’

¹³² Henry Highland Garnet, ‘Mr. Garnet’s Reply to Dr. James McCune Smith,’ *WAA*, 19 January 1861.

¹³³ This will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

valuable property on the north side of 58th Street near Second Ave.¹³⁴ The following year, McCune Smith and Malvina's names were both on the deed when they sold this property to Robert Cromwell 'of [NYC], but now of San Francisco.'¹³⁵ Cromwell – a 'col'd barber' – was Emeline Bastien's widowed brother-in-law who, along with his children, was then living in her household.¹³⁶ Bastien was 'directress' of the North Star Association of Ladies, an African American-led association originally founded in Philadelphia to support Frederick Douglass's newspaper *The North Star*. In this role and others, she also helped fundraise for the Committee of Thirteen (a vigilance committee which McCune Smith co-founded) and the Colored Orphan Asylum, where McCune Smith served as physician for about two decades.¹³⁷

Yet another real estate transaction proved significant to the Smith family's lives and fortunes and indicates a potentially fruitful avenue of research into their NYC connections beyond the African American community. In 1846, Rachel Delamater, widow of Samuel Delamater, conveyed property at 15 North Moore St to McCune Smith. Since the deed required payment of only \$1 to take possession it was, effectively, a gift.¹³⁸ Why Rachel conveyed the property to McCune Smith this way remains unknown. Samuel Delamater first appears in NYC

¹³⁴ 'United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1852-1853, Vol. 618,' digital image s.v. 'Howard Fountain to James McCune Smith,' *FamilySearch.org*.

¹³⁵ 'United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1853, Vol. 629,' digital image s.v. 'James McCune and Malvina Smith to Robert G. Cromwell,' *FamilySearch.org*.

¹³⁶ 'San Francisco City Directory - 1852-53,' *SFGenealogy: Genealogy and History for the San Francisco Bay Area*, <https://www.sfgenealogy.org/sf/1853/53c.htm> (listings under 'C'); 1850 United States Census, New York, New York County, NY, digital image s.v. 'Emiline Bastien,' *Ancestry.com*; Benjamin Franklin Wheeler, *The Varick Family* (Mobile: B. F. Wheeler, 1907), 29-30.

¹³⁷ William C. Nell, 'Items from a Spectator's Journal,' *NS*, 6 July 1849; Emeline Bastien and Fanny Tompkins, 'Fugitive Slave Fair,' *NS*, 23 January 1851; Frederick Douglass, 'Our Recent Visit to New York,' *FDP*, 10 June 1853; Philip A. Bell, 'Eastern Items Compiled and Condensed from the Anglo-African,' *Pacific Appeal*, 21 June 1862. See Chapter Two for more on the Colored Orphan Asylum and Chapter Five for more on the Committee of Thirteen.

¹³⁸ 'United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1846-1847, Vol. 480,' digital image s.v. 'Rachel De Lameter to James McCune Smith,' *FamilySearch.org*.

directories in 1799; at North Moore St (no specified number) in 1804; and at 20 North Moore St in 1810. His widow Rachel was still listed at 20 North Moore in 1846, the year she conveyed this property to McCune Smith; she was last listed at that address in 1855.¹³⁹ This made her the Smith family's neighbour for at least eight years.¹⁴⁰ Research has thus far failed to reveal other connections between the Delamater and Smith families or indeed, much else about the Delamater family besides their French/Dutch origins.¹⁴¹ The property at 15 North Moore St significantly increased in value over time. Appraised at \$5,000 in 1855, the lot and the red brick multi-storey building on it fetched \$9,250 when the Smiths sold it to one John Henry Miller in 1865.¹⁴²

These and other real estate transactions (a representative few are discussed above) added significantly to the Smith family's increasing wealth. *Boyd's New York City Tax-Book, 1856 & '57* lists McCune Smith's real estate assets at \$7,734 (no personal assets are listed).¹⁴³ The 1860 federal census states that McCune Smith's real estate and personal assets had increased to \$25,000 and \$1500, respectively.¹⁴⁴ An 1865 *Liberator* article 'The Negroes of New

¹³⁹ David Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: David Longworth, 1799), 206; David Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: David Longworth, 1804), 123; David Longworth, *Longworth's* (New York: David Longworth, 1810), 161; John Doggett, *Doggett's* (New York: John Doggett, Jr. & Co, 1849), 122; *Trow's*, 1855, 218.

¹⁴⁰ As we have seen, the Smiths moved to 15 North Moore St in May 1847.

¹⁴¹ Rachel appears to be Delamater's second wife; though there is plenty of documentary evidence for her marriage to Samuel, she is not mentioned in the brief genealogical record of this branch of the Delamater (variously spelled Delameter or De Lameter) family, the only family history uncovered in research for this thesis. From the deed as well as her listed address over the years, Rachel appears to be the second wife of Samuel, Sr. Samuel Delamater, Jr appears to have died unmarried. See La Fayette De La Mater, *Genealogy of Descendants of Claude Le Maitre (Delamater.) Who Came from France via Holland and Settled at New Netherland, Now New York, in 1652* (Albany: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1882), 183.

¹⁴² 1855 NY State Census, 'James McCune Smith;' 'United States, New York Land Records, 1630-1975 - New York > Conveyances 1865, Vol. 931,' digital image s.v. 'James McCune and Malvina Smith to John Henry Miller,' *FamilySearch.org*.

¹⁴³ William Henry Boyd, *Boyd's New York City Tax-Book, 1856 & '57* (New York: William H. Boyd, 1857), 184. This source is cited in Peterson's *Black Gotham*.

¹⁴⁴ '1860 US Census, 'Jas. M. Smith.'

York' – which also discusses many other wealthy leading African Americans in McCune Smith's inner circle such as restaurateurs Thomas and George Downing and jeweller-turned-caterer Edward Clark – describes McCune Smith as 'the most wealthy colored man in New York city, being worth about \$100,000.'¹⁴⁵ As McCune Smith recalled in an 1863 editorial, a local African American astrologer and unorthodox medical practitioner referred to him as 'Tycoonsmith' – indicating that McCune Smith's material success was perhaps an object of envy or fun to some in the community.¹⁴⁶

McCune Smith appears to have found another way to help secure his family's financial success. *Livingston's Law Register* for 1851 and 1852 both list 'Smith, James McCune (col.)' under 'New York Lawyers.'¹⁴⁷ None of the literature on McCune Smith mentions a legal career. If he did have one, it appears to have consisted of occasional side work in wills and probate. Notices placed in newspapers by the Surrogate of the County of New York cite McCune Smith's occasional involvement in such cases. Some involved wills of McCune Smith's friends and connections. For example, an 1841 notice names McCune Smith as 'Attorney for the Executrix' for Peter Williams's estate.¹⁴⁸ In 1851, McCune Smith's father-in-law James Barnett also designated McCune Smith one of the executors of his will, perhaps in part due to the latter's

¹⁴⁵ 'The Negroes of New York,' *Liberator*, 25 August 1865.

¹⁴⁶ James McCune Smith, 'Our Christmas Story,' *AA*, 26 December 1863.

¹⁴⁷ John Livingston, *Livingston's Law Register* (New York: Monthly Law Magazine, 1851), 128; John Livingston, *Livingston's Law Register* (New York: Monthly Law Magazine, 1852), 163. McCune Smith is not listed in *Livingston's* for 1850, 1853-54, 1856, or 1859.

¹⁴⁸ James McCune Smith, 'In Pursuance of an Order of the Surrogate of the County of New York, Notice Is Hereby Given...,' *Commercial Advertiser*, 1 December 1841; Charles McVean, 'The People of the State of New York...,' *Daily Albany Argus*, 16 March 1848; Charles McVean, 'The People of the State of New York...,' *Daily Albany Argus*, 21 January 1848; A.W. Bradford, 'The People of the State of New-York...,' *Tribune*, 22 July 1851.

familiarity with the law in such matters.¹⁴⁹ In an 1859 letter to Gerrit Smith, McCune Smith wrote that a 'contested will case, in which I am Executor' at which his 'presence is imperative at the Surrogate's court in this city' prevented him from visiting with Smith.¹⁵⁰ Though McCune Smith was involved in many legal efforts to assist beleaguered fellow African Americans – from testifying in court on behalf of fugitives from slavery to coordinating legal challenges to segregation in public transportation – he is not known to have served as counsel in any such cases.¹⁵¹

By the early 1840's, McCune Smith's financial success as a professional and a property owner had helped cement his status as a leader among NYC's African American community. Financial security also likely gave him greater opportunity to assume a number of roles – usually unpaid – both as an individual and within organizations dedicated to supporting the African American community. These efforts included promoting civil rights, establishing clubs and societies, facilitating educational opportunities, and other projects dedicated to improving the community's well-being in the face of legal and interpersonal racial discrimination.

For example, McCune Smith joined other NYC leaders in open letter campaigns enjoining New York politicians to do more for African American citizens. The letters also congratulated those who supported their cause and encouraged them to do more. In 1843, McCune Smith, Ulysses Vidal, and Timothy Seaman addressed one to William Seward. They thanked him for defending the rights of African Americans during his term as governor of New

¹⁴⁹ 'New York Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999, Kings > Vol. 45, 1872,' digital image s.v. 'James Barnett (probate date 13 May 1872),' *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁵⁰ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 9 March 1859, GSP.

¹⁵¹ See Chapter Five.

York regardless of whether his principled stand placed his chances for re-election at risk. They also promised their support if Seward would run again for governor or seek higher office.¹⁵² In 1845, McCune Smith, Newport Henry, John Zuille, Patrick Reason, and Thomas Van Rensselaer wrote another open letter to New York State Assemblyman William C. Bloss. They called on him to answer three questions: whether Bloss believed the racially discriminatory property qualification to vote in New York State was constitutional; whether he believed suffrage should be extended equally to all men over 21 regardless of colour; and whether he believed it was a good time to do the latter.¹⁵³ Bloss answered no, yes, and yes, respectively, with detailed explanations of his views.¹⁵⁴ Bloss, a Whig, was a temperance advocate, an abolitionist, and an operative in the Underground Railroad. He was also a champion of women's rights and other progressive causes.¹⁵⁵ McCune Smith and his fellow co-authors posed the same questions in another letter to Samuel H. Cox, Presbyterian minister, co-founder of New York University, director of Union Theological Seminary, temperance advocate, and abolitionist. Though Cox answered no, yes, and yes as Bloss had done – also expounding his reasons at length – he appears to have softened his previously uncompromising antislavery stance around the time he wrote his reply.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² James McCune Smith, Ulysses B. Vidal, and Timothy Seaman, 'Letter to His Excellency, Wm. H. Seward,' *Tribune*, 16 January 1843. McCune Smith – 'with a sad, weary, and disappointed heart' – later criticized Seward for being one of 'These great Apostles 'do evil that good may come;' in that case, for supporting the candidacy of Winfield Scott for US President. See James McCune Smith, 'A Flagrant Prostitute,' *FDP*, 6 August 1852.

¹⁵³ James McCune Smith et al., 'Letter to William C. Bloss, Esq.,' *NASS*, 9 April 1846.

¹⁵⁴ 'Mr. Bloss's Reply,' *Tribune*, 1 April 1846. Bloss apologized for the lateness of his reply due, he explained, to their original letter being mislaid.

¹⁵⁵ 'Bloss, William Clough (1795-1863), Abolitionist and Reformer,' in *American National Biography* (OUP, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1501213>. Bloss's son William W. Bloss was also connected to McCune Smith via their Underground Railroad activities, see Chapter Five.

¹⁵⁶ Samuel H. Cox, 'Dr. Cox on the Right of Suffrage (From the New York Evangelist),' *Emancipator*, 25 March 1846; Harris Elwood Starr, 'Cox, Samuel Hanson (Aug. 25, 1793-Oct. 2, 1880),' in *DAB*, ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas

McCune Smith also joined leading NYC African Americans in establishing an African American lodge for the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows since they were routinely refused entry to US lodges on account of race. According to a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article on ‘the Odd Fellows of African Descent,’ ‘The agitation for an Odd Fellows’ Lodge among the colored people began in 1841, which was stimulated by such able representative men as Dr. J. McCune Smith, George Downing, Philip Bell, Ulysses B. Vidal, P. H. Reason and others.’ After Peter Ogden – a ship’s steward on a New York-Liverpool vessel – applied personally to the Odd Fellows’ headquarters in England, ‘A dispensation was granted to open a new lodge in the city of New York, and the Philomathean Literary and Musical Society... organized itself into an Odd Fellows’ association and became Philomathean Lodge, No. 646, in the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows.’¹⁵⁷ Peterson writes that this first lodge opened on 1 March 1843.¹⁵⁸ In his *Official History of the Odd Fellows*, Charles Brooks writes that on 2 October 1845, McCune Smith attended the lodge’s ‘first general meeting’ and was elected secretary.¹⁵⁹ *The Boston Globe* reported that ‘The order in its beginning was not very successful. Public sentiment was against it and oftentimes its secret meetings were broken into and the furniture destroyed.’ However, its lodges paid out substantial sums in community relief, investment, and more over the years.¹⁶⁰ The Odd Fellows provided only one of many points of connection between NYC’s leading African Americans. As John Wesley Cromwell’s obituary for William Wilson – McCune

Malone, vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), 481–82. See Chapter Five for more about McCune Smith’s efforts to expand the elective franchise for African Americans in New York.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Colored Brotherhood: Facts About the Odd Fellows of African Descent,’ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 October 1886. See Chapter Two for more about the Philomathean Society.

¹⁵⁸ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 133.

¹⁵⁹ Charles H. Brooks, *The Official History and Manual of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America* (Philadelphia: Odd Fellows Journal Print, 1902), 24–28.

¹⁶⁰ ‘The Mystic Orders: Colored Odd Fellows of America,’ *Boston Globe*, 25 February 1889.

Smith's friend and fellow *FDP* correspondent – states: 'In the early days of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in this country, Mr. Wilson was an honored member ... equally influential in the Masonic fraternity, but the rights of man were more engrossing than the mysteries of the triple tie or of the trestle board; a stroll with McCune Smith, or a line from Phil. Bell more to be coveted than digress from Paul Drayton or a discussion on points of order.'¹⁶¹

McCune Smith was also deeply involved in many NYC literary societies. For example, he was a leading member of the short-lived New York Literary and Productive Union. As McCune Smith wrote in 1855, the Union was 'composed of young gentlemen of color, attached to the congregation of the Rev. Levin Tilmon on Sixth Street, Bowery.'¹⁶² He was also a lecturer for the New York Library Association which, along with its offshoot the Brooklyn Library Association (BLA), promoted intellectual improvement among African American young adults, both women and men.¹⁶³ According to a correspondent for *FDP*, McCune Smith was delighted that his lecture for the BLA's opening series was attended by a large number of young adults instead of the 'few aged friends' he was accustomed to addressing at NYC lectures. He decided to speak extemporaneously upon a subject "better adapted to the audience." The correspondent continued: 'Accordingly, he did so. The subject selected, and the lecture too, were good, very good, but short, very short, before he had changed again. In about fifteen minutes... he was seen in the midst of a crowd of ladies reading poetry. Call you not this progress?'¹⁶⁴ The

¹⁶¹ John Wesley Cromwell, 'Death of Prof. Wilson,' *People's Advocate*, 30 November 1878, MSRC.

¹⁶² James McCune Smith, 'New York Literary and Productive Union (Reported by Communipaw),' *FDP*, 9 February 1855; 'Meeting in Mr. Tilmon's Church,' *FDP*, 2 March 1855. The Union, among other things, conducted fundraisers for *FDP*. At one of these, McCune Smith and his father-in-law James Barnett each contributed \$5.00; the New York Library Association contributed \$30.

¹⁶³ 'The New-York Library Association,' *New York Times*, 16 January 1855.

¹⁶⁴ 'Moral, Intellectual, and Religious Progress [17 January 1855],' *FDP*, 2 February 1852.

Association also appears to have been short-lived, likely not lasting beyond this lecture series; the *FDP* correspondent later attributed the BLA's fleeting success to lack of support from the clergy, teachers, and parents.¹⁶⁵

McCune Smith was also committed to improving the material conditions of his fellow African American New Yorkers. Among his first efforts in this regard (at least within an organization) may have been his membership in the Stewards' and Cooks' Marine Benevolent Society. According to Furman's obituary, McCune Smith served as treasurer of this Society from 1836 to 1863.¹⁶⁶ According to *The Colored American*, the Society was a beneficial organization dedicated to 'united efforts, exercised faithfully in the cause of humanity, to administer comfort and cheer the hearts of the widow and orphan – to relieve the distressed, and soften the frowns of poverty, by timely aid to the afflicted.' Though its founders and members were likely all or mostly African American, the Society extended its thanks to non-African American beneficiaries as well.¹⁶⁷

McCune Smith also joined two other NYC organizations dedicated to the relief of those who he regularly referred to as 'God's poor' – those in need or those who society had

¹⁶⁵ 'New York and Brooklyn News,' *FDP*, 16 February 1855. See Chapter Two for more about McCune Smith's involvement with literary societies and libraries.

¹⁶⁶ Furman, 'Obituary,' 203–4. The former date is almost certainly a year off: McCune Smith did not return to NYC until 1837 and *CA*'s reporting on its third-year anniversary meeting in 1840 indicated that the Society was founded in 1836.

¹⁶⁷ Charles B. Ray and *James McCune Smith, 'Steward's and Cook's Marine Benevolent Society,' *CA*, 2 May 1840. The editorial opens with a report of the Society's third anniversary dinner signed 'S.' followed by commentary by Ray. 'S.' may very well be McCune Smith, who occasionally signed articles and editorials as 'S.' For more about McCune Smith's authorship as 'S.,' see Chapters Two and Four. All citations of works that may have been authored by McCune Smith but cannot yet be attributed to him with a high degree of certainty will be preceded by an asterisk in the footnotes and bibliography.

marginalized and underserved.¹⁶⁸ In 1841, McCune Smith became an official member of the New-York African Society for Mutual Relief, an organization which, as we have seen, had played a significant role in McCune Smith's early life.¹⁶⁹ In 1865, McCune Smith – apparently still a member – wrote that the Society 'in its fifty-sixth year, still holds a fine piece of real estate, and ministers, as of old, to its sick members.'¹⁷⁰ McCune Smith is also listed as a member of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor in its 1851 and 1852 *Annual Reports*. According to its Constitution, the purpose of the Association was 'the elevation of the moral and physical condition of the indigent; and so far as compatible with these objects, the relief of their necessities.'¹⁷¹

McCune Smith also deeply involved himself in the ministry of the parish church that had served the material as well as the spiritual needs of his community throughout his life. McCune Smith served as a vestryman for St. Philip's for at least two decades. He was elected to the vestry in 1843 and served in that role at least through 1863, when he was also elected church treasurer.¹⁷² He was among those who led the effort to get the Episcopal diocese to admit St. Philip's to its annual convention. While St. Philips had sent delegates to the convention since the mid-1840's – McCune Smith usually among them – the diocese resisted allowing them to participate on account of race. In 1853, the convention – as usual – at first refused to seat their

¹⁶⁸ James McCune Smith, 'Speech of James McCune Smith at the Anniversary Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society on 8 May 1838,' in *Fifth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York: AASS, 1838), 25–30; James McCune Smith, 'Preamble, Resolutions, and Remarks Offered at a Public Meeting in New York in Honor of the Mendi Men of the Amistad, 17 May 1841,' *CA*, 22 May 1841; James McCune Smith, 'Obituary [of Thomas Hamilton],' *AA*, 10 June 1865; McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 29.

¹⁶⁹ Zuille, *Historical Sketch*, 31.

¹⁷⁰ McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 24.

¹⁷¹ *Annual Reports of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Nos. 1-10, 1845-1853* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971): 1845: pp. 8-10; 1851: p. 50; 1852, p. 67.

¹⁷² 'Religious: Church Elections,' *AA*, 11 April 1863; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 169; Hewitt, *Protest and Progress*, 127.

delegates. However, this time, they called for a vote to decide whether to admit St. Philip's. The convention voted overwhelmingly in favour. McCune Smith continued to regularly serve as a delegate to the convention at least into the mid-1850's.¹⁷³ Following the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, McCune Smith – on behalf of the Committee of Thirteen, a vigilance committee he co-founded – called on the white pastor of St. Philip's and 'presented a notice, with a respectful request that it should be read, inviting the congregation to a meeting to take measures against kidnapping.' The pastor responded instead that it was their 'christian duty' to obey it since it was now 'the law of the land.' In his report of this encounter and its aftermath, Downing harshly criticized McCune Smith and the vestry of St. Philip's for 'pass[ing] a vote of thanks to said Reverend and approv[ing] of his entire course.' Yet, as we shall see in Chapter Five, Downing appears to have misinterpreted the vestry's intentions. As Lyons wrote, the members of the Committee of Thirteen – many among St. Philip's congregation – 'each... pledged to keep the letter [of the Fugitive Slave Law] but to violate the spirit of unholy enactment... Aid was given to escaping slaves, financially or otherwise...'¹⁷⁴

In addition to his efforts to improve their political, social, spiritual, and material well-being, McCune Smith's effort to help expand access to education for his fellow African Americans in NYC was among his earliest and most enduring projects. Valuing his own excellent education as he did – which he had received with the generous support of fellow African

¹⁷³ James McCune Smith and Henry Scott, 'To the President and Members of the Special Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of New-York, Holden Wednesday, November 27th, 1850,' in *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixty-Seventh Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (New York: Daniel Dana, Jr., 1848), 32–33; James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [September 1855],' *FDP*, 5 October 1855; Benjamin Franklin DeCosta, *Three Score and Ten: The Story of St. Philip's Church, New York City* (New York: St. Philip's Parish, 1889), 34–35; Hewitt, *Protest and Progress*, 59–72.

¹⁷⁴ George T. Downing, 'St. Philip's Church and the Fugitive Slave Law,' *FDP*, 29 April 1859; Lyons, 'Memories,' 26; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 168–70.

Americans as well as others – McCune Smith’s gratitude is evident in his efforts to ensure others could enjoy such opportunities, be they children or adults.¹⁷⁵

In 1839, McCune Smith hosted an evening school in his home at 151 Reade St run by Edward Marshall, a fellow graduate of the AFS on Mulberry St.¹⁷⁶ Marshall charged \$3 per quarter for his school, offering classes in spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography.¹⁷⁷ Since the classes were offered in the evening, they were likely targeted at working people. McCune Smith may have assisted Marshall in running the school and in educating its students. In 1841, McCune Smith supported another private school. Together with other NYC African American leaders and friends such as Theodore Wright, Thomas Downing, Ulysses Vidal, and Charles Ray, he served as a reference for Fanny Tompkins’s school. In her advertisement, Tompkins ‘respectively informs her friends and the public, that she has taken the school formerly taught by Mr. Still’ and would teach classes in ‘intellectual and moral culture ... Spelling, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, Grammar, Astronomy, History, Plain Sewing, Knitting, and Fancy Work of every description; also, the science of Music.’ Classes were held in a large, airy, well-lit room with a large yard ‘in a very pleasant part of the city.’¹⁷⁸ Tompkins was an African American educator who also taught in many NYC public schools for African American children, at least since 1835 and at least until the mid-1860’s.¹⁷⁹ She also served as secretary to

¹⁷⁵ Some of these efforts, especially those for adults or outside of a classroom setting, will be discussed further below.

¹⁷⁶ Edward F. Marshall, ‘Evening School,’ *CA*, 5 October 1839. Marshall and McCune Smith commenced and completed their final examinations on the same days. See *New-York African Free-School, Reports*, 2:116, 118.

¹⁷⁷ Marshall, ‘Evening School.’

¹⁷⁸ ‘Private Seminary,’ *CA*, 18 September 1841; James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 25 March 1847, GSP. ‘Mr. Still’ has not yet been identified.

¹⁷⁹ Freeman, ‘Free Negro,’ 334–35; ‘Grand Oratorio ...For the Benefit of St. Philip’s P. E. Church [Broadside],’ 1859, George T. Downing Papers, MSRC; *Directory of the Board of Education of the City and County of New York* (New York, 1865), 153.

the North Star Association of Ladies. As a member of this organization and otherwise, Tompkins assisted in fundraising and otherwise supporting institutions McCune Smith was closely involved with, from *FDP* to the Committee of Thirteen to the Colored Orphan Asylum.¹⁸⁰

During the period McCune Smith devoted himself most to the cause, educational opportunities were limited for all NYC children but especially so for African Americans. A lack of available schools was only sometimes the problem, as was quality. Efforts to establish more schools often foundered for lack of pupils or funding or both; established schools closed for the same reason(s).¹⁸¹ Lack of proximity to quality schools that would serve African Americans was also a significant problem.¹⁸² Overall, African Americans who sought an education for themselves or their children consistently faced two primary obstacles: discrimination and economic difficulties. African American children who tried to attend the rare school not officially closed to them on account of race were sometimes driven out by the persecution of fellow students, opposition from parents, or ridicule from teachers.¹⁸³ Parents also reported economic difficulties in sending their children to school for reasons such as the inability to afford proper clothing; reliance on working children's income; or older children caring for younger ones while parents worked.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Fanny Tompkins, 'Report of the North Star Fair in New York,' *NS*, 20 June 1850; Bastien and Tompkins, 'Fugitive Slave Fair;' Fanny Tompkins, 'Report of the New York Ladies' Fair in Aid of the Committee of Thirteen,' *NS*, 3 April 1851; Bell, 'Eastern Items;' Anna H. Shotwell, 'Ladies' Union Bazaar, for the Benefit of Colored Orphans,' *Liberator*, 22 April 1864.

¹⁸¹ Freeman, 'Free Negro,' 339–40; Carleton Mabee, *Black Education in New York State: From Colonial to Modern Times*, First Edition (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 59–60, 64, 75–76.

¹⁸² Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 205–6.

¹⁸³ Freeman, 'Free Negro,' 340; Mabee, *Black Education*, 71.

¹⁸⁴ Freeman, 'Free Negro,' 344; Harris, *Shadow*, 129–30.

To help remedy these situations, McCune Smith and other NYC African American community leaders and educators founded the New York Society for the Promotion of Education among Colored Children (NYSPECC) in July 1846. As *The New York Herald* reported, the NYSPECC's first annual report stated that 'from the difficulties and prejudices which it had to encounter at the commencement... little good resulted from their labors the first year.' The first high school the NYSPECC tried to establish in 1847 failed for lack of funding. However, the NYSPECC persevered and by 1848 their membership swelled from twelve to at least one hundred more.¹⁸⁵ When the NYSPECC incorporated on 7 December 1847, its trustees included McCune Smith, Marshall, Bell, Alexander Crummell, Albro Lyons, Charles Ray, George Downing, Patrick and Charles Reason, Samuel Cornish, John Peterson, Edward Clark, Ulysses Vidal, and William Wilson.¹⁸⁶ (Most were graduates of the AFS.) McCune Smith served as the NYSPECC's treasurer almost continuously throughout its existence and proved to be an excellent one. The NYSPECC succeeded in securing city funding for grammar schools but unfortunately not for high schools – hence the failure of that first attempt. The NYSPECC operated two of NYC's grammar schools by 1848 and attempted to take over management of more from the Public School Society. However, NYC's Board of Education took over management of all the African American schools in 1853. In the meantime, the NYSPECC's efforts increased overall attendance at African American schools significantly and secured them regular public funding.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ 'Meeting for the Promotion of Education Among Colored Children,' *Herald*, 9 May 1848, 64–67.

¹⁸⁶ State of New York, *Laws of the State of New-York, Passed at the Second Meeting of the Seventieth Session of the Legislature, Begun and Held the Eighth Day of September, 1847, at the City of Albany*, vol. 2 (Albany: Charles Van Benthuyzen [Printer], 1847), 527.

¹⁸⁷ Mabee, *Black Education*, 64–67.

In 1848, McCune Smith confided to Gerrit Smith the reason he threw himself into the cause of education. Fearing – like Smith – that not enough adults valued education as they should, he wrote: ‘I will devote myself to the improvement of colored *children*. There is a great work for the colored people to do in this land: a work not of today only but of centuries. ...I will fling whatever energy I have into the cause of colored children, that they may be better and more thoroughly taught than their parents are.’¹⁸⁸ Notwithstanding the private ‘fears’ he expressed to Smith in this letter, McCune Smith was publicly insistent that despite claims to the contrary – including those later made by Smith himself as well as some African Americans – NYC’s African Americans were at least as dedicated to providing their children with an education as anyone else, and perhaps more so. In 1845, he argued before the New York State legislature that ‘the children in [NYC public] schools are as proficient as the average children attending white schools’ and that rates of enrolment in the ‘twenty two colored schools supported by the State’ was ‘abundant proof of the intelligence of the parents, who sufficiently estimate the value of learning to be solicitous to educate their children’¹⁸⁹ In 1859, he wrote: ‘It is a strange [purported] ignorance [on the part of African Americans] which is manifested by the attendance of 25 per cent. more of colored than of white children in the Public Schools of New York City.’¹⁹⁰

As Rhoda Golden Freeman writes, another impediment African Americans faced in pursuing an education in NYC was lack of reliable access to public transportation. A problem for all New Yorkers, it was much more so for African Americans since they were regularly banned

¹⁸⁸ ‘James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 12 May 1848,’ GSP.

¹⁸⁹ McCune Smith, ‘Address to the Legislature.’

¹⁹⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Jennings.’

from it on account of race.¹⁹¹ McCune Smith had experienced such discriminatory bans himself throughout his life. For example, in 1837, he was denied the cabin accommodation he sought on a US vessel to take him home from Glasgow to NYC.¹⁹² In 1847, as a correspondent to *The National Era* reported, McCune Smith was ‘actually denied the use of the cars [on the Harlem railroad], after his friends had procured him a free ticket, to enable him to visit on professional business the Colored Orphan Asylum.’ The correspondent noted that the railroad subsequently relaxed its rules against ‘colored’ passengers after one of its operators mistook one of its directors for a ‘colored man’ at dusk.¹⁹³

By 1853, McCune Smith was convinced of the need for coordinated action to remove impediments to African American New Yorkers’ ability to enjoy ‘their personal rights in schools, academies, colleges, public conveyances, corporate institutions, and other public advantages...’¹⁹⁴ African Americans and their allies had already begun to challenge discriminatory bans from public transportation either individually – see paragraph below – or by sheer force of numbers. Reporting on an abolitionist meeting held in NYC’s Shiloh Presbyterian Church shortly after McCune Smith declared the need for action, a correspondent to *FDP* rejoiced that the attendees ‘not only carried the meeting... by storm last night, but carried the Sixth Avenue cars, and the Crystal Palace during the day’ in spite of attempts by ‘Our phlegmatic and fat fellow-gothamites’ to exclude them.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Freeman, ‘Free Negro,’ 338; abstract p. 2.

¹⁹² James McCune Smith, ‘Remarks of James McCune Smith at His Farewell Dinner at the Tontine Hotel, 17 June 1837,’ *CA*, 9 September 1837.

¹⁹³ ‘Spectator,’ ‘Letter to the Editor,’ *National Era*, 9 September 1847.

¹⁹⁴ James McCune Smith, ‘Resolution Offered at a Meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 12 May 1853,’ in *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*. (New York, 1853), 191.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Mr. Editor [16 July 1853],’ *FDP*, 22 July 1853.

About a year and a half later, McCune Smith, Rev. James Pennington (Shiloh's pastor), and Thomas Jennings founded the Legal Rights Association (LRA), dedicated to finding legal remedies against racial discrimination on public transportation in NYC.¹⁹⁶ As Leslie Harris writes, the immediate inspiration for founding the LRA was 'the violent ejection of Elizabeth Jennings and Sarah Adams from a Third Avenue Railway Company streetcar' in 1854.¹⁹⁷ Elizabeth was Thomas Jennings's daughter and a teacher for the NYSPECC.¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth took the railway company to court over this incident and won. On 22 February 1855, William Rockwell, judge for the Brooklyn Circuit Court, ruled that the Third Avenue Railroad Company could not, since 'they were common carriers,' exclude any 'respectable' persons from their cars, 'colored' or not; the Company would also be liable if any of its agents attempted to do so.¹⁹⁹

This case gave McCune Smith and others good reason to hope for success if they were to wage a legal campaign against discriminatory bans on NYC transportation. As McCune Smith wrote to Gerrit Smith on 31 March 1855, 'We colored men are organizing a Society to raise a fund to test our legal rights in traveling, &c, &c, in the Courts of Law.'²⁰⁰ That May, Pennington placed a notice in *FDP* informing African Americans traveling to NYC for Anniversary Week (a week in May when organizations held their annual public meetings) that 'all our public carrier-conveyances are now open to them upon equal terms' and that if anyone attempted to deny

¹⁹⁶ James W. C. Pennington, 'Notice: To the Numerous Colored Ladies and Gentlemen Who May Visit This City...', *FDP*, 11 May 1855; McCune Smith, 'Jennings.'

¹⁹⁷ Harris, *Shadow*, 270. Harris dates the organization of the LRA to 1854, but as McCune Smith indicates in a letter to Gerrit Smith and Pennington in a notice placed in *FDP*, the LRA appears to have been organized in the spring of 1855. See James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 1/31 March 1855, GSP; Pennington, 'Notice.'

¹⁹⁸ McCune Smith, 'Jennings;' Hewitt, *Protest and Progress*, 105.

¹⁹⁹ 'A Wholesome Verdict,' *Tribune*, 23 February 1855.

²⁰⁰ McCune Smith to Smith, 1/31 March 1855.

them access to 'have him arrested, or call upon' McCune Smith, Thomas Jennings, or himself.²⁰¹

In September 1855, McCune Smith was among the speakers at a public meeting of the LRA at Pennington's church to provide 'some account of the suits now pending with railroad companies and persons who have been ejected from cars,' of which there were six.²⁰²

The LRA's legal challenges had not yet succeeded in abolishing discrimination on NYC's public transport by autumn 1856. Writing of an annual meeting and parade of the Odd Fellows in NYC – which drew hundreds of African American attendees and spectators from within and without the city – McCune Smith asked, and answered: 'Do we advance? THE SIXTH AVENUE RAILROAD COMPANY deserve special mention on this day. The odious exclusion which it perpetrates on colored persons from their cars was for the day abolished...' As he reported, 'The fusion was complete, inside and out [of the train cars] – black ladies and white gentlemen – black gentlemen and white ladies – yet there was no disturbance, no quarrelling, no confusion.' This demonstrated, McCune Smith argued, 'the downright absurdity, as well as sinfulness' of denying access to public transportation on account of race. 'The second, third, and fourth avenue cars make no such exclusion.'²⁰³ As we have seen, at least the second of these was due to Elizabeth Jennings.

Despite Rockwell's ruling, many NYC area railroad companies resisted integration. By 1860, only some railroad companies had removed their bans. In 1855, Pennington was thrown off a Sixth Avenue streetcar. When he took his case to court, a jury ruled in the railroad's

²⁰¹ Pennington, 'Notice: To the Numerous.'

²⁰² 'The Colored People and Their Rights,' *Tribune*, 24 September 1855; 'Legal Rights Association,' *Tribune*, 27 September 1855.

²⁰³ McCune Smith, 'The Odd Fellows' Celebration' (1856) in *Works*, 161–62.

favour.²⁰⁴ Undeterred, the LRA continued its work and continued to grow. On 22 February 1858, 'The female branch of the Legal Rights Association' held a grand dinner to celebrate 'the third anniversary to that wholesome decision of the Supreme Court' in the Jennings case. A reporter for the *Herald* commented that 'inasmuch as the grievances with respect to colored persons riding in conveyances have greatly diminished during the past year it is therefore expected that this entertainment will be even more cheerful and happy than those which have preceded it.'²⁰⁵ At an anniversary event the LRA hosted the next year, about 300 people attended.²⁰⁶

NYC's draft riots of 13-16 July 1863 – when the Civil War was at its height – gave rise to new challenges for African Americans' right to freely access public transportation. The riots were sparked by public protests against the enactment of a recently passed federal draft law which sought to remedy the Union Army's chronic shortage of soldiers by enforced enrolment in a draft lottery system. The law also allowed avoidance of the draft by paying a hefty fee or hiring a substitute. These provisions enraged those who opposed the war; working-class people especially objected to the provision which enabled only the wealthy to buy their way out of fighting. Following the commencement of the lottery, riots broke out on 13 July and raged for four days. White rioters targeted African Americans, blaming them for being the ultimate cause of the war and, by extension, of the draft. African Americans were beaten, tortured, and murdered, with many of their homes, businesses, and institutions attacked, plundered, and burned. Among these was the Colored Orphan Asylum, for which McCune Smith was attending physician (he was not present the day it was attacked due to illness). Although it was looted

²⁰⁴ Harris, *Shadow*, 271.

²⁰⁵ 'Grand Entertainment,' *Herald*, 22 February 1858.

²⁰⁶ 'Legal Rights Association Anniversary,' *FDP*, 18 March 1859.

and destroyed, the children were saved by staff, sympathetic bystanders, and police officers of the 20th Precinct house. Rioters also targeted the wealthy; police and soldiers; Republicans; large businesses and banks; and those who supported the war effort and the African American cause for civil rights.²⁰⁷

In November of that year, McCune Smith wrote that the Eight Avenue Railroad Company had ‘excluded colored persons from all their cars’ until Peter Porter – a member of the LRA – threatened to sue them over his ‘ejection’ around nine years before, upon which they agreed to stop banning riders on account of race. ‘The company kept their faith until the occurrence of the riots in July last, when they suddenly resumed this exclusion.’ McCune Smith believed that the owner of the Railroad, George Law, was sympathetic to African Americans and therefore was not to blame for this change of policy. In fact, he had been instrumental in removing the earlier ban. Nor, McCune Smith believed, was public opinion to blame: the policy was renewed ‘At a moment when the heart of New York is warmest with sympathy towards her [entire] population.’ Rather, McCune Smith blamed the superintendent of the Railroad and Irish interest groups who feared the competition of African American labour. McCune Smith believed they succeeded in convincing Law that station houses would be burned down like other structures had been during the riot if he did not reinstate restrictions on African American ridership. McCune Smith wrote: ‘Such is the evil. What is the remedy? We must do the work ourselves.’²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 886–95; Harris, *Shadow*, 279–81.

²⁰⁸ James McCune Smith, ‘The Eighth Avenue Railroad,’ *AA*, 7 November 1863.

Renewed challenges following the draft riots also brought new opportunities for accomplishing the LRA's mission. In 1864, the LRA helped bring suit against a police officer who assisted an Eighth Avenue Railroad Company conductor in ejecting the widow of an African American soldier – a friend of Porter's – from one of their cars. Perhaps swayed by widow Ellen Anderson's mourning attire, the Board of Police Commissioners sided against the officer. The resulting negative publicity caused the Company to drop its racial segregation policy. In short order, the Sixth Avenue Railroad Company followed suit. With that, all NYC railroad lines were integrated.²⁰⁹

McCune Smith's dedication to the interests of his fellow New Yorkers and his affection for his native city was also evident in his authorship. In his articles, essays, and other works, McCune Smith frequently described NYC scenes and chronicled the lives of its inhabitants. We have already seen some of the ways in which McCune Smith recorded telling details of life in NYC – especially those of African Americans – and shall continue to do so throughout this thesis. Many are featured in McCune Smith's series 'Heads of the Colored People,' character portraits mostly of people from NYC's African American working class.²¹⁰ The city's overburdened carthorses; the relative tendencies of African American and other New Yorkers to lock their doors; the doings at social gatherings; the financial panic of 1857 and its effects on NYC; New Yorkers' moving practices; eccentric or otherwise interesting characters... few details about NYC and its inhabitants escaped McCune Smith's notice and his pen was ever ready to

²⁰⁹ Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (OUP, 2014), 165–66.

²¹⁰ See also Chapter Two.

capture them.²¹¹ McCune Smith's articles as NYC correspondent for *FDP* are rich sources for city gossip, mostly centring on his African American inner circle. A satisfactory treatment of McCune Smith's observations of and reflections on NYC, its people, and its history would require a volume; space considerations prevent more than a cursory discussion here.

For one, McCune Smith recorded his conflicting views on his childhood neighbourhood of Five Points. Although, as we have seen, McCune Smith fondly recalled his childhood there, he was fully aware of Five Points' problems. In 1844, McCune Smith wrote that one of the 'sources of errors which many commit in judging of the free black population' were – referring to the neighbourhood's most impoverished and unfortunate citizens – 'specimens visible in the Five Points.'²¹² However, McCune Smith wrote with evident pride of the best qualities of Five Points' multiracial inhabitants and of the ways in which African Americans and others had improved the quality of life of its citizens. In 1845, McCune Smith testified to the New York State Legislature of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief and the 'good which it has effected.' It had 'recently erected a fine Hall... in the vicinity of what is known as the Five Points—hitherto considered a hopeless sink of iniquity... A public school, for white children is kept in this hall: and, on Sundays, a free church is opened...'²¹³ In 1852, McCune Smith observed that though 'Humanity [was] reduced [in the Five Points] to its lowest forms,' it was also the neighbourhood which had long 'recognized human brotherhood.' However, McCune Smith

²¹¹ For example, see James McCune Smith, 'Dr. Smith's Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832],' *CA*, 16 March 1839; James McCune Smith, 'A Chapter on Locks,' *CA*, 2 March 1839; James McCune Smith, 'Second Chapter on Locks,' *CA*, 16 March 1839; James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [6 January 1855],' *FDP*, 12 January 1855; James McCune Smith, 'Chess,' *AAM*, September 1859; McCune Smith, 'Our Christmas Story.'

²¹² McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery 4.'

²¹³ McCune Smith, 'Address to the Legislature.'

lamented, ‘*caste* or prejudice against color’ had become ‘a new thing in the “*Points*,”’ introduced by ‘two branches of Methodists’ engaged ‘in a pious fight’ to dominate in the establishment of Sunday schools there. They ‘[organize] Sunday and day schools for *white* reprobates, leading them in the path to heaven - while this same religion leaves the black reprobates to the fate which Thaddeus Phelps prescribed for the Whigs... Now, is not this a mean, dirty, paltry, pitiful, infamous, lying religion, which is actually below the grade of Five Points humanity?’²¹⁴

McCune Smith described the neighbouring Sixth Ward – where he also had lived and studied – as another place that showed NYC’s multiracial inhabitants could coexist with mutual benefit so long as they were committed to the right principles. In an 1865 editorial, he remarked: ‘Of the City of New York, it is well known is Irish all over [sic], and may therefore be considered the very centre of negro-hate; yet, by some occult law of psyche – dynamics, two of the best and oldest footholders of our people in this city.’ These ‘footholders’ were the ‘Colored Ward School’ taught by John Peterson and the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, ‘both located on the very edge or in this very Ward.’ Another notable Sixth Ward institution was ‘the only hair-dressing shop conducted on the “social equality” basis, in which Misther [sic] Pat and Mister “Coon” sit on the same chairs, are shaved with the same razors, wash in the same basin, etc., etc.’ When the 1863 draft riots ravaged the city, the ‘colored families’ of the Sixth Ward were spared, demonstrating ‘that the inter-man-hate which we call *caste*, or prejudice, is extrinsic not inherent in human nature.’ McCune Smith also recalled a self-emancipated mason

²¹⁴ James McCune Smith, ‘Mr. Editor [November 1852],’ *FDP*, 26 November 1852. McCune Smith reiterated and reinforced his negative characterization of the Five Points Methodist missions in his ‘Heads of the Colored People - No. 5: The Steward,’ *FDP*, 24 December 1852.

originally from Louisiana who was given a job by a wealthy Sixth Ward Irishman. After the mason was harassed and assaulted by resentful Irish laborers, his employer called in the police to protect him until the project was finished. When the mason moved into a nearby flat with his family to be closer to his work, Irish co-tenants caused such trouble that the landlord asked the mason to move. When the mason offered to 'take or hire' the building instead, the landlord agreed; the mason ejected all the Irish tenants and replaced them with Jewish ones. There were no more problems. The mason continued to work for the wealthy Irishman's estate for a long time even after the latter died. McCune Smith intended this tale, he wrote, to demonstrate that 'No special help to the black man nor restraint *nor isolation* of the white man [was] required, ...[only] "*equality before the law.*"'²¹⁵

McCune Smith did not only provide vibrant literary portrayals of NYC and its African American community. His statistical compilations and assessments of their health, wealth, and other vital statistics provide rare insights into how they lived, worked, thrived, and struggled. As a member of the Committee on Social Conditions of the Coloured Race for the 1851 Colored Convention (held in NYC), McCune Smith delivered a 'Report on the Social Conditions of the People of Color Around New York City, and on the Best Means of Ameliorating the Same.' Likely authored principally by McCune Smith, the 'Report' stated that there were about 2,000 African American families in NYC. It also provided average figures for the cost of living, including rent, food, and fuel which, as McCune Smith pointed out, were especially high for African Americans due to abnormally low wages and abnormally high rents resulting from discriminatory practices.

²¹⁵ James McCune Smith, 'The Sixth Ward,' AA, 1 April 1865.

The 'Report' also advocated a series of measures to alleviate these conditions, including pooling resources to buy fuel, groceries, and clothing.²¹⁶ An 1865 journal article also cited 'a statistical statement furnished by Dr. J. McCune Smith' in 1861 which showed 'that colored persons had invested in businesses carried out by themselves: - In New York City,...\$755,000 In Brooklyn,...76,000 In Williamsburg,...4,900 – Total, \$836,1000.'²¹⁷

For decades, McCune Smith cited disadvantageous material and social conditions African Americans faced in NYC as reasons they should move away from the city. He made this recommendation in the 1851 'Report' cited above even as he allowed that NYC offered advantages such as better access to education and more opportunity for organization and mutual support.²¹⁸ For all the affection and attachment the urbane McCune Smith evidently held for the city of his birth, he was – at least for many years – ambivalent towards it as a likely site of African American progress. In 1839, McCune Smith authored the editorial 'Agricultural Life' for *CA*. Since, he wrote, the 'prevailing love of AGRICULTURE, which sooner or later in life discovers itself, is implanted in our very natures, or to say the least, is the result of reason and experience,' there would always be a large proportion of city-dwellers who, at some point, wish to 'retire from the bustle and anxieties of trade, the relaxation of a professional, or the turmoil of a public life, to rural quiet, and the undisturbed cultivation of a few acres of land.' The farmer, McCune Smith wrote, is the only one 'truly independent' in making a living; one who

²¹⁶ James McCune Smith and Committee on the Social Condition of the Colored Race, 'Report on the Social Conditions of the People of Color Around New York City, and on the Best Means of Ameliorating the Same,' *NS*, 10 April 1851. McCune Smith's proposed solutions may have been inspired by similar ones offered in newspapers during the Panic of 1837; see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 610.

²¹⁷ 'The Free Colored People,' *Freedmen's Record: Organ of the New England Freedmen's Aid Society* 1, no. 10 (1 October 1865): 154–56.

²¹⁸ McCune Smith and Committee, 'Report on the Social Conditions.'

prefers relying on their own strength and skill; one who scorns ‘the clinging, the fawning, the lying, that are apt to enter so largely into political, professional, mercantile, and mechanical life.’²¹⁹

McCune Smith was committed to helping his fellow African Americans achieve such independence. As McCune Smith observed, NYC’s African Americans had long exhibited the independent spirit he attributed to farmers in general: ‘The colored people of New York, from an early date, carried themselves with a free air which showed that they felt themselves free’²²⁰ However, as McCune Smith argued in his 1851 ‘Report,’ they often found it impossible to realize this independence in large cities. He offered NYC as a prime example of this. Though the city offered some opportunities (as described above), its racial caste system made it difficult to access the skilled, lucrative occupations and quality, fairly priced housing necessary for long-term success. The morally and physically unhealthy environment of the city only exacerbated these difficulties. McCune Smith thereby advised NYC’s African Americans to pool their resources and fund the creation of agricultural settlements where they could combine the best elements of rural and urban life: ‘No sane man can doubt, from this or any comparison of the kind that country life is the better choice for our people; not consolidated, isolated country-life, but a well mixed country and village life. The matter of education, the great disadvantage of country life might be remedied by concert of action.’²²¹ It was his conviction in the promise of ‘country life’ to increase African Americans’ liberty and prospects for success that would have

²¹⁹ James McCune Smith, ‘Agricultural Life,’ *CA*, 19 January 1839. For a contemporary attribution of this unsigned editorial to McCune Smith, see ‘To the Yankee Farmer,’ *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, 21 March 1839.

²²⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Sketch,’ 20–21.

²²¹ McCune Smith and Committee, ‘Report on the Social Conditions.’

led McCune Smith – along with Theodore Wright and Charles Ray – to accept the wealthy philanthropist and abolitionist Gerrit Smith’s 1846 invitation to administer a land grant scheme for African Americans.²²²

By the last year of his life, however, McCune Smith acknowledged that ‘according to the lights before them, our people acted not unwisely in sticking to the cities.’ It was, after all, in large communities that African Americans – enslaved and free – had sought, and found, more security and more educational and financial opportunities than anywhere else.²²³ As McCune Smith documented so eloquently in his ‘Heads’ series and other writings, NYC’s African American community had demonstrated, profoundly, what perseverance, self-respect, natural genius, and dedication to the highest principles of liberty and freedom could achieve in the face of oppression.²²⁴

Conclusion

As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, McCune Smith was shaped by his NYC upbringing and deeply embedded in his NYC communities, African American and otherwise. As the son of a self-emancipated mother who found a degree of freedom in NYC greater than she had ever known, McCune Smith was inspired to expand freedom and opportunity for himself and his peers within his native city and beyond. The close-knit, mutually supportive African American and multiracial communities of NYC in which he grew up imbued him with a consciousness of and a curiosity about the wider world and its history that had given rise to them. After all, his

²²² Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith: A Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1878), 102–5. See Chapter Five for more on Gerrit Smith’s land grant scheme.

²²³ McCune Smith, ‘Sketch,’ 27.

²²⁴ These writings will be explored at length in subsequent chapters, especially Chapters Two, Four, and Five.

family, friends, and neighbours had ancestors who came from all over the world if they had not done so themselves. McCune Smith's international education and cosmopolitan tastes, therefore, marked him not only as a man of the world but as a quintessential New Yorker. It is this, along with his deep attachments to his friends, family, and NYC community, that would have inspired him to return to his native city despite the personal freedom and opportunity that he may have found more easily in Europe.

As for NYC as a whole, the city's explosive growth was due to people flocking to it from all over the United States and the rest of the world. They sought opportunities in this thriving hub of intranational and international commerce in goods and ideas. McCune Smith was embedded in that sphere of NYC life as well. As this thesis will continue to demonstrate, McCune Smith's labours – professional, intellectual, and activist – were often pragmatic and centred on improving conditions in his local communities. These labours, in turn, inspired him to devise better ways of thinking and living for all humanity.

Chapter Two – The Power of Words: The Intellectual and the Author

Introduction

‘Dr. James McCune Smith, during his day, was without doubt, the most learned colored man in the United States, as well as a man of genius and of eloquence...’

~ Alexander Crummell, ‘Eulogium on Henry Highland Garnet, D.D.,’ 1882

From his years as a primary school student at New York City’s African Free School on Mulberry Street to the final weeks of his life, James McCune Smith displayed a remarkable affinity for the written word. From his childhood onward, McCune Smith was singled out for his evident intelligence and for his diligence as a scholar. He was mentored and tutored by several leading New Yorkers who encouraged and made possible his pursuit of higher education. For the rest of his life, McCune Smith read voraciously and wrote prolifically even as he held a full-time career as a physician and pharmacist and engaged ceaselessly in activism and efforts to improve his community.

Busy as he was, McCune Smith was ever driven to write. As his prodigious authorship reveals, McCune Smith more than lived up to his reputation as the foremost African American intellectual of his day.²²⁵ His written works reveal that his studies ranged widely across the humanities and the sciences to a degree unparalleled among his African American peers. As John Stauffer observes, McCune Smith was ‘as comfortable reading Aristotle and Virgil, Montaigne and Shakespeare, Carlyle and Mill, as he was reading his contemporaries Melville

²²⁵ Alexander Crummell, ‘Eulogium on Henry Highland Garnet, D.D.,’ in *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (Springfield: Willey & Co., 1891), 288–89.

and Whitman, ... Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown...’ Because of McCune Smith’s mastery of the written word, Stauffer argues, ‘we might think of James McCune Smith as the African American tradition’s first man of letters, its first intellectual, and its first professional writer.’²²⁶

This chapter argues – like Stauffer and McCune Smith’s contemporaries such as Douglass, Philip Bell, and Robert Hamilton – that McCune Smith was the preeminent African American intellectual of the nineteenth century. While this might be perceived as an attempt to pit the quality or significance of McCune Smith’s accomplishments against other African American thinkers and authors, that is not what this chapter sets out to do. There were many African American intellectuals and authors, contemporaries and predecessors, who rivalled or even outshone McCune Smith in certain areas of thought, some of whom will be considered in this chapter. Many were pioneers in fields in whose footsteps McCune Smith followed. Many others accomplished what they did without the advantage of the early, quality education and support of mentors that McCune Smith enjoyed. Nevertheless, as many of his contemporaries recognized, the quality, depth, originality, and diversity of McCune Smith’s intellectual achievements presented an unparalleled challenge to those who sought to deny the full equality of African Americans in every sphere of intellectual life. This chapter explores the nature and extent of McCune Smith’s intellectual endeavours. It also seeks to demonstrate the

²²⁶ Stauffer in *Works*, x–xi.

significance of his intellectual legacy and add to scholarly efforts to rescue it from its undeserved obscurity.²²⁷

This chapter seeks to accomplish this in three ways. First, it further explores the history of McCune Smith's intellectual development. It seeks to demonstrate how McCune Smith's consummate scholarship led him to write with authority, depth, and flair in a wider variety of styles and on a wider variety of subjects than any of his African American peers. Finally, in tandem with other chapters, it seeks to help demonstrate McCune Smith's trailblazing polymathism by exploring a selection of his works – many of which have been previously lost, overlooked, or underexplored by scholars and forgotten by history – within the context of the African American intellectual community up to and including his own time.

2.1 Early Education and Authorship

Charles Andrews, McCune Smith's teacher at the African Free School (AFS), recognized the considerable talent of his precocious young scholar early on.²²⁸ A few of McCune Smith's school exercises are preserved in the records of the AFS; one from a class for advanced students does not survive but is recorded by Andrews in his *History of the New-York African Free-Schools* as 'a remarkably neat production.'²²⁹ The fact that these productions of a child from a marginalized community do survive is a testament both to the talents McCune Smith's teachers and mentors recognized early on and evidence of the concern of the AFS's teachers and trustees to exhibit

²²⁷ Britt Rusert describes McCune Smith as 'the most highly educated African American of the nineteenth century before DuBois,' and laments the relative neglect of McCune Smith by scholars given his importance and the extent of his influence as an author and intellectual in his own time. See Britt Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (NYU Press, 2017), 51.

²²⁸ See also Chapter One.

²²⁹ Andrews, *History*, 61.

and preserve the achievements of their brightest scholars. Other than an assortment of exercises in math, drawing, and penmanship which display his scholarly acumen and meticulous attention to detail, the only other confirmed fully original production of McCune Smith's that survives from his early youth is a poem entitled 'Night.'²³⁰ These surviving exercises and compositions help indicate that McCune Smith was well advanced in reading, writing, and other subjects by the time he completed his studies at the AFS.

McCune Smith may also have written his first published works while he was in his mid-teens. These are preserved in the pages of Samuel Cornish's and John Russwurm's newspaper *Freedom's Journal*. Scholar of African American literature Dickson Bruce has identified two series in the *Journal* – simply signed 'S' – which he believes may have been authored by McCune Smith.²³¹ While their authorship cannot yet be conclusively attributed to him, it is worthwhile to consider them here for three reasons. First, many clues suggest that McCune Smith authored these works. Secondly – whatever their authorship – they are foundationally important in areas of African American literature in which McCune Smith is known to be an innovator from known works. Lastly, if McCune Smith did author them, he would have been a pioneer in these areas of authorship while still a teen, an impressive feat.

The first of these works, 'African Genealogy,' was published serially in *Freedom's Journal* (*FJ*) in 1827 when McCune Smith was fourteen years old. The three-part 'Genealogy' traces the

²³⁰ Andrews and McCune Smith, 'Address to La Fayette;' James McCune Smith, *Drawing of Napoleon Francois, Charles Joseph*, 1825, pen and ink, 1825, ED, <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/africanfreeschool/archive/78742-31.html>; James McCune Smith, 'Square Root (School Exercise),' 1826, ED, <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/africanfreeschool/archive/78742-27.html>; James McCune Smith, 'Benjamin Franklin, Ambassador to France,' 1826, ED, <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/africanfreeschool/archive/78742-25.html>. 'Night' will be discussed below; see Fig. 2, p. 251, for 'Square Root.'

²³¹ Dickson D. Bruce, *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680-1865* (UVaP, 2001), 167–68.

history of African peoples from the Biblical story of Noah and his son Ham to the ancient Egyptians to their descendants all over the world. It is part ethnology, part history, and partly an attempt to reconcile disparate accounts of the origins and trajectory of African peoples. As ‘Genealogy’s’ citations reveal, the author’s budding intellect had been steeped in the Bible, classical works, and works of thinkers and authors such as Herodotus, Josephus, George Berkeley, Samuel Bochart, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, and Edward Gibbon. Though the anonymous author was evidently well-read they were conscious of their limitations: ‘The readers of African Genealogy, doubtless, will excuse all the inaccuracies, when told that the writer of it is quite a youth. S.’²³² The author’s self-identification as ‘quite a youth’ and their advanced level of reading makes McCune Smith a very plausible candidate as the author of ‘Genealogy.’ Also, McCune Smith – as we shall see in Chapter Four and elsewhere – signed many of his known articles with the initial ‘S.’ Lastly, McCune Smith was a regular contributor to and sometimes editor of *The Colored American* (CA), Cornish’s successor to *FJ*; McCune Smith’s early contributions – if indeed they were his – to *FJ* would be only one of the many events in McCune Smith’s and Cornish’s long history of collaborations and partnerships. If McCune Smith did indeed author ‘Genealogy,’ he took part in what Bruce Dain refers to as the first known systematic attempts of African Americans to employ history and natural history in their musings on race and the future of people of African descent.²³³

²³² *James McCune Smith, ‘African Genealogy (Part 2),’ *FJ*, 24 August 1827; *James McCune Smith, ‘African Genealogy (Part 3),’ *FJ*, 31 August 1827.

²³³ Bruce R. Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (HUP, 2002), 112–13. Dain took the title for this book from McCune Smith’s 1852 essay ‘Nicaragua:’ ‘The negro “with us” is not an actual physical being of flesh and bones and blood, but a hideous monster of the mind...’ See James McCune Smith, ‘Nicaragua,’ *FDP*, 8 January 1852; Dain, *Hideous Monster*, xi.

Two years before abolitionist David Walker published his 1829 *Appeal* – a foundational work in the tradition of authorship Dain describes above – *FJ* had begun publishing ‘several long original pieces on racial themes’ in this vein, including ‘Genealogy.’²³⁴ Like ‘Genealogy,’ Walker’s *Appeal* appealed to the authority of ancient history – including the Bible – to demonstrate the long history of the achievements, rise, and decline of African civilizations. Like the author of ‘Genealogy,’ Walker predicted that they would rise again.²³⁵ Walker also called on his fellow African Americans to look to nature for evidence of African dignity, heeding Jefferson’s call for ‘lover[s] of natural history’ to observe the variety in the world and its peoples ‘with the eye of philosophy.’ Walker pointed out that Jefferson failed to do this very thing when he wrote his anti-black screed in his *Notes on Virginia*.²³⁶ Both Walker’s *Appeal* and ‘Genealogy’ were ground-breaking works which combatted widely accepted claims of the inferiority of people of African descent. They sought to provide African Americans with an inspiring origin narrative. McCune Smith would continue this project in 1859’s ‘On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia.’²³⁷

Bruce speculates that ‘Theresa, _____ A Haytien Tale’ – published in 1828 and also signed ‘S’ – was written by the teenaged McCune Smith as well. If so, McCune Smith took part at an early age in another tradition of antislavery writing: harrowing stories, both fictional and non-fictional, of the ravages of slavery and the (often romanticized) heroes who resisted it.

²³⁴ Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 112–13.

²³⁵ David Walker, *Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (Boston: David Walker, 1830), 9–13, 15–20, 22–23. McCune Smith appears to have read *Appeal* (see ‘Sketch,’ 52) but, if so, did not allude to it in ‘Query.’

²³⁶ Walker, 31.

²³⁷ James McCune Smith, ‘On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on Virginia,’ *AAM*, August 1859. See discussion of ‘Query’ in Chapter Six.

Well-known examples include Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1852) and Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853). 'Theresa' was published serially in *FJ* a few months after 'Genealogy' appeared in its pages. The story takes place 'during the long and bloody contest, in St. Domingo' when the enslaved and oppressed 'sons of Africa' revolted against 'French barbarity.' It tells of one Madame Paulina who, fearing for her family's safety, flees her hometown with her two daughters. Their journey is marked by danger, heroic exploits, grief, and joy. 'Theresa' is historical fiction, morality tale, and adventure story all in one, told with as many romantic flourishes, harrowing details, high-flown language, and laments over the trials of its noble heroines as could be packed into four short instalments. The story reads as the product of a young imagination fired by romantic literature, the noble struggles of the Haitian revolutionary hero Toussaint Louverture, and the recent liberation of New York State's enslaved African Americans by the Emancipation Act of 1827.²³⁸ The history of Haiti and its freedom struggles would continue to inspire and preoccupy McCune Smith, as many of his later known writings show. His best-known treatment of the subject is his 1841 published *Lecture on the Haytien Revolutions* (discussed below).²³⁹

²³⁸ Bruce, *Origins*, 172–73; Frances Smith Foster, 'How Do You Solve a Problem Like Theresa?,' *African American Review* 40, no. 4 (2006): 631–32, 634–35; *James McCune Smith, 'Theresa, _____ A Haytien Tale (Part 1),' *FJ*, 18 January 1828; *James McCune Smith, 'Theresa, _____ A Haytien Tale (Part 2),' *FJ*, 25 January 1828; *James McCune Smith, 'Theresa, _____ A Haytien Tale (Part 3),' *FJ*, 8 February 1828; *James McCune Smith, 'Theresa, _____ A Haytien Tale (Part 4),' *FJ*, 15 February 1828. Foster does not consider McCune Smith as a candidate for 'S.' Instead, she favours educator, diplomat, and author Prince Saunders (1775-1839). However, this appears unlikely. If 'S' refers to the author of both 'Genealogy' and 'Theresa' – which is likely since they were published in the same paper only a few months apart and signed with the same initial – it had to be someone young: 'S' described themselves in 'Genealogy' as 'quite a youth.' Saunders would have been about 53 when 'Theresa' was published. See Foster, 'Problem,' 635–37.

²³⁹ For more examples, see James McCune Smith, 'Lecture on the Haytien Revolutions' in *Works*, 25–47; James McCune Smith, 'Heads of the Colored People.—No. IX: The Bourbons,' *FDP*, 1 October 1853; James McCune Smith, 'The Late Haytian Revolution,' *FDP*, 11 March 1859.

The next surviving composition certainly written by McCune Smith is his travel journal. He wrote it in 1832 as an ambitious nineteen-year-old *en route* to Glasgow to embark on his university education. Extracts were published serially in *CA* in 1837; the original is not extant.²⁴⁰ The extracts appear to have been edited for publication: one day's entry was published in *CA* twice with significant differences between the two versions.²⁴¹ However much other extracts were edited, the voice of the hopeful, idealistic, and sometimes nervous young man is unobscured: his anticipation, his homesickness, his curiosity, his religiosity, and above all, his amazement at discovering the Old World for himself – which he had long studied but never seen – are palpable.

As his journal relates, McCune Smith distracted himself from his homesickness by closely observing and recording descriptions of his fellow passengers, the workings of the ship, and various adventures along the way. The goings-on around him, the conversations, the squabbles, and the personalities were preserved for posterity with his pen and ink. The writing style of the journal is sometimes flowery but not florid, often poetic, as McCune Smith described the ship and the ever-changing sea and sky. The style anticipates the literary skill of his later works. McCune Smith's observations at sea occasionally sent him into philosophical reveries. On one occasion, he described the ship – the 'winged *Caledonia*' – as symbolic of the United States. Like American ships in general, its elegance and swiftness were products of its multi-ethnic crafters, each bringing to bear disparate traditions of shipbuilding that resulted in a

²⁴⁰ Stauffer in *Works*, 8.

²⁴¹ James McCune Smith, 'Dr. Smith's Journal [12 September Part 2-13 September 1832],' *CA*, 21 July 1838; McCune Smith, 'Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].'

superior, more innovative craft.²⁴² His descriptions of personalities are especially compelling, marshalling detailed observations and telling quotes – often in dialect – to create memorable character sketches. This skill would prove durable throughout his years of writing, demonstrated most famously in McCune Smith’s ‘Heads’ series twenty years later.

McCune Smith’s first visual impression of the British Isles was not a flattering one. As he stepped onto Liverpool’s dockyards and headed into the city, his surroundings reminded him of ‘the enclosure and varied windings of an immense prison house.’²⁴³ This impression was only strengthened during a subsequent expedition to explore the city further.²⁴⁴ But as he quickly realized, McCune Smith had arrived in a land of freedom of a kind he had never known. Both amazed and dismayed at the extremes of wealth and poverty he observed in Liverpool, he was nevertheless acutely aware that desperate as its poorest citizens were, they enjoyed a kind of freedom denied to most African Americans. No one, he wrote, could legally seize them or their families, as slave-hunters did in his native New York. No one would turn the other way as purveyors of human flesh ‘offer[ed] up to lust or avarice’ women who were others’ wives, mothers, or daughters into ‘those secret orgies’ characteristic of the US system of chattel slavery.²⁴⁵ A few days before, McCune Smith had expressed himself in ‘no great anxiety ...to leave the ship, which as it were a part and parcel of my home.’²⁴⁶ But in his first day at Liverpool, McCune Smith was overcome with wonderment and gratitude: ‘I could embrace the

²⁴² James McCune Smith, ‘Extracts from Dr. Smith’s Journal [23 August - 3 September 1832],’ *CA*, 2 December 1837.

²⁴³ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [5-8 September 1832].’

²⁴⁴ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [12 September Part 2-13 September 1832].’

²⁴⁵ James McCune Smith, ‘Extracts from Dr. Smith’s Journal [9-11 September 1832],’ *CA*, 3 February 1838.

²⁴⁶ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [5-8 September 1832].’

soil on which I now live, since it yields not only to all who dwell, but to all who may come to it, a greater amount of rational liberty than is secured to man in any other portion of the globe.’²⁴⁷

It is notable that McCune Smith’s Liverpool entries – even in their possibly edited form – do not refer to that city’s major role in the transatlantic slave trade. Whether he was then unaware of that history or whether the 1807 British abolition of that trade was at the forefront of his consciousness regarding that country’s relationship with slavery, his recollections do not reveal. However, even if he learned the details of many British cities’ economic dependence on the slave trade only after he arrived in Britain, McCune Smith later indicated that he was aware of that history by the time he helped found the Glasgow Emancipation Society in late 1833.²⁴⁸

McCune Smith was not left to stroll and reflect in the streets of Liverpool alone for long. He was quickly swept up by an extended network of friends, friends of friends, and abolitionists. He visited their homes, attended services at the Episcopal church and a lecture at the city amphitheatre, and explored the city. All the while, McCune Smith marvelled that he was as easily and warmly accepted in public spaces as he was in the abolitionist circle he moved in. Most exciting for the budding intellectual was the heady exchange of ideas he was drawn into by his British hosts. They exchanged pamphlets, attended a lecture on gradual emancipation, and discussed the peculiarities of the US racial caste system. McCune Smith felt his circle of trust expanded by these experiences: he wrote that “the sight of a pale face” no

²⁴⁷ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [9-11 September 1832].’

²⁴⁸ James McCune Smith, ‘John Murray (Of Glasgow),’ in *Autographs for Freedom*, vol. 1 (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853), 64–65; For more about Liverpool’s role in the transatlantic slave trade, see Kenneth Morgan, ‘Liverpool’s Dominance in the British Slave Trade,’ in *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz, and Anthony Tibbles (Liverpool: University Press, 2007), 14–42. See Chapter Five for more about the Glasgow Emancipation Society.

longer “[made him] sick” from the fear and distrust that had been instilled in him by the caste system of his native country.²⁴⁹

2.2 The Classicist

On one of his solitary strolls in Liverpool, McCune Smith found himself again ‘dreaming of home’ and missing a ‘dear friend’ and fellow scholar: ‘Cruel is the fate that has separated us at the very moment when we began to explore the beauties of ancient lore!’²⁵⁰ This friend was likely Isaiah DeGrasse; McCune Smith noted in his journal that he made up a packet of letters to mail to NYC which included one ‘for dear friend I.’²⁵¹ As we have seen in Chapter One, McCune Smith continued his education soon after graduating from the AFS. At least for a time, he studied alongside DeGrasse. This entry also indicates that McCune Smith and DeGrasse continued their studies together in the classics as well. Guido Furman’s obituary for McCune Smith adds that ‘His previous severe study and thorough classical training’ under the guidance of Frederick Schroeder and a ‘Mr. Curtis... of Trinity School’ ‘enabled him to pass successfully the requisite examination for the Senior Greek and Latin Classics of the Glasgow University.’²⁵²

²⁴⁹ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [9-11 September 1832];’ James McCune Smith, ‘Extract from Dr. Smith’s Journal [11 September 1832],’ *CA*, 19 April 1838; James McCune Smith, ‘Dr. Smith’s Journal [12 September 1832],’ *CA*, 30 June 1838; McCune Smith, ‘Journal [12 September Part 2-13 September 1832];’ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].’ McCune Smith wrote that the audience at the lecture included a large contingent of immediatist abolitionists. At its conclusion, the audience cheered instead for the abolitionist George Thompson, who was in the audience.

²⁵⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [9-11 September 1832].’

²⁵¹ McCune Smith, ‘Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].’ Bell later recalled that McCune Smith’s ‘friend DeGrasse’ was included in Peter Williams’s application to Columbia on McCune Smith’s behalf. This further indicates that DeGrasse was this unidentified friend since they studied together under William’s guidance to prepare for higher education. See Chapter One.

²⁵² Furman, ‘Obituary,’ 202.

John Curtis offered an ambitious curriculum for his students ‘that reflected his classical training.’²⁵³

McCune Smith continued his studies in the classics while working as a blacksmith’s apprentice.²⁵⁴ Furman’s obituary for McCune Smith cited ‘a friend’ who described him as a teenager with ‘at a forge with the bellow’s handle in one hand and a Latin grammar in the other.’²⁵⁵ In 1859, McCune Smith reminisced about the period of his life when his classical studies and full-time work overlapped. He looked back proudly on his Saturday nights during those years as ‘wash night, and the grime and honest sweat of anvil and bellows and forge, gave place to a glorious ablution. It was Latin or Greek-Grammar night with one whole day in prospect for hard study, (except intervals at church service,) when Caesar, or Virgil, or Buttman, steadied, with their rugged and knotty hardships, the wild dreams of my boy ambitions.’²⁵⁶

McCune Smith’s first year at the University of Glasgow was also focused on the classics. He excelled at those studies, winning a First-Year General Eminence Prize in ‘Humanity’ (Latin).²⁵⁷ McCune Smith later named Sir Daniel Keyte Sandford, a prominent scholar of Greek, as one of his instructors.²⁵⁸ McCune Smith’s prior ‘hard study’ in the classics may have placed him ahead of fellow incoming students: Bell recalled that McCune Smith ‘was so far advanced that he was admitted to the Sophomore class, an unusual occurrence in a European

²⁵³ Moffat, ‘Trinity School, New York City,’ 117–18.

²⁵⁴ See Chapter One.

²⁵⁵ Furman, ‘Obituary,’ 202.

²⁵⁶ James McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [19 March 1859],’ *FDP*, 25 March 1859.

²⁵⁷ UoG, *Catalogus Togatorum in Academia Glasguensi 1832-33* (Glasgow, 1833), 13; *Prize Lists of the University of Glasgow From Session 1777-78 to Session 1832-33* (Glasgow: Carter & Pratt, 1902), 13.

²⁵⁸ ‘Reception of Dr. Smith;’ Alexander Duncan, *Memorials of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, 1599-1850* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1896), 173, 275, 279.

university.²⁵⁹ McCune Smith received his bachelor of arts degree in 1835, which required him to have successfully completed courses in Latin, Greek, logic, moral philosophy, mathematics, and natural philosophy.²⁶⁰

McCune Smith's love affair with the classics began early and would last the rest of his life. Soon after he returned to the US, McCune Smith delivered an address extolling the virtues of studying classical works and 'ancient languages.'²⁶¹ McCune Smith liberally peppered his writings with quotes and ideas from classical authors such as Virgil, Juvenal, Cicero, Sappho, Tacitus, Xenophon, and many others.²⁶² On other occasions, he expressed himself in his own words in Greek or Latin to lend them a sense of gravity, poetry, or timelessness.²⁶³ McCune Smith viewed the classics as a potent source of inspiration, both for himself and for his readers. He opened his 'Heads of the Colored People' essay series with a short selection taken from the ancient Greek lyric poet Anacreon (followed by his translation): "'Age Zographon ariste, /

²⁵⁹ Bell, 'Death.' See Chapter Two for more on Williams and McCune Smith, the University of Glasgow, and Williams' visit in Europe.

²⁶⁰ *Nomina Magistrorum Artium Universitatis Glasguensis AB Anno 1763-1888* (Glasgow: UoG, 1763), 181; John Kerr, *Scottish Education, School and University, from Early Times to 1908, with an Addendum 1908-1913* (Cambridge: University Press, 1913), 235–36. McCune Smith may also have studied ethics in his third year: the register for the 1835-36 class lists a 'Jacobus Smith.' UoG, *Catalogus Togatorum in Academia Glasguensi 1835-36* (Glasgow, 1836), 818. He is usually listed as 'Jacobus M. Smith' in class registers to distinguish him from two other 'Jacobus Smiths' attending at that time. However, McCune Smith appears simply as 'Jacobus Smith' in the register for that year's logic class. McCune Smith's earning a prize in logic for that academic year confirms that this entry refers to him. See UoG, *Catalogus Togatorum in Academia Glasguensi 1833-34* (Glasgow, 1834), 10; UoG, *University Prizes* (Glasgow: UoG, 1834), 9. See Chapters Three and Six for more about McCune Smith's education and degrees at the University of Glasgow.

²⁶¹ James McCune Smith, 'Extracts from James McCune Smith's Address at the Adelphi, 8 January 1838,' *Philanthropist*, 16 January 1838, Black Abolitionist Papers, 1830-1865, MSRC.

²⁶² McCune Smith, 'Communipaw [4 February 1852];' James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [20 February 1852],' *FDP*, 26 February 1852; James McCune Smith, 'Der Hagel,' *FDP*, 25 March 1853; James McCune Smith, 'The German Invasion [Continued],' *AAM*, March 1859, 85; McCune Smith, 'The Late Haytian Revolution.'

²⁶³ *James McCune Smith, 'Qui Est Dives...,' *FJ*, 19 October 1827; *James McCune Smith, 'Eum, Qui Bene Utitur Divitiis...,' *FJ*, 14 December 1827; McCune Smith to Smith, 12 May 1848. The two essays from *FJ* are signed 'S' and were published around the time as 'Genealogy' and 'Theresa.'

Graphe Zographon ariste, / Best of Painters, come away, Paint me the *whitewash brush*, I pray."

McCune Smith, as he wrote, '[drew] upon... Dear old musical Anacreon' in his 'endeavor to win the post of door keeper... to the outermost enclosure leading to the Republic of Letters.' Here, McCune Smith invited his readers to let the musicality of Anacreon's lines draw them into that happy Republic, a 'commonwealth' of knowledge 'perpetually progressive, free from *caste*...' ²⁶⁴

The classics could also provide rich fodder for humour. In 'A Word for the "Smith Family,"' McCune Smith romped through Homer's *Iliad* to construct 'a comparatively modern but still very ancient proof' that the Smith family name originated with a heroic 'descendant of Apollo' who delivered an ancient town from ruin. He playfully suggested that the 'grammarian' Aristarchus eventually died of remorse at having originally traced the Smith name back to 'a mouse-killer.' ²⁶⁵

McCune Smith's political thought was also grounded in the works of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and statesmen. In his 1859 essay on 'Citizenship,' McCune Smith relied on Aristotle, Cicero, and Livy. 'Citizenship' was his response to US Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney's opinion on behalf of the majority in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that – as McCune Smith paraphrased it – 'negroes had no rights which white men were bound to respect.' ²⁶⁶ In *Dred Scott*, the Court ruled that African Americans – enslaved or free – could not be citizens of

²⁶⁴ McCune Smith, 'Black News-Vendor.' See also John Stauffer, 'Remaking the Republic of Letters: James McCune Smith and the Classical Tradition,' in *The Call of Classical Literature in the Romantic Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 220–40. For a discussion of McCune Smith's use of the 'whitewash brush' as a literary device, see Rachel Banner, 'Thinking Through Things: Labors of Freedom in James McCune Smith's "The Washerwoman,"' *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 59, no. 2 (9 August 2013): 297–99.

²⁶⁵ James McCune Smith, 'A Word for the "Smith Family,"' *AAM*, March 1860, 77–78.

²⁶⁶ James McCune Smith, 'Citizenship,' *AAM*, May 1859, 144.

the United States.²⁶⁷ In ‘Citizenship,’ McCune Smith argued that, by definition, this was incorrect. As he wrote, since ‘the Constitution of the United States does not define the word *citizen*, the definition must be sought in the exact meaning of the word itself, altogether independently of the Constitution.’ While Aristotle provided invaluable insights into the concept, he argued that ‘The word citizenship, however, [is] of latin derivation, [and] gathers its purport and exact meaning from the Roman Republic; it originated and *grew* under the Romans.’ Drawing on Livy and Cicero, McCune Smith argued that Rome had traditionally extended ‘essential rights’ of citizens of Rome – such as rights to liberty, family, marriage, property, voting, and so on – to all those who came under its rule, as had been the case for all free and some enslaved African Americans throughout US history. McCune Smith concluded that the meaning of citizenship in the Constitution must be the same as it was for the Romans because ‘in the absence of any definition of the word in the Constitution, the word must bear the meaning which language itself attaches to it under like circumstances...’ In setting up a republic, the Roman form of government, the Constitution created those ‘like circumstances.’ Since all African Americans were under the rule of the US government, they must also, by definition, be entitled to all rights of citizenship.²⁶⁸

2.3 The Reader

By the time McCune Smith returned to NYC from Scotland, his reputation as the African American community’s representative intellectual was firmly established. At a welcome-home

²⁶⁷ ‘Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S. 393 (1856),’ Legal resource, Justia Law, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/60/393/>.

²⁶⁸ McCune Smith, ‘Citizenship,’ 145–49.

reception held for McCune Smith at NYC's Broadway Tabernacle in September 1837, educator and community leader Ransom Wake described the freshly minted young doctor as 'having from early youth evinced powers of mind and indications of talent of a superior order.' At the University of Glasgow, Wake rhapsodized, McCune Smith 'entered the "arena of intellect" to combat with a host of aspirants for literary fame; each striving to excel the other in the intellectual conflict, but none more successful than "he whom we delight to honor."' After excelling in his studies there, Wake continued, McCune Smith returned to NYC 'provided with abundant testimonials of literary and professional ability from those whose known wisdom and worth in the literary world place their assertions beyond the reach of the gainsayer, the scorner, or the prejudiced.'²⁶⁹ Wake's glowing description of McCune Smith's intellectual acumen and scholarly achievements would be widely echoed among the African American community. They took great pride in McCune Smith as living proof of the intellectual capabilities of African Americans which, in him, matched or exceeded those of celebrated white intellectuals.²⁷⁰

McCune Smith's scholarly reputation went well beyond his distinguished education. As we have seen, he was active in NYC's African American intellectual and self-improvement community. An avid reader, he joined or helped found literary societies from the time he was about seventeen years old. The first of these was the Philomathean Society.²⁷¹ This society, as

²⁶⁹ 'Reception of Dr. Smith.'

²⁷⁰ 'The Mental and Moral Improvement Society of Troy...', *CA*, 14 October 1837; Frederick Douglass, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' *FDP*, 3 June 1853; Brown, 'James McCune Smith, M. D.,' 205; Bell, 'Death,' Hamilton, 'Dr. James McCune Smith.'

²⁷¹ There were many societies with the same name, usually associated with universities, including one at New York University. See New York University Archives, 'Guide to the Records of the Philomathean Society RG.39.2' (New York University Archives, 2018), <http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/archives/philomathean/philomathean.html>.

CA reported, was founded in 1830 and ‘devoted to the “improvement of literature, and useful knowledge”’.²⁷² According to its constitution, the Society’s purpose was ‘to encourage African American young men to join ‘the *enterprising* part of mankind’ engaged in scientific inquiry, debate, and the acquisition of knowledge and ‘Wisdom.’²⁷³ Bell wrote that there were seven founding members including himself, James Fields, John Peterson, and Wake. Others ‘who became immediately connected with’ the Society included McCune Smith, DeGrasse, and Henry Nott.²⁷⁴ The Society held a meeting to bid McCune Smith farewell shortly before he left for Glasgow in 1832. Nearly immediately upon his return to NYC, McCune Smith became one of its featured lecturers.²⁷⁵ McCune Smith was also associated with the Phoenix Society – also known as the ‘Phoenixian Society’ – founded in early 1833 by Cornish and Theodore Wright. It was a literary and improvement society which assisted youth seeking employment, worked to improve morals, sponsored abolitionist Lewis Tappan’s Sabbath school, and established high schools for boys and girls.²⁷⁶ McCune Smith became a featured lecturer in 1841.²⁷⁷ In 1858, McCune Smith planned another literary society. As he wrote to Douglass in December of that year, he ‘hoped to scare up’ a literary society with the help of friend Charles Reason. It would be organized around Douglass’s upcoming lecture in NYC which McCune Smith had helped

²⁷² ‘To the Public,’ CA, 29 April 1837.

²⁷³ ‘Our Colored Brethren in the City of New-York...,’ *Liberator*, 4 June 1831.

²⁷⁴ Philip A. Bell, ‘Men We Have Known - Number Four: Dr. James Fields,’ *Elevator*, 12 June 1868.

²⁷⁵ ‘Lectures of the Philomathean Society [For Tue, 26 December 1837],’ CA, 23 December 1837; ‘Lectures of the Philomathean Society - James McCune Smith, M.D. [For Thu, 18 January 1838],’ CA, 13 January 1838; ‘Lectures of the Philomathean Society - James McCune Smith, M.D. [For Thu, 1 February 1838],’ CA, 27 January 1838; ‘Lectures of the Philomathean Society - James McCune Smith, M.D. [For Thu, 8 February 1838],’ CA, 3 February 1838.

²⁷⁶ Harris, *Shadow*, 186–87.

²⁷⁷ ‘Public Lectures of the New York Phoenixian Literary Society: Programme,’ CA, 6 February 1841.

arrange. Though the planned ‘New York Literary Union’ was ‘not very large,’ McCune Smith jokingly assured Douglass that its president and secretary were two different people.²⁷⁸

McCune Smith also manifested his love of books by building libraries. For one, he created a library and community meeting place in a back room of his pharmacy.²⁷⁹ Along with friends, fellow activists, and book enthusiasts Bell, George Downing, and Albro Lyons, McCune Smith was also signatory to an 1843 announcement of the establishment of the New-York Associate Library, ‘A Library for the People of Color.’ It was to be located at the Philomathean Hall at 161 Duane St and stocked with books contributed by the Philomathean and Ladies’ Literary societies. They called for donations of ‘Books, Money, Geological and Mineralogical Specimens and Philosophical Apparatus.’²⁸⁰ In 1854, McCune Smith, Bell, and others were again engaged, as McCune Smith described it, in another ‘earnest effort to establish a Library and Reading Room, and a course of Lectures for folks in this city.’²⁸¹

McCune Smith filled his personal library via regular expeditions to local bookstores. Baillière’s was among his favourites: he wrote regularly of perusing its shelves, often in company with friends such as Bell or George Bancroft. McCune Smith described the bookstore on Broadway as a ‘small cramped up agency’ where chemists, mechanics, ‘anatomists’

²⁷⁸ James McCune Smith to Frederick Douglass, 28 December 1858. This Union is not to be confused with 1855’s New York Literary and Productive Union; see Chapter One. Sources do not yet confirm whether the literary society McCune Smith proposed in 1858 ever materialized.

²⁷⁹ Lyons, ‘Memories,’ 77–78; Carla L. Peterson, ‘Dr. Smith’s Back Room,’ *Opinionator* (blog), 19 January 2011, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/19/dr-smiths-back-room/>. See Chapter Three for more about McCune Smith’s storied library.

²⁸⁰ ‘A Library for the People of Color,’ *Tribune*, 1 November 1843; ‘A Library for the People of Color,’ *Tribune*, 18 October 1843; ‘A Library for the People of Color,’ *Tribune*, 21 October 1843, 21; ‘A Library for the People of Color,’ *Tribune*, 14 October 1843, 14.

²⁸¹ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [1, 8, and 9 December 1854].’

(dissectors), scientists, astronomers, mathematicians, and ‘men of few words, but earnest brows’ pored over the latest scientific and literary titles.²⁸² Despite its modest size, Baillière’s would prove a rich resource for McCune Smith. McCune Smith’s 1860’s essay ‘A Word for the “Smith Family”’ reveals that he had read Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* – likely obtained at Baillière’s – only a few months after it was published.²⁸³ Stauffer believes that McCune Smith also obtained his copy of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* at Baillière’s.²⁸⁴ McCune Smith’s writings indicate that Baillière’s – with branches in Europe and NYC – was able to quickly identify and supply the latest and most innovative works and provide them to their clients on both sides of the Atlantic. They had found their perfect client in the philomathic McCune Smith. Baillière’s was not only a bookseller: it was a publisher as well. The NYC branch was run by two brothers, Hippolyte-Émile and Charles-Edmund Baillière, of the medical publishing dynasty founded by Jean-Baptiste Baillière in Paris in 1818.²⁸⁵ McCune Smith would come to be mentioned in the pages of a medical journal published by the Baillière brothers.²⁸⁶

²⁸² McCune Smith; James McCune Smith, ‘Heads of the Colored People - No. X: The Schoolmaster (Continued),’ *FDP*, 17 November 1854; James McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [June 1857],’ *FDP*, 19 June 1857. Though McCune Smith characterized Bell as a regular companion in his book-hunting trips to Baillière’s, Bell downplayed this. He wrote to Douglass: ‘I do not often drop in at Bailliere’s. Occasionally a learned friend of mine [McCune Smith] takes me there, to ask my opinion on some subject on which I am profoundly ignorant – which opinion I give most oracularly. Bailliere has, doubtless, a fine collection of books; but they are too abstruse for me, being chiefly in foreign language, or professional. [McCune Smith] can there find food for his metaphysical and philosophical talent. I do not soar so high; lighter, and more airy fancies suit me better.’ See Philip A. Bell, ‘Mr. Editor [4 April 1855],’ *FDP*, 20 April 1855. George Bancroft served as president of the American Geographical and Statistical Society, which McCune Smith helped to found. See Chapter Six.

²⁸³ McCune Smith, ‘Smith Family,’ 79. See Chapter Six for McCune Smith’s writings on Darwin.

²⁸⁴ Stauffer in *Works*, 143. Stauffer writes that McCune Smith was ‘the only known African American in the nineteenth century’ to have read *Moby-Dick*, at that time an obscure novel.

²⁸⁵ Jean Baptiste Baillière, *Famille Baillière* (Paris: Martinet, 1877), 8, 16–17; ‘Art and Medicine Bibliography: Jean-Baptiste-Marie Baillière,’ <http://www.artandmedicine.com/biblio/authors/french/Bailliere1862.html>.

²⁸⁶ New York Pathological Society, ‘Croup - Tracheotomy - Death from Haemorrhage Caused by Fenestra in Tubes,’ *American Medical Times* 9, no. 3 (16 July 1864): 30.

McCune Smith revealed his prodigious, wide-ranging readership through the voluminous quotes, citations, and allusions to other authors and their works that appear in his writing. (We shall consider many examples of this throughout this thesis.) Though his profession as a physician and pharmacist usually kept him very busy, he seized every opportunity to read as much as possible between the waves of disease which periodically swept NYC. In 1857, McCune Smith wrote that though the city had remained ‘provokingly healthy’ that season, it had allowed him to do ‘a power of reading since March.’²⁸⁷

McCune Smith engaged closely with what he read and included critical commentary of written works by other authors in his own articles and essays. In 1854’s ‘The Schoolmaster (Continued),’ McCune Smith criticized David Ansted’s poor fact-checking, sloppy reasoning, and poor use of statistics in *Scenery, Science and Art*. (He had read portions of the book at Baillière’s.)²⁸⁸ The following year, McCune Smith recalled an afternoon where he and Bell compared lines of poetry from Virgil and from Tennyson’s new poem ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ over coffee and a game of chess. As they did so, McCune Smith insisted that Tennyson had committed ‘flat burglary!’ in ‘Charge.’ In the stanzas beginning with ‘Cannon to right of them...’ McCune Smith detected the rhythm of a Congolese chant he had read in Gustave D’Alaux’s article ‘L’empereur Soulouque et Son Empire’ in an 1850 volume of *Revue des Deux*. (He had obtained it at Baillière’s). When Bell asked McCune Smith for the translation of the Congolese chant, McCune Smith replied that it was untranslatable. Whatever it meant, it

²⁸⁷ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [19 June 1857].’

²⁸⁸ McCune Smith, ‘The Schoolmaster (Continued).’ See also Chapter Six.

roused Congolese warriors into a ‘stupid courage’ and unconquerable fury.²⁸⁹ As we shall continue to see throughout this thesis, McCune Smith’s assessments of the books he read reveal that little within them escaped his notice or attention.

2.4 The Aesthete

In 1857, McCune Smith self-deprecatingly wrote to Douglass that he ‘had no music in [his] soul.’ He could not, he confessed, tell the difference between a soprano or a contralto.²⁹⁰ Whatever (false?) modesty he expressed here regarding his talent for music appreciation, McCune Smith displayed an acute sensitivity to the arts, beauty, and mood from an early age. In his childhood poem ‘Night,’ fourteen-year-old McCune Smith deftly evoked the deep pleasure of falling asleep in peace and safety after a day of ‘cares and woes.’ ‘Beasts of the forest’ may ‘roam’ and ‘robbers’ may prowl outside, he wrote, but the sleeper – with a handy bedside tray beside him to serve as a weapon if needed – may look forward to ‘sweet repose’ and ‘dreams that he is blest’ to the song of a lone nightingale.²⁹¹

McCune Smith’s 1832 travel journal reveals that his compositional skills had developed considerably before he left his teens. Though the entries appear to have been later edited for publication, the published versions likely preserve much of their original phrasing and style. They read more like the emotionally charged musings of a moody young man than the poised style of McCune Smith’s early postgraduate writings. These journal entries shift in mood as

²⁸⁹ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 1850:4 (Paris: Au Bureau de la Revue des Deux Mondes, 1850), 1040; McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [6 January 1855].’ See also Daniel Hack, ‘Wild Charges: The Afro-Haitian “Charge of the Light Brigade,”’ *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 199–225.

²⁹⁰ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [19 June 1857].’

²⁹¹ James McCune Smith, ‘Night [Poem, July 1827],’ in *Addresses and Pieces Spoken at Examinations, 1818-1826* (NYAF), 59, <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15052coll5/id/28498>.

frequently as the sea and the sky among which many are set. The homesickness which he described as settling in his heart like a ‘blank’ as he watched his native shore disappear on the horizon quickly gave way to interest in his fellow passengers. His journal conveys their personalities nearly as vividly and skilfully as his ‘Heads’ series of the 1850’s conveys those of the working-class people of NYC. The nineteen-year-old McCune Smith was no less adept at describing a spiritual transportation inspired by religious services at sea than he was the rarefied ‘reverie’ resulting from the contemplation of ‘sublime and beautiful objects.’ Reflecting among the tombs at Liverpool’s newly built cemetery, McCune Smith wrote:

Beautiful and level green sward, young trees, and delightful flowers render the valley a pleasant promenade, yet it is one that will cause the most thoughtless to reflect; for beyond the vernal trees and blooming flowers, abruptly arise the naked rocks out of which are hewn the tombs of the dead. I love this mingling of life with death, this decking of the grave with flowers! They are doubly significant, they tell of the evanescence of life, they tell of that bloom beyond the grave where “there is no more sorrow.”²⁹²

‘African Genealogy’ aside, McCune Smith’s travel journal also introduces his penchant for liberally peppering his writings with scholarly, literary, poetic, biblical, and classical allusions and quotes. This time-honoured practice was employed since antiquity to demonstrate the author’s scholarly *bona fides* or literary taste.²⁹³ Fellow African American authors – self- or formally educated – such as Walker, Prince Saunders, and Henry Highland Garnet also used

²⁹² James McCune Smith, ‘Dr. Smith’s Journal [16-19 August 1832],’ *CA*, 11 November 1837; McCune Smith, ‘Journal [12 September Part 2-13 September 1832].’

²⁹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality,’ in *Letters and Social Aims* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1876), 177–78, 180–85, 190–93; Claudia Stokes, ‘Novel Commonplaces: Quotation, Epigraphs, and Literary Authority,’ *American Literary History* 30, no. 2 (1 April 2018): 201–4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajy005>.

such quotes in this way.²⁹⁴ As his journal reveals, McCune Smith was enamoured with Lord Byron's poetry and drew from such works and authors as the Bible, Michel de Montaigne, James Fenimore Cooper, William Lloyd Garrison, and Antonio Vivaldi's opera *Tancredi*.²⁹⁵

A year after composing his travel journal, McCune Smith wrote another poem. It is preserved in the friendship book of Amy Matilda Cassey, the only surviving child of McCune Smith's mentor Peter Williams, Jr. 'To the River Clyde (Scotland)' is an ode to Glasgow's great river, replete with classical imagery. McCune Smith presented the Clyde as a symbol of Scotland which, in turn, symbolized freedom itself:

And such art thou my bonnie Clyde,
Nor Roman steel nor Norman yell
Nor Saxon craft nor England's pride
Could fling around thee slavery's spell
Away, flow on thou beauteous stream,
May freedom ever o'er thee beam!

Though he described the 'beauteous' qualities of the Clyde as it wound its way among grassy vales and 'bound[ed] ...wildly down the cat'ract,' McCune Smith proclaimed that its true beauty was to be found in 'the deeds beside thee done,' implicitly comparing Glasgow's growing

²⁹⁴ Walker, *Appeal*, 15–16, 40, 50, 61–62; Prince Saunders, *An Address Delivered at Bethel Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Joseph Rakestraw, 1818), 3–4; Henry Highland Garnet, *The Past and the Present Condition, and the Destiny, of the Colored Race* (Troy: Steam Press of J. C. Kneeland and Co., 1848), 7, 10, 17, 23, 25. Stokes argues that 'Quotation was particularly important to nineteenth-century African American writers for several reasons.' Among these was that 'African American reformers actively promoted imitation [i.e., quotation] as a means of uplift and social mobility.' For this selection and examples of nineteenth-century African American authors' use of quotations, see Stokes, 'Novel,' 213–16.

²⁹⁵ McCune Smith, 'Journal [16-19 August 1832];' McCune Smith, 'Journal [23 August - 3 September 1832];' McCune Smith, 'Journal [5-8 September 1832];' McCune Smith, 'Journal [9-11 September 1832];' McCune Smith, 'Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].' Byron may be McCune Smith's single most quoted author, with the possible exclusion of Biblical authors.

abolitionist movement with Scotland's storied history of resistance to tyranny.²⁹⁶ McCune Smith's forays into poetry appear to be limited to his earliest years of writing: there is no extant poetry written by McCune Smith following his Glasgow years. Perhaps his own early efforts convinced McCune Smith – with his developed taste for great literature – that poetry was not among his special talents.

As his writing matured, McCune Smith settled on the essay as his favoured form of literary expression. McCune Smith's series 'Heads of the Colored People' – written between March 1852 and November 1854 – has been widely hailed as among his finest and most innovative writing. Henry Louis Gates, Jr includes 'Heads' among the works which made McCune Smith 'probably the first experimental writer in the African American tradition.'²⁹⁷ Most critical work on the 'Heads' series focuses on the ways its essays play on phrenological themes; their innovative literary stylings and uses of tropes; their place within the African American literary canon; or their place in debates among African Americans over how they should be portrayed in writing.²⁹⁸

However, 'Heads' also displays McCune Smith's aesthetic appreciation of the moral and intellectual beauty observable in the African American struggle for survival, dignity, and

²⁹⁶ James McCune Smith, 'To the River Clyde (Scotland),' in *Amy Matilda Cassey's Friendship Album (Original & Selected Poetry &c.)*, 1833, <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/Islandora:64815>. See Chapter Five for McCune Smith's role in co-founding the Glasgow Emancipation Society.

²⁹⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr in his forward to McCune Smith, *Works*, xi; Stauffer's Introduction to 'Heads of the Colored People' in McCune Smith, 187–88; Judith Mulcahy, 'James McCune Smith: The Communipaw Connection,' *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 34, no. 1–2 (2007): 360, 364–65; Jacob Crane, "'Razed to the Knees": The Anti-Heroic Body in James McCune Smith's "The Heads of Colored People,"' *African American Review* 51, no. 1 (7 April 2018): 7, 18.

²⁹⁸ Stauffer, in his introduction to 'Heads of the Colored People' in McCune Smith, *Works*, 187–89; Banner, 'Thinking Through Things,' 291–92; Gates, in his foreword to McCune Smith, *Works*, xi; Crane, 'Razed to the Knees,' 7–8, 11, 14, 16, 18.

freedom within an oppressive racial caste system, especially among the working classes. As Stauffer observes, McCune Smith ‘wrote about the unsung little people with poignancy and beauty’ in ‘Heads’ and elsewhere, referring to McCune Smith’s character sketches as ‘word paintings.’²⁹⁹ McCune Smith described the series in similar terms. In his introductory essay for the ‘Heads’ series, McCune Smith employed the ‘whitewash brush’ as a rhetorical device, ‘draw[ing] upon old Anacreon.’³⁰⁰ In another essay, he wrote that a whitewash brush paints in broad, ‘swift, sure, and even’ strokes, and its wielder employs the skills and senses of a chemist in their mixing of colours and ‘elements.’³⁰¹ McCune Smith’s profiles of working and poor African Americans offer unflinching, touching, rough, eloquent, and unapologetic sketches of their daily trials, tribulations, defeats, and triumphs.³⁰² In these essays, McCune Smith also displays the sensitivity of the poet to beauty though he did not employ the form. Many of the most striking passages in McCune Smith’s essays convey the beauty shining through or even caused by the ravages of labour: the ‘broadly swelling chest,’ ‘fine long hooked nose,’ and ‘luxuriantly folded lids’ of the legless ‘Black News-Vender;’ the ‘delicately formed hand and wrist’ and the ‘eye and brow chiseled out for stern resolve and high thought’ of the ‘Washerwoman;’ and the ‘frank and childlike’ smile below the ‘eyes of that inlooking absent cast’ of the ‘Schoolmaster.’³⁰³

²⁹⁹ Stauffer, in his introduction to ‘New York Correspondent, 1856-1859’ in McCune Smith, *Works*, 142, 187.’

³⁰⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Black News-Vendor.’

³⁰¹ James McCune Smith, ‘Heads of the Colored People - No. VIII: The Whitewasher,’ *FDP*, 30 September 1853. In this essay, he also wryly observed that ‘even I, Communipaw, with my short brush and dry paint, cannot do these clumsy portraits without spattering some people, as I learn by their squealing.’

³⁰² Many of these profiles will be considered in other sections of this thesis.

³⁰³ McCune Smith, ‘Black News-Vendor;’ James McCune Smith, ‘Heads of the Colored People - No. 3: The Washerwoman,’ *FDP*, 17 June 1852; McCune Smith, ‘Schoolmaster (Continued).’

The ‘Heads’ essays’ focus on the humblest members of the African American community chagrined some, at least initially. In an editorial that appeared in *FDP* after his paper had published six of the ‘Heads’ essays, Douglass wrote: ‘Why will not my able New York correspondent [McCune Smith] bring some of the real “heads of the colored people” before our readers?’ Douglass offered leading clergymen and successful businessmen as examples.³⁰⁴ With his wonted irreverent humour, McCune Smith responded to Douglass’s rebuke – and perhaps to a glowing review of *Putnam’s Monthly* in *FDP* for ‘attack[ing] the various shams and heartless follies of fashionable life’ even as it dwelled on them – with ‘The Bourbons.’ This essay, like that in *Putnam’s* which inspired it, informed its readers that ‘We have Bourbons among us!’ The ‘Bourbons’ who McCune Smith identified and described, however, were not middle-class Wisconsinites of European and (in one case possibly) Native American extraction: ‘our Bourbons, like one of yourselves, are colored people!’ Benjamin d’Artois – who had ‘emigrat[ed] to New York’ from his native Haiti – was supposedly the illegitimate son of the future King Charles X of France and ‘a beautiful quadroon.’ Originally a jeweller, he had become an ice cream maker. ‘Ye people of Gotham!’ McCune Smith exclaimed, ‘How many sipped that cream in utter ignorance of the stupendous fact that the royal blood of France, the royal intellect of France, and what is still better, the perspiration-Royal of France was actually distilled, or exerted, in preparing it?’ Here, McCune Smith blurred the lines between the traditional reverence for heritable or perceived nobility and the nobility imparted by the sweat of honest labour.³⁰⁵ However, McCune Smith did not ignore the ‘heads’ that Douglass wanted

³⁰⁴ Frederick Douglass, ‘Letter from the Editor,’ *FDP*, 27 May 1853.

³⁰⁵ John H. Hanson, ‘Have We a Bourbon Among Us?,’ *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* 1, no. 2 (February 1853): 194–217; ‘Literary Notices: Putnam,’ *FDP*, 16 September 1853; McCune Smith,

him to write about. For example, McCune Smith paid tribute to well-known and successful African American authors and editors such as Bell, Delany, Garnet, Pennington, Wright, Douglass, and others in ‘The Editor.’³⁰⁶ He also discussed the doings of leading African Americans in the news commentary and gossip sections with which he concluded most of his ‘Heads’ essays.

McCune Smith’s development of his own style of creative and expository essay writing took place within an emerging field of experimental African American literature. Among his peers was friend and fellow alumnus of the AFS, Charles Reason. Reason may be the first of McCune Smith’s contemporaries whose work and scholarship would definitively place him in the tradition that Bell described as ‘the department of Belles Lettres.’³⁰⁷ Reason was appointed chair of the department of Belles-Lettres, French, and German and adjunct professor of mathematics at New York’s mostly white Central College. While his total written output was not as large as McCune Smith’s, Reason was a prolific writer of articles and essays for the African

‘Bourbons.’ My thanks to Sarah Meer for providing her transcript of ‘Bourbons;’ she discovered this lost ‘Heads’ essay. See Sarah Meer, *American Claimants: The Transatlantic Romance, c. 1820-1920* (OUP, 2020), 95–97 for her discussion of ‘Bourbons.’

³⁰⁶ James McCune Smith, ‘Heads of the Colored People - No. VI: The Editor,’ *FDP*, 18 February 1853. Martin R. Delany may come closest to challenging this chapter’s claim that McCune Smith was the preeminent African American polymath of the nineteenth century. As Robert Levine writes, Delany led the most ‘extraordinarily complex life.’ He was a ‘social activist and reformer, black nationalist, abolitionist, physician, reporter and editor, explorer, jurist, realtor, politician, publisher, educator, army officer, ethnographer, novelist, and political and legal theorist.’ Like McCune Smith, Delany’s first attempt to pursue a medical career was derailed on account of race; he was ejected from Harvard’s medical school on that account. Delany was also a contributor to the *Anglo-African Magazine*, for which he wrote on such diverse topics as the cosmos to the desirability and feasibility of a coordinated international black revolution (the latter in the form of a novel). See Martin R. Delany, ‘The Attraction of Planets,’ ed. Thomas Hamilton, *AAM* 1, no. 1 (January 1859): 17–20 and Levine in Martin Robison Delany, *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill/London: UNC Press, 2003), 1–20, 297, 313.

³⁰⁷ Bell, ‘Death.’ When he wrote ‘[McCune Smith] was a frequent contributor to the political and scientific periodicals – not often to the department of Belles Lettres, his mind was too practical,’ Bell appears to have underappreciated the literary qualities of such works as McCune Smith’s ‘Heads’ series and essays for the *Anglo-African* publications. See Chapter Four.

American press. His poetry was celebrated by the African American community. Reason was also a fellow proponent of African American education and self-improvement efforts.³⁰⁸ George Vashon was another prominent African American in this field. He followed Reason as a professor in Central College's departments of Belles-Lettres and Mathematics. Like Reason, Vashon was an essayist and poet.³⁰⁹ Like McCune Smith, Vashon managed to produce his impressive literary output throughout his busy life as an educator, lawyer, activist, and father of a large family. Also like McCune Smith, Vashon re-assessed the Haitian Revolutions, in his case through poetry. Joan Sherman writes that Vashon's powerful and imaginative epic poem 'Vincent Ogé' transforms the Haitian struggle for liberty into 'a metaphor for universal racial conflict and resistance to tyranny' and 'a symbol of disequilibrium, of a world in perpetual chaotic motion.'³¹⁰ Like McCune Smith, Reason and Vashon have been as widely forgotten today as they were well-known in their own time.

McCune Smith's love of words manifested itself in ways other than poetry and essay writing. He regularly patronised other expressive arts. Friend and frequent co-activist George Downing remarked on McCune Smith's affinity for opera and the 'Aristocratic Academy of Music.'³¹¹ In one of his lengthiest pieces of arts criticism, McCune Smith celebrated the expressive artistry and vocal skills of African American singer Elizabeth Greenfield, widely

³⁰⁸ William J. Simmons, 'Professor Charles L. Reason,' in *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland: George M. Rewell & Co., 1887), 1105–12; Anthony R. Mayo, 'Charles Lewis Reason,' *Negro History Bulletin; Washington* 5, no. 9 (1 June 1942): 212; Joan R. Sherman, *African-American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology* (Urbana: UI Press, 1992), 41–49.

³⁰⁹ Paul N. D. Thornell, 'The Absent Ones and the Providers: A Biography of the Vashons,' *Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 4 (1998): 284; Eric L. Haralson and John Hollander, eds., 'George Boyer Vashon (1824-1878),' in *Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century (Online)* (New York/Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1998).

³¹⁰ Sherman, *African-American Poetry*, 153–65.

³¹¹ George T. Downing, 'From Our Providence Correspondent [20 February 1856],' *FDP*, 7 March 1856.

known as the 'Black Swan.' Despite widespread racial prejudice, she had performed to large and enthusiastic audiences – including Queen Victoria – to widespread critical acclaim.³¹²

McCune Smith attended one of her concerts in March 1855 'reluctantly, it is true, for music, and spring, and the beautiful awaken memories that crown my soul with thorns.' Despite the depressed mood that preceded his going, McCune Smith was transported: 'Tropical nature vindicated in this child of the sun, in her department of Art... I cannot analyze, I can only describe the Swan and her genius.' He urged his fellow African Americans to go and hear her sing, sure that they would find the experience as liberating as he had: 'the first few utterances in her part will cover them with surprise, and joy and triumph. They will hear, in spite of the convictions they have been educated into in this caste cursed land, they will hear what supernal good may come out of their own Nazareth.' As for those local critics who failed to attend a Greenfield concert or report on her performances, McCune Smith urged them to enjoy another kind of liberating experience: 'We have no adequate criticism of Miss Greenfield, even in the liberal *Tribune*. I do not attribute this silence to prejudice: Art must precede criticism; and a new revelation of Art must be comprehended before it is chronicled in fitting terms. Mr. Fry [of the *Tribune*] must grow up to the comprehension of Miss Greenfield and then he may criticize.' McCune Smith here advised those critics that they would be well served in observing groundbreaking art like Greenfield's: such experiences would allow them to break free from preconceived notions and learn to appreciate something greater than they currently knew how.³¹³

³¹² James M. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston/New York: Lee and Shepard/Charles T. Dillingham, 1878), 66–87.

³¹³ James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [March 1855],' *FDP*, 9 March 1855.

McCune Smith's pride in his own African ancestry was most exuberantly expressed in his commentary on the contributions of people of African descent to the arts. For example, McCune Smith argued in his 1841 lecture 'The Destiny of the People of Color' (published in 1843) that African Americans had created the only original form of American music. African Americans also were, and would continue to be, leaders in oratory, poetry, and literature. This was because they had come to have, due to their struggle against slavery and oppression, 'minds imbued with a lofty perception of the truth, [and] faculties ...enlarged in the intellectual struggle for liberty....' Therefore, the collective imagination of African Americans would necessarily 'become fired with glimpses at the glorious and the true, and will weave their inspiration into song.'³¹⁴ McCune Smith also coupled his review of Greenfield's concert with praise for African French novelist Alexandre Dumas. He wrote of Dumas – as he had of local critics' failure to adequately recognize Greenfield's talent – that 'the rules of European criticism are too small for the accurate measure of his proportions.' 'Since the world began,' McCune Smith rhapsodized, 'no nobler, fuller man [or woman] has been thrown upon its stage than the negro!' – Greenfield, on the concert hall stage, and Dumas, on the stage of world literature.³¹⁵ The artistic heights they had reached were of a piece with what people of African descent had brought to the world, as McCune Smith observed in 1859's 'The German Invasion' with a mix of pride and delighted irony: 'The meed in oratory has been accorded to the negro. And in the matter of national music, I find the Literary World for the last week in October 1853, greatly fearing that our only national music will be negro music, and the next day I find the Chrysties

³¹⁴ McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 15. See also Chapter Six.

³¹⁵ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [March 1855].'

[sic], who have during five years said perpetual masses to the humanity of the black man, the Chrysties advertising 'The American opera' – composed of negro songs.'³¹⁶ In his 1860 biographical essay on his former AFS schoolmate, the actor Ira Aldridge, McCune Smith also asked, 'With Dumas, the father, first of living novelists, and Dumas the son, first of living dramatists, and Ira Aldridge, the first of living actors, who will have the hardihood to deny that the negro, in the middle of the nineteenth century, is fully entitled to the first place in the Temple of Art?'³¹⁷ Clearly, McCune Smith argued, artists of African descent had come into their own by the middle of the nineteenth century. They were destined to ascend to even greater heights in the years to come.³¹⁸

2.5 The Historian and the Biographer

Much of McCune Smith's literary work focused on individual personalities, their contributions, and their roles in the history of people of African descent. His explorations of these individuals were generally nonfiction or, as in the case of many of those featured in the 'Heads' series, semi-fictional composites of actual persons.³¹⁹ McCune Smith's contributions include scholarly explorations of historical events; contributions to others' historical, autobiographical, and other works; and biographical accounts of persons he knew.

³¹⁶ James McCune Smith, 'The German Invasion,' *AAM*, February 1859, 48; J.H., 'Music: The Julien Concerts,' *Literary World* 13, no. 351 (22 October 1853): 203–4. 'The Chrysties' refers to Christy's Opera House in New York City.

³¹⁷ James McCune Smith, 'Ira Aldridge,' *AAM*, January 1860.

³¹⁸ See also Amy M. Cools, 'James McCune Smith Predicted African American Preeminence in U.S. Art and Culture,' *Kalfou* 7, no. 1 (5 November 2020), <https://doi.org/10.15367/kf.v7i1.307>.

³¹⁹ If McCune Smith did write 'Theresa,' it would be the only known example of a work centring on fully fictional characters.

McCune Smith's first known sustained historical exploration was his 1841 'Lecture on the Haytien Revolution.' It was subsequently published as a pamphlet, with proceeds from both ticket and pamphlet sales donated entirely to the Colored Orphan Asylum.³²⁰ The Haitian Revolution – which, McCune Smith argued, was more accurately described as a series of three distinct revolutions – was a subject of intense interest in Haiti, the United States, and beyond, for people of African descent and slaveholders alike. In his study, McCune Smith sought to undermine certain popular conceptions about the Haitian Revolution such as its purportedly exceptionally violent nature or that it began with the Haitian underclasses. McCune Smith also recast the purportedly fierce Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture as a noble-souled, intellectual man of humble beginnings. In McCune Smith's assessment, Louverture had risen from slave to coachman to military officer to political leader not because of his ruthlessness or desire for power but because he was dedicated to high-minded principles and the wellbeing of his fellow citizens.³²¹

Most of McCune Smith's historical explorations, however, are contained within essays that focus on other themes such as cultural criticism, ethnology, race theory, and rebuttals to works that were either straightforwardly or tacitly pro-slavery. As he may have done in 'Genealogy,' McCune Smith looked to the past in 1841's 'Destiny' to 'enquire into the future' of African Americans. For clues, McCune Smith looked to the historical examples of the migrating

³²⁰ James McCune Smith, *A Lecture on the Haytien Revolutions; With a Sketch of the Character of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Delivered at the Stuyvesant Institute, (For the Benefit of the Colored Orphan Asylum,) February 26, 1841* (New York: COA, 1841).

³²¹ Prince Saunders and Henry Christoph, *Haytian Papers. A Collection of the Very Interesting Proclamations and Other Official Documents* (London: W. Reed, 1816), i–vi; 'The Haytien Revolution and Toussaint L'Ouverture,' *New-York Spectator*, 26 June 1841; Philip Edmondson, 'To Plead Our Own Cause: The St. Domingue Legacy and the Rise of the Black Press,' *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, no. 29 (October 2005): 121–54.

Israelites of the Old Testament; the political systems of the ancient Greeks and Romans; monarchies throughout the ancient and modern world; the Spanish Inquisition; conflicts in the British Isles; and the history of US laws and practices, both liberating and oppressive. McCune Smith believed these predicted a 'glorious' future for African Americans from 'a state of transition, the passing from slavery to liberty by our inborn efforts.'³²² In 1859's two-part essay 'The German Invasion,' McCune Smith also looked to the history of migration and invasion into the British Isles and the United States to explain how US society and culture had been formed and was continuing to evolve. The latter, he argued, had the potential to become the world's most advanced and freest civilization because of its richly varied ethnic heritage.³²³

McCune Smith also contributed to others' historical works. For example, William Nell consulted McCune Smith when writing his 1855 *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. Nell was an educator, editor, abolitionist, and author who, like McCune Smith, was noted for his early scholarly accomplishments and continued his intellectual pursuits independently throughout his life.³²⁴ Nell also headed Boston's Adelpic Union literary association, which featured McCune Smith among its distinguished African American speakers.³²⁵

³²² McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 4-15.

³²³ McCune Smith, 'German Invasion;' James McCune Smith, 'German Invasion (Continued),' *AAM*, March 1859.

³²⁴ Like McCune Smith, Nell's intellectual curiosity was wide-ranging. He studied subjects such as law, literature, and philosophy as well as history in his spare time. See Hilary J. Moss, 'Nell, William Cooper (1816-1874),' in *Encyclopedia of Emancipation and Abolition in the Transatlantic World*, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez (New York, NY: Sharp Reference, 2007), 389; Peter Wirzbicki, 'Black Transcendentalism: William Cooper Nell, the Adelpic Union, and the Black Abolitionist Intellectual Tradition,' *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 2 (2018): 271-72, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26478059>. As Wirzbicki writes, Nell qualified for an award endowed by Benjamin Franklin and given to the best-performing student in each Boston school. However, he was skipped over because of his race and given a copy of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography as a consolation prize instead.

³²⁵ Wirzbicki, 'Black Transcendentalism,' 269, 270, 273-75.

McCune Smith contributed richly to the historical record through biographical accounts of African Americans. As we have seen, some of these were literary portraits of ordinary citizens, individual and composite, featured in the 'Heads' series. As Stauffer writes, 'The small slices of life – a fraternal organization, an old pen, a manual laborer whose craft becomes art – are why McCune Smith loves biography. He is at his best a miniaturist....'³²⁶ Throughout his years of writing, McCune Smith created literary 'portraits' in which he would describe the persons and personalities of individuals who would spark his imagination and touch his heart.³²⁷ For example, in his 1849 physician's report for the Colored Orphan Asylum, McCune Smith included anecdotes of two patients who had died: 'Henry, the Bushman' and five-year-old Martha Jane Tredwell. Both were written with pathos and warmth. Henry has requested that his 'bed-mate ...should share his dying couch' which his little friend did with 'perfect willingness.' McCune Smith cited this as a 'touching instance of young friendship strong in death.' Martha survived a bout of cholera only to be killed two weeks later by advanced tuberculosis; her tenacious clinging to life 'might [have been] partially ...accounted for by her temperament; she was remarkable for a quiet, calm, and lovely disposition.'³²⁸

One of McCune Smith's most well-known contributions to biography is his introduction to Douglass's 1855 autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom*.³²⁹ McCune Smith added key insights to Douglass's account of himself from the stance of an observer, an admirer, a friend, and a fellow scholar. In one passage, McCune Smith compared Douglass to another

³²⁶ Stauffer in *Works*, 142.

³²⁷ McCune Smith regularly referred to works of this kind as 'portraits.' For example, see McCune Smith, 'The Editor;' James McCune Smith, 'A Card,' *FDP*, 1 April 1853.

³²⁸ *First Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms House, New York* (New York: George F. Nesbitt, 1850), 72–73.

³²⁹ McCune Smith, 'Introduction.'

autobiographer and author he admired, the largely self-educated geologist Hugh Miller of Scotland. He analogized Douglass's early awakening to a sense of injustice and the desire to be free to excavating the "first-found Ammonite," hidden away down in the depths of his own nature, ...which revealed to him the fact that liberty and right, for all men, were anterior to slavery and wrong' with Miller's account of his own childhood quest to elucidate the nature of right and wrong through introspection.³³⁰

McCune Smith considered Douglass a fellow intellectual as well as an activist and a moral leader. Douglass had authored the enormously successful *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) a few years after demonstrating impressive though not-yet-developed oratorical skills as a newly self-emancipated young man.³³¹ By the time he established the *North Star* in 1847, Douglass was already the preeminent African American orator of his time.³³² McCune Smith listed Douglass among those African Americans like 'Ward and Garnet, Wells Brown and Pennington, ...[and Jermain Wesley] Loguen' who, through 'genius, learning and eloquence,' had 'vault[ed] into the high places of the most advanced and painfully acquired civilization.' With his 'sacred thirst for liberty and for learning, first as a means of attaining liberty, then as an end in itself most desirable,' Douglass had cobbled together an excellent education despite never having received any formal schooling.³³³

³³⁰ McCune Smith, xviii.

³³¹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, No. 25 Cornhill, 1845), iii–v, 117.

³³² McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' xxiv–xxv; Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 67–72; Sarah Meer, 'Douglass as Orator and Editor,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass*, ed. Maurice S. Lee, Antislavery, Abolition, and the Atlantic World (Cambridge: CU Press, 2009), 47–49; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 136, 178–80, 187.

³³³ McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' xviii–xix.

For McCune Smith, however, the ultimate source of Douglass's genius was not his rigorous self-discipline in improving his mind through reading and study. Like Miller, McCune Smith wrote, Douglass had an 'uncommon memory' and common sense which, combined with keen intelligence, boundless energy, and indomitable will, enabled him to break through intellectual barriers others attempted to place around him. The US system of slavery, which sought to deny those such as Douglass an education, ended up serving as his primary school: 'his plantation education was better than any he could have required in any lettered school' since it taught him the exact value of liberty and the true power of knowledge.³³⁴ McCune Smith discussed this aspect of Douglass's life with the appreciation of a scientist: Douglass had learned these lessons not from scholarly sources but from raw data. He had observed first-hand the myriad cruelties of slavery and its ravages on all involved. Douglass's hard-won understanding and self-taught mastery of language had led him to become a great orator and to write in a style which 'equal[ed] if not surpass[ed] the style of Hugh Miller, which was the wonder of the British literary public.'³³⁵

McCune Smith's deep admiration of Douglass's accomplishments and strength of character also inspired him to 'place [*Bondage*] into the hands of the only child spared [him], bidding him to strive and emulate its noble example.'³³⁶ We can imagine that a desire to provide his children with stellar role models provided part of McCune Smith's motivation to write

³³⁴ McCune Smith, xix.

³³⁵ Frederick Douglass and James McCune Smith, *My Bondage and My Freedom... With an Introduction by Dr. James M'Cune Smith* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), xviii–xx, xxix. For more on McCune Smith the scientist, see Chapter Six.

³³⁶ McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' xxxi. James Ward Smith was then the only surviving child of those born to the Smith family; his sister Mary Maude would be born within a few months. See Chapter One.

biographical accounts of those he admired. Most works that McCune Smith authored of this kind were written after he first became a father.

McCune Smith's 'Introduction' is not, however, his first extant work of biography.³³⁷ It is 'John Murray (of Glasgow),' written for the first volume of *Autographs for Freedom*.³³⁸ McCune Smith's admiration for Murray was of long standing, and deep: 'I would do violence to truth and humanity whose servant and soldier he was, should I neglect to pen a few recollections of that most earnest and efficient man.' McCune Smith had long known Murray: early in his tenure as a college student at the University of Glasgow, McCune Smith was among the original members of the Glasgow Emancipation Society which Murray co-founded.³³⁹ Murray, born in 1787, was McCune Smith's senior by twenty-six years; Murray's influence on McCune Smith appears to be in part as a father figure. (McCune Smith would come to name one of his own sons after him.) McCune Smith admired Murray's staunch abolitionism, formed when Murray observed the brutal system of slavery in St Kitts as a young man. McCune Smith wrote that Murray's anti-slavery activism was pursued in Glasgow against much public opposition since much of the city was built with wealth generated by enslaved labour. McCune Smith was also impressed by Murray's strong work ethic, religious reformism, principled temperance (which caused him to give up a lucrative business as a 'spirit-dealer'), and harmonious family life as models for

³³⁷ McCune Smith wrote a 'memoir of Peter Williams, Jr.' perhaps not long after his death in 1840. It was quoted in William C. Nell's *Colored Patriots* and is no longer extant. See William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, With Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons* (Boston, MA: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855), 321.

³³⁸ McCune Smith, 'John Murray (of Glasgow).' *Autographs*, a collection of essays, poems, and other writings, was created by Julia Griffiths and the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society to raise funds for 'the dissemination of light and truth on the subject of slavery,' including the support of FDP. See Julia Griffiths, ed., *Autographs for Freedom*, vol. 1 (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853), vi; John R. McKivigan and Rebecca A. Pattillo, 'Autographs for Freedom and Reaching a New Abolitionist Audience,' *Journal of African American History* 102, no. 1 (1 January 2017): 35–51.

³³⁹ See Chapter Five for more about the Glasgow Emancipation Society.

virtuous living. McCune Smith described his biographical tribute to Murray as a ‘pebble upon his cairn’ and declared that Murray had, in his humble and ‘faithful’ way, ‘done [much more] for the cause of human progress’ than the ‘nation-wept sage of Ashland’ Henry Clay ever had.³⁴⁰

In 1859, McCune Smith wrote an obituary for Thomas Jennings, another leading light of the antislavery community. McCune Smith presented Jennings as an exemplary African American and patriot who struggled against injustice and prejudice as ‘an upright man, a useful citizen, and a devoted Christian.’ Yet, McCune Smith argued, Jennings was not only notable for his many accomplishments and virtues. He was just one among ‘that large class of earnest upright colored men who dwell in our large cities. Jennings was not an exception, but a representative of this class whose noble sacrifices, and unheralded labors are too little known to the public.’³⁴¹ McCune Smith, in his introduction to *Bondage*, had described Douglass in similar terms: ‘He is a Representative American man – a type of his countrymen.’³⁴² Throughout his years of writing, McCune Smith sought to disprove negative popular stereotypes and characterizations of people of African descent. Sometimes he did this in his medical, statistical, and scientific writing (as we shall see in Chapters Three and Six). In his biographical works, McCune Smith presented such ‘representative’ figures as Douglass, subjects of his ‘Heads’ series, and Jennings as exemplars of African American virtue and ability. With his obituary for the latter, McCune Smith wrote, he ‘proudly cast [his] mite upon the cairn of Thomas L. Jennings’ just as he had done with his biographical portrait of Murray.³⁴³ Yet McCune Smith’s

³⁴⁰ McCune Smith, ‘John Murray,’ 62–67.

³⁴¹ McCune Smith, ‘Jennings.’

³⁴² Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, xxv. ‘Representative Men’ was the topic of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1850 book of the same name. McCune Smith frequently cited Emerson and his ideas in his writings.

³⁴³ McCune Smith, ‘Jennings;’ McCune Smith, ‘John Murray,’ 67.

account of these men proved to be far more than ‘mites:’ both may have become largely lost to history if it were not for McCune Smith’s biographical accounts of them. As Patricia Carter Sluby writes, ‘Jennings’s obituary... gave the first clue to his impressive accomplishment’ of being ‘the first known African American to receive a U.S. letters patent.’³⁴⁴ All other recent accounts of Jennings appear to trace back to McCune Smith’s obituary or to Sluby’s work inspired by it. Murray appears virtually nowhere else in the historical record besides the records of the Glasgow Emancipation Society and McCune Smith’s account.

In 1860, McCune Smith wrote another biographical portrait, this one for *The Anglo-African Magazine’s* January issue. It was of Ira Aldridge, a former schoolmate from the AFS who had since become a ‘histrionic artist of the highest rank’ in Europe.³⁴⁵ McCune Smith’s ‘Ira Aldridge’ came to serve as a foundational text for later scholarship on Aldridge’s life and significance.³⁴⁶ McCune Smith intended his historical portrait of Aldridge to present a ‘splendid example, worthy the emulation of all our colored youth:’ Aldridge had worked so assiduously to improve his skills that within a quarter century he had gone from a struggling obscure actor receiving mixed reviews to being ‘pronounced the first of living tragedians’ in a European newspaper.³⁴⁷ McCune Smith also intended his account of Aldridge to serve as a corrective to

³⁴⁴ Patricia Carter Sluby, *The Inventive Spirit of African Americans: Patented Ingenuity* (Westport/London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 15–17, 239. Sluby attributes Jennings’s obituary to Douglass. However, research for this thesis revealed that McCune Smith wrote it while he was serving as editor *pro tem* of *FDP*; see Chapter Four. Textual clues also reveal McCune Smith to be the author.

³⁴⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Ira Aldridge;’ McCune Smith, ‘Sketch,’ 22. McCune Smith used ‘histrionic’ in its original sense: to denote something having to do with acting.

³⁴⁶ Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Ira Aldridge: The African Roscius* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 53; Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian* (London: The Camelot Press, 1958), 11.

³⁴⁷ McCune Smith, ‘Ira Aldridge,’ 31. McCune Smith pointed his readers to an article from the previous year which excerpted glowing reviews of Aldridge’s performances in European newspapers. See ‘Ira Aldridge, the Colored Tragedian,’ *AAM*, February 1859.

the historical record. In a footnote, McCune Smith identified and sought to correct six mistakes in the *New American Encyclopedia's* entry on Aldridge. He wrote that its author 'evidently confound[ed]' Aldridge with James Hewlett, another pioneering African American actor.³⁴⁸

McCune Smith's last work of biography is his longest. Authored in the last year of his life, 1865's 'Sketch of the Life and Labors of Rev. Henry Highland Garnet' was written as an introduction to Garnet's *Memorial Discourse* 'delivered in the hall of the House of Representatives [on] February 12, 1865.'³⁴⁹ With his discourse, Garnet became the first African American to speak in the halls of Congress.³⁵⁰ In his deeply personal tribute to Garnet, McCune Smith described how his former schoolmate, long-time friend, and sometimes ideological foe had risen from humble roots as a fugitive from slavery to a leading clergyman, antislavery activist, and intellectual. McCune Smith's 'Sketch' reveals that especially in the latter, they were kindred spirits. Like McCune Smith, Garnet was an avid scholar who loved the classics and considered their study essential. McCune Smith and Garnet had waged many battles of words throughout their years as co-activists and frequent contributors to the African American press. In 'Sketch,' McCune Smith portrayed Garnet as a dedicated, pure-minded, self-sacrificing leader of the African American community: '[Garnet] took the lead, to be sure... in all the labors of his life, he was utterly unselfish.... He has devoted his life to the service of his people, and his hands

³⁴⁸ McCune Smith, 'Ira Aldridge,' 28–29. Like the encyclopaedia author, however, McCune Smith misstated Aldridge's date of birth: Aldridge was born on 24 July 1807, not in 1808 as McCune Smith wrote. See Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge*, 2011, 4.

³⁴⁹ Henry Highland Garnet and James McCune Smith, *A Memorial Discourse; by Henry Highland Garnet, Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, Washington City, D.C. on Sabbath, February 12, 1865. With an Introduction, by James McCune Smith, M.D* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1865), title page.

³⁵⁰ Office of the Historian, 'The First African American to Speak in the House Chamber,' US Government website, US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives, <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1851-1900/The-first-African-American-to-speak-in-the-House-Chamber/>.

are clean.³⁵¹ McCune Smith's biographical portrait of Garnet also serves as a corrective to the historical record: if he had not written such a warm and personal tribute, McCune Smith's and Garnet's years of public disagreements and press fights may have obscured the friendship and mutual admiration that persisted despite them.

Conclusion

McCune Smith's restless intellect and searching curiosity led him to read widely and deeply on a wide array of subjects, from the classics, to statistics, to climatology, to ethnology, to history, to medicine, and much more. McCune Smith wrote widely and deeply as well: as a medical professional, a scientist, a classicist, a radical abolitionist, an experimental essayist, a community leader, a political theorist, a public intellectual, a practical philosopher, and perhaps most often, as a social critic. He was by turns technical, provocative, sentimental, sarcastic, witty, inspirational, quirky, arcane, and urbane. As Peterson argues, McCune Smith 'evinced an amazing ability to manipulate different kinds of discourses, ranging from religious pathos to historical example to statistical analysis.'³⁵² Stauffer has rightly described McCune Smith as 'one of the underappreciated literary lights of the 19th century.'³⁵³

McCune Smith's African American contemporaries also celebrated him as the preeminent African American intellectual of his time. In his profile of McCune Smith in *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1853), Wells Brown summarized

³⁵¹ McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 56. Episodes from McCune Smith's and Garnet's lifetime of cooperation and disagreements will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

³⁵² Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 130.

³⁵³ Bryan Greene, 'America's First Black Physician Sought to Heal a Nation's Persistent Illness,' *Smithsonian Magazine*, 26 February 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/james-mccune-smith-america-first-black-physician-180977110/>. The author of this thesis is cited in this article.

this view: 'History, antiquity, bibliography, translation, criticism, political economy, statistics, – almost every department of knowledge, – receive emblazon [sic] from his able, ready, versatile, and unwearied pen... [His writings] are the result of choice study, of nice observation, of fine feeling, of exquisite fancy, of consummate art, and the graceful tact of the scholar.'³⁵⁴ Douglass agreed with Wells Brown's assessment of McCune Smith's achievements and ability and further recognized the uniqueness and significance of the intellectual legacy he was building. As Douglass wrote for *FDP*,

Among the colored men of note in this country, distinguished for their talents and learning, and for their known devotion to the cause of their oppressed people, there is not one who has risen to his position so noiselessly and steadily, and so entirely without rivals, as Dr. McCune Smith. ...He has demonstrated the possibility of education for colored men, and has, by the force of his genius, thrown back the bolts of those iron gates which excluded the man of color in this country from the learned professions. ...*It was as a scholar that we needed a James McCune Smith...*³⁵⁵ (emphasis added)

As Douglass recognized, McCune Smith had come to personify, as no other had done in like scope or to a like degree, the intellectual mastery of the African American polymath.

³⁵⁴ William Wells Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (Boston: James Redpath, 1863), 205–6.

³⁵⁵ Frederick Douglass, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' *FDP*, 3 June 1853.

Chapter Three – James McCune Smith, M.D.

Introduction

‘Fifty years ago... it was a rash thing for a colored man in this country to think of becoming a doctor and engaging in the practice of medicine. There was a man in those days who determined to try the experiment. He succeeded beyond his expectations. He gained position and distinction and died in affluent circumstances. That man was Dr. J. McCune Smith.’

~ Philip A. White as quoted in ‘Colored Men as Physicians’

Nemaha County Republican, 1885

That James McCune Smith was the first known African American physician in the United States to practice with a medical degree is arguably the most widely known fact about him. The second is that he was forced to earn that degree abroad after New York colleges denied his applications on account of race.³⁵⁶ McCune Smith’s breaking these racial barriers is certainly a key feature of his historical significance. Yet, as this chapter argues, the significance of McCune Smith’s pioneering medical career may lie even more in the *kind* of practice he established. It was a holistic one: one that served the needs and interests of his fellow New Yorkers – especially African Americans – in myriad ways beyond those concerned with physical health.

McCune Smith’s medical expertise was consulted not only by his multiracial patients but by the managers of the Colored Orphan Asylum, where he served for over two decades as physician. Beginning with his first clinical experience in a Glasgow hospital, McCune Smith also

³⁵⁶ ‘Colored Men,’ Morgan, ‘Education and Medical Practice,’ 603.

combined his powers of observation, scientific outlook, and statistical training within his medical authorship, advocating for patients, challenging medical opinions of senior physicians, and combatting racist medical theories. McCune Smith's pharmacy – through which he first established his medical practice – also promoted events featuring African Americans and their friends and allies. It housed a library and meeting place for African American activists and community leaders. It was a place to turn to for African Americans confronting discrimination on transportation and elsewhere. It was a site of help for African Americans fleeing slavery. It was all this, and much more.

Throughout his years as a community leader and activist, McCune Smith also gained a reputation for argumentativeness, especially among fellow abolitionists who criticized him for alienating key political and ideological allies over finer points of disagreement. McCune Smith's willingness to challenge ideas from within his chosen communities – especially those which he believed undermined the larger cause to improve the wellbeing of African Americans – is best known through his debates with Oliver Johnson, William Lloyd Garrison, and Charles Remond over the paternalism of many white abolitionists; Horace Greeley and Henry Highland Garnet over colonization and other expatriation movements; and William Watkins over the propriety of supporting the Republican party.³⁵⁷ This chapter will present newly discovered sources which reveal that McCune Smith first demonstrated his willingness to challenge his peers on behalf of marginalized groups when he was a young intern at a Glasgow hospital. This chapter also argues that a debate McCune Smith initiated in a London journal over the efficacy and cruelty

³⁵⁷ See Chapters Four and Five.

of a medical treatment first displayed the instincts that would become a guiding principle of his life: to serve as an uncompromising advocate for the overall health and wellbeing of those he could best serve.

3.1 Medical Student and Early Career

McCune Smith applied to New York colleges to pursue his higher education with the help of his mentor and pastor Peter Williams, Jr. These applications, which included one to Columbia College – later Columbia University – were rejected on account of McCune Smith's race.³⁵⁸

While no source has been found which includes an official policy for Columbia's barring non-white students, an 1808 commencement address for its College of Physicians and Surgeons (CPS) by Nicholas Romaine – Columbia's president and fellow of the CPS – makes it clear that the college was founded by and for white Europeans and their descendants.³⁵⁹ Philip White, McCune Smith's apprentice and protégé, later recalled that several African Americans had sought and failed to enter the mainstream medical profession in New York and elsewhere 'before [McCune Smith's] time.' For example, as White recalled, 'Charley Cognac and Dr. John Brown tried to obtain degrees, and went through a hard course of study [yet] were told they could not get diplomas in America.'³⁶⁰ Charles Ray wrote that John Augustine Smith, as president of CPS in 1831, would not allow Brown or any other 'colored man' to receive a

³⁵⁸ Since the application for McCune Smith's entry into Columbia included his friend Isaiah DeGrasse, DeGrasse was likely rejected for the same reason. See Chapters One and Two.

³⁵⁹ Nicholas Romaine, *An Address, Delivered at the Commencement of the Lectures in the College of Physicians and Surgeons in the City of New-York* (New York: Columbia University, College of Physicians and Surgeons, 1808), 4, 23–24.

³⁶⁰ 'Colored Men.' Since they could not raise the funds to pursue degrees in Europe, White recalled, Cognac opened a pharmacy – which proved to be successful – and Brown practiced medicine without a degree.

diploma from the College unless they signed a pledge 'that he would not avail himself of its benefits in any place but Liberia.' Brown refused.³⁶¹

When applications to New York colleges failed, Williams and McCune Smith turned their attention overseas. The literature on McCune Smith agrees that he pursued a medical degree at the University of Glasgow and that Williams helped him apply or applied for him. While the literature generally suggests that McCune Smith set out for Glasgow to pursue a medical degree, two primary sources suggest that McCune Smith may have settled on studying medicine only after he left for Glasgow. In his 1834 address 'To the Citizens of New York,' Williams stated that as he 'felt it was my duty to strive to rear up some well qualified ministers[,] I selected two lads of great promise, and made every effort to get them a collegiate education.'³⁶² In his 1865 obituary for McCune Smith, Bell indicated that these two 'lads' were McCune Smith and Isaiah DeGrasse. Bell also recalled (using the editorial 'we'):

When [McCune Smith] first went to Europe, Parson Williams wished him to study for the ministry, and we believed we were instrumental in directing his mind to the study of medicine; our frequent correspondence while he was abroad, added to our conversations on that subject before he went away, convinced him that the ministry was not his appropriate sphere. If we had that influence with him, we have the consolation of knowing we spoiled what would have made a poor preacher and turned it into an excellent physician.³⁶³

McCune Smith's conversations and correspondence with Bell on the matter may have been based at least in part on McCune Smith's already developing interest in medicine. Carla Peterson suggests that McCune Smith may have been inspired to pursue his medical career by

³⁶¹ Charles B. Ray, 'Eulogy on the Life and Character of Dr. John Brown,' CA, 28 March 1840.

³⁶² Williams, Jr., 'Rev. Mr. Williams, to the Citizens of New-York.'

³⁶³ Bell, 'Death.' See Chapters One and Two for more about DeGrasse.

the cholera epidemic that raged through New York City (NYC) that summer as well as a dramatic scene he witnessed on his voyage to Glasgow of a man stricken with Asiatic cholera, which deeply affected him.³⁶⁴

While McCune Smith's contemporaries and later scholarship rightly emphasize the injustice of his being turned away from New York institutions of higher learning, this may have been a blessing in a very ugly disguise. Many US medical schools offered a relatively sparse education and little if any clinical experience. Standards were often low and tests of poor quality; many medical students, especially in the smaller and more rural schools, successfully graduated even if nearly illiterate. This was likely due to medicine still being widely considered a practical, hands-on art rather than a scientific, evidenced-based discipline. For this reason, many American students opted to go abroad for their medical degrees and clinical experience. When McCune Smith attended medical school in the 1830's, Paris and the British Isles offered the best and most thorough of both.³⁶⁵

McCune Smith commenced his undergraduate studies at the University of Glasgow in the autumn of 1832. His medical education overlapped with his liberal arts studies beginning in his second year: McCune Smith was enrolled in James Jeffray Sr's anatomy class in 1833-34.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 115; James McCune Smith, 'Dr. Smith's Journal [16-19 August 1832],' *CA*, 11 November 1837.

³⁶⁵ James Bordley and Abner McGehee Harvey, *Two Centuries of American Medicine, 1776-1976* (Philadelphia/London/Toronto: W.B. Saunders Company, 1976), 5-6, 38; Hermes C. Grillo, 'To Impart This Art: The Development of Graduate Surgical Education in the United States,' *Surgery* 125, no. 1 (1 January 1999): 5; Russell M. Jones, 'American Doctors and the Parisian Medical World, 1830-1840,' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 47, no. 1 (1973): 49-51.

³⁶⁶ UoG, *University Register: Professor Jeffray's Students 1811-12 to 1847-48* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1848), 150; Alexander Duncan, *Memorials of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, 1599-1850* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1896), 173, 265, 287.

After receiving his bachelor's degree in 1835, McCune Smith enrolled in the medical school that autumn. His medical education that year also overlapped with his studies for his master's degree, which he was awarded in 1836.³⁶⁷ McCune Smith became a full-time medical student that autumn.³⁶⁸ According to a report by Lord Provost James Spittal, the 'Curriculum for the University Degree of M.D. in Glasgow' in 1837 was '1. Anatomy. 2. Chemistry. 3. Institutes of Medicine. 4. Surgery. 5. Practice of Medicine. 6. Materia Medica. 7. Midwifery. 8. Botany. 9. Attendance at an Infirmary for 12 Months.'³⁶⁹

McCune Smith included the names of two of his instructors in these disciplines in a speech he delivered at a welcome-home celebration in his honour: '[U]nder the Thomsins [sic], the Cummins, the Sandfords of the University of Glasgow, I enjoyed opportunities of improvement as ample as are afforded in any British Institution and far more ample than can be yielded by any Institution in America.' These were Thomas Thomson, M.D., chemistry professor and author and editor of encyclopaedias, books, and journals of history, philosophy, and other subjects; and William Cummin (or 'Cumin'), M.D., professor of midwifery and surgeon to the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Lock Hospital, and the Royal Asylum for Lunatics. (Sir Daniel Keyte Sandford was a prominent professor of Greek.)³⁷⁰ After a well-rounded education in the

³⁶⁷ *Nomina Magistrorum*, 181; UoG, *University Prizes*, 26; UoG, *University Register: Medicine*, 84.

³⁶⁸ *Register of Attested Students of Medicine, 1766-1843* (Glasgow, 1766), 138, 144, 146.

³⁶⁹ James Spittal, 'Chair of Pathology (Memorial of the Town Council of Edinburgh),' *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 August 1837.

³⁷⁰ James McCune Smith, 'Address of James McCune Smith at a Welcome Reception in His Honor, 26 September 1837,' *CA*, 28 October 1837; Duncan, *Memorials*, 173, 275, 279; Sir Daniel Keyte Sandford, Thomas Thomson, and Allan Cunningham, *The Popular Encyclopedia, Being a General Dictionary of Sciences, Literature, Biography, History, and Political Economy*, vol. 7, Part 2 (Glasgow: The Popular Encyclopedia, 1837), 791–92.

humanities, science, and medicine, McCune Smith received his medical degree on 27 April 1837.³⁷¹

In addition to his appointment as clerk to the Lock Hospital and testimonies of friends and admirers (discussed below), McCune Smith's high performance at medical school is further indicated by his association with the Glasgow Medical Society (GMS).³⁷² It was founded in 1814 and mostly composed of physicians and lecturers. (An early proposed name, the 'Glasgow Medical and Surgical Society' was rejected as 'objectionable' to some members: there was ongoing debate as to 'whether surgery was technically included in medicine.') The GMS was exclusive and the duties of membership were rigorous: until 1844 all members were required to present 'papers in rotation [and participate in] periodical discussions on prevalent diseases.' Members who did not fulfil these requirements or attend all meetings had to pay fines, though the latter were occasionally waived for physicians who gave evening lectures or suffered ill health.³⁷³ While research in the GMS' minute book indicates that McCune Smith was not among its core members – only professors and other well-established medical practitioners appear in its pages – the GMS invited McCune Smith to present a paper to them, as we shall see.³⁷⁴

During his last year of medical school, McCune Smith satisfied his medical degree requirement of a year's clinical experience at Glasgow hospitals. One of his internships was

³⁷¹ *Nomina Medicinæ Doctorum Universitatis Glasguensis AB Anno 1769-1888* (Glasgow: UoG, 1769), 68–69. See Chapter Three for more on McCune Smith's education at the University of Glasgow.

³⁷² 'Farewell Dinner to Dr. James M'Cune Smith, A.M. (From the Glasgow Chronicle of June 21st),' *CA*, 9 September 1837.

³⁷³ Duncan, *Memorials of the Faculty*, 187–89.

³⁷⁴ See 'Minute Book of the Glasgow Medical Society, 1814-51,' Glasgow, 1851, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow Archives. An advertisement for a lecture McCune Smith delivered in NYC in 1837 names him as one-time vice president of the GMS but this appears to be incorrect. Research into whether there was a students' affiliate society is ongoing. See 'Anti Phrenology,' *CA*, 14 October 1837.

probably at the Royal Infirmary, one of the two major hospitals associated with the University.³⁷⁵ Multiple sources confirm that the other was at the Lock Hospital.³⁷⁶ McCune Smith must have excelled in his studies in obstetrics under Cummin: clerkships at Lock were reserved for his top students.³⁷⁷ Lock was a charity hospital which treated women and girls suffering from venereal disease. It was established in 1805 for patients who were poor or otherwise considered outside respectable society.³⁷⁸ Sometime before he returned to NYC in late summer 1837, McCune Smith also sought additional clinical experience at a Paris hospital, adding to the prestige of his medical training.³⁷⁹ When Williams visited his protégé while he was in Europe, he accompanied McCune Smith to Paris in the summer of 1836. As Bell recalled, ‘His guardian, Rev. Peter Williams, being in Europe at the time, they visited London and Paris; in the latter city he attended a course of lectures delivered we believe by the celebrated [Alfred-Armand-Louis-Marie] Valpeau [sic]. This was during the vacation at Glasgow, and on his return he received his

³⁷⁵ ‘Farewell Dinner to Dr. James M’Cune Smith, A.M. (From the Glasgow Chronicle of June 21st);’ Moses Steven Buchanan, *History of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, From Its Commencement in 1787, to the Present Time* (Glasgow: James Lumsden and Son, 1832), 3, 17–20, 31; Duncan, *Memorials*, 137, 146, 148, 171.

³⁷⁶ James McCune Smith, ‘Solid Silver Nitrate of Silver in Gonorrhoea,’ in *London Medical Gazette*, vol. 20 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1837), 310; ‘“The Nuisances,”’ *Liberator*, 26 May 1837; James McCune Smith, ‘On the Influence of Opium Upon the Catamenial Functions,’ *New York Journal of Medicine and Collateral Sciences* 2, no. 1 (January 1844): 56.

³⁷⁷ John Barras Hay, *Inaugural Addresses by Lords Rectors of the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow: David Robertson, 1839), 61.

³⁷⁸ Alexander Patterson, *Statistics of Glasgow Lock Hospital Since Its Foundation in 1805* (Glasgow: Alexander Macdougall, 1882), 2, 8; C.F.P., ‘The Lock Hospital,’ *Glasgow Medical Journal* 30, no. 1 (1888): 48–49; *Report of the Managers of the Glasgow Lock Hospital, for 1810* (Glasgow: Glasgow Lock Hospital, 1811), 5–7.

³⁷⁹ Furman, ‘Obituary,’ 202; Jones, ‘American Doctors,’ 40–41, 45, 49–51; Bordley and Harvey, *Two Centuries of American Medicine, 1776-1976*, 6.

degree.³⁸⁰ Before McCune Smith returned to NYC, his ‘friends and fellow students’ hosted a farewell dinner in his honour at Glasgow’s Tontine Hotel.³⁸¹

3.2 Earliest Medical Authorship

It was during his clerkship at the Lock Hospital that McCune Smith first appears in the pages of a medical journal.³⁸² In his 17 May 1837 letter to the editor of *The London Medical Gazette* ‘Solid Nitrate of Silver in Gonorrhœa – To the Editor of the Medical Gazette’ McCune Smith wrote of a paper he had delivered to the GMS on 1 April: ‘The materials of my paper on the subject of the gonorrhœa of women were collected whilst I held the office of Clerk to the Glasgow Lock Hospital. As the attack on this essay has appeared in the pages of the MEDICAL GAZETTE, I trust you will not deny me the opportunity of defending myself through the same medium.’³⁸³

In the paper, McCune Smith described the suffering of women who had undergone a silver nitrate treatment for gonorrhoea under Alexander Hannay, a member of the GMS and surgeon to the Royal Infirmary who also periodically presided at Lock. McCune Smith remarked ‘that the Lock Hospital is always full whilst Dr. Cumin has charge of it, but, on the other hand, does not average four-fifths whilst under the charge of Dr. Hannay,’ suggesting either that

³⁸⁰ Williams, Jr to Schroeder, 30 July 1836; Bell, ‘Death.’ Alfred-Armand-Louis-Marie Velpeau was a well-known French surgeon who worked and delivered lectures at the teaching hospitals Hôpital de la Pitié and Hôpital de la Charité in the 1830’s. See F. Campbell Stewart, *Eminent French Surgeons, with a Historical and Statistical Account of the Hospitals of Paris* (Buffalo: A. Burke, 1843), 47, 409–12. Stewart wrote that Velpeau’s ‘clear and distinct enunciation renders him more easily understood by foreigners than most of the other surgeons. Hence his hospital is a favourite resort of American and English students.’ It is possible that McCune Smith gained his clinical experience in Paris at one of the hospitals at which Velpeau lectured. See below for McCune Smith on Velpeau.

³⁸¹ ‘Farewell Dinner.’

³⁸² Leslie Falk had identified McCune Smith’s 1848 ‘Lay Puffery of Homeopathy’ – discussed below – as ‘the first “Letter to the Editor” of a medical journal by a black doctor.’ See Leslie A. Falk, ‘Black Abolitionist Doctors and Healers, 1810-1885,’ *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 54, no. 2 (1980): 260.

³⁸³ McCune Smith, ‘Solid Nitrate.’

women were discharged prematurely after Hannay administered the treatment or that some avoided the hospital when Hannay was in charge.³⁸⁴ Hannay had vigorously promoted and defended the treatment in the pages of the *Gazette*. In response, McCune Smith argued that the treatment was both ineffective and painful. These taken together – let alone the risk of horrific side effects occasionally caused by the treatment – made its application doubly cruel. Defenders of Hannay and his treatment savaged the letter. One accused McCune Smith of inciting fear in his patients by describing how they would suffer if they submitted to the treatment. McCune Smith pursued the debate no less forcefully, citing statistics drawn from figures and case studies that Hannay and others had published in the *Gazette*. When the *Gazette* finally refused to publish any more letters continuing the debate unless the authors paid the additional cost of doing so, McCune Smith did just that.³⁸⁵

While McCune Smith may have originally decided to write the first *Gazette* letter to satisfy the GMS's requirement to participate in 'periodical discussions on prevalent diseases,' the passion with which he publicly – and perhaps disadvantageously to himself given that the GMS included distinguished faculty at the University – advocated for his patients demonstrates

³⁸⁴ Duncan, *Memorials of the Faculty*, 281.

³⁸⁵ Alexander John Hannay, 'On the Application of Solid Nitras Argenti in the Gonorrhœa of Women,' in *London Medical Gazette*, vol. 20 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1837), 185–91; Joseph Bell, 'Solid Nitras Argenti in Gonorrhœa,' in *London Medical Gazette*, vol. 20 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1837), 473–75; Editors, 'Notice: The Letter of Dr M'Cune Smith...', in *London Medical Gazette*, vol. 20 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1837), 640; James McCune Smith, 'Solid Nitrate of Silver in Gonorrhœa – To the Editor of the Medical Gazette (Part 2),' in *London Medical Gazette*, vol. 20 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1837), 2; Henry Somerset Taylor, 'Solid Nitrate of Silver in Gonorrhœa in Females,' in *London Medical Gazette: New Series*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1838), 63; James Cross, 'Nitrate of Silver in the Gonorrhœa of Females,' in *London Medical Gazette: New Series*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1838), 99–100. The *Gazette Médicale de Paris* also discussed this controversy, see 'Du Traitement de la Gonorrhée Crez la Femme, a l'Aide du Nitrate d'Argent Solide, par M.M. Hannay, Bell, Thomson, Summers, Pelethorpe et Smith,' *Gazette Médicale de Paris* 5 (1837): 455–56.

his instinct to defend the most vulnerable. The women and girls treated at the Lock Hospital certainly fell into this category. This instinct, no doubt instilled and heightened by his experiences as a member of a marginalized group in his native country, is evident throughout the work and writings of McCune Smith which this thesis explores.

Almost immediately after returning to NYC to practice medicine, McCune Smith demonstrated his commitment to increasing public understanding of health, medicine, and science by embarking on several series of lectures on these subjects. (These will be explored below). Once McCune Smith became a regular contributor and sometimes editor to the African American press, his public engagement as a physician was mostly confined to published articles and essays.³⁸⁶ As co-editor of *The Colored American (CA)* in the first half of 1839, McCune Smith authored several editorials – unattributed, as all *CA*'s editorials were – on health and medicine. The most well-known of these are two editorials written in response to the annual report on the health and mortality of the children at the Colored Orphan Asylum written by its attending physician James Macdonald.³⁸⁷ 'Items of City Mortality' first subjected *CA*'s regular publication of mortality rates from NYC authorities to statistical analysis and accompanied them with medical opinions.³⁸⁸ He also wrote on the holistic health benefits of the 'Oriental System of Bathing.'³⁸⁹ In another editorial, McCune Smith advised 'the Ladies' to heed author Eliza Ware Farrar's advice not to shrink from being forthright with their physicians or submitting to necessary examinations out of fear of 'indelicacy.' After all, he wrote, he had 'known many a

³⁸⁶ See Chapter Four for McCune Smith's history with the African American press.

³⁸⁷ These are discussed in the fifth section of this chapter and again in Chapter Five.

³⁸⁸ James McCune Smith, 'Items of City Mortality,' *CA*, 16 February 1839.

³⁸⁹ James McCune Smith, 'Oriental System of Bathing,' *CA*, 16 March 1839.

sickness greatly prolonged, and several fine constitutions irretrievably injured, by a want of the moral courage which is... so beautifully delineated' in Farrar's book.³⁹⁰ McCune Smith also likely selected the medical content published in *CA* that was written by others.³⁹¹

McCune Smith continued to demonstrate his commitment to public engagement on health and medicine while serving as editor *pro tem* of *Frederick Douglass' Paper (FDP)* in 1859. One of his editorials included brief news items on medical matters such as an innovative treatment which supplied oxygen to croup patients; treatments for sprains and corns; a home remedy for neuralgia; and evidence of poisons in tobacco. McCune Smith also included a warning about the dangers of a popular method for weight loss followed by an injunction (anticipating the body-positivity movement of our time): 'Therefore, young ladies, be boldly fat! Never pine for graceful slimness or romantic pallor; but if nature means you to be ruddy and round, accept it with a laughing grace which will captivate more hearts than all the paleness of a circulating library.'³⁹² Perhaps inspired by his experiences as a medical student in Paris, McCune Smith also wrote of 'Professor [Alfred-Armand-Louis-Marie] Velpeau, Chief Surgeon of the Charity Hospital in Paris' who placed a 'mulatto' doctor named Wries, 'well known as "the Black Doctor"', in charge of a ward there. Wries was famous for curing many well-known people of seemingly incurable 'cancerous abscesses' with natural remedies 'brought from

³⁹⁰ James McCune Smith, 'To the Ladies,' *CA*, 16 March 1839; Eliza Ware Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friend; a Manual of Practical Advice and Instruction to Young Females* (London: John W. Parker, 1837), 52–53.

³⁹¹ For example, see 'Successful Operation for a New Nose (From the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal),' *CA*, 19 January 1839; 'Influence of Marriage on Health and Life (From the Library of Health),' *CA*, 19 January 1839; 'Rheumatism (By a Correspondent of the Pittsburgh Advocate),' *CA*, 16 February 1839.

³⁹² James McCune Smith, 'Miscellaneous: Health, Diseases, Remedies...,' *FDP*, 4 March 1859.

Dutch East Indies.’ McCune Smith called him the ‘mulatto Esculapius’ and wrote that he received ‘fees of fabulous amount.’³⁹³

With the exceptions explored above, McCune Smith’s medical authorship was mostly confined to medical and professional journals in the years following his medical lecture period of the late 1830’s – early 1840’s; these writings are explored below. Otherwise, McCune Smith regularly incorporated medical discoveries and reasoning in his writings on abolitionism and civil rights, explored later in this chapter and in others; he focused especially on combatting racist medical theories. McCune Smith’s public engagement as a physician, from public lectures to editorials to journal articles, continued the practice that he had begun as a clerk at the Lock Hospital: using his medical training to promote public health and to combat negative stereotypes of African Americans and other underserved people, expanding his circle of care from the physical body to the body politic.

3.3 Medical Practice and Consultation

When McCune Smith established his medical practice in NYC, there were few other non-white health care providers there. As we have seen, White identified one of these as Dr John Brown. McCune Smith and Brown were colleagues and friends until the latter’s death in 1840.³⁹⁴ At least one non-white woman also practiced medicine in NYC in that era. In 1827, *Freedom’s Journal (FJ)* published an advertisement for Sarah Green, an ‘Indian Doctress’ who offered cures for many common ailments, including a remedy for ‘the bite of a mad dog.’³⁹⁵ *FJ* published

³⁹³ McCune Smith, ‘The “Black Doctor.”’

³⁹⁴ Samuel E. Cornish, ‘Philomathean Society,’ *CA*, 4 November 1837; ‘Eulogy,’ *CA*, 14 March 1840.

³⁹⁵ ‘Diseases Cured,’ *FJ*, 1 June 1827. ‘Indian’ probably refers to a person of West Indian origins, see Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 73.

another ad in 1827 for John Sickels, Jr., who offered ‘Medical advice... gratis’ at his pharmacy, at which ‘particular and personal attention [was] given to Physician's prescriptions.’³⁹⁶ A similar establishment was operated at 365 Broadway by Josiah and John Hopper the year McCune Smith established his practice.³⁹⁷ NYC’s African American newspapers regularly advertised the services of other medical practitioners during that era; they were likely all or mostly of African or other non-white descent since part of the papers’ mission was to help ‘colored’ people succeed in professions largely closed to them on account of race.³⁹⁸ Literature on medical practitioners of African and non-white descent prior to the Civil War has only been able to roughly estimate their numbers since they were routinely excluded or ignored by the white mainstream medical profession and its registers and publications. It is certain that there were very few. Perhaps surprisingly, there were many more in the South than in the North. The literature on the history of African Americans in medicine agrees that McCune Smith is the first known African American physician to practice with a medical degree and that it was ten more years before an African American, David Peck, graduated from a US medical school. Besides Brown, three other notable African American physicians among McCune Smith’s close connections – brother-in-law James Parker Barnett and fellow abolitionists John Rock and Martin Delany – were also among the founding generation of those who persevered in their careers despite discrimination in the mainstream medical profession.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ ‘Drugs and Medicines: John Sickels, Jr.,’ *FJ*, 20 April 1827.

³⁹⁷ ‘Drugs and Medicines: Josiah and John Hopper,’ *CA*, 6 May 1837.

³⁹⁸ ‘Dr. Thorp, No. 16 Collect Street, Indian Physician and Botanist,’ *FJ*, 20 July 1827; John T. Raymond, ‘Letter to the Editor Re: J.B. Helms, M.D.,’ *CA*, 2 November 1839.

³⁹⁹ ‘Denial of a Diploma to a Colored Student,’ *Buffalo Morning Express and Illustrated Buffalo Express*, 2 May 1853; James P Barnett, College of Physicians and Surgeons in the City of New York, and New York (State) Supreme Court, *The People, &c. Ex Rel., Barnett vs. the Trustees of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, &c.* (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1851); Dartmouth College, *Catalogue Senatus Academici et Eorum Qui Munera et Officia Academica*

Racial prejudice against African American medical practitioners was also revealed in the extent to which they were compelled to court white patients in the face of it. In 1885, McCune Smith's protégé White noted that there were still only eight African American physicians in NYC and Brooklyn 'who have built up a lucrative practice among white patients as well as among those of their own race.' White and the reporter who interviewed him – as an anonymous friend of McCune Smith's had in an 1844 letter to the editor – alluded indirectly to a reality that pioneering African American physicians faced in the nineteenth century. They had to rely heavily on white patients – who could most afford to pay for their services and who, by their patronage, could overcome other prospective patients' reluctance to consult non-white physicians – to get a foothold in the profession.⁴⁰⁰

It was likely some combination of McCune Smith's prestigious European medical credentials and African American leaders' calls for community support which contributed to the early and lasting success of McCune Smith's medical practice.⁴⁰¹ When McCune Smith returned in early September 1837 to establish his medical career in NYC, Cornish wrote an editorial equating McCune Smith's success with that of the African American community. He insisted it was up to them to help achieve both by patronizing McCune Smith's practice.⁴⁰² The first

Gesserunt Quique Alicujus Fradus Laurea Donati Sunt, in Collegio Dartmuthensi, Hanoverae, in Republica Neo-Hantoniensi (New York: Dartmouth College, 1858), 65; W. M. Byrd and L. A. Clayton, 'Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey,' *Journal of the National Medical Association* 93, no. 3 (supplement) (March 2001): 195; Robert G. Slawson, 'Medical Training in the United States Prior to the Civil War,' *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine* 17, no. 1 (1 January 2012): 23–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156587211427404>; Wilbur Watson, *Against the Odds: Blacks in the Profession of Medicine in the United States* (Routledge, 2017), 22. Like Brown, Delany never did receive a medical degree but continued to practice without it.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Colored Men,' 'A Friend to Both,' 'Dr. Dewey and Dr. Smith,' Watson, *Against the Odds*, 9.

⁴⁰¹ Samuel E. Cornish, 'Return of Dr. Smith,' *CA*, 9 September 1837; 'Reception of Dr. Smith,' Samuel E. Cornish, 'Dr. Smith in Philadelphia,' *CA*, 23 December 1837.

⁴⁰² Samuel E. Cornish, 'Return of Dr. Smith,' *CA*, 9 September 1837.

advertisement for McCune Smith's practice appeared only two months after his return to NYC. In his offices at 93 West Broadway McCune Smith offered a wide variety of treatments to his multiracial patients, from 'Bleeding, Tooth-drawing, Cupping and Leeching' to 'Medical cures of every description.'⁴⁰³ As White and other contemporaries related, McCune Smith was widely respected and patronised by both the African American and mainstream medical communities.⁴⁰⁴

However, McCune Smith continued to be subjected to discrimination on account of race by at least some mainstream medical institutions. For example, McCune Smith was asked to withdraw his 1847 nomination for fellowship by the newly founded New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) on the grounds that his presence might discomfit some of his white colleagues, although two of them had nominated McCune Smith in the first place and – as we shall see – many routinely worked with McCune Smith.⁴⁰⁵ At least one white colleague who accepted McCune Smith as an equal apparently sought to circumvent such institutional discrimination by presenting a paper of McCune Smith's on his behalf. John Watson – who had been called in for consultation by McCune Smith in the difficult case described within it – read

⁴⁰³ 'Medical Consultations,' *CA*, 11 November 1837; James McCune Smith, 'Bleeding, Tooth-Drawing, Cupping and Leeching...', *CA*, 23 December 1837; James McCune Smith, 'Dr. James McCune Smith May Be Consulted...', *CA*, 5 October 1839.

⁴⁰⁴ Bell, 'Death;' 'Colored Men;' 'Fifty Years a Druggist: Dr. Ray Will Celebrate the Event in the Eastern District on Friday,' *Brooklyn Citizen*, 22 August 1900. Robert Vietrogoski has presented extensively on McCune Smith and his rejection by the NYAM. See 'Robert Vietrogoski | Rutgers University Libraries,' https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/profile/robert_vietrogoski.

⁴⁰⁵ McCune Smith, 'Chess,' 274–75. The NYAM remedied this historical injustice over a century and a half later: see 'The New York Academy of Medicine Awards Posthumous Fellowship to Dr. James McCune Smith 171 Years After It Was Withheld,' *The New York Academy of Medicine News & Blog*, 5 November 2018, <https://nyam.org/news/article/academy-awards-posthumous-fellowship-dr-james-mccune-smith/>.

McCune Smith's report on a 'Case of Ptyalism' to a meeting of the New York Medical and Surgical Society in 1840.⁴⁰⁶

Yet despite such institutional discrimination, McCune Smith appears – perhaps surprisingly – to have been widely accepted as an equal by individual colleagues within the white medical community. As White recalled, 'He often took part in consultation with white physicians, and his diploma was accepted and recorded in the archives of the County Medical society.'⁴⁰⁷ Multiple other sources confirm that McCune Smith regularly consulted with leading white physicians and surgeons. Many – including James Fitch, Gurden Buck, Alexander Hosack, and James Wood – assisted him with cases at the Colored Orphan Asylum.⁴⁰⁸ Others did not hesitate to call on McCune Smith for consultation or to include his name in their medical reports and articles. For example, William Currie Roberts wrote in 1842 of an 'autopsy, which was made in the course of the day, and in which I was kindly assisted by Dr. James McCune Smith.'⁴⁰⁹ Roberts was a delegate to and a resident fellow of the American Medical Association who, in 1844, co-founded the New York Pathological Society along with Lewis Sayre and others.⁴¹⁰ (Sayre also consulted with McCune Smith, as we shall see.) In 1858, McCune Smith

⁴⁰⁶ James McCune Smith, 'Case of Ptyalism. Fatal Termination,' 1840, NYAM Historical Collections: Small Manuscript Collection; Morgan, 'Education and Medical Practice,' 610. The envelope which contains the original case report says (in a typed note): 'This was read before the New York Medical and Surgical Society, 1840, by Dr. John Watson.'

⁴⁰⁷ 'Colored Men.'

⁴⁰⁸ *Eighth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1844), 5; *Ninth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1845), 3–4; *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans*. (New York, 1853), 14–16; *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans*. (New York, 1860), 24.

⁴⁰⁹ William C. Roberts, 'Cursory Observations on Thymic Enlargement, with a Case, and Some Remarks on a Recent Paper by Dr. C. A. Lee, of This City,' *New York Medical Gazette* 2, no. 14 (13 April 1842): 211–15.

⁴¹⁰ Guido Furman, ed., *The Medical Register of the City of New York, for the Year 1864* (New York: New York Medico-Historical Society, 1864), 76, 79, 81, 92. See below for discussions of other white medical professionals who worked with McCune Smith in the context of his medical authorship.

was listed among New York subscribers to *Researches on Primary Pathology, and the Origin and Laws of Epidemics* alongside Wood, Sayre, Richard Kissam, James Kissam, and Guido Furman (whose glowing obituary of McCune Smith for the *Medical Register* is the most cited).⁴¹¹ Richard Kissam and the College of Physicians and Surgeons had also provided McCune Smith with anatomical specimens for use in his 1845 debate with Robert Grant, helping him to combat Grant's claims of the inferiority of peoples of African descent.⁴¹²

Since the historical record is silent on the matter, we cannot know to what degree McCune Smith's light complexion – often commented on by contemporaries – contributed to making individual members of the institutionally discriminatory medical community more comfortable with working with him as a colleague.⁴¹³ It appears certain that his distinguished European credentials did. In any case, their spirit of professional collegiality did not appear to extend to their personal lives. Bell remarked that 'We might suppose that professional superiority and literary eminence would produce social equality, but it does not. – Doctors Hosack, Kissam, and all the first-class medical men in New York, willingly consult and advise with that experienced physician, learned savant and finished gentleman, James McCune Smith; but he has his social circle, as they have theirs; and neither party wish to cross the other's barrier.'⁴¹⁴ It is also unknown to what extent McCune Smith's white colleagues in the medical profession resented or protested his exclusion from professional institutions. It did not dissuade

⁴¹¹ Moses L. Knapp, *Researches on Primary Pathology, and the Origin and Laws of Epidemics*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Moses L. Mapp, 1858), 338–39.

⁴¹² Philip A. Bell, 'A Question of Races,' *Elevator*, 10 January 1868. McCune Smith's debate with Grant is discussed at length in Chapter Six.

⁴¹³ Brown, *Black Man*, 207; 'The Negroes of New York.'

⁴¹⁴ Philip A. Bell, 'Hon. Frank M. Pixley,' *Elevator*, 18 August 1865.

Fitch, Buck, Hosack, Wood, Roberts, Sayre, and Richard Kissam from becoming members and officers of the NYAM themselves.⁴¹⁵

Whatever level of discrimination McCune Smith experienced among his colleagues in the mainstream medical community, it did not prevent his career from flourishing. McCune Smith's practice kept him so busy that he rarely had the opportunity to leave NYC. As he wrote to Gerrit Smith in 1848, 'I have repeatedly found two days & a half of absence inflict an injury upon my medical (punctual) reputation which months could not remove.'⁴¹⁶ This often kept him from being able to take part in events and visit friends elsewhere, much as he longed to do so. Yet part of the reason McCune Smith was so busy was the extent to which his patients included his friends, family, and connections.⁴¹⁷ When friend and leading African American abolitionist Theodore Wright died on 25 March 1847 of a 'cerebral affection,' McCune Smith was at his bedside.⁴¹⁸ When, in October 1863, a distraught Frederick Douglass sought the best care for his ailing son Lewis – a Sergeant Major in the Union Army's 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment – he sent for his friend McCune Smith. He examined Lewis in consultation with Jean Chauveau of NYC.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ New York Academy of Medicine, *The Transactions of the New York Academy of Medicine, Instituted 1847*, vol. 1 (New York: S. S. & W. Wood, 1851), ix–xiii.

⁴¹⁶ 'McCune Smith to Smith, 12 May 1848.'

⁴¹⁷ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 28/30/31 December 1846; McCune Smith to Smith, 25 January 1847; James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 28 July 1848; and McCune Smith to Smith, 6 February 1850, GSP; John Isom Gaines, 'Emigration,' *Provincial Freeman*, 20 January 1855. McCune Smith sometimes treated Gerrit Smith by correspondence.

⁴¹⁸ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 25 March 1847, GSP.

⁴¹⁹ James McCune Smith and Jean F. Chauveau, 'Medical Report: Lewis H. Douglass,' 6 October 1863, Lewis H. Douglass Field and Staff Muster Rolls, Civil War Records, National Archives, Washington, DC; Henry Wilson and John F. Trow, *Trow's* (New York: John F. Trow, 1863), 154; Furman, *Medical Register*, 1864, 183; Celeste-Marie Bernier and Andrew Taylor, eds., *If I Survive: Frederick Douglass and Family in the Walter O. Evans Collection* (Edinburgh: EU Press, 2018), 122–23.

McCune Smith's medical career also influenced his personal convictions, especially those pertaining to social reform. For example, McCune Smith believed that the regular consumption of alcohol played a significant role in undermining physical and social health, especially among the disenfranchised, the poor, and the oppressed.⁴²⁰ In 1857, he testified at a coroner's inquisition into the death of one Catherine Young. Her live-in partner, Henry Johnson, was charged with violent assault in connection with her death. After a delay in reaching her bedside when he could not locate their address, McCune Smith found Young 'dying,' with a black eye and apparently suffering the effects of alcohol or poison. She had a very low pulse though she was not quite comatose. When McCune Smith asked about the cause of the black eye Johnson said Young had fallen off the bed while drunk. Others testified that Johnson and Young quarrelled frequently and that he often beat her.⁴²¹

McCune Smith also furthered the cause of breaking racial barriers in medicine by nurturing the careers of other African American physicians. As White recalled, 'He educated two young men who have since become physicians, and three others who are now operating drug stores;' White himself was among the latter.⁴²² One of the physicians to whom White referred may have been McCune Smith's brother-in-law James Parker Barnett, who often worked professionally with McCune Smith. After Barnett's pursuit of a medical degree was delayed by his 1850 expulsion from the CPS on account of race, he served as assistant physician to McCune Smith at the Colored Orphan Asylum in the mid-1850's. He would again in later

⁴²⁰ McCune Smith and Committee on the Social Condition of the Colored Race, 'Report on the Social Conditions;' 'Right and Wrong in New York,' *NASS*, 17 September 1853; McCune Smith, 'German Invasion,' 48–49; McCune Smith, 'German Invasion [Continued],' 85.

⁴²¹ 'The Thomas-Street Homicide: The Inquisition Concluded,' *Tribune*, 23 September 1857.

⁴²² 'Colored Men.'

years when McCune Smith could not attend at the Asylum hospital due to illness.⁴²³ McCune Smith's mentorship may have helped Barnett go on to earn his medical degree from Dartmouth College in 1854.⁴²⁴ White also likely referred to Peter Williams Ray, who became a physician and pharmacist following his apprenticeship under McCune Smith.⁴²⁵ (Ray will be discussed further below.)

3.4 Pharmacy

McCune Smith's early and lasting success as a medical professional was also the result of his quickly placing his practice on a sound financial footing. White recalled that '[McCune Smith] conducted a drug store to aid him in building up a [medical] practice.'⁴²⁶ This was standard practice at the time. Historian of pharmacy Gregory Higby writes that in the early nineteenth century medical school graduates often established offices combined with pharmacies. They would hire 'drug clerks' who were already trained in the preparation and compounding of drugs through apprenticeships to 'keep shop' while they consulted with patients. Once their medical practices were established, physicians would often sell the pharmacies to their clerks who would then assume the title of 'apothecary.' These practices led to the rise of the 'retail drug trade.'⁴²⁷ Primary sources indicate that McCune Smith may have worked as both physician and

⁴²³ 'Denial of a Diploma;' Dartmouth College, *Catalogue of the Faculty and Students of Dartmouth College, for the Academical Year 1853-4* (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1853), 5; 'Supreme Court - Special Term. Before Hon. Judge Roosevelt: A Curious Colored Case,' *Herald*, 21 April 1853; *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York: John F. Trow, 1854), 20-22.; *Seventh Annual Report of the Governors of the Almshouse, New York, for the Year 1855* (New York: Hall, Clayton & Co., 1856), 186-88; *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York: Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, 1864), 12, 17.

⁴²⁴ Dartmouth College, *Catalogue Senatus Academici*, 65.

⁴²⁵ 'Fifty Years a Druggist;' Lyons, 'Memories,' 77; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 287.

⁴²⁶ 'Colored Men.'

⁴²⁷ Gregory J. Higby, 'From Compounding to Caring: An Abridged History of American Pharmacy,' in *Pharmaceutical Care*, ed. Calvin H. Knowlton and Richard P. Penna (American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, 2003), 22.

clerk at first, preparing the medicines sold in his shop. As we have seen, McCune Smith had been trained as a chemist and in ‘*materia medica*’ – the body of knowledge on the properties and uses of drugs – at the University of Glasgow. Like a typical 1830’s urban pharmacy, McCune Smith’s also sold a variety of toiletries and other items. Early ads for his pharmacy listed ‘Drugs and medicines,’ ‘Shaker’s Herbs,’ whitewasher’s colours, ‘Soda Water, with the best of Syrups, & c.,’ and ‘fancy articles of every description’ available for sale.⁴²⁸

McCune Smith opened his pharmacy almost immediately upon his return to NYC in early September 1837.⁴²⁹ By about 1839, it was successful enough that McCune Smith had begun to take on apprentices. Maritcha Lyons named three of these as George Phillips, Peter Ray, and Philip White.⁴³⁰ White may have been the first. According to an obituary by their mutual friend George Downing, White had first apprenticed under the engraver Patrick Reason.⁴³¹ After White exhibited ‘not the slightest aptitude for the work’ he was apprenticed to McCune Smith, at which point ‘his life work began in earnest.’ By the time White began working at the pharmacy, McCune Smith’s practice had become so busy that he delegated almost all aspects of running the shop ‘from porter at one end to first clerk at the other’ to White. Downing indicated that at least for a time, White may have been McCune Smith’s only employee. After sufficient training,

⁴²⁸ Higby, 26–27; ‘Drugs and Medicines,’ *CA* 11 November 1837; ‘Shaker’s Herbs,’ *CA*, 18 November 1837; ‘To Whitewashers,’ *CA*, 11 May 1839; ‘Soda Water...,’ *CA*, 5 October 1839. Shaker’s herbs were natural remedies devised by a ‘healing revolution’ movement coming out of New England in the nineteenth century which promoted ‘The use of local herbs and plants, good health practices, and abstention from alcohol and tobacco;’ see Elizabeth B. Hall, ‘Canterbury Shaker Village: Medicines as Seen Through Archeological Artifacts’ (M.H.C., New Hampshire, Plymouth State University, 2008), 4.

⁴²⁹ ‘Drugs and Medicines,’ 11 November 1837; ‘Medical Consultations.’

⁴³⁰ Lyons, ‘Memories,’ 77–78.

⁴³¹ Reason was McCune Smith’s friend, fellow African Free School alumnus, and a famed African American engraver. His portrait of McCune Smith is the most well-known. See Fig. 1, p. 8, for Reason’s engraved portrait of McCune Smith.

White also took over ‘the treatment of minor ailments.’ All the while, McCune Smith guided White’s studies in the *Dispensatory* and other key pharmaceutical texts.⁴³² By 1848, White had established his own pharmacy.⁴³³

If White was indeed McCune Smith’s only apprentice for a time, it was not for long. Ray began his apprenticeship at McCune Smith’s pharmacy at age fourteen and remained there for six years.⁴³⁴ Both White and Ray would maintain close connections with McCune Smith. White was a fellow vestryman at St Philip’s and fellow member of the Society for the Promotion of Education among Colored Children. Ray witnessed McCune Smith’s will and attended him in his final illness.⁴³⁵ Both would go on to have successful, lifelong careers as pharmacists.⁴³⁶

McCune Smith’s pharmacy would not only function as a health care centre and training ground for African American medical practitioners: it became a social, intellectual, and activist hub for the African American community of NYC and beyond. McCune Smith’s pharmacy frequently sold tickets for lecture series and other events featuring African Americans and abolitionists.⁴³⁷ It was also an outlet for African American newspapers such as *The North Star*

⁴³² ‘Downing’s Eulogy - Meeting in Memory of Philip A. White,’ *Brooklyn Citizen*, 27 March 1891; Charles B. Ray, Philip A. Bell, and Stephen H. Gloucester, ‘To Our Readers,’ *CA*, 22 June 1839; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 3–4, 67, 146, 156, 158. The editors of *CA* explained that McCune Smith had to resign as co-editor in June 1839 because of ‘an increase of business in the line of his profession.’

⁴³³ William C. Nell, ‘Gleanings by the Wayside,’ *NS*, 11 February 1848.

⁴³⁴ ‘Pharmacist for Half a Century: Dr. Ray Has Been in Business in Same Place in Eastern District Since 1850,’ *Standard Union*, 24 August 1900.

⁴³⁵ Lyons, ‘Memories,’ 79–80; Hewitt, *Protest and Progress*, 70, 72, 77 n67; ‘New York Probate Records, 1629-1971 - Kings County - Wills,’ digital image s.v. ‘James McCune Smith,’ *FamilySearch.org*; Furman, ‘Obituary of James McCune Smith,’ 204.

⁴³⁶ ‘Pharmacist for Half a Century;’ ‘Colored Men;’ ‘Black Men as Druggists: Finding Success in the Business - The Pupils of Dr. Smith [From the New York Tribune],’ *Morning Journal and Courier*, 21 October 1886.

⁴³⁷ ‘Lectures of the Philomathean Society: Mr. John Peterson’s Lectures...,’ *CA*, 2 March 1839; ‘Eulogy;’ ‘Hamilton Lyceum,’ *NASS*, 19 February 1846; ‘Lectures,’ *New York Times*, 11 January 1865.

and *The Impartial Citizen*.⁴³⁸ McCune Smith's pharmacy supported educational and charitable associations as well. It accepted donations on behalf of charities and sold fundraising tickets and items such as *Autographs for Freedom*.⁴³⁹ The Colored Orphan Asylum's annual reports regularly listed medicines donated for the children's care by McCune Smith, certainly from the pharmacy's stock.⁴⁴⁰ McCune Smith also advertised on behalf of African American youth seeking employment opportunities from his pharmacy office. It was also a place to apply for land set aside for African Americans through Gerrit Smith's land grant scheme.⁴⁴¹ African Americans who were subject to discrimination on NYC public transportation were also encouraged to 'call upon Dr. Smith' at his pharmacy.⁴⁴² McCune Smith's pharmacy appears to have played a role in the Underground Railroad as well.⁴⁴³

In keeping with his role as an intellectual and author as well as physician, pharmacist, and activist, McCune Smith also established a library and meeting room behind his pharmacy. As Lyons wrote, McCune Smith's pharmacy

had a backroom which became historical. The doctor was visited daily by men, young and old, not only by the most intelligent colored residents but men of other localities.

⁴³⁸ 'List of Agents,' *NS*, 3 December 1847; Samuel Ringgold Ward, 'Agents,' *Impartial Citizen*, 27 June 1849; 'The Object of The North Star...', *NS*, 5 January 1849.

⁴³⁹ 'Thirty-Fifth Anniversary of the New-York African Society for Mutual Relief,' *NASS*, 27 March 1845; 'Thirty-Sixth Anniversary of the New-York African Society for Mutual Relief,' *NASS*, 19 March 1846; Julia Griffiths, ed., *Autographs for Freedom*, vol. 1 (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853), vi; A.H. Benedict, 'New York Central College,' *Impartial Citizen*, 12 October 1850; 'The Autographs for Freedom Are for Sale at This Office...', *FDP*, 24 March 1854. The proceeds from sales of *Autographs* supported the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society and antislavery publications such as *FDP*.

⁴⁴⁰ *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 24; *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1862), 19–20; *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 27.

⁴⁴¹ 'Gerrit Smith's Colored Settlement,' *National Era*, 4 January 1849; James McCune Smith, 'Trades' Column: Wanted [Carpenter's Apprenticeship],' *FDP*, 18 January 1856; James McCune Smith, 'Trades' Column: Wanted [Apprenticeship in Country Village],' *FDP*, 4 July 1856. See Chapter Five for more about Smith's land grant scheme.

⁴⁴² Pennington, 'Notice.' See Chapter One for more about McCune Smith, Pennington, and the Legal Rights Association they co-founded to combat racial discrimination on public transport.

⁴⁴³ See Chapter Five.

This room was a rallying centre: it had its library and in there were held discussions and debates on all the topics of the day. The visitors had public spirit and erected constructive force that molded public sentiment which had much to do in bringing about a more favorable state of things affecting the colored people of New York State. It was indeed a host who [sought] the doctor, some for advice and consultation, some for relaxation others for sheer admiration.⁴⁴⁴

McCune Smith's friend and fellow *FDP* correspondent William Wilson also appears to have described the pharmacy's 'backroom.' On one occasion he did so briefly while teasing McCune Smith for his scholarly habits: 'Belonging as I do to the toiling masses, I have no back office with cushioned chairs, and no idle time for readings.'⁴⁴⁵ On another occasion, Wilson described one of the many 'discussions and debates' of which Lyons wrote. It occurred at an 1855 meeting of the Committee of Thirteen, a vigilance committee he and McCune Smith helped found.⁴⁴⁶

Wilson wrote: 'Imagine to yourself, my dear Douglass, a group of twelve men [waiting for the last to arrive], seated in a neatly-furnished, well-warmed, and well-lighted room, in a respectable, but retired part of the TOWN, on a cold December night.' By 'retired part of the town' Wilson may have been alluding to the fact that, at that time, many Broadway businesses were relocating north on the same street; McCune Smith's pharmacy would have been at a now-less-bustling location.⁴⁴⁷ Though he does not name them, Wilson described the men in detail, their physicalities and personalities so vividly rendered that those familiar with them could hardly have failed to recognize them. One evidently refers to McCune Smith: 'there is...

⁴⁴⁴ Lyons, 'Memories,' 77–78. See also Peterson, 'Dr. Smith's Back Room.'

⁴⁴⁵ William J. Wilson, 'From Our Brooklyn Correspondent [20 January 1855],' *FDP*, 26 January 1855. McCune Smith and Wilson often wrangled in *FDP*'s pages over differing ideas about how to best improve African American prospects. In their columns, they alternately criticized, bantered with, and praised one another. See also Chapter Four.

⁴⁴⁶ See Chapter Five for more about the Committee of Thirteen.

⁴⁴⁷ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 668. McCune Smith's pharmacy had relocated from 93 West Broadway to number 55/57 by 1848. See John Doggett, *Doggett's* (New York: John Doggett, 1848), 377.

another massive head in the room; one that a phrenologist [likely a teasing reference to McCune Smith's well-known opposition to phrenology] would be proud to pronounce upon. ...His first sentence, (whether in jest or earnest,) tells you he is a gentleman and a scholar: the next, that a great master mind is developing itself.' Wilson described the debate and discussion that ensued among the armchairs, 'choice book[s],' and 'periodical[s]' as a spirited but good-natured battle of wits. 'Piece by piece do the other members see their speeches, propositions, good, bad, and indifferent, hacked up, amid roars of laughter, and shout of applause. Wit, fun, sarcasm, collectively, are the reign of the moment....'⁴⁴⁸

Though the pharmacy was initially created to help launch his medical practice, it was so lucrative that McCune Smith retained it nearly until the end of his life.⁴⁴⁹ The pharmacy had become much more than a business. It had become a rallying point and intellectual centre for NYC's African American community, especially for its leaders. McCune Smith would certainly have been loath to close the doors of an establishment from which he had served them so well and in so many ways.

3.5 Colored Orphan Asylum

Like his pharmacy library, McCune Smith's role as attending physician to NYC's Colored Orphan Asylum (COA) 'became historical.' It was this connection, in fact, which led his descendant

⁴⁴⁸ William J. Wilson, 'From Our Brooklyn Correspondent [31 January 1852],' *FDP*, 12 February 1852. See Chapter Six for McCune Smith's views on phrenology.

⁴⁴⁹ His son James Ward is recorded in an 1865 census as a pharmacy clerk; it is uncertain if he worked in his father's shop or another such as White's; see '1865 NY State Census, 'James M. Smith.' McCune Smith appears to have transferred ownership or management of the pharmacy sometime in 1865: a NYC directory and an ad in *AA* reveal that John Rogers became the proprietor of the drugstore at 55 West Broadway that year, likely by late spring or early summer. See Henry Wilson and John F. Trow, *Trow's*. (New York: John F. Trow, 1865), 286; 'White's Vegetable Extract for the Hair,' *AA*, 8 July 1865.

Greta Blau to discover that he was among her ancestors. This discovery, in turn, helped lead to a resurgence of public interest in McCune Smith in recent decades.⁴⁵⁰

McCune Smith may have first become associated with the COA through his mentor Peter Williams, Jr. As the COA's *Fourth Annual Report* states, Williams 'was among the first to co-operate with the Managers, in laying the foundation of the Asylum.'⁴⁵¹ McCune Smith's first recorded interest in the COA is his 1839 *CA* editorial critique of a medical report by its attending physician James Macdonald. In it, Macdonald suggested that the 'unusual mortality' among his COA patients during the past year was likely due in part to 'the peculiar constitution and condition of the colored race.'⁴⁵² As Leslie Harris writes, the American Colonization Society – of which Macdonald was a member – argued that people of African descent should 'be returned' to Africa 'where the warm climate better suited them.'⁴⁵³ While MacDonal did not specifically advocate this in his report, McCune Smith was acutely aware – as were Samuel Cornish and the *CA*'s readers – that colonialists routinely cited medical opinions such as Macdonald's to promote voluntary or forced emigration from the United States.⁴⁵⁴ McCune Smith opened his rebuttal by showing how the application of simple logic could alone demolish Macdonald's explanation: 'As no deaths occurred during the first year, the mortality in the second year cannot be the result of any general cause, for a general cause being in constant operation,

⁴⁵⁰ See Stauffer and Blau in *Works*, xvi–xix; Associated Press, 'White Descendants Gather to Honor 1st Black US Doctor, Put Tombstone on His Unmarked NYC Grave,' *FoxNews.Com*, 26 September 2010, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/white-descendants-gather-to-honor-1st-black-us-doctor-put-tombstone-on-his-unmarked-nyc-grave>; 'Bringing Black History Home,' *CUNY Newswire*, 15 April 2011, [http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2011/04/15/bringing-black-history-home/..](http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2011/04/15/bringing-black-history-home/)

⁴⁵¹ Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, *Fourth Annual Report*, 6.

⁴⁵² James Macdonald and James McCune Smith, 'Colored Orphan's Asylum: Physician's Report [and Reply],' *CA*, 26 January 1839.

⁴⁵³ Harris, *Shadow*, 154.

⁴⁵⁴ James McCune Smith, 'Dr. Macdonald's Report,' *CA*, 22 December 1838.

would have made a like proportion of deaths in both years.’ McCune Smith then turned to specifics. Rather than focusing on only the four deaths Macdonald selected for his report, McCune Smith described all nine mortality cases and examined them in the context of published medical statistics for NYC. He also cited medical literature to show that these deaths were readily explicable for other reasons, demonstrating that not only was the mortality rate of African American children generally similar to that of white children stricken by the same disease, African American children were less likely to die of many childhood diseases. Given that these children also disproportionately suffered deprivations caused by ‘that legalized curse’ of prejudice, McCune Smith argued that the only reasonable conclusion was that they were *better* suited to the New York climate. He argued that though Macdonald ‘must be a benevolent man, or he would not gratuitously perform the duties of physician to the Asylum’ – his ‘erroneous’ opinions did harm nonetheless since they ‘minister[ed] to public prejudices.’ McCune Smith’s robust rebuttal of Macdonald is the earliest known example of what could be called his ‘medical abolitionism:’ marshalling medical evidence and expertise to combat pro-slavery arguments. This scientific approach was simultaneously, and no less, a moral one: ‘Next to our Maker do we revere Science as the clearest manifestation of his law which he has vouchsafed us.’ God had not only written the essential equality of humankind into Scripture, McCune Smith argued: he had realized it in the bodies he created. As a physician, McCune Smith considered himself peculiarly well-placed to discover and proclaim this truth.

Before he is known to have begun providing medical care at the COA, McCune Smith supported its mission in many ways, particularly by fundraising. In 1841 McCune Smith delivered his ‘Lecture on the Haytian Revolution’ at the Stuyvesant Institute; all profits from its

sales of 50 cent tickets went to the COA.⁴⁵⁵ 'Lecture' was later published as a pamphlet, with all profits from its sales again going to the Asylum.⁴⁵⁶ McCune Smith was the featured speaker at the COA's anniversary event the following year, which also served as a fundraiser.⁴⁵⁷

McCune Smith certainly began providing care at the COA by 1843. Its annual report for that year states that since the children generally enjoyed good health 'Little necessity has of course been felt for medical treatment... but the Board are indebted to Drs. James Fitch and J. McCune Smith, for their regular attendance at the house, though it has frequently been only to register their testimony, to its healthful and satisfactory condition.'⁴⁵⁸ The COA's annual reports for the next three years list McCune Smith as 'Physician' under officers and managers; however, they specify that he volunteered his services there, as did other physicians. The 1845 report stated that the overall excellent state of the children's health obviated the need for an attending physician; the following year's report stated that while there were a few more deaths, the children generally remained healthy.⁴⁵⁹

Despite these sunny reports the COA's managers realized they needed to do more in terms of healthcare as it continued to grow. At a December 1846 board meeting they 'unanimously appointed [Dr. J. McCune Smith] physician to the Institution for the year.'⁴⁶⁰ The

⁴⁵⁵ 'Lectures in Clinton Hall by James McCune Smith, M.D.,' *CA*, 13 February 1841; 'Lecture in Clinton Hall by James McCune Smith, MD,' *NASS*, 11 February 1841; 'A Lecture on the Haytien Revolution...', *NYJC*, 20 February 1841; 'Colored Orphan Asylum,' *NYJC*, 25 February 1841; *Fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1841), 9, 15.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Haytien Revolution and Toussaint L'Ouverture.'

⁴⁵⁷ 'The Sixth Anniversary of the Colored Orphan Asylum,' *Evening Post*, 12 December 1842.

⁴⁵⁸ *Seventh Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1843), 6.

⁴⁵⁹ *Eighth Annual Report*, 5, 14; *Ninth Annual Report*, 1845, 2, 3–4; *Tenth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1846), 2, 4.

⁴⁶⁰ Anna H. Shotwell, 'Minutes of Board Meetings of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans: Vol. 2: December 1846 - 11 January 1857,' 9, *Records of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans*, New-York

following spring, they approved his plan to appoint ‘a board of consulting Physicians’ and set him an annual salary.⁴⁶¹ These changes seem to have been prompted by a growing unease at the fact that the low rate of illness at the COA was not only due to the healthful diet and play spaces they provided for the children: many applicants were ‘rejected in conformity to a By-law which prohibits the admission of infectious or incurably diseased children.’ Co-founder Anna Shotwell came to believe that the COA needed to change this policy to better fulfil its mission. She called a special board meeting on 5 May 1847 which McCune Smith attended at her invitation. According to their minute book, ‘The Secretary [Shotwell] informed that this meeting was called to receive a proposition to erect a Hospital for diseased children.... Though fully aware that by the erection of such an establishment we shall be incurring a heavy responsibility she cannot consider it so great as that involved in rejecting this deplorably destitute and suffering portion of the human family...’ While the minutes do not state it explicitly, they imply that the proposal for the hospital originated with McCune Smith.⁴⁶²

After the board agreed to the proposal, McCune Smith set about fundraising and garnering public support.⁴⁶³ McCune Smith wrote in one of his annual physician’s reports that the new hospital would not only allow them to take in more ‘feeble and sick orphans,’ it ‘would afford a much coveted opportunity for the study of the interesting class of diseases.’ (Here, the caring physician meets the thoroughgoing scientist).⁴⁶⁴ Once the COA’s new hospital opened its

Historical Society,
<http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A134839#page/8/mode/1up>.

⁴⁶¹ Shotwell, 28.

⁴⁶² Shotwell, 30–32.

⁴⁶³ Shotwell, 32–33, 37; ‘The Colored Orphan Asylum,’ *Herald*, 11 May 1847; ‘The Colored Orphans,’ *Tribune*, 11 May 1847.

⁴⁶⁴ *First Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms House, New York, for the Year 1849* (New York: George F. Nesbitt, 1850), 71–75.

doors on 26 June 1850, McCune Smith wrote, the ‘ample’ new building with its ‘sunny side, ...quiet school-room, and ...mild teacher’ was so popular that healthy children tried to get McCune Smith to admit them. McCune Smith also expressed his and the managers’ relief at no longer having to turn away sick applicants to the COA for lack of a hospital to care for them.⁴⁶⁵

McCune Smith took great pride in the COA, its hospital, and especially its children. He regularly conducted tours for interested visitors.⁴⁶⁶ He also continued to be a regular featured speaker and organizer at its anniversaries and other events. On one occasion, McCune Smith spoke on the history, characteristics, and culture of the ‘Bushmen’ – the San people of southern Africa – following an oration by Henry, ‘a young Bushman not long since captured and brought to this country’ and eventually taken in by the COA. McCune Smith remarked on the double tragedy that Henry had suffered, having been orphaned by the loss of his parents and the loss of his native people.⁴⁶⁷ McCune Smith’s yearly physician’s reports also provided detailed information on illness and mortality rates at the COA and discussed them in light of medical literature and published health statistics. He recommended ways to lessen the spread of disease at the COA and to further improve the children’s health. McCune Smith sometimes described individual cases in detail which struck him as particularly interesting. In some cases, his interest appears mostly scientific. In most, however, McCune Smith’s accounts reveal his

⁴⁶⁵ *Second Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms House, New York, for the Year 1850* (New York: William C. Bryant & Co., 1851), 87–88.

⁴⁶⁶ Frederick Douglass, ‘The New York Colored Orphan Asylum,’ *NS*, 4 May 1849; Alexander Marjoribanks, *Travels in South and North America* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Company, 1853), 312–13; Frederick Douglass, ‘Our Recent Visit to New York,’ *FDP*, 17 March 1854.

⁴⁶⁷ ‘Annual Meeting of the Coloured Orphan Asylum,’ *NASS*, 22 February 1849; ‘Exhibition of the Colored Children,’ *Herald*, 15 January 1852; ‘Grand Concert for the Benefit of the Orphan Asylum,’ *Evening Post*, 16 April 1857.

sorrow or admiration for the sympathy and courage his patients and their friends displayed in the face of suffering and death.⁴⁶⁸

McCune Smith's feelings as a father often extended to the children under his care at the COA. Following the deaths of three of his own children in 1854 during one of NYC's cholera epidemics, McCune Smith wrote to Gerrit Smith that he sometimes looked into the glad eyes and heard the glad voices of other little children – surely those at the COA – and wished they were his.⁴⁶⁹ In his memoir of his childhood years at the COA, Thomas Barnes recalled McCune Smith's firm yet caring treatment of him and his brother.⁴⁷⁰ Over the years, McCune Smith donated cash, medicines, and holiday treats for the children. After the COA was looted and burned during NYC's 1863 draft riots, McCune Smith assisted in fundraising for a new facility.⁴⁷¹ The riots occurred during the period in which McCune Smith's declining health sometimes kept him from fulfilling his duties as physician; his brother-in-law Barnett was in attendance during the riot since McCune Smith was ill at that time.⁴⁷² When the COA settled into its new location

⁴⁶⁸ *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans*. (New York: Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, 1851), 14–16; *Third Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms House, New York, for the Year 1851* (New York: William C. Bryant & Co., 1852), 92–95; *Fourth Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms-House, New York, for the Year 1852* (New York: Charles Shields, 1853), 72–74; *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 20–22; *Seventh Annual Report*, 1856, 186–88; *Ninth Annual Report of the Governors of the Almshouse, New York, for the Year 1857* (New York: Governors of the Almshouse, 1858), 165; *Tenth Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms House, New York, for the Year 1858* (New York: Office of the Governors of the Alms House, 1859), 276–78; *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans*. (New York: Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, 1863), 12–13; *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 17.

⁴⁶⁹ McCune Smith to Smith, 1/31 March 1855.

⁴⁷⁰ Thomas H. Barnes, *My Experience as an Inmate of the Colored Orphan Asylum, New York City* (Fanny, Douglass Barnes, and Miriam Crawford, 1924), 7, 12.

⁴⁷¹ *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 30; *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 22, 24; *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans*. (New York, 1861), 17–18, 25; *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report*, 19–20; *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report*, 21; *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 14–16, 27; James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 26 April 1864, GSP; Shotwell, 'Ladies' Union Bazaar, for the Benefit of Colored Orphans;' *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1865), 18–19.

⁴⁷² *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 12, 17.

in September 1863 McCune Smith was able to return to his duties there. Over the next two years, however, he could only do so intermittently. Barnes recalled that in those later years ‘it was my duty and pleasure to carry [McCune Smith] with horse and buggy to and from the Hudson River Railroad Station at 152nd Street. The last visit he made to the Asylum he had become old, infirm and retired from practice.’⁴⁷³ Even illness could not keep him away from his beloved orphans though he could no longer care for them as their physician.

3.6 Continuing Medical Authorship

As this chapter has described, McCune Smith’s first published writings on medical matters were informal, consisting of letters to the editor of *The London Medical Gazette* in 1837 and editorials for *CA* in 1839. His early letters to the *Gazette* are likely the first by an African American to be published in any medical journal.⁴⁷⁴ McCune Smith’s article ‘On the Influence of Opium Upon the Catamenial Functions,’ published in the *New York Journal of Medicine and Collateral Sciences* in 1844, is widely acknowledged to be the first by an African American to be published in an American medical journal.⁴⁷⁵ McCune Smith’s ‘Ptyalism’ has been identified by some scholars as the first case report authored by an African American to be presented – albeit, as we have seen, by a white physician – to a medical society. However, the specifics of when

⁴⁷³ Barnes, *My Experience*, 12; *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report*, 5–7; *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans* (New York, 1865), 6.

⁴⁷⁴ This thesis introduces these and many more of his medical writings to the literature on McCune Smith.

⁴⁷⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Opium,’ January 1844; Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 238; Morgan, ‘Education and Medical Practice,’ 610; Lujan and DiCarlo, ‘First African-American to Hold a Medical Degree,’ 135. ‘Opium’ was republished in the 29 March 1844 issue of the *Gazette*. See James McCune Smith, ‘On the Influence of Opium Upon the Catamenial Functions,’ *London Medical Gazette (New Series) - For the Session 1843-44* 1, no. 29 March (1844): 878–79.

and how it was presented are more difficult to confirm.⁴⁷⁶ In any case, ‘Ptyalism’ and ‘Opium’ carry on McCune Smith’s early authorship focusing on women’s health; in the latter, McCune Smith referred to his ‘somewhat extensive experience in the Lock Hospital at Glasgow.’

McCune Smith’s next published medical article was ‘The Influence of Climate on Longevity.’ That topic, under that title, was among the 1845 prize questions posed by Harvard’s Boylston Medical Committee in *The New York Journal of Medicine and Collateral Sciences*. Though McCune Smith’s dissertation did not win that year’s prize the Committee selected it, along with two others, as among the ‘valuable and interesting essays’ they recommended the authors publish.⁴⁷⁷ However, ‘Climate’ was not published in a medical journal. It appeared in Freeman Hunt’s *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review* with the subtitle ‘With Special Reference to Life Insurance,’ published in two instalments in April and May 1846.⁴⁷⁸ Since much of ‘Climate’ is dedicated to analysis of vital statistics and climate data it is discussed at length in Chapter Six, which focuses on McCune Smith’s scientific thought in areas other than medicine. Yet McCune Smith also offers medical theories in ‘Climate’ focusing particularly on relative susceptibility to certain diseases in early childhood and in various human populations. His theories centred on the ‘vital forces of the human frame’ – underdeveloped in children and weakened in the elderly – which enable it to produce and sustain heat. Since these vital forces

⁴⁷⁶ Most discussions of ‘Ptyalism’ trace back to Leslie Falk’s unpublished draft of a biography of McCune Smith (ca. 1990) and Morgan’s 2003 article; both include incomplete citations for their discussion of the case report. See Falk, ‘James McCune Smith,’ 22–23; Morgan, ‘Education and Medical Practice,’ 610.

⁴⁷⁷ James McCune Smith, ‘*The Influence of Climate on Longevity: With Special Reference to Life Insurance [Part I]*,’ *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review, Conducted by Freeman Hunt* 14, no. Jan-June 1846 (1846): 319; Samuel Forry, ed., *The New York Journal of Medicine and the Collateral Sciences*, vol. 3 (New York: Henry G. Langley, 1844), 277.

⁴⁷⁸ See Chapter Six for more about Freeman Hunt.

could also be affected by climate, they could be strengthened or weakened in populations in different parts of the world accordingly.⁴⁷⁹

Though he adopted the tone of the dispassionate scientist in 'Climate,' McCune Smith's commitment to medical abolitionism remains clear throughout the article. For example, McCune Smith returned to the themes of race and 'constitutions' central in his rebuttal of Macdonald's report.⁴⁸⁰ He also explained that estimates of longevity between enslaved African Americans and whites could only be approximated because 'the depressing circumstances' of slavery surely had negative effects on the health of enslaved people. If they were free to achieve 'the standard of civilization' of free people, they would likely enjoy the same higher rates of longevity.⁴⁸¹

In 1848, McCune Smith wrote another letter to the editor of a medical journal, this one published in *The Annalist* as 'Lay Puffery of Homœopathy.' As the title suggests, its tone is anything but dispassionate. In 'Lay Puffery,' McCune Smith again focused on children's health, vigorously refuting a recent claim put forward by the New York Homeopathic Dispensary Association that children treated with homeopathy at the Protestant Half-Orphan Asylum over the last five years had lower mortality rates than children at other orphanages.⁴⁸² McCune

⁴⁷⁹ McCune Smith, 'Climate on Longevity (Part I),' 329; James McCune Smith, 'The Influence of Climate on Longevity: With Special Reference to Life Insurance. Part II,' *The Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review, Conducted by Freeman Hunt* 14, no. May 1846 (1846): 409, 413, 416.

⁴⁸⁰ See also Chapters Five, and Six.

⁴⁸¹ McCune Smith, 'Influence of Climate, Part I,' 329; McCune Smith, 'Influence of Climate, Part II,' 409, 413, 415–18. McCune Smith argued that slavery produced a higher number of centenarians while reducing overall longevity in enslaved populations, theorizing that those particularly hardy individuals who survived slavery well into adulthood could survive nearly anything. He cited 'the mass of' enslaved Russians as another example of this, commenting: 'What with the hunger, the slavery and the cold, the wonder is – not that individual cases of extreme old age should occur, but that these ancient Russ, once seasoned, should ever die!'

⁴⁸² James McCune Smith, 'Lay Puffery of Homœopathy,' *The Annalist: A Record of Practical Medicine, in the City of New York* 2, no. 1847–48 (1848): 348–51.

Smith was wary of homeopathy and other systems of healing based on philosophical or metaphysical reasoning – which were increasingly popular – rather than medicine subjected to the scientific method. As medical historians James Bordley and Abner McGehee Harvey write: ‘...some people in the early nineteenth century, in order to escape the more violent forms of therapy practiced at that time, turned to quacks and cultists.’⁴⁸³ Despite his opposition to such systems of therapy, McCune Smith was sympathetic to the instinct to turn to them. As he wrote to Gerrit Smith in 1846, McCune Smith was glad that Smith had the ‘strong sound sense’ to stick to science-based medicine for his chronic malady, unpleasant as its treatments often were. McCune Smith confessed that he could ‘scarcely blame’ those who wanted to avoid it given the ‘nauseous doses, and painful operations by which we M.D.’s cure the people.’⁴⁸⁴ Nevertheless, McCune Smith was convinced that evidence-based medicine was the only effective system of treatment. He felt it was his duty as a medical professional, therefore, to promote and defend it.

In ‘Lay Puffery,’ McCune Smith used statistical analysis – as he did in much of his medical and scientific writing – to demonstrate that the New York Homeopathic Dispensary Association’s claims in support of homeopathy were incorrect. These errors, McCune Smith argued, were not only sloppy, they were dangerous: ‘These entries... indicate a custom of quietly thrusting away from this charity the very sick children, in order that they may die elsewhere. They indicate that a noble institution is in danger of being prostituted to the perpetration of the cold-blooded atrocity of turning the probably dying out of doors, in order to

⁴⁸³ Bordley and Harvey, *Two Centuries of American Medicine, 1776-1976*, 41.

⁴⁸⁴ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 17/18 December 1846, GSP.

magnify Homœopathy by clumsily contrived statistics.’ In fact, McCune Smith argued, statistics from the Protestant Half-Orphan Asylum published in a medical journal the year before revealed that ‘Allopathy saves seven times more patients than Homœopathy.’ It was up to practitioners of evidence-based medicine, then, to remain vigilant: ‘Sincerely and truly, as against the murder and the assassin, may the regular practitioner do battle against the most deadly quackery that curses the nineteenth century...’⁴⁸⁵ As he had demonstrated in his writing in opposition to the silver nitrate treatment and faddish weight-loss regimen, McCune Smith considered it his duty as a physician to warn his peers and the public against harmful practices born of ignorance or prejudice, be they lay or professional.

McCune Smith’s last known medical publication is a case report he authored between 31 December 1863 and 7 January 1864. It opened a pamphlet reprinted ‘from the Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of New York, 1864’ in which Lewis Sayre, surgeon at Bellevue Hospital and Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at its medical college, discussed the efficacy of tracheotomy and ‘inhalation of steam’ as treatments for croup. McCune Smith had called Sayre in for consultation on a severely ill ten-year-old croup patient who, ‘asphyxia [being] imminent,’ evidently required surgical intervention. Though the tracheotomy in combination with steam treatment initially appeared successful, the patient died four days later when her father pulled out the breathing tube at her (signed) request, causing ‘a gush of blood as if she had been cut.’ When Sayre performed a post-mortem on her – assisted by McCune Smith and two other physicians – he found that removing the tube had ruptured a major vessel

⁴⁸⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Lay Puffery.’

in her throat.⁴⁸⁶ This case may have been one of the last in which McCune Smith combined his skill as a physician and his rigorous dedication to the scientific method to help perfect a remedy for a difficult and dangerous ailment. As we shall see, this case opened the final year in which McCune Smith was able to do so.

Conclusion

In the *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report* for the Colored Orphan Asylum, Shotwell wrote that McCune Smith had retired from practice by December of 1864 ‘on account of ill health.’⁴⁸⁷ However, he may have occasionally continued to see patients in his home office or consult with his colleagues. *The Medical Register of the City of New York* for 1865 still listed him as an active physician.⁴⁸⁸ Though McCune Smith was realistic enough about his precarious state of health to write his will in January 1865, he also at times seemed hopeful that he could recover enough to resume working outside of his home (as we shall also see in the other chapters).⁴⁸⁹ It appears, however, that McCune Smith intended to change his career from the practice of medicine and keeping a pharmacy to something less physically demanding. As he wrote to Gerrit Smith in February 1865, he ‘had accepted a call to a Chair in Wilberforce College, Xenia, Ohio, in case [his] health should permit.’ (Underlined in original.)⁴⁹⁰ However, McCune Smith died in November of that year.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁶ Lewis A. Sayre and James McCune Smith, *Croup: Case of Traumatic Hemorrhage Following Tracheotomy* (Albany: Van Benthuysen’s Steam Printing House, 1864), 1–6. This case, and McCune Smith’s role in it, was also discussed in the *American Medical Times*: see New York Pathological Society, ‘Croup - Tracheotomy.’

⁴⁸⁷ *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report*, 5–7.

⁴⁸⁸ Guido Furman, ed., *The Medical Register of the City of New York, for the Year Commencing June 1, 1865* (New York: New York Medico-Historical Society, 1865), 111–12.

⁴⁸⁹ ‘New York Probate Records, James McCune Smith.’

⁴⁹⁰ McCune Smith to Smith, 17 February 1865.

⁴⁹¹ Furman, ‘Obituary.’

In the early years of his medical career, McCune Smith had written in his editorial 'Agricultural Life:' 'the PHYSICIAN and the DIVINE, the curers of physical and moral diseases, consult their own ease and quiet, and find a balm for both body and mind by snatching a few hours from the calls of professional duty to apply them to the grateful purpose of tilling the earth.'⁴⁹² For most of his life, McCune Smith never did find it possible – even if he had actually wanted to – to move away from the bustling metropolis of NYC. His relocation to Williamsburg within the final two years of his life was not to the idyllic semi-rural setting he sometimes advocated as the ideal home. Yet his pairing of the 'physician' with the 'divine' in this 1839 editorial is telling. As this chapter has described, McCune Smith created a holistic practice through which he sought to alleviate as many of his patients' ills as he could. Through his practice as a physician, his pharmacy, and his medical writings, McCune Smith sought to remedy suffering and privation wherever he found it, be it the bodily ravages of disease or the mental and spiritual ravages of oppression and deprivation imposed by the US racial caste system.

⁴⁹² McCune Smith, 'Agricultural Life.'

Chapter Four – James McCune Smith and the African American Press

Introduction

‘We have labored longer at this oar than any live black man.’

~ James McCune Smith, ‘Our Faults – Remedies’
The Anglo-African, 10 December 1864

James McCune Smith played many foundational roles in the establishment of the African American press. As a frequent contributor and sometimes editor, he often wrote as a dissident or provocateur. In some instances, McCune Smith espoused controversial ideas, sometimes aggressively. In others, he attacked ideas espoused within the African American community that he believed were detrimental to their struggle for liberty and for political and social equality. As we have seen in Chapter Three, McCune Smith’s fearlessness in engaging in controversy had manifested itself early in his career when, as a medical student, he challenged more established colleagues in the pages of *The London Medical Gazette*. Even as he continued to provoke or engage in fearless debate as contributor to or editor of African American publications, their proprietors refused to censor his work even when they disagreed with his views. They defended not only McCune Smith’s and other contributors’ right to freely express their opinions: they stressed the importance of publishing diverse views in debates over issues of concern to the African American community.

This chapter argues, firstly, that McCune Smith played a more central and enduring role in the history of the African American press – a still emerging field of scholarship – than is generally recognized in relevant literature. McCune Smith was among the founding generation

of editors and contributors who made the press not only a vital forum for sharing information but for encouraging robust debate and elucidating the intellectual underpinnings of the freedom struggle amongst the African American community. While McCune Smith is sometimes mentioned in the literature on the African American press, his contributions are often acknowledged fleetingly or focus primarily on his work as a correspondent for *Frederick Douglass' Paper* and his contributions to the *Anglo-African Magazine* in the 1850's.⁴⁹³ Patrick Washburn's *The African American Newspaper* – among the most recent books on the African American press – does not mention McCune Smith at all.⁴⁹⁴ Yet McCune Smith's contemporaries and early writers on the African American press regularly described him as a foundational figure. In 1863's *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, William Wells Brown summarized McCune Smith's long history of contributions to the early African American press. Irvine Garland Penn did so at greater length in his pioneering history *The Afro-American Press and its Editors*.⁴⁹⁵

This chapter, therefore, also offers at least a partial explanation – or, perhaps more accurately, a justified suspicion – of why McCune Smith suffers from relative neglect in this field of scholarship. McCune Smith's often idiosyncratic, provocative, obscure, and unorthodox ideas and modes of expression may have led to this neglect. This might suggest a tendency or

⁴⁹³ See Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827 to 1860* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993), 30, 109; McCune Smith, *Works*, xiii, 8–24, 75–296; Mulcahy, 'The Communipaw Connection;' Banner, 'Thinking Through Things;' Crane, 'Razed to the Knees.' For a notable exception to the general lack of in-depth explorations of McCune Smith's contributions to the African American press beyond those for *FDP*, see Edmondson, 'To Plead Our Own Cause.'

⁴⁹⁴ See Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston: NU Press, 2006).

⁴⁹⁵ Brown, *Black Man*, 205–7; Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 33–34, 40, 66, 98. See also Philip A. Bell, 'Salutatory,' *Pacific Appeal*, 5 April 1862; Philip A. Bell, 'Letter to the Editor (From California),' *AA*, 28 January 1865; Bell, 'Death;' Robert Hamilton and Philip A. Bell, 'Progress of Colored Journalism [From the Anglo-African],' *Elevator*, 17 November 1865; Philip A. Bell, 'Pioneer Newspapers,' *Elevator*, 12 April 1873.

willingness to side-line McCune Smith's views in a way that publishers and editors of the early African American press generally were not. Admittedly, McCune Smith's obscurity may be at least partially explained by his regular practice of writing anonymously, especially during his later years writing for the *Anglo-African* publications.⁴⁹⁶ It may also be partially explained by the short duration and small subscriber lists of many African American publications. Issues are often hard to find and many appear to be no longer extant.⁴⁹⁷

However, given the testimony regarding McCune Smith's significance by his contemporaries and early writers on the African American press, the primary explanation may lie elsewhere. John Stauffer argues that 'as a writer, McCune Smith never pandered to a general public. His richly ironic style, formal experimentation, and frequent use of foreign words alienated some readers.'⁴⁹⁸ Yet, as we shall see, McCune Smith's work was very much in demand by publishers and editors of the African American press throughout his life and therefore presumably by subscribers as well. The explanation, then, may lie more in how his ideas were received and interpreted by posthumous rather than contemporary readers. McCune Smith's complex, nuanced, at times apparently contradictory, and often controversial ideas may have rendered him anything from a cipher to a thinker too hot to handle by later scholars. McCune Smith's method of inquiry was perhaps too fearless for his own good at least when it came to establishing an enduring historical legacy. Yet in exploring essential but difficult

⁴⁹⁶ Among many other previously unattributed works by McCune Smith, this dissertation cites many unsigned editorials which he wrote as co-editor or editor *pro tem* for African American publications. Unless preceded by an asterisk in footnotes, they can be confidently attributed to McCune Smith both because it can be demonstrated that he was serving as editor at the time and because of strong textual evidence.

⁴⁹⁷ James Philip Danky and Maureen E. Hady, *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: A National Bibliography* (Cambridge: HU Press, 1998), xxxiii.

⁴⁹⁸ Stauffer in *Works*, xvi.

or uncomfortable questions that demanded answers, McCune Smith played a vital role in formulating key ideas and moving debates forward in areas of thought such as race theory, the nature of identity, political theory, and much more. He did so most ably and prolifically within the pages of the African American press.⁴⁹⁹

4.1 Overview of McCune Smith's History with the African American Press

In his editorial 'Our Faults – Remedies' for a December 1864 issue of *The Anglo-African (AA)*, McCune Smith wrote of his own role in the history of the African American press: 'We have labored longer at this oar than any live black man.' He summarized his years writing for the abolitionist and African American press, from his correspondence for the newly founded *Liberator* to his contributions to the *Anglo-African* publications.⁵⁰⁰ While McCune Smith's letters to the editor of the *New York Tribune* and his contributions to some publications are relatively well known, his work for the *Liberator* and other publications named or described in 'Our Faults' and other sources have not been found in relevant literature. This section will also, therefore, present original discoveries that will help fill in some of those gaps, thereby revealing the larger role McCune Smith played in the establishment, authorship, and promotion of the African American press than has been revealed to date.

⁴⁹⁹ This chapter will focus on the history and significance of McCune Smith's role in the African American press. See Chapter Two for an exploration and intellectual history of many of his writings, the bulk of which were published in African American newspapers and periodicals.

⁵⁰⁰ McCune Smith, 'Our Faults.' For this editorial, signed only as 'S.,' McCune Smith's authorship is confirmed by biographical details as well as evidence found in the pages of *The Anglo-African* that he was acting editor at the time it was written. Many other unsigned works can be confidently attributed to McCune Smith through cross-referencing with known works and other sources; biographical details; and distinctive thematic and stylistic elements.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, McCune Smith's first contributions to the African American press may have appeared in *Freedom's Journal (FJ)*. Founded in New York City (NYC) by the Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm in 1827, it was the first African American newspaper.⁵⁰¹ Cornish, born in 1875, was an evangelical Presbyterian minister. He moved to NYC from his native Delaware by 1824, when he married wealthy Jane Livingston. The money she brought into the marriage may have helped make Cornish feel secure enough to pursue such a financially risky endeavour as establishing a newspaper for an economically and socially disadvantaged community. However, after seven months, Cornish severed his connection with *FJ* over his disagreement with Russwurm's support for the movement to colonize African Americans outside of the United States.⁵⁰² Jamaican-born Russwurm was the first African American to receive a degree from Maine's Bowdoin College. He was dedicated to improving the educational and economic situation of African Americans. For example, in the late 1820's, Russwurm taught evening classes at the African Free School on Mulberry St, McCune Smith's first alma mater. However, frustrated at what he perceived as African Americans' widespread unwillingness to improve their condition in the US, Russwurm moved to Liberia after *FJ* went bankrupt in 1829. With Russwurm gone, Cornish quickly revived the paper as *The Rights of All*; it lasted one more year.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' xxiv; Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 1.

⁵⁰² Danky and Hady, *National Bibliography*, 240; Hutton, *Early Black Press*, 5–6.

⁵⁰³ Hutton, *Early Black Press*, 4–7, 123–24; Jeremy Rich, 'Russwurm, John Brown,' in *Dictionary of African Biography*, ed. Emmanuel K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates (OUP, 2012), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195382075.001.0001/acref-9780195382075-e-1772>.

As we have also seen, fourteen-year-old McCune Smith may have authored two series for *FJ*, 'African Genealogy' and 'Theresa, _____ A Haytien Tale,' published in 1827 and 1828, respectively. Like these series, the articles 'Oh! Medillia!,' "Qui est dives..." and "Eum, qui bene utitur divitiis..." were signed 'S.' All appear to have been written by a youthful author – the last instalment of 'Genealogy' specifies that at least this series was – and many appear to have been written by a classics scholar like McCune Smith.⁵⁰⁴ While there is no other clear corroborating evidence of McCune Smith's authorship of these pieces, McCune Smith would occasionally write to and for the *Anglo-African* publications under the signature 'S' nearly forty years later. One of these, 'Our Faults,' was also simply signed 'S.'

'Our Faults' also informs us that McCune Smith was among the early anonymous contributors to William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*. Founded in 1831, the radical *Liberator* forcefully called for the immediate abolition of slavery.⁵⁰⁵ In its pages, Garrison brought together and amplified African American and white abolitionist voices through an organ that would become the longest-running anti-slavery publication. While it cannot properly be listed among African American newspapers, it is worth discussing here because McCune Smith included it when outlining his involvement in the African American press. Also, the *Liberator* was primarily supported through the efforts and subscriptions of African Americans in its early years.⁵⁰⁶ While Garrison and his *Liberator* are often represented as the vanguard of a revived

⁵⁰⁴ *James McCune Smith, 'Oh! Medillia!,' *FJ*, 10 August 1827; *McCune Smith, 'African Genealogy [Pt 1];' *McCune Smith, 'African Genealogy [Pt 2];' *McCune Smith, 'African Genealogy [Pt 3];' *McCune Smith, 'Qui Est Dives...;' *McCune Smith, 'Eum, Qui Bene Utitur Divitiis...;' *McCune Smith, 'Theresa (Pt 1);' *McCune Smith, 'Theresa (Pt 2);' *McCune Smith, 'Theresa (Part 3);' *McCune Smith, 'Theresa, _____ A Haytien Tale (Part 4).'

⁵⁰⁵ In 'Our Faults,' McCune Smith erroneously recalled first writing for the paper the year before.

⁵⁰⁶ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 31; David W. Blight, 'William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: His Radicalism and His Legacy for Our Time,' in *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: History, Legacy, and Memory*, ed. James Brewer Stewart (YUP, 2013), 6.

movement that would lead to the abolition of chattel slavery in the United States, McCune Smith wrote that ‘when in 1830-31, Mr. Garrison came among them, he found the Colored People already a “power on the earth” through their press, activism, and accomplishments.’⁵⁰⁷ McCune Smith was an early and ardent admirer of Garrison and would only later come to criticize him and many of his fellow white abolitionists and supporters for their paternalism, disunionism, and unwillingness to use the vital tool of politics to end legalised slavery.⁵⁰⁸

Close reading of *the Liberator* throughout its first year of publication has failed to identify unsigned articles that can be definitively attributed to McCune Smith. He may have been one of the many anonymous contributors to the Juvenile Department since it contained the bulk of the unsigned, non-editorial articles in the paper. Some of the pieces included in that column display the romantic, flowery style of many of the *FJ* articles listed above. However, none are signed ‘S.’ Garrison specially thanked the mostly anonymous contributors to that department in an 1831 editorial; as Garrison noted, their identities were unknown to him.⁵⁰⁹

During most of the period when McCune Smith was in Scotland pursuing his studies and medical training, there were no active African American newspapers or periodicals. After the *Rights of All* ceased publication in 1830, its role went unfilled until *The Weekly Advocate* – soon to be renamed *The Colored American (CA)* – was founded in January 1837.⁵¹⁰ However, McCune Smith continued to write for other publications. As we have seen, he contributed to European

⁵⁰⁷ James McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [February 1855],’ *FDP*, 16 February 1855.

⁵⁰⁸ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [1, 8, and 9 December 1854];’ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [February 1855];’ McCune Smith, ‘Introduction,’ xxi, xxiv.

⁵⁰⁹ William Lloyd Garrison, ‘The Editor Takes This Occasion...,’ *Liberator* 1, no. 52 (24 December 1831): 206. Research into which articles McCune Smith may have written for the *Liberator* is ongoing.

⁵¹⁰ Hutton, *Early Black Press*, 165; Danky and Hady, *National Bibliography*, 161, 240, 494.

medical journals in 1837. McCune Smith wrote in 'Our Faults' that he was also 'from 1832 to '37... a constant correspondent of a foreign paper.' Unfortunately, he revealed no other details about this publication. It may have been the reformist *Glasgow Chronicle* or *Glasgow Argus*.⁵¹¹ It could also have been one of the British newspapers in Newcastle, Leeds, Newark, London, and elsewhere which also favourably reported on the growing abolitionist movement.⁵¹²

Starting a few months after McCune Smith returned from Scotland in the summer of 1837, entries from the travel journal he wrote *en route* to Britain were published serially in *CA*, founded earlier that year.⁵¹³ Cornish served as the paper's first editor. *CA* was owned by Philip Bell, fellow alumnus of the African Free School and McCune Smith's close friend. It was published by Robert Sears 'of Toronto, Canada, a warm friend to the race.' It was Sears's idea,

⁵¹¹ R. M. W. Cowan, *The Newspaper in Scotland: A Study of Its First Expansion 1815-1860* (Glasgow: George Outram & Co., 1846), 50–52, 84, 373–77. Research for this thesis has found that surviving issues of relevant British newspapers are rare; the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, one of the few recently published reference works on British journalism, contains relatively little information about these and other smaller Scottish newspapers. See Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, eds., *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Ghent/London: Academia Press/British Library, 2009).

⁵¹² J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade 1787-1807* (London: Routledge, 2012), 103–4, 131–32. *The Loyal Reformer's Gazette*, later *The Reformer's Gazette* (Glasgow, ca. 1831-1835) was a reformist paper that, among other causes, opposed slavery in British dominions. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (ca. 1825-1836) reported almost exclusively on the cruel nature and practices of slavery in British colonies and political efforts to combat colonial slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. However, none of the correspondence in found issues of these publications appear to be by McCune Smith. See *The Loyal Reformers' Gazette*, vol. 1–2 (Glasgow: Muir, Gowans, & Co., 1831 and 1832); *The Reformers' Gazette*, vol. 3–5 (Glasgow: Muir, Gowans, and Co., 1833, 1834, and 1835); Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (London: Longman, 1972), 9–10, 35 n58, 271. Research into which 'foreign paper' may have featured McCune Smith's correspondence is ongoing.

⁵¹³ McCune Smith, 'Dr. Smith's Journal [16-19 August 1832];' James McCune Smith, 'Extracts from Dr. Smith's Journal [23 August - 3 September 1832],' *CA*, 2 December 1837; James McCune Smith, 'Extracts from Dr. Smith's Journal [5-8 September 1832],' *CA*, 16 December 1837; James McCune Smith, 'Extracts from Dr. Smith's Journal [9-11 September 1832],' *CA*, 3 February 1838; James McCune Smith, 'Dr. Smith's Journal [12 September 1832],' *CA*, 30 June 1838; James McCune Smith, 'Dr. Smith's Journal [12 September Part 2 - 13 September 1832],' *CA*, 21 July 1838; McCune Smith, 'Dr. Smith's Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].'

according to Penn, to change the paper's name from *The Weekly Advocate* to *The Colored American* to present its outlook and mission more accurately.⁵¹⁴

The toast of NYC's African American community following his prestigious education and accomplishments abroad, McCune Smith was frequently featured in the pages of *CA*.⁵¹⁵ Beginning with its first 1839 issue, he joined as co-editor of the newly expanded publication. By then, Charles Ray and Stephen Gloucester had joined the paper's proprietors and had taken over publication; it was now printed in its own offices in NYC and Philadelphia.⁵¹⁶ Since all *CA*'s editorials are unsigned, it is not always possible to be certain which were written by McCune Smith and which by Cornish. However, some very clearly portray his distinctive style of writing and citation. These include 'The Petition of Our People,' 'Coleman, the Murderer,' and 'Henry Clay's Speech.'⁵¹⁷ Others such as 'Recent Anecdote' and 'Mr. George Combe's Lectures' contain biographical details that firmly establish his authorship.⁵¹⁸ 'Agricultural Life,' reprinted from *CA* in *The Yankee Farmer*, was 'doubtless from the pen of the junior editor... to wit, Dr. James McCune Smith,' according to an enthusiastic reviewer.⁵¹⁹ As we have seen, McCune Smith also authored several medical editorials for *CA*; he likely selected its other medical content as well.

⁵¹⁴ Samuel E. Cornish, 'Title of This Journal,' *CA*, 4 March 1837; 'New Auspices,' *CA*, 11 May 1839; Bell, 'Death of Dr. Jas. McCune Smith;' Bell, 'Pioneer Newspapers;' Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 32; Danky and Hady, *National Bibliography*, 161.

⁵¹⁵ 'Farewell Dinner;' 'Reception of Dr. Smith;' Samuel E. Cornish, 'Phrenology,' *CA*, 23 September 1837; Cornish, 'Dr. Smith in Philadelphia.'

⁵¹⁶ *The Colored American* [front page], *CA*, 8 December 1838; Philip A. Bell, 'Our Next Volume,' *CA*, 8 December 1838.

⁵¹⁷ James McCune Smith, 'The Petition of Our People,' *CA*, 12 January 1839; James McCune Smith, 'Coleman, the Murderer,' *CA*, 19 January 1839; James McCune Smith, 'Henry Clay's Speech,' *CA*, 16 February 1839.

⁵¹⁸ James McCune Smith, 'Recent Anecdote,' *CA*, 2 March 1839; McCune Smith, 'Mr. George Combe's Lectures.'

⁵¹⁹ McCune Smith, 'Agricultural Life;' 'To the Yankee Farmer.'

McCune Smith's co-editorship of *CA* lasted only six months. As the new editorial department wrote in its 22 June 1839 issue, both McCune Smith and Cornish resigned their editorial positions for the paper. Both had become too busy in their respective businesses to continue and were especially unwilling to do so given that *CA* could not afford to pay them for their services. The proprietors Ray, Bell, and Gloucester took over as editors.⁵²⁰ Yet, as we shall see, McCune Smith would be periodically willing and able throughout the rest of his life to offer his services *gratis* to the African American press. Presumably, this was because he had become more financially secure and once again able to devote more free time to his personal interests.

In the 1840's through the early 1850's, McCune Smith offered his services as co-editor or assistant editor to other fledgling African American newspapers. Probably the first of these was the *People's Press*. As McCune Smith wrote, it was founded by Thomas Hamilton, a fellow former student of NYC's African Free School and ten years McCune Smith's junior.⁵²¹ As Penelope Bullock writes, Hamilton was born to a 'pioneering family of journalists and civil rights activists' in NYC. The influence of his literary family, the rise of the African American press, and the growing antislavery movement all combined to instil in him an enthusiastic desire to be a newspaperman.⁵²² At first, Hamilton worked odd jobs for African American and antislavery newspapers. His first attempt at running his own paper was the short-lived *People's Press*, published in his late teens.⁵²³ It was founded around October 1841 – perhaps with the help of

⁵²⁰ Ray, Bell, and Gloucester, 'To Our Readers.'

⁵²¹ McCune Smith, 'Our Faults.'

⁵²² Thomas Hamilton, 'Apology (Introductory),' *AAM*, January 1859, 1.

⁵²³ Penelope L. Bullock, *The Afro-American Periodical Press 1838-1909* (LSU Press, 1981), 55, 57.

his elder brother Robert – as a ‘spicey little sheet,’ as described in *CA*. As Hamilton recalled, the *People’s Press* lasted ‘for several months.’⁵²⁴ There appear to be no extant issues.

‘About the same time,’ McCune Smith recalled, he ‘edited a paper with Rev. Dr. Pennington, under the proprietorship of the now venerable Stephen Myers.’⁵²⁵ This paper, at least for a time, was titled *Northern Star and Clarksonian*. The years that this paper was active is also difficult to establish; it does not appear under this name in literature on the African American press and no issues appear to be extant. However, other papers refer to it either under its full name or an abbreviated one and occasionally reprinted its articles. An 1844 announcement states that ‘Stephen Myers, Temperance Lecturer and General Agent of the “Northern Star and Clarksonian,” will lecture at Middletown.... Also, S. Myers obtains subscribers for the Northern Star and Clarksonian, edited by Dr. Jas. M’Cune Smith and J.W.C. Pennington.’ From these articles and notices, the *Clarksonian* appears to have been active under that name only through much of 1844. Two editorials that McCune Smith wrote for the *Clarksonian* are preserved in the pages of the *Liberator*.⁵²⁶ The difficulty of establishing dates for this publication is also due to the fact that Myers was associated either as proprietor, editor, or agent with multiple Albany papers published throughout the 1840’s under similar names: *The Northern Star and Freeman’s Advocate*, the *(Albany) Northern Star*, the *Northern Star and*

⁵²⁴ ‘The People’s Press,’ *CA*, 30 October 1841; Hamilton, ‘Apology (Introductory).’

⁵²⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Our Faults.’ The stated year, 1859, appears to be a typographical error.

⁵²⁶ ‘Northern Star,’ *NYJC*, 16 May 1844; David Ruggles, ‘Northampton Association of Education and Industry: To the Editor of the Albany Northern Star (From the Clarksonian),’ *Liberator*, 24 May 1844; ‘Notice - Stephen Myers,’ *Hartford Courant*, 20 June 1844; James McCune Smith, ‘The Liberty Party (From the Northern Star),’ *Liberator*, 28 June 1844; ‘The Free Church of Scotland and Slavery (From the Northern Star and Clarksonian),’ *Liberator*, 12 July 1844; ‘The Northern Star and Clarksonian Says...,’ *Livingston Democrat*, 2 October 1844; James McCune Smith, ‘The Liberty Party - No. IV (From the Northern Star and Clarksonian),’ *NASS*, 14 November 1844.

Clarksonian, and *The Northern Star and Colored Farmer*.⁵²⁷ Only the first and last of these appear in literature on the African American press.⁵²⁸

Though McCune Smith did not mention it in 'Our Faults,' he was also involved with *Myer's Telegraph and Temperance Journal* in the early 1850's. As McCune Smith coyly wrote in 1853, 'Communi-paw [his main pseudonym] would have done himself the honor to enumerate James McCune Smith among the editors, but found, on inquiry, that the gentleman had never been any more than an assistant editor.'⁵²⁹ The *Journal* also rarely appears in literature on the African American press. Like the *Clarksonian*, its existence is also largely known from mentions in other newspapers; it was extant about 1852-1853.⁵³⁰ Myers and McCune Smith's ongoing relationship through the press represented only a small part of their work together on, as well as debates over, issues of concern to the African American community. Myers's *Colored Farmer* was part of his effort to help African Americans successfully settle on lands deeded to them through Gerrit Smith's land grant scheme; participation, cooperation, and debate at various Colored Conventions; promotion of temperance; efforts to establish an 'American League of Colored Laborers;' efforts to coordinate African American efforts to improve their economic

⁵²⁷ 'Anti-Slavery Items: New Papers,' *NASS*, 10 February 1842; 'Temperance in Kinderhook, Among the Colored People (From the Albany Northern Star),' *Columbia Washingtonian*, 29 September 1842; Henry Highland Garnet, 'The Sweet Cake Party,' *NASS*, 14 November 1844; William C. Nell, 'The Smith Lands,' *NS*, 14 April 1848.

⁵²⁸ Hutton, *Early Black Press*, 121-22; Danky and Hady, *National Bibliography*, 431; Paul Stewart, 'Myers, Stephen (1800-1870) and Myers, Harriet (1807-1865),' in *Encyclopedia of Antislavery and Abolition*, ed. Peter P. Hinks, John R. McKivigan, and R. Owen Williams (Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 487.

⁵²⁹ James McCune Smith, 'A Card,' *FDP*, 1 April 1853.

⁵³⁰ 'Liberty Party Nominations,' *FDP*, 10 September 1852; 'The Free Democracy...,' *FDP*, 1 October 1852; Frederick Douglass, 'Voice of the Colored People of Sandwich, C.W.,' *FDP*, 8 April 1853; Stewart, 'Myers, Stephen (1800-1870) and Myers, Harriet (1807-1865),' 487.

and social well-being by establishing a National Council; and a press debate over whether to support the Republican Party.⁵³¹

Like Myers, McCune Smith supported the African American press in various ways throughout his career, sometimes between his stints as a regular contributor or editor. For example, he sometimes served as an agent.⁵³² As we have seen, McCune Smith also sold African American publications in his pharmacy. Lastly, he advocated the expansion of the African American press and explored ways to secure better funding for it, as this chapter explores below.

In 1851, McCune Smith became a featured correspondent for *Frederick Douglass' Paper (FDP)*.⁵³³ McCune Smith's correspondence – usually under the pseudonym Communipaw – began in December of that year and appeared regularly until mid-1859.⁵³⁴ His contributions were written in a wide array of styles: sometimes as chatty or gossipy letters; sometimes as argumentative or expository essays; sometimes in hard-to-classify styles that later scholars would describe as 'modernist' or 'experimental.'⁵³⁵ Among McCune Smith's wealth of

⁵³¹ Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York, *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York: Held in the City of Schenectady, on the 18th, 19th, and 20th of September, 1844.*, 1844, 6, 10, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/602>; *Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends; Held in Troy, NY; on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th of October, 1847*, 1847, 6, 8, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/279>; Nell, 'The Smith Lands;' 'Northern Division: Delevan States Union,' *NS*, 30 June 1848; 'American League of Colored Laborers,' *NS*, 13 June 1850; 'Proceedings of the National Convention Held in Rochester on the 6th, 7th, and 8th of July, '53,' *FDP*, 15 July 1853; 'National Council of the Colored People,' *Tribune*, 9 May 1855; Stephen Myers, 'Letter from Stephen Myers,' *FDP*, 4 March 1859. See Chapter Five for McCune Smith's roles in Smith's land grant scheme and the National Council.

⁵³² 'List of Agents;' Ward, 'Agents;' Douglass, 'The Object of The North Star....'

⁵³³ Bullock, *Periodical Press*, 52; Danky and Hady, *National Bibliography*, 236, 430.

⁵³⁴ James McCune Smith, 'Messrs. Editors [18 December 1851],' *FDP*, 25 December 1851. McCune Smith's last extant letter for *FDP* appears in the 23 April 1859 issue; a letter to the editor in the 22 July 1859 issue of *FDP* critiques McCune Smith's featured correspondence from an earlier July issue, apparently no longer extant. See McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [23 April 1859];' 'Ben. Banneker,' 'Our Correspondence: A Great Crime,' *FDP*, 22 July 1859.

⁵³⁵ For example, see Gates and Stauffer in *Works*, x–xi, xiii, xvi, xxix–xxx; Blight, *Prophet*, 256.

contributions to African American authorship as correspondent for *FDP* include his letters in debate with fellow correspondent William Wilson (as ‘Ethiop’) on the nature of race and the role of wealth in African American social and political advancement; literary reviews and commentary; and sketches of African American life in NYC.⁵³⁶

McCune Smith’s essays for his series “‘Heads of the Colored People,” Done with a Whitewash Brush,’ published in *FDP* between 1851 and 1854, are among the best-known examples of the latter. They are widely considered to be among his most influential and innovative works.⁵³⁷ Initially, Frederick Douglass did not appear to understand the import or intent of McCune Smith’s sometimes stark or uncompromising portraits of working-class African Americans. He critiqued McCune Smith’s ‘Heads’ essays as ‘faithful pictures of contented degradation.’ Douglass suggested that McCune Smith ‘rouse the colored people to seek higher, more useful and profitable employments’ by presenting examples of middle-class or wealthy members of the community.⁵³⁸ Nevertheless, Douglass continued to publish the ‘Heads’ essays. Eventually, he came around: ‘A regular contributor to our columns is Dr. J. M’Cune Smith, of New York, over the signature of “Communi-paw,” whose racy articles, treating, as they do, of matters which can be best understood by persons brought into

⁵³⁶ James McCune Smith, ‘Nicaragua [1 January 1852],’ *FDP*, 8 January 1852; James McCune Smith, ‘Nicaragua - No. II [8 January 1852],’ *FDP*, 15 January 1852; McCune Smith, ‘Letter from Communi-paw [4 February 1852],’ James McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [20 February 1852],’ *FDP*, 26 February 1852; James McCune Smith, ‘Letter from Communi-paw [6 March 1852],’ *FDP*, 18 March 1852; James McCune Smith, ‘Book Review: The Two-Fold Slavery of the United States [7 November 1854],’ *FDP*, 24 November 1854; McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [1, 8, and 9 December 1854],’ McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [6 January 1855],’ McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [23 April 1859].’

⁵³⁷ For example, see Blight, ‘Search of Learning,’ 11–12; Stauffer in *Works*, 187–89; Gabrielle Bellot, ‘Twenty-First-Century Word Paintings: Nafissa Thompson-Spires’s ‘Heads of the Colored People,’ *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 30 April 2018, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/twenty-first-century-word-paintings-nafissa-thompson-spires-heads-of-the-colored-people/>.

⁵³⁸ Frederick Douglass, ‘Communi-paw Gives Us Quite a Vivid Picture...,’ *FDP*, 17 June 1852.

immediate contact with the oppressed, are invaluable, as furnishing an insight into the every day life of that people.’⁵³⁹

As a foundational figure in the establishment and growth of the African American press, McCune Smith was no less aware than Douglass of the invaluable roles it played in recording and promoting African American efforts to attain both public respect and freedom. In 1855, McCune Smith credited Douglass with reviving it almost single-handedly. In his introduction to Douglass’s second autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom*, McCune Smith wrote: ‘It had almost been given up, as an impracticable thing, to maintain a colored newspaper, when Mr. Douglass... essayed, and has proved, the thing perfectly practicable, and, moreover, of great public benefit.’⁵⁴⁰ Starting with *The North Star (NS)* – first issued on 3 December 1847 – Douglass firmly established the African American press as an essential forum for presenting news and discussing issues of African American concern as well as an outlet for African American expository, literary, and creative writing. Douglass honed his own skills as a writer along the way. As Penn wrote, *NS* was ‘conducted on a much higher plane than any of the preceding publications. ...Previous to this publication, [the orator] Mr. Douglass was not known as a writer; but he was afterward recognized as a great man in more than one sphere.’⁵⁴¹ *The North Star* was not Douglass’s first journalistic endeavour, however; he had previous experience, though brief, as co-editor of *The Ram’s Horn*.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ Frederick Douglass, ‘Fifth Volume,’ *FDP*, 17 December 1852. See also Chapter Two.

⁵⁴⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Introduction,’ xxv.

⁵⁴¹ Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 68.

⁵⁴² ‘The Ram’s Horn (Full Issue),’ *Ram’s Horn*, 5 November 1847. National Bibliography lists *The Ram’s Horn* as active 1847-1849; however, it operated at least into the next year. There appears to have been some hard feelings between its proprietor and editor Thomas Van Rensselaer and Douglass following the latter’s departure to establish *The North Star*. See Danky and Hady, *National Bibliography*, 483–84; Frederick Douglass, ‘The Ram’s Horn

Given its key importance to the African American community, McCune Smith continued to write for *FDP* and to help support and sustain the paper throughout the 1850's. From 4 February through 11 March 1859, McCune Smith also served as editor *pro tem* of *FDP* while Douglass was away on a six-week speaking tour.⁵⁴³ He conducted his editorship by correspondence from his home in NYC.⁵⁴⁴ McCune Smith's editorial contributions – all unsigned but attributable because of his *pro tem* editorship confirmed in *FDP* as well as thematic and biographical details and attributions by others – include news, political and social commentary, reviews, opinion pieces, advice, and world affairs.⁵⁴⁵

In 1859, McCune Smith began to write for a new series of publications which would come to rival and then supplant *FDP* as the major African American publication.⁵⁴⁶ In January 1859, *FDP* announced *The Anglo-African Magazine (AAM)* as a 'bright new fact' and described it as a major advance in African American media 'devoted to Literature, Science, Statistics, etc.' Douglass praised McCune Smith's essay 'Civilization: Its Dependence on Physical Circumstances' – the 'feature of the magazine for the present month' – as 'learned and masterly.'⁵⁴⁷ After McCune Smith stopped contributing to *FDP* later that year, he and Douglass debated and

Has Had Serious Trouble...,' *NS*, 8 December 1848; Frederick Douglass, 'The Ram's Horn,' *NS*, 22 December 1848; Frederick Douglass, 'The Ram's Horn,' *NS*, 29 June 1849.

⁵⁴³ Frederick Douglass, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' *FDP*, 28 January 1859; Frederick Douglass, 'Home Again,' *FDP*, 18 March 1859.

⁵⁴⁴ James McCune Smith, 'Mr. Watkins' Last – The Parthian Arrow,' *FDP*, 18 March 1859.

⁵⁴⁵ James McCune Smith, 'Slave Trade Suppression - Seward's Bill,' *FDP*, 11 February 1859; James McCune Smith, 'A Personal Liberty Bill,' *FDP*, 11 February 1859; James McCune Smith, 'F.P. Blair's Lecture in Boston,' *FDP*, 11 February 1859; James McCune Smith, 'Dr. Cheever on the Slave Trade,' *FDP*, 18 February 1859; James McCune Smith, 'Give Them Encouragement,' *FDP*, 4 March 1859; James McCune Smith, 'Mistakes of Printers,' *FDP*, 4 March 1859; James McCune Smith, 'Real Backbone Talk in Congress,' *FDP*, 4 March 1859; McCune Smith, 'Miscellaneous: Health, Diseases, Remedies...;' James McCune Smith, 'The Late Haytian Revolution,' *FDP*, 11 March 1859.

⁵⁴⁶ Debra Jackson, "'A Cultural Stronghold': The 'Anglo-African' Newspaper and the Black Community of New York,' *New York History* 85, no. 4 (2004): 337–38.

⁵⁴⁷ Frederick Douglass, 'The Anglo-African Magazine,' *FDP*, 14 January 1859.

exchanged ideas and cited one another's influence within the pages of the *Anglo-African* publications.⁵⁴⁸ The *AAM*, published for little over a year (January 1859 – March 1860), was soon joined by its offshoot *The Weekly Anglo-African* (*WAA*), which was later renamed *The Anglo-African* (*AA*). All told, the *Anglo-African* was published in one iteration or another – with one brief interruption – from January 1859 (the first issue of the *Magazine*) through 23 December 1865 (date of the last issue of *AA*).⁵⁴⁹ Hoping to place *WAA* on a more secure financial footing, its proprietor Thomas Hamilton sold the paper in early 1861. However, with a new owner and new editor, *WAA*'s mission changed; its name was also changed to *The Pine and Palm* to reflect its new ethos as a pro-emigration paper as well. (That iteration of the paper will be referred to below as *WAA-Pine and Palm*.)⁵⁵⁰ Determined to carry on *WAA*'s original mission to provide a platform for a wide range of views within the African American community, Hamilton's brother Robert resurrected the paper under that name in July 1861 and acted as its chief editor. Though no longer a proprietor or editor, Thomas would remain closely involved in the paper's operations.⁵⁵¹ McCune Smith apparently took an active role in *WAA*'s resurrection. Floyd J. Miller writes that 'in late July, [McCune] Smith evidently helped finance the birth of

⁵⁴⁸ James McCune Smith, 'Citizenship,' *AAM*, May 1859; James McCune Smith, 'Frederick Douglass at the Cooper Institute,' *AA*, 28 February 1863; Frederick Douglass, 'Frederick Douglass at the Cooper Institute [Reply to the Editor of The Anglo-African],' *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 6 (March 1863): 802; James McCune Smith, 'Our Southern Loyalists,' *AA*, 5 September 1863.

⁵⁴⁹ Bullock, *Periodical Press*, 223–34; Jackson, 'Cultural Stronghold,' 331, 334, 336. The publication of the *Magazine* and the *Weekly* overlapped for about eight months: the *Weekly*'s first issue was published 23 July 1859, the *Magazine*'s last was published March 1860.

⁵⁵⁰ See below for more on the paper under its new ownership.

⁵⁵¹ McCune Smith, 'Obituary [for Thomas Hamilton];' Jackson, 'Cultural Stronghold,' 336, 340, 357.

another *Weekly Anglo-African* as an anti-emigration organ to fill the void created by the acquisition and re-christening of the paper...⁵⁵²

In becoming a contributor and sometimes co-editor of the *Anglo-African* publications, McCune Smith had, as he wrote, 'returned to our early love, Thos. Hamilton, Esq.' The *AAM*, Thomas Hamilton wrote, was to provide 'an independent voice [for] the *'fourth estate'* which would demonstrate 'the forces of the negro' – whom, as we have seen, McCune Smith had described four years earlier as a "*power on the earth*".⁵⁵³ 'In issuing THE WEEKLY ANGLO-AFRICAN' a few months later, Hamilton wrote, he 'hope[d] to supply a demand too long felt in this community. We need a Press – a press of our own.'⁵⁵⁴ Given the existence of Rochester's *FDP*, Hamilton may have been referring to an unmet need of the NYC community rather than the African American community overall. However, he may have referred instead to the need for more African American editorial voices. Besides McCune Smith, editors, co-editors, and department editors of the *Anglo-African* publications would come to include Thomas and Robert Hamilton, William Wilson, Parker Smith, and Henry Highland Garnet. Some, such as McCune Smith, served anonymously and are only identified within scattered editorials and/or private correspondence.⁵⁵⁵ However, the anonymous editors' identities – including McCune Smith's – appear to have been known to many among the papers' regular readers. Many letters to the editor of the *Anglo-African* publications acknowledge McCune Smith's editorship, though

⁵⁵² Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization 1787-1863* (UIP, 1975), 243.

⁵⁵³ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [February 1855];' Hamilton, 'Apology (Introductory),' 1–2.

⁵⁵⁴ Thomas Hamilton, 'Our Paper,' *WAA*, 23 July 1859.

⁵⁵⁵ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 21 June 1860, GSP; 'Philadelphia Department: Parker T. Smith, Editor,' *AA*, 3 January 1863; James McCune Smith, 'A Pleasant Re-Union,' *AA*, 5 March 1864; McCune Smith to Smith, 17 February 1865; 'The Anglo-African - Published Weekly...,' *AA*, 1 July 1865.

not always directly. Oliver Johnson, editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, also alluded to McCune Smith as editor. Congressman Samuel S. Cox of Ohio identified McCune Smith as the author of an anonymous WAA editorial during a debate in the House of Representatives. McCune Smith later confirmed Johnson's and Cox's attributions of his articles in editorials.⁵⁵⁶

As with earlier papers for which he wrote anonymously, McCune Smith's authorship of unsigned editorials and other material for the *Anglo-African* publications cannot always be confirmed definitively. However, many can be confidently attributed to him based on biographical details, thematic clues, self-quotations from known works, distinctive style, and/or the signature 'S' (though he was not the only contributor to sign with an 'S') within the articles. Others can be based on evidence that McCune Smith was acting editor at the time.⁵⁵⁷ Unsigned articles which can be attributed to McCune Smith reveal that he wrote on such diverse topics as politics, holidays, literature, equal rights, economic opportunities for African Americans, materialism, the Civil War, and much more.⁵⁵⁸ The *Anglo-African* publications have proven to be among the richest sources for understanding the development of McCune Smith's ideas over time and for discovering previously unknown biographical details about him.

⁵⁵⁶ Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison, 6 January 1859; George T. Downing, 'There's Money in It,' AA, 13 February 1864; Samuel S. Cox, *Miscegenation or Amalgamation: Fate of the Freedman* (Washington, D.C.: Office of 'The Constitutional Union,' 1864); James McCune Smith, 'Hon. S. S. Cox of Ohio,' AA, 27 February 1864; H. H. White, 'Equality of Races,' AA, 28 January 1865; James McCune Smith, 'Gen. Sherman,' AA, 29 April 1865; Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison, 1 May 1865. See Chapter Six for the Cox and *Miscegenation* debate.

⁵⁵⁷ Research to discover more unsigned works by McCune Smith in the *Anglo-African* publications is ongoing.

⁵⁵⁸ James McCune Smith, 'The Merry Christmas Time,' WAA, 29 December 1860; James McCune Smith, 'Slavery in South Carolina... by Mrs. M. A. French [Book Review],' AA, 7 February 1863; James McCune Smith, 'The Problem of American Destiny Solved by Science and History [Book Review],' AA, 25 July 1863; McCune Smith, 'Loyalists;' James McCune Smith, 'The Regeneration of the South,' AA, 19 September 1863; Theodore Tilton and James McCune Smith, 'A Note from Mr. Tilton, and Reply,' AA, 3 October 1863; McCune Smith, 'Eighth Avenue;' James McCune Smith, 'Why Can't We Also!,' AA, 9 January 1864; James McCune Smith, 'There's Money in It,' AA, 30 January 1864; James McCune Smith, 'The War – Its Issues,' AA, 20 August 1864.

McCune Smith intended his connection with Thomas Hamilton and the AA to continue as long as his rapidly declining health would allow him to write: 'We have jogged along thus far happily together, and will continue to do so, we hope, until the catastrophe mentioned in a certain ceremony [a funeral] shall occur. ...A few more scribblings and the old pen will be shelved.'⁵⁵⁹ Before long, death would indeed sever their connection but not as McCune Smith foresaw: McCune Smith would outlive Hamilton by several months.⁵⁶⁰

4.2 A National Press?

Except for his resignation as co-editor of *CA* partially due to lack of pay, McCune Smith appears to have neither sought nor received remuneration for his contributions to the African American press. Considering also that McCune Smith's voluminous work as editor, correspondent, fundraiser, agent, and promoter over nearly four decades was often uncredited, one may wonder at his motivations. McCune Smith provided insights on this matter on several occasions. Shortly after serving as *pro tem* editor for *FDP* in early 1859, McCune Smith wrote that he 'could not tell why I felt so dull on this blustering Saturday night, until I remembered that my tenure of the office editorial had ceased last week, and that the ideas which doubtless gathered up in my brain for next week's paper, were lolling and stretching themselves in magnificent indolence...'⁵⁶¹ In 1865, ill and housebound, he wrote to Gerrit Smith: 'In regard to the *Anglo-African*, I must plead guilty to scribbling the leading editorial of almost every number. Remnants of thought, fragments of old ideas, and shreds of old activities appear to filter down

⁵⁵⁹ McCune Smith, 'Our Faults.'

⁵⁶⁰ McCune Smith, 'Obituary [for Thomas Hamilton];' Furman, 'Obituary.'

⁵⁶¹ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [19 March 1859].'

to some portion of my brain, and must be let out once a week like an impostume [abscess] else I would grow irritable.⁵⁶²

Though McCune Smith's restless intellect may have provided much of the driving force behind his prodigious authorship, his volunteerism may be best explained by his ideological commitment to the African American press. Reflecting on his long history writing and working on its behalf, he wrote in December 1865 that 'It has been to us, throughout, a labor of love.'⁵⁶³ Like Cornish, Douglass, the Hamilton brothers, and others among its founding generation, McCune Smith was convinced that a vibrant press owned and operated by African Americans was vital to their social and political advancement. To this end, McCune Smith not only supported individual publications: he advocated for the establishment of a national African American press.

McCune Smith first advocated for the establishment of such a press at the 'National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends' of October 1847. As head of a three-person 'committee upon the Printing Press,' McCune Smith presented a report that proposed

a printing press, a copious supply of type, a full and complete establishment, wholly controlled by colored men; let the thinking writing man, the compositors, pressmen, printers' help - all, all, be men of color; then let there come from said establishment a weekly periodical and a quarterly periodical, edited as well as printed by colored men; let this establishment be so well endowed as to be beyond the chances of temporary patronage; and then there will be a fixed fact, a rallying point, towards which the strong and the weak amongst us would look with confidence and hope...

⁵⁶² McCune Smith to Smith, 17 February 1865.

⁵⁶³ McCune Smith, 'Our Faults.'

McCune Smith's already significant experience with African American newspapers had made him painfully aware that regardless of their talent, commitment, and energy, their proprietors had faced financial difficulties that had caused their papers to fold within a few years. A single national press, McCune Smith and his supporters believed, would resolve that difficulty. Given that African Americans were a significant minority and that most did not have the financial wherewithal to adequately support multiple small, local papers, a centralized establishment could be better funded by pooling the funds African Americans could spare for such a project. McCune Smith argued that a unified, well-funded press could be more effective in explaining African Americans' plight and promoting their interests both within and without the African American community. In short, the more money and subscribers the African American press could amass, the more social and political influence it could have.⁵⁶⁴

While many – such as Garnet and Ray – fully supported the committee's proposal, others had their doubts. Myers agreed that while a national press might be a worthwhile project in theory, he did not think that it should replace currently existing papers. However, if the plan were amended to merge existing papers into one national paper, he could support such a project. Ray assured the convention that the plan 'did not preclude' this idea. Douglass, still co-editor of *The Ram's Horn* and planning the establishment of *NS*, was among those who opposed it outright. He argued that a single paper would not adequately reflect the diversity of views among the African American community. Douglass proposed that the convention work

⁵⁶⁴ *Convention, Troy 1847*, 6–8, 18–20.

instead to increase support for multiple, independent papers. While the committee's report was finally adopted, the national press it called for never materialized.⁵⁶⁵

McCune Smith continued to diligently support African American newspapers despite the failure of his committee's plan. While Douglass's newspaper managed to survive far longer than any of its predecessors or contemporaries, it nevertheless continued to suffer financial difficulties and almost folded more than once.⁵⁶⁶ McCune Smith was solicitous of the paper's success; in an October 1851 letter to Douglass, he proposed a plan to expand it and keep it more adequately funded. Among his proposals was to solicit a pool of regular subscribers who, rather than paying a flat rate, would contribute according to their means. McCune Smith pledged \$10, the highest subscription amount he suggested for others.⁵⁶⁷

However, the vision of a unified press remained in McCune Smith's mind. In the early- to mid-1850's this vision was centred around Douglass's newspaper, already unprecedented in its longevity. In 1851, *NS* was renamed, gained a larger subscriber base, and was set on a more secure financial footing through a merger with Samuel Ward's *The Impartial Citizen* and the Gerrit Smith-backed *Liberty Party Paper*. (Smith had already helped rescue Douglass's financially strapped paper many times.)⁵⁶⁸ In February 1855, McCune Smith acknowledged that the enlarged publication had become *the African American newspaper*: '...we recognize in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, the organ of the enslaved and down-trodden throughout this

⁵⁶⁵ *Convention, Troy 1847*, 6–7.

⁵⁶⁶ Blight, *Prophet*, 195, 213, 265.

⁵⁶⁷ James McCune Smith, 'Letter from Dr. James McCune Smith,' *FDP*, 16 October 1851.

⁵⁶⁸ Frederick Douglass, 'Frederick Douglass, Editor of the North Star...', *FDP*, 26 June 1851; Gerrit Smith, 'Letter to the Editor,' *FDP*, 26 June 1851; Blight, *Prophet*, 208, 213, 217.

land...'⁵⁶⁹ In a letter to Smith three months later, McCune Smith proposed another merger: William Goodell's newspaper *American Jubilee* with *FDP*. This would combine the 'immense power of Goodell's pen' with *FDP*'s much larger subscriber base. While the upcoming Jubilee celebration would provide a good fundraising opportunity for both papers, McCune Smith argued, combining the funds could result in a single more powerful paper.⁵⁷⁰ This proposed merger reflected Ray's idea about the implementation of McCune Smith's 1847 plan for a single national press. The merger never materialized: *Jubilee* became the *Radical Abolitionist*, mouthpiece of the political abolitionist movement of the same name which McCune Smith helped organize that autumn.⁵⁷¹

Besides Douglass, McCune Smith most admired Thomas Hamilton for 'his long and patient struggle to establish on a sound basis a newspaper which should plead for God's poor in this proud and hypocritical nation.'⁵⁷² By the time McCune Smith wrote Hamilton's obituary in June 1865, Douglass's final paper *Douglass' Monthly* had already stopped publication for nearly two years.⁵⁷³ By this point, *The Anglo-African* had become the closest thing to a national African American press. In Hamilton's obituary, McCune Smith again pressed the point he had made when he originally advocated for such an institution: 'the simultaneous issue of half-a-dozen papers for a people only able to support one or two' was among the many reasons why the African American press lacked the 'element of continuity' vital to its success. Hamilton's ability

⁵⁶⁹ James McCune Smith, 'Resolutions Offered at a New York Literary and Productive Union Event, 1 February 1855,' *FDP*, 9 February 1855.

⁵⁷⁰ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 4 May 1855, GSP; Freeman, 'Free Negro,' 185.

⁵⁷¹ *Proceedings of the Convention of Radical Political Abolitionists, Held at Syracuse, N.Y., June 26th, 27th, and 28th, 1855* (New York: Central Abolition Board, 1855), 4; Danky and Hady, *National Bibliography*, 41, 482. See Chapter Five for more about the Radical Political Abolitionists.

⁵⁷² McCune Smith, 'Obituary [for Thomas Hamilton].'

⁵⁷³ Bullock, *Periodical Press*, 240–41.

to keep the *AA* going, McCune Smith argued, was due to his financial acumen; his close attention to business details; his nearly twenty years' experience 'on newspapers in Printing House Square;' that fact that he 'was, emphatically, a hard worker' who '*thoroughly understood the colored people;*' and his pedigree as a member of a leading African American family descended – as McCune Smith and others claimed – from founding father Alexander Hamilton. Therefore, McCune Smith argued, 'it must be admitted that Mr. Hamilton, alone, has done more than all the rest of our newspaper publishers have done added together.' McCune Smith called on the African Americans community to pay tribute Hamilton's life's work by paying for and building the 'well-stocked printing office' for the *AA* that Hamilton had long wanted and striven to establish himself – just the sort of printing office that McCune Smith had proposed in 1847.⁵⁷⁴

The editors of *AA* generally appear to have viewed the paper as the *de facto* national African American press. The leading editorial of its 1 October 1864 issue offered several recommendations for the 'National Convention of colored men' to be held at Syracuse on 4 October. Its first proposal was that the convention 'organize and thoroughly support a good TRUMPET... The modern trumpet is the press. We promptly offer the *ANGLO-AFRICAN* until a better can be found.'⁵⁷⁵ However, *AA* folded at the end of the following year. McCune Smith and the

⁵⁷⁴ McCune Smith, 'Obituary [for Thomas Hamilton].'

⁵⁷⁵ 'The National Convention,' *AA*, 1 October 1864. It is uncertain whether Robert Hamilton (then head editor of *AA*), McCune Smith, or another authored this editorial. While it promoted the establishment of a national press in a way McCune Smith had long done, it appears unlikely that he was in the position to offer *AA* as the voice of the convention and the entire African American community. Therefore, Robert – or perhaps Thomas – was more likely its author.

other AA editors' vision of a unified African American press that would outlive them, inspiring while it lasted, remained unfulfilled.

4.3 The African American Press and the American Anti-Slavery Society

As the NYC correspondent for *FDP*, McCune Smith provoked a famous press war in the mid-1850's when he charged many white abolitionists of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) with paternalism.⁵⁷⁶ While McCune Smith – like Douglass – was initially a strong supporter of the AASS's Garrisonian ideology and plan of action, he also became an early dissenter. In 1864, McCune Smith recalled that he 'had the honor of being hauled over the coals by Frederick Douglass, Esq., for pitching into [the] "old organization" [the AASS]' as editor of the *People's Press* in 1841.⁵⁷⁷ However, McCune Smith's public criticism of the AASS began earlier. As co-editor of *CA* in the spring of 1839, McCune Smith argued that though it was 'last of all and best of all' anti-slavery societies then in existence, the AASS neglected the 'sound principles' that had given energy and purpose to their organization. This neglect 'suffered a deformity to creep in, which, imperceptible at first, has become more glaring with each succeeding year. They make secondary and collateral what ought to have been the primary object of all their efforts. In their strong zeal and fiery indignation against slavery in the South, they half overlooked slavery in the North....'⁵⁷⁸ Though McCune Smith continued to attend AASS meetings until at least the mid-1840's, he had broken off all connection with them by 1850.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁶ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 90–91; Blight, 'Search of Learning,' 15–16. For more on McCune Smith, Garrison, and the AASS, see Chapter 5.

⁵⁷⁷ McCune Smith, 'Our Faults.'

⁵⁷⁸ James McCune Smith, 'It Is a Fact, in Morals as Well as Physics...', *CA*, 18 May 1839. See Chapter Five for discussion of McCune Smith's view of Northern 'slavery.'

⁵⁷⁹ See Chapter Five.

Over time, Douglass aligned with McCune Smith in his increasing opposition to the 'old organization.' Douglass's disillusionment with the AASS began when Garrisonian patrons opposed and even tried to derail his plan to establish his own newspaper in 1847.⁵⁸⁰ McCune Smith wrote that 'The Garrison party, to which [Douglass] still adhered, did not want a *colored* newspaper – there was an odor of *caste* about it... and the wide gulf which separated the free colored people from the Garrisonians, also separated them from their brother, Frederick Douglass.'⁵⁸¹ It was only later, however, that this separation became complete. As Eric Foner writes, 'Douglass and the Garrisonians... experienced a bitter falling-out in the early 1850s over the former's embrace of political action and his conversion to the idea that... the Constitution could be construed as an anti-slavery document.' In this, Foner adds, 'James McCune Smith quickly weighed in on Douglass's side.'⁵⁸²

By the mid-1850's, McCune Smith turned his focus from tactics to attitudes in his opposition to the AASS. In an 1854 *FDP* article, McCune Smith charged the AASS with favouring famous but pro-slavery lecturers over African American ones; paying African American lecturers less than white ones; overcharging for those lectures; and (over)paying the lacklustre white editor of the AASS's *National Anti-Slavery Standard* when there was better African American talent to be had. 'It is whispered hereabouts, that Oliver [Johnson, associate to Sydney Howard Gay as editor of the *NAAS*] regards this as sound, Anti-Slavery doctrine...'⁵⁸³ Johnson, together

⁵⁸⁰ Blight, *Prophet*, 188–89.

⁵⁸¹ McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' xxiv.

⁵⁸² Foner, *Gateway*, 182.

⁵⁸³ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [1, 8, and 9 December 1854],' 9; Foner, *Gateway*, 100, 159.

with African American Garrisonians Robert Purvis and John Mercer Langston, vigorously objected to 'the mendacious assault of Dr. James McCune Smith.'

At McCune Smith's request, *FDP* reprinted Johnson's response together with McCune Smith's reply. Upon reading Johnson's detailed rebuttal, McCune Smith acknowledged that he had been mistaken about details of the Boston lecture series and some other specifics. Nevertheless, he doubled down: most of the facts underlying his criticism *were* correct, McCune Smith insisted, and the 'real charge' that lay at the heart of his claims was 'that American Abolitionists do not, as organizations, treat black men as men, and therefore, do not regard them as such.' Though a relative few continued to adhere to the 'old organization,' McCune Smith argued, African Americans had been largely driven away. They perceived that the AASS had, over time, increasingly eschewed their participation and financial support – upon which the AASS initially depended – in favour of courting middle- and upper-class white patrons and activists.⁵⁸⁴ McCune Smith's and Johnson's feud inspired a firestorm of controversy in the pages of *FDP*, with some in support of McCune Smith, some of Johnson, and some wavering between both.⁵⁸⁵

Throughout the controversy, Douglass sided firmly with McCune Smith and defended his right to unapologetically express his views in the press. In 'The Old Controversy Re-Opened,' Douglass wrote that McCune Smith's initial article attacking the AASS was inserted in the paper

⁵⁸⁴ Oliver Johnson, 'A Mendacious Blunderer,' *NASS*, 23 December 1854; James McCune Smith, 'Jas. McCune Smith vs. the Standard: Communipaw's Reply and Responses,' *NASS*, 13 January 1855.

⁵⁸⁵ William W. Chapman, 'A Word to Communipaw [23 December 1854],' *FDP*, 4 January 1855; 'A String of Falsehoods,' *Liberator*, 29 December 1854; 'Letter from Observer [11 January 1855],' *FDP*, 23 February 1855; 'A Sharp Controversy,' *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 20 January 1855; Wilson, 'From Our Brooklyn Correspondent [20 January 1855];' Samuel Ringgold Ward, 'The Modern Negro - No. II [March 1855],' *FDP*, 13 April 1855.

‘in our absence and without our knowledge.’ (Watkins, as assistant editor, was likely in charge of all content while Douglass was away at that time on a speaking tour.) This, however, was not to be construed as an apology. Though Johnson used McCune Smith’s article as an excuse to further abuse him, Douglass wrote, ‘we ...must beg to be excused from any participation in this quarrel for the present’ since he had a busy lecture schedule coming up. He called Johnson a ‘paid calumniator’ and was confident that McCune Smith would ‘triumphantly vindicate himself in this controversy.’ Furthermore, unlike Johnson – who was paid for his writing and lectured wherever he could command the most money – McCune Smith ‘has worked for his people without “fee or reward.”’ For this reason, Douglass exclaimed, ‘If there is one man in this country more than any other (always excepting Gerrit Smith) who has deserved the love, the esteem and gratitude of the oppressed in this country, that man is he who writes in our columns over the signature of “Communi paw.”’⁵⁸⁶

McCune Smith followed his initial attack on the AASS with a series of *FDP* articles describing the history and nature of their estrangement from the African American community. As he wrote, ‘The reciprocal relations of the Free Colored People and the American Anti-Slavery Society form a subject of intense interest at the moment; it is admitted that these two classes of persons stand aloof from each other ...the twain ought to be, but are not, one flesh.’ Though the AASS has begun as a principled organization, McCune Smith argued, it had begun to lose the support of African Americans when, in 1835, they decided to hire white agents instead of African Americans as they had done originally. Once the AASS began to raise a significant

⁵⁸⁶ Frederick Douglass, ‘The Old Controversy Re-Opened,’ *NASS*, 13 January 1855.

amount of money, they hired white people for lucrative leadership roles while passing over African Americans: 'colored men were never placed in these positions, while white men of inferior merit crawled in' during which time 'swarm after swarm of hungry white abolitionists have feasted and fattened....' Yet it was mostly African Americans who had supported the AASS for free or for little pay in its early days and were the very people the organization had been founded to help. In response to the last of these articles – which included a critique of the AASS's apparent endorsement of religious leaders who promoted social inequality while opposing slavery – Douglass praised McCune Smith's 'well written paper, explaining the grounds of the coldness of the colored people towards the American Anti-Slavery Society. His right, as a colored man, to enter upon such an explanation, is unquestionable.'⁵⁸⁷ Douglass, for one, would not transgress that right by excluding McCune Smith's controversial views from *FDP*.

4.4 The Colonization/Emigration Debate

For all McCune Smith's later criticism of Garrison's ideas and his followers, Garrison's own early influence on McCune Smith may have played a role in engendering another of his most well-known press fights. In 1832, nineteen-year-old McCune Smith loaned his copy of Garrison's *Thoughts on Colonization* to another guest at a dinner party. Among the topics of conversation was a series of anti-colonization articles published in Garrison's *Liberator*. Garrison's *Thoughts* opposed the idea that African Americans should leave the United States, voluntarily or by

⁵⁸⁷ James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [20 January 1855],' *FDP*, 26 January 1855; McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [February 1855];' James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [May 1855],' *FDP*, 11 May 1855; Frederick Douglass, 'Communi-paw and the American A.S. Society,' *FDP*, 18 May 1855.

coercion, to found colonies in Africa.⁵⁸⁸ McCune Smith remained an ardent foe of any movement that sought to promote or coerce the relocation of African Americans to other countries. He viewed any such efforts and attempts to justify them as ultimately pro-slavery because 1) they were ultimately founded on the underlying presumption that African Americans did not really belong in the country of their birth, and 2) by leaving the US, African Americans ceded ground to pro-slavery interests, thereby increasing their power.⁵⁸⁹

The African American press provided a vital public forum for debate on the issue of colonization and emigration amongst their own community. Though some early colonization efforts were started by African Americans, the movement came to be largely led by white abolitionists. Over time, the majority of African Americans opposed colonization. Like McCune Smith, many believed that it was an outgrowth of pro-slavery thought, a thinly disguised attempt to rid the nation of African Americans instead of granting them the rights to which they were entitled as citizens.⁵⁹⁰ However, like Russwurm, some believed that emigration was the best chance for African Americans to achieve liberation, self-improvement, and self-sufficiency. African Americans continued to debate the issue in the pages of the African American press – so long as there was such a press to conduct it in. As we have seen, *FJ*'s cofounders' opposing views on colonization ultimately caused them to dissolve their partnership; the paper did not long survive their split.

⁵⁸⁸ McCune Smith, 'Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].'

⁵⁸⁹ James McCune Smith, 'Preamble, Resolution, and Address for the Great Anti-Colonization Meeting in New York, 8 January 1839,' *CA*, 19 January 1839; McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 5–6. McCune Smith's opposition to colonization and emigrationist movements is further explored in Chapter Five.

⁵⁹⁰ Edmondson, 'To Plead Our Own Cause,' 126–27; Foner, *Gateway*, 52–55.

Cornish continued to adamantly oppose colonization in the paper he founded a decade later. As co-editor of *CA*, McCune Smith joined Cornish in attacking the ideas, 'prejudices,' and misleading or false data which many colonizationalists used to rationalize their cause.⁵⁹¹ After leaving the *CA*'s editorial team, McCune Smith continued to attack colonization and emigrationist efforts in the press.⁵⁹² One notable (possible) exception was in his 1852 two-part, lengthy review of Ephraim Squier's recently published book on Nicaragua. In these articles, McCune Smith extolled Nicaragua as a model multiracial society. Near the end of the second instalment, McCune Smith wrote: 'If any of our young men feel enterprise kindling in their blood, Nicaragua, free Nicaragua, offers the highest inducements to fair and honest endeavor.' However, since he followed this immediately with 'But I call on all to rally around the State Convention to Protest against Gubernatorial caste and Colonization,' it is hard to tell whether his suggestion to emigrate was tongue-in-cheek or a recommendation to those already determined to do so.⁵⁹³

Other leading African American leaders such as James Forten, Charles Ray, Samuel Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, John Vashon, Martin Delany, George Downing, and Mary Ann

⁵⁹¹ Samuel E. Cornish, 'Colored People Always Opposed to Colonization,' *CA*, 13 May 1837; Samuel E. Cornish, 'American Colonization,' *CA*, 11 August 1838; Macdonald and McCune Smith, 'Physician's Report [and Reply];' *James McCune Smith, 'Agriculture of Liberia,' *CA*, 23 February 1839; McCune Smith, 'It Is a Fact, in Morals as Well as Physics...;' *James McCune Smith, 'A Point Settled,' *CA*, 16 February 1839.

⁵⁹² For example, see McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery 1;' James McCune Smith, 'African Colonisation - The Other Side,' *NASS*, 28 August 1851; James McCune Smith, 'African Colonisation - The Other Side, No. II,' *NASS*, 11 September 1851; McCune Smith, 'Communipaw [4 February 1852];' James McCune Smith, 'From Our New York Correspondent [4 May 1854],' *FDP*, 12 May 1854. For McCune Smith's organizing and speeches against colonization and emigration schemes, see Chapter Five.

⁵⁹³ McCune Smith, 'Nicaragua;' McCune Smith, 'Nicaragua - No. II.' 'State Convention' referred to one called for by McCune Smith and other anti-colonialists in response to New York governor Washington Hunt's recent recommendation to the state legislature to appropriate funds for colonization efforts. See 'A Call for a State Convention of Colored Citizens,' *Tribune*, 7 January 1852.

Shadd Cary joined both sides of the debate on colonization and emigration in the pages of the African American press.⁵⁹⁴ Douglass, like his predecessors Cornish and McCune Smith, regularly opposed colonization and emigration movements in his newspapers. Yet he was also dedicated to providing a forum for the debate from all sides. In 'African Civilization Society,' Douglass responded to Garnet's call for him to publish an explanation for his opposition to the African Civilization Society (AfCS).⁵⁹⁵ Their mission, as its president Garnet described it, was 'the civilization and christianization [sic] of Africa... [while] engaging in agriculture, lawful trade, and commerce in the land of my forefathers... an organization that shall endeavor to check and destroy the African slave-trade....' Douglass replied that though he was willing to comply with Garnet's request for an explanation of his views, he preferred to let others debate the issue in the pages of *FDP*: 'Hitherto we have allowed ourselves but little space for discussing the claims of this new scheme for the civilization of Africa, doing little more than indicating our dissent from this movement, yet leaving our columns as free to its friends as to its opponents. ...We need discussion among ourselves, discussion to rouse our souls to intenser [sic] life and activity.' Douglass held up McCune Smith as an example of this: "Communi-paw' did capital service when he gave the subtle brain of Wm. Whipper a little work to do [on the subject of the AfCS], and our readers the pleasure of seeing it done.' Douglass then provided his own list of reasons 'which prevent our co-operation with the African Civilization Society;' they aligned

⁵⁹⁴ James Forten, 'For the Freedom's Journal (18 May 1827),' *CA*, 13 May 1837; Charles B. Ray, 'Colonization,' *CA*, 12 January 1839; Samuel Ringgold Ward, 'Bishop H. H. Garnet,' *NS*, 9 February 1849; Henry Highland Garnet, 'Colonization and Emigration - H.H. Garnet's Reply to S.S. Ward (From The Impartial Citizen),' *NS*, 2 March 1849; John Bethune Vashon, 'African Colonization,' *NS*, 13 June 1850; Martin Robison Delany, 'Call for a National Emigration Convention of Colored Men,' *FDP*, 19 August 1853; George T. Downing, 'Letter from George T. Downing,' *FDP*, 22 December 1854; Garnet, 'Mr. Garnet's Reply;' Mary Ann Shadd Cary, 'Haytian Emigration: Editor of the Anglo-African,' *WAA*, 28 September 1861.

⁵⁹⁵ Not to be confused with the American Colonization Society (ACS). See also Chapter Five.

closely with McCune Smith's. He added that while he was personally opposed to promoting AfCS's project, the decisions African Americans made for themselves in the matter were none of his business. Douglass concluded that though his own objections 'seem sober, rational, and true... we shall be glad to have them honestly criticised.'⁵⁹⁶

Though resolutely sceptical of all emigrationist movements, McCune Smith was initially willing to give the AfCS the benefit of the doubt. Reporting for *FDP* on a meeting of the Society held in March 1859, McCune Smith wrote that one 'Hon. Mr. Johnson of Liberia' 'made a very clever speech, showing the progress of Christianity and Civilization in the region round about Monrovia' and insisting that the AfCS held no sympathy with the African Colonization Society or 'its hateful principles of expatriation.' Though Johnson presented 'a plausible statement of the case,' McCune Smith objected that the AfCS's project focused on fulfilling a mission abroad that had not yet been accomplished at home. 'Nevertheless,' McCune Smith wrote, 'these meetings have their benefit' in that 'They aid in promoting that free speech, which is a necessary preliminary to real progress.'⁵⁹⁷

By the beginning of 1861 McCune Smith no longer demonstrated even a modicum of sympathy with the AfCS or any – to his mind – similarly motivated project such as the 'Haytian emigration' scheme promoted by the *WAA-Pine and Palm's* owner James Redpath, its editor George Lawrence, Jr, and Haitian emigration advocate Rev. James Theodore Holly.⁵⁹⁸ By that time, *WAA* had become a key forum for debate over the colonization/emigration issue. Its

⁵⁹⁶ Frederick Douglass, 'Colonization,' *NS*, 26 January 1849; Frederick Douglass, 'African Civilization Society,' *FDP*, 14 January 1859.

⁵⁹⁷ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [19 March 1859].'

⁵⁹⁸ Edmondson, 'To Plead Our Own Cause,' 267–68.

pages featured McCune Smith's blistering criticisms of Garnet for 'The sudden agility with which you wheeled about from African civilization to Haytian emigration.' He characterised both schemes as 'feeble attempt[s] to do what the American Colonization Society has failed to do.' McCune Smith implored Garnet to stay true to their old pledge to dedicate their lives to the cause to liberate African Americans at home and to 'shake off these migrating phantasms.'⁵⁹⁹ The debate between McCune Smith, Garnet, Holly, and many others raged ever more hotly in the pages of *WAA* for about a year.⁶⁰⁰ While *WAA* was under their control, the Hamilton brothers displayed even less of a willingness to rein in or take sides in the debate than Douglass had in the pages of *FDP*.

Shadd Cary also lent her passionate voice to the fray. The first woman of African descent to publish and edit a newspaper in North America, Shadd Cary recognized the paramount importance of the press as a forum for the debate on the colonization/emigration question. Her newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman* of Windsor, Ontario, was founded in large part because she – along with Ward, one of the first co-editors she recruited – believed that Canada's only existing African American newspaper *Voice of the Fugitive* sought to silence dissenting views.⁶⁰¹ When *WAA* changed its neutral editorial stance on the emigration question following its sale to Redpath, Shadd Cary was dismayed.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁹ James McCune Smith, 'Emigration: To the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet [Part 1],' *WAA*, 5 January 1861; James McCune Smith, 'Emigration: To the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet [Part 2],' *WAA*, 12 January 1861.

⁶⁰⁰ Freeman, 'Free Negro,' 53–60; Philip Edmondson, 'The St. Domingue Legacy in Black Activist and Antislavery Writings in the United States, 1791–1862' (PhD, University of Maryland, 2003), 300–308.

⁶⁰¹ Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (UIP, 1999), xi, 46, 58, 70–72.

⁶⁰² Miller, *Search*, 242–45.

As Douglass had pointed out, there was no necessary contradiction between expressing an editorial opinion and being willing to publish uncensored debate on any given issue. Yet when *WAA*'s new editor Lawrence announced that the paper would not hesitate to express its editorial opinions, he conveyed conflicting messages on whether *WAA* would continue as a forum for vibrant debate. In the paper's first issue under his editorship, Lawrence wrote: 'The "Anglo-African" has not, hitherto, expressed any opinion, editorially, on the question of Emigration to Hayti. While it has permitted the utmost latitude of debate, it has preserved a rather ominous silence as to the merits of the controversy. It is *our* intention to define our position on every question that arises in which the welfare of our people is involved...' While Lawrence promised readers that *WAA* would continue to present different sides of the debate, he warned 'Let our correspondents take the negative or affirmative as they please; but if they prefer to denounce their opponents instead, they must excuse us if we refuse to print their letters.' In any case, 'only a limited space can be given to the discussion of the question.'⁶⁰³

Whether or not Lawrence's use of 'ominous' and 'limited space' initially alarmed Shadd Cary as to the new editor's intention of allowing continued free and robust debate from all sides on this issue in *WAA* by the African American community, developments would soon confirm her worst suspicions. Many readers wondered whether *WAA* was still truly an African American publication under its new ownership despite having an African American editor. As George Downing wrote: 'There is considerable inquiry as to the change which has lately taken place in the *Anglo-African*. I think that it is but an act of justice to inform the anti-slavery public,

⁶⁰³ George Lawrence, 'Emigration to Hayti,' *WAA*, 16 March 1861.

and particularly its colored subscribers, that the paper was purchased last month for a sum by a white gentleman of this city...' Downing sarcastically suggested that the name be changed to *'The Anglo-Saxon.'*⁶⁰⁴ Robert Hamilton observed, with dismay, that *WAA* no longer served as a trusted public forum in which African Americans could freely express their diverse opinions on the subject: 'those who bought [the paper] transformed it into an Haytian emigration organ, when it immediately lost the confidence of those for whom it was published.'⁶⁰⁵

In her letter to the editor shortly after the Hamilton brothers revived *WAA*, Shadd Cary echoed Downing's, Robert Hamilton's, and other anti-emigrationists' sentiments: 'When your paper "went out," the hopes of many who had only heard of it, seemed to die out with it; some feared, they felt by intuition, that mischief was brewing... For the first time, since colored men dared to canvass questions relating to their own interests, have they been summarily silenced – forbidden to examine both sides...' The new proprietors and editors of the paper, Shadd Cary charged, 'in the prosecution of the Haytian Colonization scheme' promoted the 'worn out, and repudiated' arguments of the original colonizationalists 'about the extinction of our race... the invincibility of American prejudice... [and] the incongeniality of climate.' Readers of *WAA-Pine and Palm* witnessed 'for the first time in thirty years... our Pennington's, our Delaney's, our [McCune] Smith's and Downings... cuffed into silence. Our so-called enemies, the African Colonizationalists, never dared stigmatize as drunkards, "renegade negroes" and snobs, those of our men known to be the leaders in defence of our rights.' Shadd Cary rejoiced that 'the

⁶⁰⁴ George T. Downing, 'Transfer of the Anglo-African,' *Liberator*, 19 April 1861.

⁶⁰⁵ Quoted in Jackson, 'Cultural Stronghold,' 336.

“Anglo-African” is in circulation once more – and suggested that if readers wanted to know where to send those fleeing slavery, send them to hospitable Canada instead.⁶⁰⁶

Over time, the debate over the emigration-colonization movement ebbed from *WAA*'s columns. As the Civil War introduced new challenges and a renewed sense of hope for the abolition of slavery the paper's contributors largely turned their attention to other matters. Though McCune Smith continued to critique the movement and its underlying rationale in *WAA*, debate over this issue largely faded in the face of a widely shared commitment to promoting African American involvement in the Civil War.⁶⁰⁷ On at least one occasion, McCune Smith lent his support to the AfCS once it changed its primary mission to increasing educational opportunities for African Americans, especially those recently freed from slavery. He served on the organizing committee for the jubilee celebration at the Cooper Institute in NYC in January 1864, organized by the AfCS for ‘the benefit of the great educational movement in this country, the purchasing of the Wilberforce University, for the education of the liberated in this land, and to assist the suffering Freedmen in the South.’⁶⁰⁸ The Civil War and its promise to finally rid the nation of slavery appears to have rendered the colonization/emigration debate moot, at least for a time.

Conclusion

⁶⁰⁶ Shadd Cary, ‘Haytian Emigration.’

⁶⁰⁷ James McCune Smith, ‘The Narrowing of the Circle,’ *WAA*, 21 December 1861; James McCune Smith, ‘On Deck!’, *AA*, 7 March 1863; James McCune Smith, ‘Our Colored Soldiers,’ *AA*, 4 April 1863.

⁶⁰⁸ ‘Ho! For the Great Emancipation Celebration and Jubilee at Cooper Institute,’ *AA*, 28 November 1863; ‘Glory to God in the Highest,’ *AA*, 12 December 1863.

McCune Smith continued writing for the African American press until shortly before his death.⁶⁰⁹ He continued to do so boldly, evidently without fear of his sometimes controversial views being subjected to editorial censorship.⁶¹⁰ In 'Our Faults,' McCune Smith replied to a reader objecting that some of the editorials in *AA* were overly pedantic. McCune Smith claimed responsibility for this but urged forbearance: 'Our readers will see that we are rather an old hand at the bellows editorial – too old, we fear, to mend. It has been to us, throughout, a labor of love. We look back at it, not without a certain degree of complacency; for however imperfectly we have performed, we meant to do well.' Rather than ask him to change his own style of discourse, McCune Smith suggested that the reader 'remedy' the situation by sending in their own submissions, which he promised to publish. Here, McCune Smith showed his own fidelity to the principle that had animated Douglass, the Hamilton brothers, Shadd Cary, and other proprietors and editors of the African American press: that their community needed a forum in which they could openly share ideas and concerns, however controversial or unpopular. That principle, in turn, had allowed McCune Smith to help establish the African American press as a vital and vibrant tool in their struggle for freedom.

⁶⁰⁹ McCune Smith's last editorial (unsigned, as often the case) for *AA* probably appeared in October. See James McCune Smith, 'The New Evangel,' *AA*, 7 October 1865.

⁶¹⁰ See Chapter Six for another notable example: McCune Smith's writings in *AA* in support of the controversial pamphlet *Miscegenation*.

Chapter Five - Slavery's Foe

Introduction

'We are awakened, as never before, to the fact that if Slavery and caste are to be removed from the land we must remove them, and remove them ourselves; others may aid and assist if they will, but the moving power rests with us.'

~ James McCune Smith, 'Address to the National Council
of the Colored People,' 8 May 1855

James McCune Smith's experience with the broad and corrosive reach of the US system of slavery began from birth. Despite the legally free status he enjoyed after New York State completed its abolition of slavery in 1827, McCune Smith recognized that neither he nor his fellow nominally free African Americans truly enjoyed liberty. He frequently wrote and spoke of the pervasive ways in which slavery and the racial caste system it gave rise to sharply circumscribed their freedom and harmed them in nearly every aspect of their being, from the mental to the spiritual to the material.⁶¹¹ His acute consciousness of this, sharpened by examples of resistance provided by his mother Lavinia, his Aunt Sally, and other members of the largely African American community of his childhood, spurred him to action. From his early adulthood until his death, McCune Smith engaged in a life of anti-slavery activism, an unwavering and uncompromising foe of slavery in all its forms.

⁶¹¹ McCune Smith, 'Address to the Legislature;' McCune Smith, 'Resolutions Offered;' McCune Smith, 'Loyalists.'

This chapter argues that McCune Smith's broad conception of slavery drove his lifelong opposition to all forms of slavery, from the legal system of chattel slavery in the South to *de facto* forms practiced in the North. As a result, ideologies, practices, attitudes, theories, movements, and all else that justified or supported slavery and the racial caste system it gave rise to were targets of McCune Smith's passionate anti-slavery activism. We have already seen in earlier chapters how McCune Smith combatted these in various ways. In this and the final chapter of this thesis, we shall explore how he further combatted them in the realms of anti-slavery activism and science. First, this chapter seeks to explain how McCune Smith conceived of slavery, how he came to conceive of it the way he did, and the ways in which this conception informed his anti-slavery activism. This chapter then explores McCune Smith's activism against pro-slavery institutions and practices including colonization; impediments to gainful employment; political disenfranchisement; and chattel slavery itself.

5.1 What is Slavery?

From early on, McCune Smith defined slavery broadly. For him, slavery encompassed not only the race-based chattel slavery practiced in the South: it also included racially discriminatory laws and practices endemic in Northern states. In 1838, McCune Smith declared that 'there is slavery at the North — for semi-emancipation is slavery still.'⁶¹² The following year, McCune Smith described African Americans in the 'Northern States' as only 'nominally free,' on whom was 'flung the necessity of battling for freedom.'⁶¹³ On another occasion, McCune Smith wrote

⁶¹² McCune Smith, 'Speech to the AASS, 8 May 1838,' 30.

⁶¹³ McCune Smith, 'Petition.'

of ‘the deep and damning thralldom which grinds to the dust the colored inhabitants of New York’ and ‘the soul-crushing bondage of the Northern states.’⁶¹⁴

This system of ‘thralldom’ or *de facto* slavery was imposed through what McCune Smith – like many of his fellow African American abolitionists – frequently referred to as ‘caste.’ McCune Smith defined ‘caste’ as the ‘general term for that feature in human institutions which isolates man from his fellow man.’⁶¹⁵ In the US, caste enabled the oppressions of slavery to be imposed in various and often insidious ways whether slavery was legal or not: ‘the caste which slavery has thrown in our midst... is the chief minister to the continuance of slavery.’⁶¹⁶ In his 1845 address to the New York State legislature protesting racially discriminatory voting laws, McCune Smith explained how caste, imposed in the US via differential treatment or laws according to race, ‘establishes an aristocracy of the skin.’⁶¹⁷ In 1844, McCune Smith described ways in which caste was imposed in Northern states and how, in some ways, it could be more detrimental to the well-being of nominally free African Americans than the system of chattel slavery was to those it enslaved: ‘the free blacks, taught to believe themselves naturally inferior, barely admitted to common-school instruction, shut out from the temples of higher literature, and taunted with ignorance, barred from the jury bench and driven from what are called churches, yet branded with impiety. This has been no trifling conflict. The Indian race

⁶¹⁴ McCune Smith, ‘It Is a Fact, in Morals as Well as Physics...’

⁶¹⁵ James McCune Smith, ‘Civilization: Its Dependence on Physical Circumstances,’ *AAM*, January 1859, 15–16.

⁶¹⁶ McCune Smith, 16.

⁶¹⁷ McCune Smith, ‘Address to the Legislature.’ Isabel Wilkerson echoes McCune Smith’s views on caste when she writes: ‘As a means of assigning value to swaths of humankind, caste guides each of us often beyond the reaches of our awareness. It embeds into our bones an unconscious ranking of human characteristics and sets forth the rules, expectations, and stereotypes that have been used to justify brutalities against entire groups within our species. ...In America, race is the primary tool and the visible decoy, the front man, for caste.’ See Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (Random House, 2020), 18.

have perished in a like encounter. It has severely tried the vitality of the free blacks, whilst the slaves of the South have had no such battle to fight in their struggle for bread.’⁶¹⁸

McCune Smith also described the spiritual damage wrought by the caste system in the North: “the terrible ordeal which we free colored men and women are passing every moment of our existence” an ordeal twisting a real human heart from trustfulness in anything human – an ordeal periling a human soul from the chances of redemption.’⁶¹⁹ Several years later, McCune Smith quoted Edward Wilmot Blyden, a ‘foreign black gentleman’ who also ‘partially experienced’ this ordeal when in ‘the noble state of New York ten years ago.’ In 1862’s *Liberia’s Offering*, Blyden described the corrosive effects of caste-based *de facto* slavery in much the same terms as McCune Smith had several years before: “You perhaps have read the narratives of African (African American) sufferings, but painfully intense as they are, they are only the outside... But those inflictions [imposed in the North] which tend to contract and destroy the mind; these cruelties which benumb the sensibilities of the soul... these are the awful instruments of suffering and degradation...’⁶²⁰ For those such as Blyden and McCune Smith, the destructiveness of *de facto* slavery was enhanced because of general indifference to the suffering it caused, including by abolitionists too narrowly focused on the cruelties and depredations of chattel slavery.

McCune Smith was far from alone in conceiving of slavery so broadly. As Jane and William Pease argue, many African Americans and their leaders such as Charles Remond, Hosea

⁶¹⁸ James McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans,’ *Tribune*, 1 February 1844.

⁶¹⁹ James McCune Smith, ‘Reply to the Anti-Slavery Standard [13 January 1855],’ *FDP*, 19 January 1855.

⁶²⁰ As quoted in James McCune Smith, ‘The Perils by the Way,’ *AA*, 26 September 1863. McCune Smith inserted ‘African American’ into the Blyden quote, reflecting his development of the theory that African Americans were a separate ethnicity from others of African descent. See Chapter Six.

Easton, Henry Highland Garnet, James L. Smith, William Allen, Charles Reason, and Frederick Douglass likewise believed that all ‘bondage, prejudice, and discrimination were only varied manifestations of the same problem, so interrelated that to neglect one was to endanger all.’⁶²¹ In 1807, Easton described the racial caste system as “slavery in disguise... the very essence of hell.”⁶²² In 1854, Reason wrote that abolitionists must work to “abolish not only chattel slavery, but [also] that other kind of slavery, which, for generation after generation, dooms an oppressed people to a condition of dependence and pauperism.”⁶²³ In an 1857 address to an anti-slavery gathering in New Brighton, Remond ‘endeavored to show that it was of slaveholding, American origin’ and that the spirit of caste ‘was diffused and made popular in the free States at the bidding of the slaveholder, as a means of strengthening the ‘peculiar institution’ of the South.’⁶²⁴ Many other abolitionists agreed with these views. An *Appeal* delivered to an 1837 multiracial convention of abolitionist women described how forms of unfreedom in the North and the South were inextricably linked: ‘the bleeding slave is now bound by the chains of his servitude, and the colored freeman by “the cord of caste.”’⁶²⁵

McCune Smith was less inclined than many of his fellow abolitionists to view slavery and caste as a primarily American problem. As a scholar and a classicist with an international education and outlook, McCune Smith studied prejudice, oppression, and slavery through a global lens. He often compared the ways in which caste and slavery was and had been

⁶²¹ As quoted in Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 8–10, 13, 52.

⁶²² As quoted in Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (YUP, 2016), 308.

⁶²³ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 10.

⁶²⁴ ‘Meetings at Pittsburgh and New Brighton,’ *Liberator*, 18 December 1857.

⁶²⁵ *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States, Issued by an Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 10.

instituted and imposed throughout the world. In his 1841 lecture 'Destiny,' McCune Smith named and described various forms which had existed 'on the coast of Barbary' and in Egypt, Sparta, Athens, Rome, and Ireland.⁶²⁶ On another occasion, McCune Smith wrote: '...the system of slavery can exist, independently of the slave trade. In Russia, and until very recently, in Scotland, Poland, and other European states, slavery, and the severest forms of slavery, exist without [it].'⁶²⁷ In 1865, McCune Smith wrote: 'It is needless at the present day of enlightenment to inform our readers, that white men in England, and on the Continent have held each other in slavery as cruel as any which ever existed in this land... Nor need we state, that in the matter of caste, worse forms than any to which we have been subjected exist in India, and until recently in Christian Europe.'⁶²⁸ In sum, McCune Smith argued, the US system was only one among other manifestations of this phenomenon. Terrible as it was, it was not the worst.

McCune Smith was convinced that so long as nominally free Northern states oppressed African Americans through forms of *de facto* slavery, the broader cause of abolition would necessarily fail. For one, it was up to the nominally free North to provide a model for national emancipation. In the 1838 annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, he declared: 'Let us first purify our own soil and then may we call upon the South to follow the example... it is my firm belief, a belief which springs from the deepest and strongest conviction, that which will... do most towards the abolition of southern slavery, will be the sight of freed colored men, elevated in these northern white communities to the dignities and privileges of citizens of the

⁶²⁶ McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 5, 10, 13.

⁶²⁷ McCune Smith, 'Liberty Party (From the Northern Star).'

⁶²⁸ James McCune Smith, 'A Grave Mistake,' AA, 25 February 1865.

republic.⁶²⁹ Secondly, fugitives from chattel slavery – who, through self-emancipation, weakened that institution – could find no secure refuge in their own country if they were not protected as equal citizens in the North.⁶³⁰ Finally, the oppressions of chattel slavery could be perpetuated in disguise if it were abolished while the racial caste system remained in place. As McCune Smith wrote in 1864, ‘The word *slavery* will, of course, be wiped from the statute-book... but the “ancient relation” can be just as well maintained by cunningly devised laws.’ It was only by thoroughly dismantling all forms of racial discrimination and oppression that slavery – in all its manifestations – could be abolished in practice and in law.⁶³¹

5.2 This Land is Our Land: Colonization and Emigration

McCune Smith’s fight against slavery in all its forms manifested itself early in his implacable and lifelong opposition to all efforts to expatriate African Americans from the United States.

McCune Smith extended his opposition to emigrationist organizations and schemes such as the African Civilization Society and schemes to promote and aid emigration to Haiti and Africa.

Whether colonization or emigration movements were coercive or voluntary, he believed, they were inherently pro-slavery because they were predicated on essentially pro-slavery ideas: that African Americans were not true Americans and that they could not thrive in the US except at the pleasure of white citizens. Furthermore, by leaving the US, African Americans were reneging on their moral duty to remain and help free those enslaved in the South.

⁶²⁹ McCune Smith, ‘Speech to the AASS, 8 May 1838,’ 30.

⁶³⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Address to the Legislature;’ McCune Smith, ‘Sketch,’ 26–27.

⁶³¹ James McCune Smith, ‘A Word for a Thing,’ AA 5 December 1863; James McCune Smith, ‘The War – Its Issues. No. II,’ AA, 27 August 1864.

McCune Smith's anti-colonization/emigration convictions appears to have been at least partially due to the influence of his mentor Peter Williams, Jr. Initially a supporter of emigration, Williams came to critique some aspects of the larger movement and most likely shared his concerns with his protégé McCune Smith. Williams's evolving view appears, in turn, to have been influenced by changing views in the larger African American community following the creation of the first emigrationist movement. In the mid-1810s, two wealthy African American businessmen, Massachusetts merchant Paul Cuffe and Philadelphia sailmaker James Forten collaborated on a scheme to resettle African Americans in Sierra Leone and increase trade between that colony and the US. However, the concurrent founding of the white-led American Colonization Society (ACS) seemed to confirm to many African American northerners – especially in Philadelphia – that Cuffe's and Forten's scheme might be part of a larger one to round them up and forcefully deport them. This saw the origin of the African American community's general tendency over time to link voluntary emigration with colonization schemes in general, viewing both as manifestations of the idea that African Americans did not belong in the US. While Cuffe, Forten, and their allies sought to allay these fears by insisting that participation was voluntary and their intention was to promote African American liberty and well-being, anti-colonization sentiment grew. In 1817, Forten, increasingly convinced by the arguments of anti-colonialists, turned against the ACS. Cuffe's death on 7 September 1817 cemented Forten's opposition. He vociferously opposed the ACS, charging it with holding pro-slavery ideas – such as the assumption that African Americans did not belong in the US – and promoting pro-slavery interests. His and other anti-colonialists' fears were confirmed

by the violence, instability, and hardships that resulted from further attempts at African colonization in the early 1820's.⁶³²

Though Cuffe had sought and won Williams's support for his African American-led emigration scheme, Williams opposed the ACS and its colonialist ideology which 'held out the idea, that a colored man, however he may strive to make himself intelligent, virtuous and useful, can never enjoy the privileges of a citizen of the United States.' However, Williams continued to support voluntary emigration and 'felt it my duty to aid [the emigrant], in all my power, on his way.' Among those Williams assisted in emigrating to Liberia was John Russwurm, cofounder of *Freedom's Journal*.⁶³³ As we have seen in Chapter Four, the other founder of the *Journal*, Samuel Cornish – another early influence on McCune Smith – split with Russwurm over the colonization/emigration issue and remained an implacable foe to such schemes.

William Lloyd Garrison was another early influence on McCune Smith's views of colonization. In 1832, McCune Smith – in line with Garrison – characterized colonization as a 'safety valve of American fears and American prejudices.'⁶³⁴ While McCune Smith pursued his education in Scotland, old and future friends and colleagues were organizing against the colonization movement. For example, Charles Remond, James Pennington, and Cornish were among the delegates at the 'Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in these United States' held in New York City in June 1834. Among the reasons that the convention was 'necessary,' declared its president William Hamilton, was to address the

⁶³² Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (OUP, 2003), 177–78, 180–201.

⁶³³ Williams, Jr., 'Rev. Mr. Williams, to the Citizens of New-York.'

⁶³⁴ McCune Smith, 'Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].'

growing and malign influence of the ACS. Despite the professed benignity of their intentions, the ACS had ‘distilled into the minds of the community a desire to see us removed.’⁶³⁵

Upon his return to the US, McCune Smith joined Cornish and others in their opposition to the colonization movement and its underlying ideology. On 22 December 1838, Cornish’s *The Colored American (CA)* published McCune Smith’s critiques of James Macdonald’s annual physician’s report that year for the Colored Orphan Asylum. In the first of two instalments, McCune Smith characterized Macdonald’s explanation for the rates of death and illness in the asylum as a ‘hackneyed colonization opinion that the colored people, born and raised in this country have constitutions different from the whites, and with different adaptations’ and was ‘too absurd to be countenanced ...Facts go against such a supposition.’ He promised to ‘professionally say more on this subject.’⁶³⁶ A month later, McCune Smith combined a sarcastic point-by-point refutation of Macdonald’s reasoning with statistical analysis showing that white children were more susceptible to, and had a higher mortality rate from, many of the diseases that MacDonald attributed largely to the ‘peculiar constitution and condition of the colored race’ and the children’s ‘unhealthy parents.’ McCune Smith argued that the only reasonable inference that could be drawn – according to Macdonald’s ‘own principles’ – was that African Americans were *better* suited to NYC’s climate than their white counterparts.⁶³⁷

McCune Smith’s editorials against Macdonald’s physicians report was only the first of his long history of opposing colonialist movements through his writing, which we have

⁶³⁵ *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour, in the United States; Held by Adjournments in the Asbury Church, New York, from the 2nd to the 12th of June, Inclusive, 1834, 1834, 4–5, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/276>.*

⁶³⁶ McCune Smith, ‘Report.’

⁶³⁷ Macdonald and McCune Smith, ‘Physician’s Report [and Reply].’ See also Chapters Three and Six.

explored in previous chapters and will explore further below. He also engaged in other forms of anti-colonialist activism. For example, McCune Smith had joined Cornish, Theodore Wright, and Philip Bell at the 'Great Anti-Colonization Meeting,' held the same month he wrote the second Macdonald editorial. McCune Smith read the preamble stating that those assembled vigorously opposed the ACS: 'we, the people of color, citizens of New York, feel and know that the American "Colonization Society" is the source whence proceed most the various proscriptions and oppressions under which we groan and suffer.' Cornish, Wright, Bell, and others read many more resolutions opposing colonization.⁶³⁸ McCune Smith and most of his fellow leading African American activists would continue their organized and individual opposition to colonization over the next decade and more.

Yet African Americans did not remain wholly united in their opposition to colonization or emigration. Throughout the 1850's, the anti-slavery cause suffered a series of severe political setbacks with the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the 1857 *Dred Scott* Supreme Court decision. With the US apparently in the ever-tightening grip of slaveholders' power, some leading African Americans and their white abolitionist allies gradually came to look more favourably on emigration and colonization schemes as the only viable alternatives to racial oppression. At their 1852 annual meeting, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS) voted to adopt a resolution which declared that while the AFAASS opposed all '*coercive*' (italics in original) colonization or 'expatriation' schemes, they

⁶³⁸ 'Great Anti-Colonization Meeting,' CA, 12 January 1839.

would 'aid' such African Americans who chose to settle outside the United States 'in the accomplishment of their own wishes.'⁶³⁹

However, this apparent weakening of the AFASS's previously uncompromising anti-colonization stance met with opposition. McCune Smith was among the African American delegates and others who opposed the resolution as contrary to the AFASS's previously held convictions. As he argued, 'It is a new idea, this – to offer material aid for colonization.... It is the first time that assistance was ever proffered to send men to Africa ...[or] it matters not where. The sin is to drive them out of the country anywhere.'⁶⁴⁰

McCune Smith did not only oppose colonization and emigration in the African American press: he did so in mainstream newspapers as well. The New York *Tribune*, edited by McCune Smith's ideological foe Horace Greeley, was chief among them. While Greeley was a prominent abolitionist and outspoken opponent of the expansion of slavery to new territories, he supported the expatriation of African Americans. Greeley believed that slavery had rendered African Americans uneducated, improvident, subservient, and otherwise unready to succeed economically or politically once they were free. Even if they could overcome these obstacles within themselves, Greeley argued, widespread racial prejudice among white Americans meant that African Americans could never hope for more than second-class citizenship within the

⁶³⁹ *Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at New-York, May 11, 1852* (New York, 1852), 4, 15–16.

⁶⁴⁰ 'American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,' *FDP*, 27 May 1852.

US.⁶⁴¹ The *Tribune*, accordingly, regularly published editorials and articles promoting, supporting, or sympathetic to colonization and emigration.

McCune Smith's opposition to Greeley on this issue began in 1844. That year, the *Tribune* published a sympathetic report of an address delivered by Orville Dewey at NYC's Broadway Tabernacle which defended the US against 'foreign writers' who, among other things, criticized its system of slavery. Dewey argued that, though 'slavery was wrong, radically wrong, and must, sooner or later, cease,' he accused abolitionists of 'exasperat[ing] the South' and making matters worse by 'array[ing] the community against them.' He believed that slavery would fade away naturally and that in the meantime, those enslaved in the southern United States were better off than the poor in Europe. Enslaved African Americans, Dewey argued, were 'not beaten, and scourged, and starved, but on the contrary were the most gay and joyous of all the laborers' and that 'Free Blacks are worse off than the Slaves of the South – not being so well clothed, fed or so happy.' He went on to espouse expatriation of African Americans to the West – which, as we shall see, was regarded by many anti-emigrationists as part of that movement, with the same underling ideology – as a better alternative to the immediate abolition of slavery, which he believed was currently a socially and politically unrealizable goal.⁶⁴²

The day after this report of Dewey's remarks was published in the *Tribune*, McCune Smith penned an impassioned response. He challenged Dewey to debate his claim – that

⁶⁴¹ Allan Nevins, 'Greeley, Horace,' in *DAB*, ed. Dumas Malone and Allen Johnson (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1964), 529, 530; Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. John Blassingame, vol. 2: 1847-54, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews 1 (YUP, 1982), 240 n8.

⁶⁴² 'The Rev. Dr. Dewey's Lecture at the Tabernacle,' *Tribune*, 11 January 1844.

emancipated African Americans were worse off than those enslaved – in any public forum of Dewey’s choosing. Just as Dewey felt compelled to ‘defend ‘American Manners and Morals’ from assaults against them, McCune Smith wrote that ‘I am forced to defend a class of our countrymen from stereotyped libels of unmitigated platitude.’⁶⁴³ When Dewey declined to take up McCune Smith’s invitation to debate, McCune Smith redirected his remarks to Greeley since it was he who had published Dewey’s ‘libels.’ Not only were Dewey’s claims undermined by facts and statistics, McCune Smith argued, they were contradicted by simple logic. For example, if those enslaved in the South were much better off compared to African Americans in the North, one would expect Northerners to flee South *to* slavery, not Southerners to flee *from* it. Yet, as those currently under penalty for fleeing slavery or those aiding others to flee – such as Charles Ray of NYC’s vigilance committee – could attest, precisely the opposite was happening, and in large numbers.⁶⁴⁴

By the early 1850’s, Greeley had gone from sympathetically publishing others’ colonizationalist views to offering his own. In May 1850, the *Tribune* published ‘Colonization of Africa – Mr. Bryan’s Project,’ an exchange composed of a letter opposing colonization – signed ‘Justice’ and evidently written by an African American – and an editorial by Greeley strongly supporting it. ‘Justice’ commended Bryan’s ‘candor in openly and frankly declaring to remove the Free Colored People to Liberia’ in contrast to colonizationalists’ often veiled language.

⁶⁴³ McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery 1.’

⁶⁴⁴ James McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans,’ *Tribune*, 26 January 1844; McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery 3;’ McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery 4.’ McCune Smith here was contradicting Dewey’s claims that chattel slavery as practiced in the South was generally beneficial to those enslaved in terms of physical and mental well-being. He was not claiming that those who fled chattel slavery could count on escaping forms of *de facto* slavery in Northern states. See Chapter Six for more about McCune Smith’s statistical refutation of Dewey’s and others’ claims about African Americans.

However, 'Justice' insisted that African Americans had already decided the question for themselves: they did not want to be expatriated. Greeley insisted that 'Justice' did not speak for all free African Americans. Though he disagreed with slaveholders who claimed that 'the Negro Race' was only fit for servitude, those African Americans who remained in the US – subject to discrimination and forced into menial jobs as they were – served as unwitting proof of slaveholders' assertions of their inferiority. Therefore, Greeley declared, it was up to African Americans to prove their equal worth and potential by achieving success elsewhere.⁶⁴⁵ When Douglass sided with 'Justice,' Greeley doubled down.⁶⁴⁶

After another year and a half of Greeley's continuing advocacy of colonization, McCune Smith could no longer keep silent. In 1851, he wrote another open letter to Greeley on the subject. This time, Greeley refused to publish it, complaining that it manifested a 'captious spirit and an unamiable temper.'⁶⁴⁷ The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* published it instead.

McCune Smith opened by citing Garrison's *Thoughts on African Colonization*. In this case, he did not focus on Garrison's influence on his and other African Americans' anti-colonization views. Rather, McCune Smith insisted that Garrison's pamphlet 'simply embodied the ideas long previously uttered by' African Americans who had met 'in Philadelphia in 1817, and in New York and all the free States shortly after, denouncing the [colonization] scheme as unchristian and unjust.' After dressing Greeley down for parroting popular but incoherent ideas about race, McCune Smith criticised Greeley's colonizationalist logic:

⁶⁴⁵ Horace Greeley, 'Colonization of Africa – Mr. Bryan's Project,' *Tribune*, 3 May 1850.

⁶⁴⁶ Horace Greeley, 'African Colonization - Frederick Douglass and The Tribune,' *Tribune*, 30 May 1850.

⁶⁴⁷ Horace Greeley, 'Black and White,' *Tribune*, 30 August 1851, 30.

Your views on Colonisation may be summed up in three propositions. 1. The Free Blacks in the United States are a degraded class, who cannot be raised to the political and social level of the whites while they remain in the United States. / 2. The Free Blacks ought to be elevated to a position equal to the whites; but as they cannot be raised to such equality in these United States, therefore, / 3. The Free Blacks ought to emigrate to Africa, where they can attain equality with the whites, and where, moreover, they may put an end to the Slave Trade (if they do not engage in it) and evangelise Africa. This last proposition you piously support by the divinely directed exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, which, singularly enough, began by swindling the Egyptians, and ended in the divinely directed extermination of the Gergashites, Ammonites, and other natural lords of the land of Promise... The second proposition you do not announce in so many words, but it is the logical necessity of your case, and is therefore introduced parenthetically as the minor of the syllogism.

As for Greeley's assertion relating to the third proposition – that African Americans were usually relegated or relegated themselves to servile employment in the US – McCune Smith retorted: 'When you attempt to brand degradation upon us because we are servants, you evidently have an eye to a class of people called flunkeys, who are to be sought for not among us, but in the land of your 'Scotch-Irish' ancestry, and their unmixed descendants in this free and happy land.' McCune Smith offered Greeley himself as a prime example of such 'flunkeyism' in the 'abject servility with which [Greeley] thanked Congress for disposing of that infamous [Fugitive Slave Law] —by passing it.' When it came to the dignity or lack thereof in humble professions, the pious Greeley might want to consider another biblical principle: 'the Divine authority of our Saviour has linked the highest human greatness with the meanest of human employments.'⁶⁴⁸

In his promised follow-up letter, McCune Smith pressed Greeley further on another claim which he used to support colonization: that racial antipathy was natural. McCune Smith

⁶⁴⁸ McCune Smith, 'Other Side.'

accused him of libelling God and man alike when he made that claim: ‘The other day, you libelled the people of the Free States; to-day (Aug. 30), you more grossly libel our fellow citizens of the Slave States, when you say ‘that intermingling with the blacks is naturally revolting to the whites.’ This could not be so, McCune Smith argued, since ‘the hundred thousand whites who will pass this night in the embraces of black women, in the South... [produce] mulattoes *de novo* every hour.’ Greeley should know better than to also ‘libel the Almighty God by thinking that he has emplanted in one portion of his human creatures a hatred, an inextinguishable hatred, against another portion of his human creatures.’ After all, ‘the Creator had long since solemnized and made holy this connexion [between blacks and whites], when He ordained that human frames and immortal souls should spring there from.’ Further on, McCune Smith made it clear that this argument related only to the naturalness of interracial attraction *per se*, not to issues of consent, coercion, or exploitation within the system of slavery. In fact, McCune Smith used these issues as the basis of his wry suggestion that perhaps he had misunderstood Greeley, that perhaps he was advocating for colonization of the United States: ‘do I understand you to mean, that we free blacks should instil a little aboriginal African civilization into this barbarous land of ours?’ After all, it was in the US that women were hanged, ‘*enciente*, for defending her own person from violation’ and where Southerners ‘buy and sell the offspring of [their] own bodies.’⁶⁴⁹

McCune Smith’s attack put Greeley on the defensive and – evidently to Greeley’s dismay – placed Greeley in the pro-slavery side of the debate over colonization in the eyes of many,

⁶⁴⁹ McCune Smith, ‘Other Side, No. II.’

abolitionists and pro-slavery apologists alike. South Carolina's *Sumter Banner* gleefully reprinted an article on the growing rift between Greeley and anti-colonizationist abolitionists, arguing that African Americans who opposed colonization had been 'deluded by the Abolitionists into the belief that they are soon to enjoy in this country a practical as well as theoretical equality with the whites' and siding with Greeley's argument that white Americans did not want free African Americans around. It also included blistering remarks on Greeley's hypocrisy in achieving fame and wealth as an abolitionist only to argue that African Americans were inferior and undesirable as citizens.⁶⁵⁰ Greeley later regretted his support for colonization though his reversal on the issue appears more than a little disingenuous. In his 1868 autobiography, Greeley could only bring himself to admit 'complacency' in the movement, and that only up to 1837, when Samuel Houston wrangled to 'wrest' Texas 'from its rightful owners' and the abolitionist newspaperman Elijah Lovejoy was murdered.⁶⁵¹ Yet, as we have seen, Greeley's support for colonization extended well beyond that time.

Though McCune Smith's ongoing fight against expatriation schemes was mostly waged against white abolitionists before the early 1850's, some were directed at the relative minority of African American leaders who came to espouse emigration and/or colonization. Few of these battles were more rancorous and involved the bitterest attacks than that between lifelong friends and occasional ideological foes McCune Smith and Henry Highland Garnet. As we have seen, McCune Smith and Garnet waged a bitter battle – replete with *ad hominem* attacks – in the African American press over the African Civilization Society (AfCS) and a Haitian emigration

⁶⁵⁰ 'Falling Out by the Way,' *Sumter Banner*, 23 September 1851.

⁶⁵¹ Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (New York: J. B. Ford and Company, 1868), 285–86.

scheme between 1861 and 1862.⁶⁵² Their disagreements over emigration and colonization, however, began years earlier.

In January 1849, Garnet rejoiced to Douglass over the growing numbers of African Americans seeking freedom in the West, though he insisted 'It is my purpose, however, merely to speak of the western portions of New York at this time.'⁶⁵³ However, one week later, he expanded on his newfound enthusiasm for emigration, advising African Americans to 'avoid the old beaten and narrow path' of continuing to seek liberation where there they had so long been denied it. Yet his change of heart went much further than the recommendation to head west. Garnet continued, 'I hesitate not to say, that my mind, of late, has greatly changed in regard to the American Colonization scheme. So far as it benefits the land of my fathers, I bid it God-speed; but so far as it denies the possibility of our elevation here, I oppose it. I would rather see a man free in Liberia, than a slave in the United States.'⁶⁵⁴ Douglass, alarmed, responded 'We should be glad to know what friend Garnet means by "the old and beaten path."⁶⁵⁵ Samuel Ward – like McCune Smith and Garnet, a newspaperman and graduate of the African Free School – also demanded a public explanation. Ward agreed with Garnet that western New York was 'the very battle ground of impartial Freedom.' However, this did not mean that Garnet or any other African American should advocate emigration in general; rather, they should continue to 'beseech [African Americans] to do much more where they are.' Ward also cautioned Garnet not to forget the ACS's sinister motives, including regarding their Liberian

⁶⁵² For a detailed discussion of the origins, details of, and participants in this press fight, see Edmondson, 'St. Domingue Legacy,' especially Chapter Five.

⁶⁵³ Henry Highland Garnet, 'Self-Help -The Wants of Western New York,' *NS*, 19 January 1849.

⁶⁵⁴ Henry Highland Garnet, 'The West - The West!,' *NS*, 26 January 1849.

⁶⁵⁵ Garnet.

colonization scheme.⁶⁵⁶ In his reply, Garnet doubled down on his newfound hopes for Liberia as a site of African American liberation.⁶⁵⁷

McCune Smith was not as quick to oppose Garnet as Douglass and Ward, at least not directly. However, the shift in opinion among some African American leaders apparently galvanized him to action. Nearly three months after Garnet announced his newfound pro-emigrationist views, McCune Smith attended a meeting held at NYC's Shiloh Presbyterian Church to oppose the ACS's recent attempts – in Britain as well as the US – to promote and fund emigration to Liberia. The large, two-day meeting was also attended by such leading African Americans as George Downing, James Pennington, Charles Remond, Charles Reason, and Douglass. The meeting was concluded by a series of resolutions and a speech by McCune Smith. After offering some tongue-in-cheek advice that the ACS colonize politician Henry Clay and his allies 'in the land of their forefathers' for disturbing the peace and malign[ing]' African Americans, McCune Smith praised the strength and courage of African Americans who had persevered against slavery and oppression within the US. McCune Smith also lamented 'Let me in conclusion say, that I am sorry, that for the first time since I have known of Colonization, and Colonization Meetings, there is now a falling back from the faith among some of us.' McCune Smith certainly had Garnet in mind given his recent change of heart on the emigration issue. In response to an attendee who, like Garnet, 'recognized the right of men to go where they

⁶⁵⁶ Ward, 'Bishop H. H. Garnet.'

⁶⁵⁷ Garnet, 'Colonization and Emigration.'

pleased,' McCune Smith 'den[ied] the right of any among us to go to Liberia in search of advancement,' comparing them to 'deserters in time of war.'⁶⁵⁸

Despite his concerns over what he saw as some African Americans' apostasy in this regard, McCune Smith remained convinced that most were united in their opposition to colonization. As he wrote to Douglass in 1854: 'Public opinion says we must go to Liberia; yet here we are, and it is granted by public opinion that here we will stay; so omnipotent is our combined *will* against the public *wish*.'⁶⁵⁹

5.3 National and International Anti-Slavery Activism

Despite his insistence that the rightful place for African Americans was in the United States, McCune Smith had long recognized that the abolitionist cause was necessarily international, especially in coordination with Britain. McCune Smith's first known membership in an abolitionist society was in a British one which he helped to found. Immediately upon his arrival in Liverpool in 1832, McCune Smith met several leading white British abolitionists; his letters of introduction to them were likely written by his mentor Peter Williams, Jr.⁶⁶⁰ Some of these, in turn, likely offered him their own introductions to members of Glasgow's burgeoning anti-slavery community. Among the latter was John Murray, who made a deep and lasting impression on McCune Smith. In March 1833, McCune Smith introduced Murray to his old African Free School classmate, the expatriate Shakespearian actor Ira Aldridge. As the *Glasgow Argus* reported, Aldridge 'had taken "a very prominent and appropriate interest, in 1833

⁶⁵⁸ William Henry Burr, 'Great Anti-Colonization Mass Meeting of the Coloured Citizens of the City of New York,' *NASS*, 3 May 1849.

⁶⁵⁹ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [4 May 1854].'

⁶⁶⁰ McCune Smith, 'Journal [9-11 September 1832],' 1832; McCune Smith, 'Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].'

[during his last visit to Glasgow], at several of the public meetings which were held at that time for the emancipation of the slaves.”⁶⁶¹ 1833 was an important year for anti-slavery activism: as Duncan Rice writes, it was a ‘watershed for all British abolitionists:’ the passage of the Emancipation Act that year energized them to combat slavery wherever it still existed, especially in cooperation with their fellow ‘citizens of [the] English-speaking Atlantic community’ that had formed by the 1830’s.⁶⁶²

In early December 1833, a cadre of Glasgow abolitionists including Murray, William Smeal, Ralph Wardlaw, Hugh Heugh, William Anderson, James Johnston, and McCune Smith met to consider Murray’s proposal to form a society similar to one which had recently formed in Edinburgh, which dedicated itself to promoting the abolition of slavery ‘wherever it exists.’ Meeting again on the 12th, they founded the organization as the Glasgow Emancipation Society (GES).⁶⁶³ Though his studies appear to have prevented him from attending every meeting, McCune Smith remained a committed and active member throughout the rest of his sojourn in Scotland. In June 1837, the GES published a farewell letter to McCune Smith expressing their ‘esteem’ and admiration and enrolling him as an honorary committee member.⁶⁶⁴ Edward Dixon argues that the wording and warm tone of this farewell letter revealed that McCune Smith made a deep impact on the GES.⁶⁶⁵ The GES, in turn, remained a force in McCune Smith’s life

⁶⁶¹ As quoted in Bernth Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge: The Vagabond Years, 1833-1852*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora (Rochester: UR Press, 2011), 109.

⁶⁶² Duncan C. Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists, 1833-1861* (LSU Press, 1981), 3–5, 11.

⁶⁶³ ‘Minute Book of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, No. 1’ (Glasgow, Scotland, 1833), 1–8, WSC; Rice, *Scots Abolitionists*, 36.

⁶⁶⁴ John Murray and William Smeal, ‘Letter from the Committee of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, to James McCune Smith, M.D.,’ CA, 17 February 1838.

⁶⁶⁵ Edward Dixon, ‘The American Negro in Nineteenth Century Scotland’ (MLitt, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 1969), 28–31.

and thought: he would remain an honorary member of the GES for at least another decade or so and – as we have seen – McCune Smith wrote a biographical tribute to its co-founder Murray and named one of his children after him.⁶⁶⁶

The year after his return to New York City (NYC) in 1837, McCune Smith joined the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) and its auxiliary New York City Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society.⁶⁶⁷ The latter was organized because, as its founders stated, 'The city of New York presents a vast field of labor to the abolitionists; but hitherto it has been deemed inaccessible' because it was 'the focus of Northern pro-slavery influence, hostility and violence' and unduly captive to its financial relationship with slaveholding Southerners. However, they argued, this was all the more reason for abolitionists to 'prosecute the work [in NYC] with renewed skill and energy.'⁶⁶⁸

The AASS was founded – simultaneously with the GES – by Garrison, NYC abolitionists, businessmen, philanthropists, and brothers Arthur and Lewis Tappan, and others at a Philadelphia anti-slavery convention. It convened 4-6 December 1833 'for the purpose of forming a National Anti-Slavery Society, pursuant to an invitation from the New-York Anti-

⁶⁶⁶ *Fifth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow, 1839), 6; *Sixth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow, 1840), 8; *Seventh Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow, 1841), 8; *Ninth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow, 1843), 12; 'Minute Book of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, No. 2' (Glasgow, Scotland, 1836), WSC, entry for 1 February 1846. In his memorial biography of Murray, McCune Smith also affectionately recalled 'William Smeal, of the Gallowgate, grocer... [and] a Friend' and 'the silver voice and keen acumen of Ralph Wardlaw, the earnest and powerful Hugh Heugh, the inexorable logic and burning sarcasm of swarthy Wully Anderson, and the princely munificence of James Johnston.' See McCune Smith, 'John Murray,' 64–65.

⁶⁶⁷ Freeman, 'Free Negro,' 200; *Fifth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society: With the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting. 8th May 1838* (New York, 1838), 10, 24–30, 33, 42; 'City Abolition Convention,' *CA*, 9 February 1839; 'Report of the N. Y. City A. S. Convention,' *Emancipator*, 14 March 1839.

⁶⁶⁸ 'New York City Convention,' *Emancipator*, 6 December 1838.

Slavery Society.⁶⁶⁹ The timing was not a coincidence: Garrison, who travelled to Britain to witness the passage of the 1833 Emancipation Act, felt driven to act in opposition to its ‘compromise clauses on apprenticeship and compensation.’⁶⁷⁰ McCune Smith delivered the third speech of the AASS’s fifth anniversary celebration at Broadway Tabernacle on 8 May 1838. In it, he expressed a more optimistic view of British emancipation efforts.⁶⁷¹ Surely heartened by his experiences with the GES, McCune Smith opened with a resolution that all attending should ‘contemplate, with heartfelt satisfaction, the noble efforts that are making by the abolitionists in Great Britain, and France, for the total cessation of slavery.’ He described how British and French efforts throughout the last century, despite delays, setbacks, and the British origins of the transatlantic slave trade, showed that they had become ‘united with us in sentiment and exertion in the sacred cause of universal and immediate emancipation.’ McCune Smith recommended that the AASS work closely with British abolitionists since the British people were generally more enlightened regarding the evils of slavery and its incompatibility with principles of universal rights and liberties than white Americans.⁶⁷²

McCune Smith’s high hopes for the AASS were dashed the following year. It was not for the same reason that some others began to oppose the ‘Old Organization.’ At the AASS’s annual meeting in May 1839, McCune Smith joined the majority of the large New York State delegation in opposing the resolution ‘That the roll of this meeting be made by placing thereon

⁶⁶⁹ *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention, Assembled at Philadelphia, December 4, 5, and 6, 1833* (New York, 1833), 3, 5–7, 9. The initial meeting of McCune Smith and the Glasgow abolitionists to discuss the formation of the GES took place on 6 December 1833.

⁶⁷⁰ Rice, *Scots Abolitionists*, 11.

⁶⁷¹ William Lloyd Garrison to Helen Eliza Garrison, 7 May 1838.’

⁶⁷² *Fifth Annual Report*, 1838, 23–30; Cornish, ‘Dr. J. McCune Smith;’ Garrison, ‘Letter to Helen Eliza Garrison, 7 May 1838.’

the names of all persons, male *and female*, who are delegates from any auxiliary society, or members of this society.' (Emphasis added.) Despite their opposition, a sizable majority of all delegates – especially from Massachusetts and Philadelphia – approved the move to equalize the role of women in the ASSS. Though McCune Smith did not favour this change in policy he apparently did not consider it overly objectionable: he did not sign onto a 'Protest, of 123 members of the meeting against the vote adopted by the Society, respecting the admission of women to vote.'⁶⁷³ Lewis Tappan was among those who strongly objected to the new policy. He wrote in his journal that though he 'had long been in favor of Women's Rights... those who advocated this measure... intended to put an end to women's conventions and Societies... & to make this question an [illeg.] wedge for the introduction of other novelties...' This innovation, Tappan believed, was simply a distraction from the fact that 'Mr. Garrison & others have grown lukewarm on the anti-slavery subject & have to add the cause with their no-government-women's-rights-[indecipherable word here]' activism.⁶⁷⁴

About a week later, McCune Smith made it clear that his own growing disillusionment with the AASS had little or nothing to do with the women's rights issue and everything to do with the 'lukewarm[ness]' Tappan described. In an editorial for *CA*, McCune Smith described how the AASS had, like NYC's Manumission Society and the early anti-slavery societies 'of the

⁶⁷³ 'American Anti-Slavery Society. Meeting for Business,' *Emancipator*, 23 May 1839. McCune Smith would later come to support equal rights for women. Writing later of Abby Kelley – who was appointed to a committee following the AASS's adoption of the resolution admitting female delegates – McCune Smith remarked: 'I have an opinion that one half of the opposition to Women's Rights arises from a half defined dread of woman's eloquence: I would stand up, in fair fight with any living man, but I have a wholesome dread of Abby Kelley's tongue or any like it.' See McCune Smith to Smith, 1/31 March 1855.

⁶⁷⁴ Lewis Tappan, 'Lewis Tappan Journal Entry for 7-8 May 1839,' in *Lewis Tappan Journal August 31, 1838 - ? 10, 1840* (New York, 1839), 31–32; Lewis Tappan, 'Lewis Tappan Journal Entry for 6 June 1839,' in *Lewis Tappan Journal August 31, 1838 - ? 10, 1840* (New York, 1839), 44.

days of Rush and Franklin' before it, 'either died the death of expediency or have offered up all that was noble and holy among them on the altar of... common usage.' Though the AASS was the 'last... and best of all' of those societies, it had betrayed its original mission of 'apply[ing] those democratic maxims embodied in the American Declaration of Independence.' They had done so by 'making secondary and collateral what ought to have been the primary object of all their efforts. In their strong zeal... against slavery in the South, they half overlooked slavery in the North.'⁶⁷⁵ Here, McCune Smith reiterated his insistence that slavery was alive and well in both North and South and must be fought on both fronts – but in the North first.

McCune Smith's disillusionment with the AASS appears to have lasted at least into the next year; he appears nowhere in reports of their 1840 annual meeting.⁶⁷⁶ However, either his faith in the 'Old Organization' revived somewhat or he realized that it was still the best organization in existence to combat slavery: he continued as an active member of the AASS during the early to mid-1840's. At times, McCune Smith took a leading role in pushing them to adopt plans of practical action – as opposed to simple moral suasion, a central tenet of Garrisonian abolitionism – such as generating a test case for the Supreme Court to decide 'whether the citizens of each State shall be allowed the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States.' This was not pursued.⁶⁷⁷

McCune Smith's continued loyalty to the AASS during this time may have led him to initially forgo joining the rival American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS). It was

⁶⁷⁵ McCune Smith, 'It Is a Fact, in Morals as Well as Physics...'

⁶⁷⁶ *Seventh Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York [1840]: Kraus Reprint [1972]).

⁶⁷⁷ 'Proceedings at the Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society,' *Liberator*, 27 May 1842; 'Business Meetings of the American Anti-Slavery Society for 1844 (From the Anti-Slavery Standard),' *Liberator*, 24 May 1844.

founded in 1840 by defecting members of the AASS over continuing disagreement with the latter's ideology and policies. As the AFASS's president Arthur Tappan explained, the disagreement went well beyond the issue of female delegates. Agreeing with his brother Lewis, Arthur argued that the 'chief cause of the difficulty... [was that] the same persons belonging to the Anti-Slavery ranks, who are contending for what they call "woman's rights"—the civil and political equality of women with men—deny the obligation of forming, supporting, or yielding obedience to civil government, and refuse to affirm the *duty* of political action.'⁶⁷⁸ The AFASS's emphasis on political action was more in line with McCune Smith's views at this time – as evidenced by his Supreme Court test case proposal – than the AASS's opposition to participating in a political system that supported slavery. The AFASS's commitment to increased cooperation with British and French abolitionist efforts also aligned more closely with his views. Given these facts, is curious that McCune Smith does not appear to have attended AFASS meetings throughout the 1840's; at least, his name does not appear in any of their annual reports or newspaper accounts of their meetings from those years. He did, however, agree to contribute to their journal the *American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter* in 1841.⁶⁷⁹

By 1852, McCune Smith had joined the AFASS, displaying the same willingness to vigorously critique it as he had the AASS. While McCune Smith praised the vigour and comprehensiveness of the discussions held at their annual meeting that year, he sided with those who opposed a resolution which proposed offering aid to individuals voluntarily emigrating to Liberia. As recording secretary, McCune Smith offered a report of the sessions

⁶⁷⁸ Arthur Tappan, 'Address of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,' *NASS*, 23 July 1840.

⁶⁷⁹ 'Editor of the Reporter,' *American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 September 1841. Research into McCune Smith's authorship for this paper – preserved copies are rare – is ongoing.

that presented some of the discussions as much less heated than did *FDP's* reporting. An especially tense exchange resulted when McCune Smith, siding with friend and fellow NYC entrepreneur Edward Clark, accused the AFASS and some of its wealthier members of failing to hire qualified African Americans for high-paid positions or – in one instance – refusing to accede to a reasonable request for a loan. The resulting debate was widely reported; in some instances, colonizationalists seized on this as evidence that they had more respect for African American rights and abilities than many abolitionists.⁶⁸⁰

Though McCune Smith's criticism – to some, forthright; to others, unfairly aggressive – provoked consternation among some of AFASS's members, he was once again selected as recording secretary for the AFASS's 1853 annual meeting. The proceedings reveal that the AFASS continued to emphasise its connections to international anti-slavery efforts and – as advocated by McCune Smith – expanded its mission to help secure equal access for African Americans to education, transportation, 'and other public advantages, in the States in which they dwell.' Pennington and others related their experiences of racial discrimination in public spaces, experiences which would help lead to the establishment of the Legal Rights Association in 1855.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸⁰ *Annual Report 1852*, 24–30; 'American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,' 27 May 1852; 'Consistency Demanded,' *New-York Colonization Journal* 2, no. 6 (June 1852): 4; 'Friends Falling Out [From the New York Observer],' *Richmond Weekly Palladium*, 9 June 1852. Perhaps still chastened by those critical of their opposition to women's equal participation as delegates, the AFASS also took care to single out and praise the efforts of female abolitionists at this meeting.

⁶⁸¹ *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*. (New York, 1853), 174–75, 189–91; 'Statistics from the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Presented by a Committee of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society on 11 May 1853,' in *American Congregational Year-Book for the Year 1854* (New York: American Congregational Union, 1854), 367–68; 'Extraordinary Meeting of Philanthropists...,' *Herald*, 14 May 1853. See also Chapter One.

However, McCune Smith's enthusiasm for the AFASS appears to have waned over the next two years. If he attended 1854's annual meeting, it is not mentioned in accounts of its proceedings; it is only hinted at by McCune Smith's subsequent approval of the speech Douglass delivered on that occasion.⁶⁸² McCune Smith's ambivalence towards the AFASS appears to have been shared by some of its members. Though Douglass remarked in another speech in January of the following year that the AFASS was, 'Strictly speaking, ...the only Anti-Slavery party in the country,' the organization was clearly on the decline. While McCune Smith served as vice president for the AFASS meeting that May, he – along with some of its other members – had already helped form two other anti-slavery groups earlier that year whose views and aims overlapped those of the AFASS: the Abolition Society of New York City and Vicinity and those who called themselves the Radical Political Abolitionists. The latter two soon merged into the American Abolition Society. The organization of the Abolition Society of New York City and Vicinity was discussed at the AFASS meeting and described as 'having the same objects in view.' This signalled the end of the now-redundant AFASS: it did not publish an annual report for that year and did not convene again.⁶⁸³

McCune Smith's leading role in founding these new groups demonstrates how his priorities had shifted from international to intranational abolitionism. His efforts to end racial oppression in nominally free states gave rise to a firm conviction that all forms of slavery must

⁶⁸² McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' xx–xxi.

⁶⁸³ Abolition Society of New York City and Vicinity, *The Constitutional Duty of the Federal Government to Abolish American Slavery* (New York, 1855); 'New York City Abolition Society,' *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 21 April 1855; Gerrit Smith, 'To the Radical Political Abolitionists,' *FDP*, 13 April 1855; Frederick Douglass, 'American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,' *FDP*, 25 May 1855; 'American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,' *Tribune*, 9 May 1855. For more on the formation of the American Abolition Society and the demise of the AFASS, see M. Leon Perkal, 'American Abolition Society: A Viable Alternative to the Republican Party?,' *Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 1 (1980): 57–71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3031548>.

be combatted by widespread and coordinated political action. The founding documents of the Radical Political Abolitionists (RPA) and the American Abolition Society centred, in turn, on their shared conviction that the founding documents of the US were inherently anti-slavery.

The RPA were composed of many AFASS members who shared these convictions. This led them to seek one political party they could support. In the spring of 1855, McCune Smith, Lewis Tappan, William Goodell, Gerrit Smith, and Douglass were among the signatories to their manifesto which declared: 'Our undertaking, as radical political abolitionists, is to remove slavery from the national territories by means of our national political power, and to remove it from the States also, by means of the same power...' and that among all existing political parties, 'The Liberty party is the only political party in the land, that insists on the right and duty to wield the political power of the nation for the overthrow of every part and parcel of American Slavery' and that 'the Federal Constitution demands the abolition of all American Slavery, State or national.' Apparently believing that the AFASS could not sufficiently promote the cause of political abolitionism, they proposed holding a national convention in Syracuse in June.⁶⁸⁴ McCune Smith presided over the convention as president. In a speech he delivered there, McCune Smith described the RPA's mission as a spiritual one: 'And we shall go hence to proclaim the gospel of liberty – for it is good news, glad tidings of great joy, that we have to tell.' The RPA, McCune Smith argued, had also 'wrested [the Constitution] from the grasp of pro-slavery constructionists, and relieved [it] from the filth and slime and dirt of their foul interpretations.' They had taken the Constitution, 'the stone which the builders have rejected,'

⁶⁸⁴ Smith, 'To the Radical Political Abolitionists.'

and made it the cornerstone of the abolition movement.⁶⁸⁵ The members of the Convention appreciated McCune Smith's leadership: Douglass cited their unanimously adopted resolution 'thanking [McCune Smith] for the ability, urbanity, and impartiality, with which he presided over its deliberations.'⁶⁸⁶

The RPA held a national convention in Boston later that year, where McCune Smith again served as president. The purpose of this convention, as Douglass wrote, was 'to form a National Abolition party, and find a remedy for Slavery in political agitation, claiming the Constitution on their side.'⁶⁸⁷ It was formally instituted on the third day of the convention – 25 October – as the American Abolition Society.⁶⁸⁸ Though, as M. Leon Perkal writes, the American Abolition Society hardly lasted three years, he argues that it was nevertheless significant in that its members, with their radical views, 'were able to exert some moral influence upon the Republican Party, perhaps preventing further compromise with abolitionist ideals.'⁶⁸⁹

5.4 The Fight for Equal Suffrage

McCune Smith's belief in the power and necessity of political engagement was not new; it had only taken a more partisan form by the mid-1850's. Among his most long-standing efforts to politically combat the marginalization and oppression of African Americans was his fight to increase their access to the ballot box, especially in his home state of New York.

⁶⁸⁵ *Convention of Radical Political Abolitionists*, 57–60, 64–65. McCune Smith framed the African American freedom struggle in terms of following a new gospel or 'evangel' on other occasions as well. For example, see McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [20 January 1855]'; James McCune Smith, 'To the Members of the National Council of the Colored People of the United States,' *FDP*, 27 April 1855; McCune Smith, 'New Evangel.'

⁶⁸⁶ Frederick Douglass, 'Convention of Radical Abolitionists,' *FDP*, 6 July 1855.

⁶⁸⁷ 'Radical Abolitionist Convention at Boston,' *FDP*, 26 October 1855.

⁶⁸⁸ William Goodell, 'Appeal of the Executive Committee of the American Abolition Society, Recently Organized,' *FDP*, 7 December 1855.

⁶⁸⁹ Perkal, 'American Abolition Society,' 65–68.

African Americans in New York State had, over time, had their right to vote ever more restricted even as they were gradually freed from chattel slavery. As Rhoda Golden Freeman writes, while New York State's original 1777 Constitution made no mention of colour, African Americans were increasingly targeted throughout the 1810s with more stringent voting requirements as the Democratic-Republican Party grew concerned over their increasing political representation. By 1826, only African American voters were still required to own a freehold of at least \$250; this qualification was removed for white voters. Individual African Americans loudly and consistently opposed this suffrage discrimination. Finally, as Freeman writes, the 'organized drive for equal suffrage began' in February 1837. Continuing efforts over the next two years were led by many of McCune Smith's closest friends and colleagues including Cornish, Bell, Garnet, Charles Ray, Thomas Jennings, Charles Reason, and Albro Lyons, among others.⁶⁹⁰

By 1839, McCune Smith had thrown himself into the equal suffrage movement as eagerly as he had the anti-colonialist movement. McCune Smith himself was legally entitled to vote given the fact that he quickly became an owner of a substantial amount of property after his return to NYC.⁶⁹¹ His lifetime of concerted activism on this front was another manifestation of his conviction that Northern forms of racial oppression, including political disenfranchisement, were intimately linked with the larger system of slavery. As he declared in a NYC abolitionist convention held early that year, 'all the oppressions under which the colored people in this State labor arise from a violation in regard to them of the principle of equal rights

⁶⁹⁰ Freeman, 'Free Negro,' 118–32; Harris, *Shadow*, 116–17.

⁶⁹¹ See Chapter One.

– from their being debarred from an equal exercise of the elective franchise – and that consequently the only means of elevating them is, to give them equal rights in voting.’⁶⁹² While McCune Smith focused his efforts on attaining equal voting rights in his home state, he also saw this as an essential part of the effort to end slavery worldwide. As he argued at another anti-slavery gathering in 1840, ‘whilst this meeting cordially rejoices in the progress made by the British philanthropists, in the successful and safe emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies, we yet regard the elective franchise as a boon required by the freemen in order to secure them their rights... in order to complete and make permanent their triumph.’⁶⁹³

In February of the following year, McCune Smith joined Garnet in presenting arguments before the New York State legislature in favour of equal suffrage for African Americans; Garnet had submitted petitions from all over the states more than two weeks before. The petitions and McCune Smith’s and Garnet’s presentation were well received by the legislature; however, the effort was derailed by other matters occupying their attention.⁶⁹⁴ McCune Smith was also signatory later that year to ‘A Call for a State Convention to Extend the Elective Franchise.’ Though McCune Smith ultimately did not serve as a delegate because it was later designated a ‘colored’ convention (at that time, he opposed self-segregated activism), he attended the New

⁶⁹² ‘City Abolition Convention.’ This selection appears to be the reporter’s approximation of McCune Smith’s remarks rather than a direct quote. The convention was called for by New York City Young Men’s Anti-Slavery Society.

⁶⁹³ Thomas Van Rensselaer and John Hopper, ‘Meeting at the Asbury Meeting-House [From the National Standard],’ *Liberator*, 14 August 1840.

⁶⁹⁴ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 184–85.

York County Convention that the state convention had called for and served on its business committee.⁶⁹⁵

In 1845, McCune Smith once again appeared before the New York State Legislature to argue in favour of equal suffrage. While McCune Smith's address included many elements from the arguments he and Garnet had presented in 1840 – especially regarding harms inflicted on the African American community by disenfranchisement – McCune Smith focused more on the ways racially discriminatory voting requirements violated political and moral principles enshrined in the state constitution. McCune Smith also appealed to his hearers' regional pride. One of his arguments turned the tables on pro-slavery interpretations of states' rights: by disenfranchising some of its citizens to cater to Southern attitudes and interests, New York State was 'crippl[ing] its progress... in order to avoid offending the fancied wrath of other States, especially when those States are filled with ideas of reciprocity of such kind, that they believe reciprocity to be an admirable thing when it is all on one side, and that side their own.' McCune Smith also appealed to the Legislature's pride in their state as a site of liberty: 'Gentlemen, will you, her honored representatives, suffer the Empire State to be outstripped in the career of freedom by Massachusetts on the one hand, and Ohio on the other?... Let me entreat you, remove this reproach from the fair fame of our noble State!' ⁶⁹⁶ Though some at the New York State constitutional convention the following year favoured equal suffrage, the

⁶⁹⁵ 'A Call for a State Convention to Extend the Elective Franchise,' *CA*, 31 July 1841; Tilton and McCune Smith, 'Note from Mr. Tilton;' 'Proceedings of the New York County Convention,' *CA*, 30 October 1841. See below for more on McCune Smith, the Colored Conventions Movement, and his changing views on segregated activism.

⁶⁹⁶ McCune Smith, 'Address to the Legislature.' Assemblyman William C. Bloss chaired the meeting of the Legislature which McCune Smith here addressed. As we have seen, Bloss was an abolitionist; as such, he surely would have supported McCune Smith's cause.

attendees did not agree overall. They put it to a referendum, upon which voters overwhelmingly decided to retain the discriminatory property qualification.⁶⁹⁷

In 1846, Gerrit Smith conceived of a plan to get around the discriminatory property requirement while providing African Americans better opportunities for self-sufficiency than he believed – as a self-described ‘Agrarian’ – they could find in cities. Smith decided to donate about three thousand plots of land to what he described as ‘the meritorious colored poor.’ Smith invited McCune Smith, Theodore Wright, and Charles Ray to help administer his land grant scheme. Their task was to select likely candidates from ‘certain counties,’ including New York County, who would be most likely to make the most of his donations.⁶⁹⁸ Over the next four years, McCune Smith, Wright, and Ray compiled several lists of such candidates for Smith and reported on the grantees and their progress.⁶⁹⁹ While a relative few of these new landowners found success, the land grant scheme overall failed to help a significant number of African Americans achieve financial independence and the right to vote. While Smith largely (and bitterly) blamed the failure of his scheme on the improvidence of the grantees, he grudgingly allowed that the climate and terrain of the part of New York in which the plots were located made it difficult for anyone to wrest a living from the land.⁷⁰⁰ However, the new landowners faced many more problems than the harsh climate and thin soil. As Carla Peterson writes, ‘The

⁶⁹⁷ Freeman, ‘Free Negro,’ 142–43.

⁶⁹⁸ Gerrit Smith, ‘Letter to Theodore S. Wright, Charles B. Ray, and James McCune Smith, 1 August 1846,’ in *Gerrit Smith: A Biography*, by Octavius Brooks Frothingham (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1878), 102–5; Harris, *Shadow*, 223, 264, 275–77.

⁶⁹⁹ McCune Smith to Smith, 17/18 December 1846; James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 22 March 1848; James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 27 March 1848; James McCune Smith and Charles B. Ray to Gerrit Smith, 1 September 1848; and McCune Smith to Smith, 6 February 1850, GSP.

⁷⁰⁰ Gerrit Smith, ‘Letter from Mr. Gerrit Smith: To the Editor of the N.Y. Tribune,’ *Tribune*, 10 August 1857. See Chapter Six for McCune Smith’s refutation of Smith’s negative characterizations of ‘the mass’ of African Americans in this letter.

families were unprepared. Many who attempted to claim their land were swindled out of their lots or charged a service fee. Once settled, they were baffled by the obligations of land ownership. They knew nothing about taxes; they lacked agricultural skills; the soil was too poor for cultivation, or the harvesting of wood too expensive.⁷⁰¹

Undeterred by these failures to help more African Americans win the right to vote, McCune Smith continued to advocate for equal suffrage through lecturing, organizing, co-authoring public appeals, and criticizing attacks on voting rights and arguments for African American disenfranchisement in the press.⁷⁰² He was admired as a particularly tireless and effective advocate for the cause even as the state legislature – many members of which were convinced by McCune Smith’s arguments – repeatedly failed to provide a remedy. One Justin Holland wrote to a Colored Convention: ‘So great was the array of statistics and facts, so conclusive were [McCune Smith’s] arguments and deductions, and so successfully were they presented, that at the close, the meeting [of the New York State Legislature] unanimously adopted four resolutions’ in favour of his arguments for equal suffrage. Holland recommended that the convention follow McCune Smith’s lead in presenting ‘an overwhelming show of facts’ to ‘deprive the trading politicians of even a decent excuse for further opposing our enfranchisement.’⁷⁰³ McCune Smith’s commitment to equal suffrage extended – at least

⁷⁰¹ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 199.

⁷⁰² James McCune Smith, John Jay Zuille, and James P. Miller, ‘The Suffrage Question - In Relation to Colored Voters in the State of New York,’ *Principia* 1, no. 49 (20 October 1860): 385; James McCune Smith, James P. Miller, and John Jay Zuille, ‘Appeal of New York Negroes for Equal Suffrage Rights, 1860,’ in *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), 454–58; McCune Smith, ‘Regeneration of the South,’ James McCune Smith, ‘Equal Suffrage [Part 1],’ *AA*, 24 June 1865; James McCune Smith, ‘Equal Suffrage [Part 2],’ *AA*, 1 July 1865; Freeman, ‘Free Negro,’ 144–53; Blight, *Prophet*, 325.

⁷⁰³ *Minutes of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, January 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th, 1850*, 1850, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/248>.

eventually – to female suffrage. In 1853, he was signatory to a call for a women’s rights convention to consider, among other things, whether it was just or legal to deny voting and other political rights to women.⁷⁰⁴

Despite the sustained and impassioned efforts of McCune Smith and his co-activists, African American men (but not women) were not legally granted the right to vote until the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified over four years after McCune Smith’s death. A final effort to overturn New York State’s discriminatory voting laws in 1860 had once again failed; voters again rejected the equal suffrage amendments though not as overwhelmingly as they had in 1846. Nevertheless, as Freeman writes, the struggle for equal suffrage had ‘concrete results. Skilled leadership had developed and a growing sense of unity was forthcoming.’⁷⁰⁵ More of this sense of unity, as McCune Smith recognized, was sorely needed.

5.5 Unity in Action: The Colored Convention Movement

A lack of unity, in fact, was one of two primary reasons McCune Smith identified as to why African Americans did not make more headway in disrupting the US racial caste system. McCune Smith’s concerns over this lack of unity led him to join African American-led efforts to further their interests and advocate for their rights through unified action outside of politics and within their own communities. The 1830’s saw the beginnings of one of the most notable of these efforts: the Colored Convention movement.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁴ ‘Woman’s Rights,’ *Evening Post*, 25 November 1853.

⁷⁰⁵ Freeman, ‘Free Negro,’ 152–54.

⁷⁰⁶ Peterson, ‘Alexandrine Library,’ 105.

Though he followed it with great interest from the beginning, McCune Smith was initially ideologically opposed to the movement's self-segregation.⁷⁰⁷ This may appear surprising given McCune Smith's abiding concern over African American unity. As we have seen, McCune Smith deeply valued the African American press, itself a racially exclusive or near-exclusive institution. However, McCune Smith evidently did not believe that the logic which supported the establishment of a separate press – that African Americans shared particular interests and concerns best discussed amongst themselves – extended to organized social and political activism. At a series of three planning meetings for 'a State Convention of the colored inhabitants of the State of New York' to be held in Albany in August 1840, McCune Smith joined educator John Peterson and friend Peter Guignon in opposing the convention on the grounds that – in Peterson's words – 'it is contrary to reason, and contrary to experience, to say that any separate political movement on the part of the colored people (now shut out from political rights) can obtain for them the said political rights.'⁷⁰⁸ When elected to serve as a delegate to the convention despite his objections – which says much about the degree to which many attendees regarded McCune Smith as a preeminent representative of their community – McCune Smith excused himself 'as he was opposed to any distinct complexional organization'

⁷⁰⁷ Writing of Nathaniel Paul's fundraising tour for an effort of 'the people of color, of the United States' to establish a college in Canada, McCune Smith declared his surprise at the plan in the 14 September 1832 entry in his travel journal, written as he was bound for Scotland: 'For the convention which sat in Philadelphia in June last made no such determination. And I cannot conceive how such a resolve could have been made without my hearing of it.' This shows how closely he was following the movement's doings. See McCune Smith, 'Journal [Liverpool, 13-15 September 1832].'

⁷⁰⁸ 'Public Meeting [7 August 1840],' *CA*, 15 August 1840; 'Adjourned Meeting [4 August 1840],' *CA*, 8 August 1840. Carla Peterson argues that, regarding Guignon's offering a series of anti-convention resolutions, McCune Smith 'put Peter up to this, using his quiet and unassuming friend as a stalking horse.' As Peterson and *CA*'s reporting on this meeting indicate, McCune Smith was neither quiet nor unassuming. He argued against segregating the convention 'at great length, - and in his usual forcible manner.' See Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 125; 'Public Meeting [27 July 1840].'

and nominated another to serve in his stead. However, he agreed 'for the common good of our people, [to] attend the Convention, and labor to promote its objects.'⁷⁰⁹

Perhaps experiencing some pushback for his opposition to the Albany convention, McCune Smith felt compelled to publicly defend himself. In a letter to the editor of *CA*, McCune Smith offered four reasons. For one, African Americans should 'husband our [scarce] means so as to meet our actual physical wants;' in the face of widespread financial disadvantage, paying for conventions seemed profligate. Holding segregated conventions would also increase prejudice against African Americans. McCune Smith believed that this had already occurred in Philadelphia; he attributed African Americans' loss of voting rights 'in consequence of a similar movement there'). Also, 'the Convention aims to do by separate action what can better be done by a movement based on principle.' Lastly, McCune Smith argued, segregated activism betrayed the principle of equality they were supposed to promote.⁷¹⁰ In sum, McCune Smith argued that when it came to social equality and political enfranchisement, African American unity was not enough: for reasons of practicality as well as principle, they must join their efforts with those of the wider multiracial community of believers in liberty.

Though McCune Smith again did not participate in the 1841 New York State convention held in Troy, he continued to follow the movement closely. In September 1841, he addressed a meeting which detailed the proceedings of the Troy convention.⁷¹¹ The convention had elected McCune Smith to a New York County suffrage committee, again indicating their regard for him

⁷⁰⁹ 'Public Meeting [7 August 1840].'

⁷¹⁰ James McCune Smith, 'Position Defined [Letter to Charles Ray, 12 August 1840],' *CA*, 15 August 1840. See also Peterson on McCune Smith and others' opposition to segregated convention in 'Alexandrine Library,' 109.

⁷¹¹ 'Public Meeting,' *CA*, 25 September 1841; *New-York State Convention of Colored Citizens, Troy, August 25-27, 1841, 1841*, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/231>.

and their recognition of McCune Smith's devotion to their cause regardless of whether he served as a delegate or not.⁷¹²

By 1844, McCune Smith had dropped his opposition to the movement, evidently realizing that the need for African Americans to unite was more pressing than other concerns. He served as a delegate to the fifth annual New York State Colored Convention held in Schenectady, NY, taking a leading role in drafting rules and setting the agenda for the year during the first day's session. Yet before the day was out, McCune Smith and a few others resigned from the convention. They left because the convention refused to record a protest they supported; in so doing, they argued, the Convention 'denied [them] the right of petition.' The protest originated in McCune Smith's and other NYC delegates' opposition to the convention's official support – following Garnet's lead – for the Liberty Party. This episode resulted in another of McCune Smith's and Garnet's many public quarrels.⁷¹³ McCune Smith had, on this occasion, once again failed to find the spirit of unity he sought.

McCune Smith came once again to support the Colored Convention movement, albeit intermittently. In 1847 – after skipping several – he attended the national convention held in Troy, this time serving as one of its vice presidents. This convention, among other things, focused on expanding educational opportunities for African Americans. McCune Smith threw his support behind a plan to establish a college as well as one to establish a national press. Once again, the question of the principle and practicality of separate African American

⁷¹² 'Proceedings of the New York State Convention Held in the City of Troy, August 25th, 26th, and 27th, 1841,' CA, 11 September 1841.

⁷¹³ Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York, *Minutes*, 10–11, 13–14; Garnet, 'The Sweet Cake Party;' Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 197–98; Joel Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 69–70.

conventions was thoroughly debated. McCune Smith does not appear to have raised objections this time, perhaps because the title of the convention, 'National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends,' demonstrated the convention's recognition of the need for multiracial as well as intraracial unity for achieving their aims.⁷¹⁴

Throughout the early- to mid-1850's, McCune Smith attended many more Colored Conventions, from local to state to national.⁷¹⁵ For example, McCune Smith attended the state convention held in Albany in January 1852 convened in response to New York State Governor Washington Hunt's proposal to allocate state funds to the American Colonization Society. He presented his report of the convention to a follow-up meeting held to hear reports from the delegates who attended.⁷¹⁶ However, McCune Smith did not attend all the conventions. He may have missed some due to his busy schedule which, as we have seen, often prevented him from traveling. He may also have skipped others due to lingering frustration; as Carla Peterson surmises, 'Perhaps [McCune] Smith felt discouraged and chose not to attend most of the state conventions of the early 1850's because a bold proposal [to hold a "general convention" in conjunction with delegates from other states] he had put forth at the 1844 Schenectady convention had been ignored.' However, she argues, 'his intellectual influence was pervasive even in his absence' since they discussed and debated issues in which McCune Smith had taken a leading role in articulating and promoting.⁷¹⁷ McCune Smith continued to call for and attend

⁷¹⁴ William C. Nell, 'Report of the Doings of the National Convention of Colored Americans and Their Friends, Held at Troy, N.Y., Oct. 6, 1847,' *Liberator*, 19 November 1847; *Convention, Troy 1847*, 6–10.

⁷¹⁵ 'Convention of Colored Citizens,' *NS*, 10 April 1851; 'Proceedings,' 15 July 1853; 'Meeting of Colored Citizens,' *Tribune*, 12 September 1855.

⁷¹⁶ James W. C. Pennington, 'Colored People of New York,' *Liberator*, 5 March 1852; 'Colored Meeting: Report from the State Convention - Governor Hunt and Amalgamation,' *FDP*, 12 February 1852.

⁷¹⁷ Peterson, 'Alexandrine Library,' 111.

other conventions at which he advocated bold and innovative plans to improve the situation of African Americans in the face of *de facto* and legal slavery.

Reflecting on the Colored Convention movement in 1865, McCune Smith wrote: ‘These meetings answered a double purpose: they knit together the oppressed living in all parts of the State, enabled them to cheer and encourage each other in the up-hill road it was their destiny to tread; they also afforded to the dominant (white) class an opportunity to witness the fine talent for business and oratory which these conventions always exhibited.’ Whatever his frustrations with the movement in those years, McCune Smith recalled it with appreciation: ‘There were good times at most of them, there being just enough differences of opinion to produce lively debates without the bitter remembrances which sometimes remain after similar gatherings.’⁷¹⁸

5.6 A National Council and a Manual Labour School

McCune Smith continued to fret over the African American community’s lack of unity throughout the 1850’s, offering several explanations for its cause. In 1853, McCune Smith lamented ‘One of the bitterest evils slavery has imposed on our people ...is the almost entire destruction of self-reliance and *clannish*-ness in our character.’⁷¹⁹ The following year, he attributed this lack of unity more specifically to the ways African Americans suffered different kinds and degrees of oppression depending on factors such as where they lived and the shade of their skin. For example, he noted that in some places ‘The weight is laid heavily on the pure black man, and is lightened as he approaches the caste of the purely white man.’ This not only

⁷¹⁸ McCune Smith, ‘Sketch,’ 33–34.

⁷¹⁹ McCune Smith, ‘Editor.’

served to alienate African Americans from the wider communities in which they lived: it often served to alienate them from one another: ‘each man feels his peculiar wrong, but no hundred men together feel precisely the same oppression; and while each would do fair work to remove his own, he feels differently in regard to his neighbor’s oppression.’⁷²⁰ In 1855, McCune Smith attributed their lack of unity to a widespread lack of sufficient self- and mutual respect. Many African Americans were, he lamented, ‘mutually repellent’ to one another even as they disproportionately admired white people.⁷²¹

McCune Smith recognized that another key impediment to African Americans advancement was their widespread lack of access to skilled and well-paid professions. Yet McCune Smith appeared ambivalent at times on issues of labour and wealth. In a running debate in *FDP* with fellow correspondent William Wilson in the early 1850’s, McCune Smith disagreed with Wilson’s growing conviction that a focus on wealth acquisition should be first among African Americans’ priorities in the struggle for liberation. However, McCune Smith’s objections appear more philosophical than pragmatic; he worried that the wrong kind of focus on wealth could undermine virtue.⁷²² McCune Smith was under no illusion as to the necessity of a certain amount of wealth for African Americans to advance in education, self-reliance, and social and political standing. Therefore, he committed himself to helping African Americans obtain better job opportunities. For example, McCune Smith joined with Wilson and other

⁷²⁰ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [4 May 1854].’

⁷²¹ James McCune Smith, ‘Our Leaders,’ *FDP*, 21 September 1855.

⁷²² William J. Wilson, ‘From Our Brooklyn Correspondent [10 January 1852],’ *FDP*, 15 January 1852; McCune Smith, ‘Communipaw [4 February 1852],’ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [20 February 1852],’ William J. Wilson, ‘From Our Brooklyn Correspondent [21 February 1852],’ *FDP*, 4 March 1852; McCune Smith, ‘Communipaw [6 March 1852].’ Wilson, under the pseudonym ‘Ethiop,’ was the Brooklyn correspondent for *FDP* in the 1850’s. McCune Smith (as ‘Communipaw’) and ‘Ethiop’ often debated issues of concern to the African American community in the pages of *FDP*, and often at length.

African Americans professionals in 1850 to form an ‘American League of Colored Laborers.’

Based on the premises that ‘one very great evil now suffered by the free colored people of the United States is the want of money’ and ‘All colored men should engage in the most profitable labor, provided it be honorable,’ the League was to promote the training and hiring of African Americans workers and raise funds to set them up in business.⁷²³

Three years later, McCune Smith conceived of another way to help resolve these problems of African American unity and labour. He presented his plan for a ‘National Council of the Colored People’ at the 1853 National Colored Convention in Rochester. The Council would consist of members from each state, some elected by the Convention and others elected by state councils. Among its many projects, the Council would institute a ‘Protective Union for the purchase and sale of articles of domestic consumption.’ The Council’s ‘Business Relations’ office would promote African American employment by, among other things, keeping a ‘registry of colored mechanics, artizans and business men throughout the Union’ and of ‘all person willing to employ colored men in business, to teach colored boys in mechanical trades, liberal and scientific professions, and farming,’ as well one for African American ‘men and youth seeking employment or instruction.’ The Council’s Committee on Publication would collect ‘facts, statistics, and statements’ as well as biographies, histories, and other materials by and about African Americans, and establish a reading room and library. They were also responsible for defending African Americans from ‘any assaults’ in the press.⁷²⁴

⁷²³ ‘American League of Colored Laborers.’ Unfortunately, the League never materialized. See Harris, *Shadow*, 239–40.

⁷²⁴ *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th, and 8th, 1853* (Rochester, 1853), 4, 18–19. Douglass, who some initially credited for the idea of the National Council, declared on more than

The National Council would further address the labour problem by instituting a 'Manual Labor School' that would provide African Americans the opportunity to learn and practice skilled trades as well as provide a basic but comprehensive liberal arts education.⁷²⁵ This was not McCune Smith's first time advocating for the establishment of such an institution. In 1847, McCune Smith, Alexander Crummell, and P. G. Smith had presented their 'Report on Education' at the National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends in Troy in which they recommended 'the founding of a collegiate institution, on the manual labor plan' for African American youth.⁷²⁶

The National Council never did succeed in achieving the unity of purpose and effort that McCune Smith called for. While McCune Smith passionately promoted the Council as an ideal structure within which African Americans could 'bring forward, discuss and adopt such plan of movement as may seem best,' the Council was largely unsuccessful in bringing about agreement on or in implementing any of the plans its members considered.⁷²⁷ Despite McCune Smith's and his allies' best efforts, the Council lasted barely over two years. As Floyd Miller writes, it met 'a quiet death' at another national Colored Convention held in Philadelphia in autumn 1855, finally 'succumb[ing] to internal discord' while its committees 'never became anything other than paper organizations.'⁷²⁸ McCune Smith tried to salvage his plan first by opposing the Philadelphia delegation report's recommendations against establishing the

one occasion that it originated with McCune Smith. See Frederick Douglass, 'Honor to Whom Honor Is Due,' *FDP*, 22 July 1853; 'The Person Who Reported the Plan of Organization...,' *FDP*, 28 July 1853.

⁷²⁵ *Convention, Rochester 1853*, 18, 30–33.

⁷²⁶ James McCune Smith, Alexander Crummell, and P.G. Smith, 'Report of the Committee on Education,' *NS*, 21 January 1848.

⁷²⁷ James McCune Smith, 'Address to a Meeting of the National Council of the Colored People, 8 May 1855,' *Tribune*, 9 May 1855.

⁷²⁸ Miller, *Search*, 136–37.

Manual Labour School. He followed this with a more modest plan for community-based 'Industrial Associations... for the purpose of encouraging colored artizans of both sexes in the pursuit of Mechanical or Artistic employment.'⁷²⁹ These, like the American League of Coloured Laborers, never materialized.

5.7 The Committee of Thirteen and the Underground Railroad

Though McCune Smith often argued that ending *de facto* slavery and racial oppression in the North should be the first priority in the larger cause of abolition, he was no less committed to undermining the institution of chattel slavery in the South. This commitment was realized in McCune Smith's direct assistance to fugitives from Southern slavery as well as by his activism within the anti-slavery organizations described throughout this chapter. No doubt inspired by the examples of his mother Lavinia, his Aunt Sally, and other members of his childhood community, McCune Smith likewise frequently extended a helping hand to those emancipating themselves as Lavinia had done.

McCune Smith responded to the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law by helping to organize NYC's Committee of Thirteen in September 1850, likely the first of many such vigilance committees established throughout the North.⁷³⁰ This law shifted primary responsibility for enforcing laws pertaining to slavery from the states to the federal government; lessened defendants' ability to seek legal protection in courts of law; and required citizens to aid law

⁷²⁹ *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held in Franklin Hall, Sixth Street, Below Arch, Philadelphia, October 16th, 17th and 18th, 1855* (Salem, 1856), 10–13, 26–27, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/281>.

⁷³⁰ 'Meetings of Colored Citizens,' *NASS*, 10 October 1850. Anti-Fugitive Slave Law meetings in Syracuse, Oswego, Springfield, Haverhill, and Worcester also established vigilance committees of anywhere from thirteen to forty members; see 'The Hunt,' *NASS*, 17 October 1850; 'Meeting in Haverhill,' *Liberator*, 18 October 1850; 'Fugitive Slave Law - Great Excitement,' *Liberator*, 25 October 1850.

enforcement in capturing suspected fugitives.⁷³¹ The Committee – whose members also included William Powell, John Zuille, Robert Hamilton, William Wilson, and Albro Lyons – called on their ‘fellow citizens... to urge and compel our representatives in Congress to repeal this Fugitive Slave Bill’ and committed themselves to opposing the Fugitive Slave Law using every means at their disposal.⁷³² In her memoir, Maritcha Lyons recalled that ‘Unknown except to the initiated, a committee of thirteen was formed in our city, each member of which was pledged to keep the letter [of the Fugitive Slave Law] but to violate the spirit of unholy enactment. Without offices, headquarters, passwords or treasury, this band was liberally supported. Aid was given to escaping slaves, financially or otherwise, by those who required no other details save that such help was needed.’⁷³³ Not all the Committee’s activities were clandestine, however. As Foner writes, ‘like other groups involved with the underground railroad, [the Committee] operated both openly and in secret.’⁷³⁴ As the need and enthusiasm for vigilance grew, the Committee established two offshoots: a Committee of Nine in Brooklyn and a Committee of Five in Williamsburg.⁷³⁵ These committees could count on widespread support and help from the community; as Lyons wrote, ‘Every thinking man and woman was a volunteer in the famous “underground railroad.” The passage of the infamous “Fugitive Slave Law” incited a flame of resentment which scorched the souls of those whose lives had been one protest against the foul injustice of a disregard of the consciousness of human brotherhood.’⁷³⁶

⁷³¹ Foner, *Gateway*, 18, 24, 25.

⁷³² ‘Meetings,’ 10 October 1850; James McCune Smith et al., ‘To the People of the State of New York,’ *NASS*, 31 October 1850.

⁷³³ Lyons, ‘Memories,’ 26.

⁷³⁴ Foner, *Gateway*, 166.

⁷³⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Messrs. Editors.’

⁷³⁶ Lyons, ‘Memories,’ 26.

Among the Committee of Thirteen's efforts on behalf of fugitives from slavery was assistance with court cases, from providing funds to participating in the cases themselves.⁷³⁷ Indeed, a court case appeared to have sparked the Committee's formation: it coincided with the late September 1850 arrest of alleged fugitive James Hamlet in neighboring Williamsburg. In his address to the Committee's first public meeting, McCune Smith cited this case as evidence of the extent of the Fugitive Slave Law's assault on life and liberty.⁷³⁸ While Hamlet's freedom was quickly purchased with money raised by sympathizers, another arrested two months later was not so fortunate. When Henry Long, a waiter at a NYC hotel, was hauled into court on suspicion of being a fugitive from slavery, McCune Smith was among 'several other members of the colored population' who flocked to the crowded courtroom.⁷³⁹ Despite the concerted efforts of supporters, Long's case appeared doomed from the start. As the *Tribune* reported, 'The [court and police] OFFICIALS... manifested a bearing wholly in sympathy with the slaveholder...' For example, the 'Marshal peremptorily refused allowing any colored man, however respectable, to come into the Courtroom. Dr. [McCune] Smith, an educated man and a gentleman, was thus rudely ejected by the Marshal, and compelled to go into the crowded gallery.'⁷⁴⁰ Long lost his case and was turned over to his enslaver.⁷⁴¹

In at least one other case, McCune Smith offered expert testimony in an effort to help secure an alleged fugitive's freedom. This was in keeping with his declaration that 'one of [the Committee's] first duties was to have a committee of two appointed, who would be always on

⁷³⁷ Harris, *Shadow*, 272; Foner, *Gateway*, 166.

⁷³⁸ 'Meetings,' 10 October 1850.

⁷³⁹ 'The Fugitive Slave Bill. Extraordinary Excitement. Alleged Fugitive Slave,' *Herald*, 28 December 1850.

⁷⁴⁰ 'Facts and Reflections on the Late Fugitive Slave Case,' *Tribune*, 14 January 1851.

⁷⁴¹ Foner, *Gateway*, 130–32.

hand to give evidence and aid in favor of the poor fugitive.⁷⁴² In late August 1851, McCune Smith testified in a case which sought to ‘establish the relationship between slave and master’ of ‘[John] Bolding,’ a ‘nearly white’ tailor who had ‘lately married an interesting wife at Poughkeepsie, a free woman’ and ‘Messrs. Barnett and Anderson, of Columbia, S.C.,’ who claimed him as their property. Among other things, the prosecutor sought to prove that Bolding – also known as Daniel Davis – was of African descent. McCune Smith opposed ‘numerous gentlemen, skilled in physiology’ who claimed that he was, arguing that based on his own deep study of physiology and the ‘history of races,’ it was ‘evident that John is of white and Indian blood, without any admixture of African blood.’ Despite similar testimony from others, Bolden lost his case.⁷⁴³ He, too, was returned to slavery.⁷⁴⁴

Clear as it was that the courts could not be relied upon to protect alleged and actual fugitives’ freedom in the face of the Fugitive Slave Law, the Committee also worked with the Underground Railroad. It is unclear whether McCune Smith’s activities in the Underground Railroad predated the Committee. In any case, his pharmacy appears to have played a role in it as well.⁷⁴⁵ One Samuel Murray, himself active in the Underground Railroad in the 1810’s and 1820’s in Philadelphia, recalled decades later that McCune Smith and Garnet ‘were at the New-

⁷⁴² ‘Meetings,’ 10 October 1850.

⁷⁴³ ‘Poughkeepsie.’ We can imagine that McCune Smith would have found it distasteful (albeit necessary in this instance) to publicly examine Bolding’s body to determine that, based on his appearance, he did not look like someone who could be legally enslaved since, of course, McCune Smith did not believe that it should be legal to enslave anyone. It was also at this court case that McCune Smith revealed, under cross-examination, that his own mother was a ‘mulatto,’ and his ‘father a descendant of the Puritans, a real Caucasian.’ See Chapter One.

⁷⁴⁴ Foner, *Gateway*, 132.

⁷⁴⁵ For more on New York City’s Underground Railroad, see Philip A. Bell, ‘Underground Railroad in New York: Introduction,’ *Elevator*, 11 January 1873; Bell, ‘Underground Railroad in New York: No. 1;’ Philip A. Bell, ‘Underground Railroad in New York: No. 2,’ *Elevator*, 29 March 1873.

York station.’⁷⁴⁶ As Murray told a reporter in 1897, his father would shelter people fleeing slavery then send them to a ‘Dr J. G. Bies’ in Philadelphia. He, in turn, sent them to ‘Dr. McCune Smith of New York, who kept a drug store on Broadway.’ McCune Smith would send them on to Jermain Loguen (‘Rev. J. Logan’), a Syracuse abolitionist and leading Underground Railroad operative. From there, they would be assisted on their way to Canada.⁷⁴⁷ Booker T. Washington lists McCune Smith, Loguen, Pennington, and Douglass among the ‘principal agents of the Underground Railroad’ in New York.⁷⁴⁸

As Leslie Harris writes, despite the Committee’s valuable work on behalf of fugitives from slavery, ‘there was little the committee could do to guarantee the freedom of New York’s blacks.’⁷⁴⁹ Though it may have failed in many of its objectives, the Committee proved invaluable to NYC’s African American community in this time of heightened threat and fear. Particularly, it served as a further source of unity. For example, Emeline Bastien and Fanny Tompkins helped organize a fundraising fair hosted by the North Star Association of Ladies in 1851 ‘to assist the Committee of Thirteen in aiding and defending such persons as may be arrested as fugitive slaves.’ The fair attracted donations from supporters in several states.⁷⁵⁰ The Committee also organized public events, such as a welcome reception for the Hungarian freedom fighter Louis

⁷⁴⁶ ‘Days Long Gone By: An Old Negro Recalls the Underground Railway and Its Workings,’ *Buffalo Weekly Express*, 14 June 1888.

⁷⁴⁷ ‘Befo’ the War: Experiences of Samuel Murray Assisting Slaves to Canada, *Buffalo Enquirer*, 11 March 1897.

⁷⁴⁸ Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery*, vol. 1 (New York: Association Press, 1909), 283.

⁷⁴⁹ Harris, *Shadow*, 272.

⁷⁵⁰ Bastien and Tompkins, ‘Fugitive Slave Fair;’ Tompkins, ‘Report of the New York Ladies’ Fair in Aid of the Committee of Thirteen.’ McCune Smith, as treasurer of the Committee of Thirteen, ‘acknowledge[d] the receipt of \$292.25’ in proceeds from this fair. See James McCune Smith, ‘The Undersigned Respectfully...,’ *Tribune*, 10 March 1851. Buoyed by their success, the ‘Committee of Thirteen Ladies’ held another fundraising event in Rochester which sold ‘rich, elegant and beautiful articles’ donated from as far away as England and Ireland. See Frederick Douglass, ‘Rochester Anti-Slavery Festival,’ *NS*, 17 April 1851.

Kossuth.⁷⁵¹ In 1852, the Committee called another mass meeting, this time in opposition to rising support among African Americans for the colonization movement.⁷⁵² Wilson wrote that the Committee was ‘becoming the nucleus round which most of what is of any worth here, clustre [sic].’⁷⁵³ This ‘nucleus’ may itself have been centred in McCune Smith’s pharmacy library; the Committee held at least some of its meetings there.⁷⁵⁴

The Committee also outlived its existence as an organization insofar that its members continued to pursue its goals individually. For example, Lyons recalled that her father, Committee co-founder Albro Lyons (and one of McCune Smith’s closest friends) ran a stop on the Underground Railroad from the family home. Over the many years Lyons and his wife Mary Joseph operated this stop, Maritcha Lyons wrote, they helped around a thousand people on the road to self-emancipation.⁷⁵⁵ McCune Smith also continued his Underground Railroad activities well after the Committee disbanded. On one occasion, according to a letter to the editor of the *Tribune*, ‘About Friday, 1st April, [1859] Doctor McCune Smith of West Broadway, at his druggist’s store, received a letter from a friend in California, bearing on its envelope the

⁷⁵¹ ‘Reception of Colored Persons,’ *FDP*, 18 December 1851; *James McCune Smith, ‘Address to His Excellency Governor Louis Kossuth, of Hungary, by the Committee of Thirteen Appointed to Secure the Legal Defence of Persons Claimed As Fugitive Slaves; Presented, New York, December 12, 1851,’ *NASS*, 18 December 1851. Though Kossuth was regarded as a hero by many African Americans for his role as a freedom fighter, others were critical of him – and, by extension, of the Committee of Thirteen for promoting his cause – because he refused to publicly take a stance on the issue of American slavery. See Frederick Douglass, ‘Kossuth and American Slavery,’ *FDP*, 18 December 1851; ‘Kossuth in New York [14 December 1851],’ *FDP*, 8 January 1852. In this instance, the Committee’s reception served as both a unifying and dividing event for the community.

⁷⁵² ‘Meeting of the Colored People of New York (Corrected from a Report in the New York Herald),’ *NASS*, 22 January 1852.

⁷⁵³ William J. Wilson, ‘From Our Brooklyn Correspondent [17 January 1852],’ *FDP*, 22 January 1852. A founding member of the Committee, he had migrated to the local one established in Brooklyn.

⁷⁵⁴ Wilson, ‘Br. Corr. [31 January 1852].’

⁷⁵⁵ Lyons, ‘Memories,’ 46. The Lyons family moved to Providence, Rhode Island, after their home was attacked in during the 1863 draft riots in NYC; since it operated as a ‘semi-public’ stop on the Underground Railroad, it would have been targeted by rioters. See Lyons, 8–11, 46.

endorsement, “By favor of Daniel Dangerfield,”” also known as Daniel Webster. On the 3rd, ‘a man called on Dr. Smith, who is one of the friends of the slave, and supposed to know something of those *in transitu*, and asked Dr. Smith if he knew Daniel Dangerfield.’ The caller professed himself ‘anxious’ to find the man to help prove he was not Webster and to warn the real Dangerfield of the danger of recapture. McCune Smith replied that he had received the letter ‘by the hands of Daniel Dangerfield, but was out when it was delivered.’⁷⁵⁶

Webster/Dangerfield, who was alleged to have fled slavery in Virginia in 1854, was freed in 1859 by a federal commissioner in Philadelphia. This outcome was welcomed by both abolitionists and some non-abolitionists, the latter consisting of those who resented the South’s attempts to limit Northern states’ rights to make their own laws regarding slavery and personal liberties. Both perceived it as evidence of the Fugitive Slave Law’s inability to effectually nationalize slavery.⁷⁵⁷

There is one known surviving document which provides direct evidence of McCune Smith’s work on the Underground Railroad and his connections within it. In this case, McCune Smith’s intervention occurred while the Committee was still active. On 11 February 1852, A. L. Bates of Syracuse wrote to ‘Frederick Douglass or Wm Bloss of Rochester’ that ‘These men came from McCune Smith New York and I have ticketed them to you trusting that you will see them put on their way from Rochester.’ The next day, Bloss recorded on the note that he ‘Recd

⁷⁵⁶ C. Glen Peebles, ‘The Fugitive Slave Case at Philadelphia (From the N.Y. Tribune),’ *FDP*, 15 April 1859.

⁷⁵⁷ Horace Greeley, ‘There Is Much Excitement in Philadelphia...,’ *Tribune*, 5 April 1859; ‘Kidnapping in Philadelphia,’ *Tribune*, 8 April 1859; ‘The Fugitive Slave Case in Philadelphia,’ *National Era*, 14 April 1859; Foner, *Gateway*, 218.

of Maria G. Porter \$5.00 in behalf of fugitives.⁷⁵⁸ The ‘Wm Bloss’ of this letter was William Wirt Bloss, son of William C. Bloss, the abolitionist and New York State assemblyman discussed earlier in this chapter. Bloss’s activities in the Underground Railroad represent how profoundly he was influenced by his father who, as we have seen, was also an operative. On one occasion, the younger Bloss was shot for ‘participating in the rescue of Charles Fisher, a negro who had been kidnapped by pro-slavery ruffians.’ Fortunately, he survived the attack.⁷⁵⁹ McCune Smith’s links to the Bloss family and their Underground Railroad activities indicate one more intriguing line of research – which is ongoing – into the extent of McCune Smith’s work as an ardent foe of slavery in all its forms.

5.8 Violence and the Civil War

The use of violence as a mean of resisting or ending slavery had long been controversial among African Americans. For example, when Garnet read his ‘Address to the Slaves of the United States of America’ at the 1843 Colored Convention – in which he called on enslaved people to resist slaveholders’ depredations, by force or bloodshed if necessary – it was rejected by the delegates as being too violence-promoting.⁷⁶⁰ McCune Smith’s own views on violence as a desirable or necessary means for African American emancipation shifted over his lifetime. At an

⁷⁵⁸ A. Bates ALS to Frederick Douglass and W[illia]m W. Bloss, February 12, 1852, Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/r/rochester/rochester.0001.001/1#?s=0&cv=0>. My thanks to Prof. Celeste-Marie Bernier for alerting me to the existence of this newly digitized document. It is unknown whether Fisher was one of the men McCune Smith also assisted; research is ongoing.

⁷⁵⁹ William W. Bloss and Anonymous, ‘William W. Bloss, Brevet-Major,’ in *A Complete Military History of the 108th Regiment N.Y. Volunteers, from 1862-1894*, ed. George H. Washburn (Rochester: Press of E.R. Andrews, 1894), 225.

⁷⁶⁰ *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens; Held at Buffalo, on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1843* (New York, 1843), 12–14, 17–19, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/278>; Henry Highland Garnet, ‘An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America, Buffalo, N.Y., 1843’ (Electronic Texts in American Studies), <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=etas>.

1837 meeting of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, McCune Smith demonstrated his adherence to the Garrisonian tenet of nonviolence and moral suasion. He praised the British abolitionist George Thompson for his activism centred on nonviolence. McCune Smith declared that if ‘physical force were made use of, I would be the first to resist’ it even in the case of armed invasion of the US to liberate African Americans from slavery; he was certain that free African Americans would likewise rise up in patriotic defence of their country. It would be better, McCune Smith argued, for British abolitionists to launch a ‘moral invasion’ of the US, wielding the ‘physically harmless, but morally omnipotent, weapons of truth and righteousness.’⁷⁶¹

McCune Smith’s convictions regarding violence evolved slowly. As he wrote to Gerrit Smith, he was still committed to an ethos of non-violence in 1846.⁷⁶² By the mid-1850’s, McCune Smith had come to accept that violent resistance to the aggressions of slaveholders, their agents, or their allies was often necessary and even praiseworthy.⁷⁶³ Nevertheless, McCune Smith continued to oppose certain kinds of violence, especially retaliatory violence. In 1862, he praised his fellow African Americans’ forbearance in ‘refrain[ing] from deluging our country in blood’ despite slaveholders’ long history of meting out oppression, cruelty, and murder.⁷⁶⁴ Yet McCune Smith had come to recognize that violence was a necessary means for ending slavery and for keeping it ended. In his 1865 biographical ‘Sketch’ of Garnet’s life,

⁷⁶¹ James McCune Smith, ‘Remarks by James McCune Smith, M.D. Seconding the Motion by the Rev. Patrick Brewster of Paisley at a Meeting of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, 15 March 1837,’ in *Britain and America United in the Cause of Universal Freedom: Being the Third Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow: Glasgow Emancipation Society, 1837), 78–79.

⁷⁶² McCune Smith to Smith, 28/30/31 December 1846.

⁷⁶³ McCune Smith to Smith, 1/31 March 1855; James McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [August 1856],’ *FDP*, 8 August 1856; Stauffer, *Black Hearts*, 251–52.

⁷⁶⁴ James McCune Smith, ‘No Retaliation,’ *WAA*, 8 March 1862.

McCune Smith included Garnet's 1843 'Address' and praised it highly.⁷⁶⁵ McCune Smith offered similar arguments to those Garnet had made in an editorial he wrote earlier that year: 'We must exchange the gospel of endurance for the gospel of resistance.' McCune Smith quoted an article which argued that law and order everywhere rested on the presupposition that "most men will defend life and limb, horde, wife and children, with the first weapon that comes to hand. Flogging and knocking down at the South will never entirely cease so long as there are men who will submit to be flogged and knocked down." Putting a final end to slavery and achieving equality before the law through resistance would be a long, hard process, yet long experience had taught them that 'This must be accomplished to a great extent by FORCE' nevertheless.⁷⁶⁶

McCune Smith's changing views on violence led him to applaud John Brown's 1859 attempt to start an insurrection of enslaved people by raiding the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. In exploring the connections between Brown and McCune Smith, John Stauffer quotes the latter's praise of the "iron nerves surrounding such a tender heart" which led Brown to risk his life and those of his sons in order to deliver others from slavery.⁷⁶⁷ In his praise of Garnet's address on resisting slavery, McCune Smith cited its influence on Brown as evidence of its importance.⁷⁶⁸ While it remains unknown whether they ever met, Brown also valued McCune Smith's opinions on how slavery could be combatted most effectively: before the raid, he had sought both McCune Smith's (by letter) and Douglass's advice as to whether a move to Kansas

⁷⁶⁵ McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 44–52.

⁷⁶⁶ McCune Smith, 'New Evangel.'

⁷⁶⁷ Stauffer, *Black Hearts*, 254–55.

⁷⁶⁸ McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 52.

was 'more likely to benefit the colored people *on the whole*.'⁷⁶⁹ If McCune Smith did offer advice on the matter, evidence has not been found. It also unknown whether Brown sought McCune Smith's advice – as he had Douglass's – when planning the raid.

McCune Smith viewed the Civil War as an instance of regrettable but necessary violence. As he wrote in 1859, 'The devastations of war are at any time to be deplored... nevertheless, there is a justification in yielding to the demands of necessity; and this is the common soldier's and his sympathizer's consolation.'⁷⁷⁰ McCune Smith saw the Civil War as a just war of this kind and wholeheartedly supported it. Douglass wrote that 'the Governor of Massachusetts [John Albion Andrew] had commissioned his friend *Dr. James McCune Smith* to call for volunteers in New York for the first colored Massachusetts regiment.'⁷⁷¹ While no government records or contemporary correspondence providing details of McCune Smith's recruitment efforts have been found, an obituary for Tunis G. Campbell states that 'The first year of the war he was awarded the contract to raise 4000 colored troops in defence [sic] of the Union. In this attempt he was assisted by such men as Dr. James McCune Smith, Martin R. Delaney and Prof. Charles L. Reason of New York city.'⁷⁷²

Over the course of the war, McCune Smith continued to call on more African Americans to enlist: "'On deck!" then boys: Abraham Lincoln called us, John Andrew, from glorious old

⁷⁶⁹ John Brown, 'Letter to Ruth and Henry Thompson at North Elba, 30 September 1854,' in *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words, in the Words of Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Louis Ruchames (London/New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 86; John Brown, 'Letter to His Children, 2 November 1854,' in *The Life and Letters of John Brown, Liberator of Kansas, and Martyr of Virginia*, ed. F. B. Sanborn (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1885), 110–11; Stauffer, *Black Hearts*, 198, 251–52.

⁷⁷⁰ James McCune Smith, 'The War and Its Lessons,' *WAA*, 30 July 1859.

⁷⁷¹ Douglass, 'Cooper Institute (Reply).'

⁷⁷² 'His a Life of Good Works: Rev. Tunis G. Campbell, a Notable Colored Man, Dead,' *Boston Globe*, 5 December 1891.

Massachusetts, calls us! ...Then there is Old John Brown marking our pathway before us, can we any longer refuse to follow?’⁷⁷³ In a follow-up editorial, McCune Smith proudly observed that ‘Our young men are availing themselves of the golden moment in offering their services and their lives for our country and freedom. A better cause and nobler devotion the sun never has, never will shine upon. There is no middle path of compromise, no back door of ignominious escape, the government and the country are pledged to put down slavery.’ Yet it was neither the government nor the country as a whole which would ultimately determine slavery’s fate: ‘How effectually [the Civil War] shall put down slavery, and how thoroughly it will enfranchise the freedmen, it lies in the power of the free blacks of the North to determine. If we, who are intelligent, active-minded, and thoroughly acquainted with our rights as citizens, if we throw ourselves into the army as soldiers, these things will surely happen.’⁷⁷⁴ McCune Smith continued to support the Civil War effort as long as it lasted, especially in his role as co-editor of the *Anglo-African*.⁷⁷⁵ In one of his editorials, McCune Smith employed language strikingly similar to that of Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address written nearly two years later. In ‘Coming Out of Egypt,’ McCune Smith wrote: ‘We have often cried to God for deliverance; but our prayer has been “Not in Thy dreadful ire, O Lord! No, not with fire! No, not with sword!” But He has seen fit to order it otherwise, and the whole world can but regret His judgments while they

⁷⁷³ McCune Smith, ‘On Deck!’

⁷⁷⁴ McCune Smith, ‘Our Colored Soldiers.’

⁷⁷⁵ For example, see James McCune Smith, ‘Frederick Douglass in New-York City,’ *AA*, 2 May 1863; James McCune Smith, ‘Massachusetts to the Rescue!,’ *AA*, 16 May 1863; James McCune Smith et al., ‘Special Notices: Public Meetings [Call for 5th Ward Enlistment Meeting],’ *AA*, 19 December 1863; McCune Smith, ‘Perils;’ James McCune Smith, ‘Governor Andrew and Theodore Tilton,’ *AA*, 26 December 1863; McCune Smith, ‘Money.’

bow in acknowledgement of His Justice.⁷⁷⁶ Here, McCune Smith claimed divine recognition of the terrible necessity of violence in ridding the world of injustice.

Conclusion

In his 1865 editorial 'A Grave Mistake,' McCune Smith reflected on the history of the African American struggle against slavery. In what would prove to be his final year, he expressed only one regret: 'The greatest mistake made by our people, in our view of the oppression under which we labor, is, that they are heavier in themselves and more difficult to be borne up against, than any ever inflicted on the human race. This was the key note of our public speakers forty years ago, and is the burden of their cry today.' As we have seen, McCune Smith had long written about the world history of slavery and the variety of forms it took, from the biblical slavery of the Israelites to Russian serfdom to the caste system in India to the caste system and chattel form of slavery in the United States. Even as he described the US system of slavery as 'hideous national crimes,' McCune Smith cautioned against perceiving it as the world's worst system of oppression. Rather, it was a recurrence, and not the worst one, of 'more gigantic forms of vice committed in every age of the world.' McCune Smith's remarks here do not represent an attempt to minimize or excuse the US versions of slavery. He had an entirely different purpose: 'Our object in reciting these matters, is simply to remove a lion from our path.' By thinking, feeling, stating, or implying that white Americans held total power over them, African Americans set themselves up to fail. Such subjection was not their fate, McCune

⁷⁷⁶ James McCune Smith, 'Coming out of Egypt,' AA, 20 June 1863; 'Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address - Lincoln Memorial (U.S. National Park Service),' <https://www.nps.gov/linc/learn/historyculture/lincoln-second-inaugural.htm>.

Smith insisted, nor should it be seen as such. As he had argued almost 25 years earlier, McCune Smith was confident that eventually – with God’s help – African Americans would persevere and overcome slavery, as just as others had done so many times throughout world history. Though it might take a long time to finally conquer slavery, it was their destiny to do so.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁷ McCune Smith, ‘A Grave Mistake.’

Chapter Six – Science, Evidence, and Race

Introduction

‘Figures cannot be charged with fanaticism. Like the everlasting hills, they give cold, silent evidence, unmoved by the clouds and shadows of whatever present may surround them. Let us see what they say...’

~ James McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans,’
New-York Daily Tribune, 1 February 1844

As he had for literature, medicine, journalism, and abolitionism, James McCune Smith also made significant contributions to several sciences, particularly the emerging fields of statistics and anthropology. In lectures and in what Britt Rusert refers to as his ‘stunningly artful writing on science and medicine,’ McCune Smith revealed the depth and breadth of his reading and the ingeniousness and originality of his thinking in these fields.⁷⁷⁸ Resurrecting McCune Smith’s contributions to the sciences from their unwarranted obscurity – likely at least partially attributable to race-based exclusion from scientific institutions and publications – is part of a larger project to, as anthropologist Thomas Patterson describes it, ‘[look] more closely at bodies of subjugated knowledge’ and ‘acknowledge and incorporate the intellectuals whose color placed them outside the mainstream.’⁷⁷⁹

McCune Smith initially appears to have authored scientific and statistical works primarily out of pure curiosity and intellectual enjoyment. However, he was also motivated

⁷⁷⁸ Rusert, *Fugitive Science*, 34.

⁷⁷⁹ Thomas C. Patterson, ‘An Archaeology of the History of Nineteenth-Century U.S. Anthropology: James McCune Smith, Radical Abolitionist and Anthropologist,’ *Journal of Anthropological Research* 69, no. 4 (2013): 460, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24393935>. Chapter Three of this thesis explores McCune Smith’s medical authorship.

throughout his life by a desire to understand, explain, and celebrate the origins and history of peoples of African descent.⁷⁸⁰ In all his scientific works, McCune Smith reiterated his commitment to adhere to demonstrable facts since this was the surest way to avoid errors caused by prejudice, bias, and adherence to irrational ideologies. Over time, McCune Smith came to apply his evidence-based scientific and statistical learning to addressing social issues, particularly to defending African Americans from pro-slavery attacks in politics, scholarly works, and the press. He also applied his thinking in these fields to ethnological works in which he sought to formalize coherent theories about race.⁷⁸¹

First, this chapter traces the origins and development of McCune Smith as a scientific thinker and author. This chapter argues that his thinking in these fields was centred on one foundational theory: the unity of the human race. McCune Smith argued that humans were classifiable as groups or 'races' only according to relatively superficial, mutable characteristics ultimately caused by their environments. His decades of scientific inquiry were therefore ultimately concerned with unifying disparate theories in sciences such as medicine, biology, and anthropology to demonstrate the truth of his theories on humanity and race. This is not to argue that McCune Smith sought to side-line or dismiss differences in human populations: he was deeply interested in these differences and in fact believed that they were necessary and beneficial for human survival and improvement. This led him to promote and vigorously defend one of his most influential ideas on race: that 'amalgamation,' or race-mixing, was among the most potent sources of human progress. Finally, this chapter argues that among McCune

⁷⁸⁰ For example, see Chapter Two's discussion of the 'African Genealogy' series.

⁷⁸¹ See Chapter Six.

Smith's most significant contributions to anthropology and social thought was his development of the theory that African Americans had arisen as a unique, indigenous people, strengthened and perfected not only through their shared struggle against oppression but due to their multiracial origins and diverse cultural influences and development.

6.1 Science and Statistics: The Scholar

Among McCune Smith's earliest and most enduring intellectual preoccupations were science and statistics. McCune Smith expressed his reverence for science in many of his works; on one occasion, he wrote: 'Next to our Maker do we revere Science as the clearest manifestation of his law which he has vouchsafed us.' He characterized science as one of the surest methods for arriving at truth, trusting that fidelity to its methods would allow science to 'ever rear her head far above the buzz of popular applause, or the clash of conflicting opinion in the moral world.'⁷⁸² According to Philip Bell, this fascination also originated from key aspects of McCune Smith's personality and his particular type of intelligence. Bell wrote that 'Dr. Smith was a close analytical reasoner... He excelled as a writer on practical sciences; his love of mathematical studies, together with his power of analysis enabled him to comprehend the mysteries of statistics... He was a frequent contributor to the political and scientific periodicals—not often to the department of Belles Lettres, his mind was too practical.'⁷⁸³ As a result, McCune Smith often reiterated his firm commitment to the empirical approach underlying science and statistics. For example, McCune Smith introduced his 1846 article 'The Influence of Climate on Longevity'

⁷⁸² Macdonald and McCune Smith, 'Physician's Report [and Reply].'

⁷⁸³ Bell, 'Death.' Bell was correct about McCune Smith's skills as a scientific and statistical writer. However, he here underestimated the extent and quality of McCune Smith's contributions to *belles-lettres*. See Chapter Two.

with a pledge not to speculate beyond what the bounds of evidence would allow. In keeping with his love of the classics, he employed a quote from the ancient Greek poet Pindar to so: '*Ta makra d'énénepein / Erukei me tethmos / Horai t'épeigomenai*' ('But the strict law that rules my song / And hours which urge their course along / This thought prohibit, and restrain / Within just bounds the wandering strain').⁷⁸⁴

Surviving records from the African Free School (AFS) indicate that McCune Smith received a quality early education in mathematics and physical sciences and excelled at them. The AFS's teacher Charles Andrews took care to include science in the well-rounded education he sought to provide his students, including studies in geography and astronomy. 'One special habit of his,' McCune Smith recalled, 'was to find out the bent of his boys and then, by encouragement [and] instruction... develop[ed] such talent as far as possible.' McCune Smith was evidently one of these. Andrews added 'Natural Philosophy and Navigation' classes to the AFS curriculum 'which were then new studies in a free school.' Since he was 'himself not deeply learned, but thorough as far as he went,' Andrews 'carried on classes' in these subjects 'as far as he was able, and then hired more competent teachers at his own expense.'⁷⁸⁵ McCune Smith thrived under this advanced instruction. In his *History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, Andrews singled out a 'Journal of a voyage from Boston to Madeira, an exercise in the navigation class, by James McCune Smith, aged about 12 years' for inclusion as an example of star pupils' works. He described it as 'a remarkably neat production.'⁷⁸⁶ A mathematical exercise

⁷⁸⁴ McCune Smith, 'Influence of Climate, Part I,' 319. This translation of this selection from the Fourth Nemean Ode is taken from Pindar, *Pindar*, trans. C.A. Wheelwright (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 177. For more on McCune Smith and the classics, see Chapter Two.

⁷⁸⁵ McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 21.

⁷⁸⁶ Andrews, *History*, 61.

which McCune Smith created the next year is also preserved among advanced scholars' works, likely among those which were, as McCune Smith recalled, 'exhibited' at 'periodical fairs' which Andrews put on to 'stimulate his pupils, and bring out their varied talents.'⁷⁸⁷

McCune Smith resumed his scientific and mathematical education at the University of Glasgow.⁷⁸⁸ Surviving records show that McCune Smith was enrolled in botany, physics, and logic during his second year there; he won a prize for the latter.⁷⁸⁹ The curricula for McCune Smith's undergraduate, graduate, and medical degrees also included natural philosophy, chemistry, and mathematics.⁷⁹⁰ Thomas Morgan's oft-cited article on McCune Smith's medical and scientific career lists geology, natural history, mathematics, natural philosophy, and practical astronomy among the subjects in the University's bachelor and master's degree curriculum.⁷⁹¹ It is unknown precisely when McCune Smith applied his studies in maths and logic to a serious study of statistics; Morgan writes that McCune Smith's 'relative sophistication' in the subject 'derived from his education in Glasgow, which coincided with early advances in quantitative public health developed by Adolphe Quetelet' and others whose work deeply influenced him.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁷ McCune Smith, 'Square Root (School Exercise);' McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 21.

⁷⁸⁸ This is in addition to his studies in the liberal arts and medicine, as described earlier in this thesis. McCune Smith's studies post-AFS and in preparation for university appear to have been focused largely on the classics and perhaps in other language studies.

⁷⁸⁹ UoG, *Catalogus Togatorum 1833-34*, 10; UoG, *University Register: Professor Jeffray's Students*, 150; UoG, *University Prizes*, 9; UoG, *Catalogus Togatorum 1835-36*, 816.

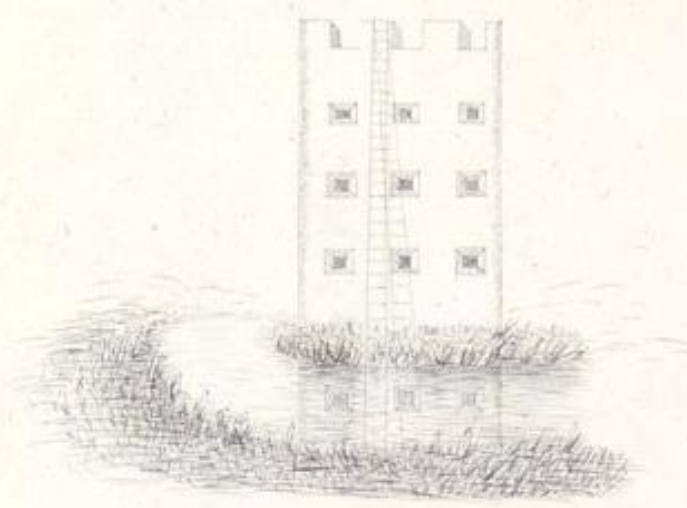
⁷⁹⁰ Kerr, *Scottish Education*, 235; Spittal, 'Chair of Pathology.'

⁷⁹¹ Morgan, 'Education and Medical Practice,' 608. See Chapter Three for more about McCune Smith's curriculum and training as a medical student.

⁷⁹² Morgan, 611. For more on Quetelet's influence on McCune Smith, see Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 248, 257–58, 262; Patterson, 'Archaeology,' 467.

Square Root.

The wall of a fort is 23 feet in height, and a ditch of 19 feet wide surrounds the fort; I wish to know the length of a ladder that will reach from the outer edge of the ditch to the top of the wall.



The length of the ladder is $23^2 + 19^2 = 850$
 The length of the ladder is $\sqrt{850} = 29.154$
 Answer 29.154
 $29.154^2 = 850$
 $29.154 \times 29.154 = 850$

From the ciphering book of James McCune Smith, Ggedras Years
 New York African School 1829

Figure 4. 'Square Root' by James McCune Smith, 1826. Collection of the New-York Historical Society. Used with permission.

McCune Smith would continue his studies in science and statistics as an independent scholar throughout the rest of his life. The breadth and depth of his scholarship in these areas are revealed throughout McCune Smith's writings discussed throughout this thesis and especially in this chapter. Baillière's bookshop – which, as we have seen, McCune Smith described as a 'small cramped up agency' where chemists, mechanics, 'anatomists' (dissectors), scientists, astronomers, mathematicians, and 'men of few words, but earnest brows' – was McCune Smith's go-to source for the latest scientific and mathematical works.⁷⁹³ McCune Smith also regularly reviewed works in these fields throughout his years writing for the African American press. Some of these were in stand-alone book reviews; others were reviewed or critiqued at length within longer essays.⁷⁹⁴

6.2 Science and Statistics: In Action

McCune Smith's enthusiasm for these fields of scholarship were manifested immediately upon his return to NYC. With three university degrees to his name, McCune Smith took on the role of public intellectual. In the late 1830's, he gave multiple series of public lectures discussing topics related to medicine and biology such as 'Organs of Sense' and 'Circulation of the Blood.'⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹³ McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [1, 8, and 9 December 1854];' McCune Smith, 'Schoolmaster (Continued);' McCune Smith, 'NY Corr. [19 June 1857].' In addition to his frequent companion Bell, McCune Smith regularly browsed Baillière's in company with George Bancroft, president of the American Geographical and Statistical Society. See American Geographical and Statistical Society, *Bulletin of the American Geographical and Statistical Society, Incorporated May 22, 1852*, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852), 5.

⁷⁹⁴ McCune Smith, 'Nicaragua;' McCune Smith, 'Nicaragua - No. II;' McCune Smith, 'Book Review: Two-Fold Slavery;' McCune Smith, 'Smith Family;' James McCune Smith, "'The Lake Regions of Central Africa - A Picture of Exploration. By Richard F. Burton, Capt. H. M. L. Army, Fellow and Gold-Medalist of the Royal Geographical Society.'" Re-Print. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, Franklin Square [Book Review], 'WAA, 15 December 1860; McCune Smith, 'Problem of American Destiny [Book Review].'

⁷⁹⁵ 'Lectures of the Philomathean Society - James McCune Smith, M.D... [For Thu, 18 January 1838], 'CA, 13 January 1838; 'Public Lectures of the New York Phoenixian Literary Society: Programme,' CA, 6 February 1841.

The first and best known of these was dedicated, as an advertisement announced, to ‘shewing the fallacy of the pretensions upon which Phrenology is founded.’⁷⁹⁶ Phrenology, which sought to establish a science of the human mind by combining psychological theories with observations of the structure of the brain, was – especially at first – favoured by many reformers, including abolitionists.⁷⁹⁷ McCune Smith, however, was having none of it. ‘By the aid of skulls and extemporaneous drawings,’ one reviewer wrote, McCune Smith demonstrated that many of phrenology’s claims were based on ‘fallac[ious],’ ‘arbitrary,’ ‘artificial,’ and ‘imaginary’ divisions of the brain into separate organs and correlations between these and mental attributes. The reviewer wrote that McCune Smith, in his conclusion to the lecture, alluded to the way in which the ‘cultivation of phrenology’ led to a ‘tendency to infidelity and irreligion... [such as that] he had seen exemplified among his fellow students in the University of Glasgow.’⁷⁹⁸ Yet as we shall see, McCune Smith’s study of skulls – initially inspired by his opposition to phrenology on empirical and religious grounds – informed his later anthropological thought.

His first lecture on phrenology was so well received that McCune Smith was invited to speak again on the subject several times. These lectures drew on McCune Smith’s anatomical and scientific training at the University of Glasgow as well as on his other research on ethnology and natural history.⁷⁹⁹ While the lectures attracted praise from friends and supporters such as

⁷⁹⁶ ‘Anti Phrenology.’

⁷⁹⁷ James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (UoCP, 2000), 70; James Poskett, ‘Phrenology, Correspondence, and the Global Politics of Reform, 1815-1848,’ *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (June 2017): 410, 414, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1017/S0018246X16000236>.

⁷⁹⁸ ‘On Monday Evening, We Had the Pleasure...,’ *Commercial Advertiser*, 20 September 1837.

⁷⁹⁹ ‘Dr. Smith,’ *CA*, 14 October 1837; ‘Anti Phrenology;’ Cornish, ‘Phrenology;’ Cornish, ‘Dr. Smith in Philadelphia;’ McCune Smith, ‘Communipaw [12 January 1859].’

Samuel Cornish – who, reviewing the lecture as editor of *The Colored American (CA)* – wrote that phrenology ‘savour[ed] too much of witchcraft’ and referred to phrenology dismissively as ‘Bumpification’ – there were some, including abolitionists, who criticized it. For example, Sarah Grimké wrote to Theodore Dwight Weld: ‘Hast thou heard J. McCune Smiths [sic] lectures against Phrenology? I saw a synopsis of one, but the reasoning was to me very unsatisfactory. I am sorry he has come out ag[ain]st Phre[nology] because it appears to me so perfectly consistent with the other works of God and with enlightened reason and religion.’ Grimké, like many other like-minded abolitionists, considered phrenology a progressive science. They believed that it had the potential to combat racial prejudice by proving scientifically, as Grimké wrote, that ‘the colored man [had] the intellect of the white,’ or, at the very least, that any different mental capacities they might possess were not sufficient to justify slavery.⁸⁰⁰

George Combe, a British phrenologist, social reformer, and abolitionist, argued the latter. In his *Notes on the United States of North America*, Combe objected to ‘an attack on Phrenology’ published in *CA*’s 30 March 1839 issue (no longer extant). Referring to McCune Smith, Combe wrote that ‘one of the editors is a coloured gentleman, who studied medicine in Edinburgh [sic], and imbibed the prejudices of his teachers against the science, ...he is now laboring to transfer them to his colored brethren.’⁸⁰¹ McCune Smith politely accepted Combe’s invitation to attend his ‘course of lectures on Phrenology at Stuyvesant Institute’ though he

⁸⁰⁰ Sarah M. Grimké to Theodore Dwight Weld, 1 February 1838, in *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844*, ed. Gilbert Hobbs Barnes and Dwight Lowell Dumond, vol. 2 (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1965), 529; David De Giustino, ‘Phrenology in Britain, 1815-1855: A Study of George Combe and His Circle’ (PhD, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin, 1969), 90–91; Poskett, ‘Phrenology,’ 416, 420.

⁸⁰¹ George Combe, *Notes on the United States of North America, During a Phrenological Visit in 1838-39-40*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: MacLachlan, Stewart, & Company, 1841), 190.

could only find time to attend four. '[F]rom these we received much interesting and delightful information ...however ...we heard nothing from the distinguished lecturer which led us to change any of our views regarding the fallacies of Phrenology.'⁸⁰² Bell recalled that despite McCune Smith's early opposition, he later became a 'partial convert' to phrenology. Despite Grimké's high hopes, phrenology – eventually considered a pseudoscience – came to be most often employed to demonstrate the superiority of people of European descent.⁸⁰³

In February 1845, McCune Smith gave another of his most celebrated public scientific presentations, this one in the form of a debate. In it, he again opposed a theory based on variety in human skull shapes. Early that month, the *Herald* announced that one 'Mr. Robert Grant will give two Lectures on the Natural History of the Human Race' and that he 'challenges any abolitionist to disprove the facts he will adduce to sustain the natural superiority of the white race above the negro and Indian.'⁸⁰⁴ McCune Smith was roused to respond. When Grant reiterated his challenge at the close of the first lecture 'Dr. M'Cune Smith, a colored physician of this city, rose and accepted.'⁸⁰⁵ The debate commenced a week later.⁸⁰⁶ Over the three days it continued, as Bell recalled, McCune Smith 'proved by authentic anatomical preparations... and by living examples of both races, that the obtuse facial angle, the receding skull, the protruding jaw, etc., are as peculiar to some types of the Caucasian race as they are to the negro.'⁸⁰⁷ One review of the debate declared that McCune Smith – who it described as 'a

⁸⁰² McCune Smith, 'Combe's Lectures.'

⁸⁰³ Bell, 'Death;' De Giustino, 'Phrenology in Britain,' 88–90; Poskett, 'Phrenology,' 417–18, 420, 424–25.

⁸⁰⁴ 'Lectures on Ethnography,' *Herald*, 10 February 1845.

⁸⁰⁵ 'Indians and Negroes Incapable of Civilization,' *Evening Post*, 12 February 1845.

⁸⁰⁶ 'To-Night, at the Lecture Room...,' *NYJC*, 18 February 1845.

⁸⁰⁷ Bell, 'Question of Races.' McCune Smith had used specimens in this way to illustrate his arguments in his phrenology lecture series.

colored gentleman of very superior intellect and acquirements' – 'did himself great credit' in proving 'a point which we thought facts had long before this sufficiently determined, to wit, the capacity of the negro race for civilization.'⁸⁰⁸ Unlike Grant's initial lecture, the debate was well attended. Most reviews – both within and without the abolitionist press – praised McCune Smith's performance while describing Grant's as comparatively lacklustre and ill-informed. One exception was the virulently anti-abolitionist *Herald* which, despite taking Grant's side, admitted that the exchange demonstrated 'the prodigious extent of [McCune Smith's] reading.'⁸⁰⁹

McCune Smith's triumph over Grant was, for a time, remembered by many as a notable demonstration of intellectual acumen and scientific rigour and became part of abolitionist lore. Eight years later, Frederick Douglass wrote that 'poor Dr. Grant, who undertook to argue the black race into extinction, a few years ago, was himself completely extinguished, so that after his debate with Dr. Smith, we find no trace of him.'⁸¹⁰ Another paper that year described McCune Smith as 'the same man who completely used up Professor Grant in a long continued public debate on the question of the negro's inferiority.'⁸¹¹ McCune Smith's obituary in NYC's *Medical Register* memorialized this 'very spicy controversy with Dr. Grant... during which, in the opinion of his admirers he fully exemplified his powers as an off-hand debater, a clear reasoner and able orator.'⁸¹² Bell recalled that McCune Smith's 'celebrated discussion with Professor

⁸⁰⁸ 'A Discussion (From the Commercial Advertiser),' *NYJC*, 20 February 1845.

⁸⁰⁹ 'Discussion;' 'Pro-Slavery in New-York,' *NASS*, 27 February 1845; 'Manners of the Abolitionists,' *Herald*, 3 March 1845.

⁸¹⁰ Douglass, 'Dr. James McCune Smith,' 28 January 1859.

⁸¹¹ 'It Will Be Seen by an Advertisement... (From the Rhode Island Freeman),' *FDP*, 18 February 1853.

⁸¹² Furman, 'Obituary,' 203.

Grant was a beautiful specimen of his mode of attack and defence. He left no salient points, while he seized every weak or undefensible [sic] position of his antagonist and overthrew every barrier and completely demolished him.⁸¹³

In December of that year, McCune Smith delivered a lecture on ‘Civilization – in Relation to the Physical Circumstances That Have Contributed Thereto’ at Boston’s Ritchie Hall as part of an Adelpic Union Library Association lecture series.⁸¹⁴ While the text of the original version is not extant, the lecture was edited and published as an essay nearly a decade and a half later in the *Anglo-African Magazine’s* January 1859 issue. The essay is an ethnological study of how human populations came to differ in their physical attributes and how these differences have affected the development of civilizations throughout history.⁸¹⁵ One way we can be reasonably sure of what the essay version retains from the original lecture is to read Frederick Douglass’s 1854 lecture ‘The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered.’ As Bruce Dain observes, Douglass’s lecture was strongly influenced by McCune Smith’s ethnological theories as expressed in the ‘Civilization’ lecture.⁸¹⁶ Dain argues that the ‘new concept of race’ that Douglass attributed to McCune Smith was one of the major themes in ‘Claims.’ This theory held that “‘ethnographically isolated” peoples degenerated, while mixture and dynamism built great civilizations and nations.”⁸¹⁷ (McCune Smith’s theories of race and his influence on Douglass’s ‘Claims’ will be discussed further below.)

⁸¹³ Bell, ‘Death.’

⁸¹⁴ ‘We Rejoice to Perceive...,’ *Liberator*, 31 October 1845; ‘Adelpic Union Library Association [McCune Smith’s Lecture],’ *Liberator*, 19 December 1845.

⁸¹⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Civilization.’

⁸¹⁶ Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 248–49, 252.

⁸¹⁷ Dain, 248–49, 252.

McCune Smith's abiding interest in ethnology and statistics led him to help found an organization devoted to these and other related subjects: the American Geographical and Statistical Society (AGSS). In 1851, McCune Smith met with a group of scholars and authors led by Freeman Hunt – who, as we have seen, had published one of McCune Smith's best-known works, 'The Influence of Climate' – and Luther Wyman in 'Mr. Disturnal's Geographical Statistical Rooms' to form the AGSS. McCune Smith was appointed member of a committee to draft its constitution and by-laws.⁸¹⁸ However, the AGSS's first *Bulletin* does not mention McCune Smith.⁸¹⁹ By 1853, McCune Smith was certainly a member: the AGSS's *Charter, By-laws, and List of Members* states that McCune Smith was elected to the Society that year.⁸²⁰ No sources have been found which explain the gap between McCune Smith's early role in forming the AGSS and his formal election to membership. It is possible that, despite the abolitionist Hunt's leading role in the AGSS, there may have been some institutional resistance to African American membership similar to that which McCune Smith experienced with NYC's medical societies.⁸²¹ It is unclear whether there were any other non-white members of the AGSS that year or others. In 1854, an editorial in *Frederick Douglass' Paper (FDP)* rejoiced that 'At least

⁸¹⁸ 'A New Geographical Statistical Society,' *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 13 September 1851; McCune Smith, 'Influence of Climate, Part I;' McCune Smith, 'Influence of Climate, Part II.'

⁸¹⁹ American Geographical and Statistical Society, *Bulletin of the AGSS*, 1852. It does not list members, only officers.

⁸²⁰ American Geographical Society of New York, *Charter, By-Laws, and List of Members of the American Geographical and Statistical Society. March, 1860* (New York: American Geographical and Statistical Society, 1860), 28.

⁸²¹ For more about Freeman Hunt's abolitionist and other views, see Jerome Thomases, 'Freeman Hunt's America,' *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 30, no. 3 (1943): 395–407, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1896775>; A. Everett Peterson, 'Hunt, Freeman (Mar. 21, 1804 - Mar. 2, 1858),' in *DAB*, ed. Dumas Malone, vol. 5 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 384–85.

one of the learned societies of this city have overcome the prejudice against permitting colored men to share in its deliberations' when the AGSS admitted McCune Smith as a member.⁸²²

In any case, McCune Smith was active in the AGSS at least into the mid-1850's. For example, McCune Smith led the AGSS's Committee on Ethnology in 1853.⁸²³ In June of that year, McCune Smith delivered his paper 'The Micronesian Islands' – which the *Tribune* described as an 'interesting Geographical and Ethnological' work – at one of the AGSS's general meetings.⁸²⁴ McCune Smith may also have authored or helped author the unsigned 'Memorial of the American Geographical and Statistical Society to the Legislature of the State of New York on the Subject of the Next Census' in early 1854. As *FDP* reported, McCune Smith 'addressed the Society, on the subject of devising measures to improve the system heretofore adopted for taking the states census' that spring.⁸²⁵ As we shall see below, McCune Smith was deeply interested in censuses, both for the data they provided for his scholarship and in the ways they were used and misused to make claims about African Americans and to advocate policies accordingly.

6.3 Statistics and the Defence of African Americans

⁸²² 'A Colored Savan,' *FDP*, 5 May 1854.

⁸²³ American Geographical and Statistical Society, *Bulletin of the American Geographical and Statistical Society*, vol. 2 (New York: Baker & Godwin, 1856), 6, 286.

⁸²⁴ James McCune Smith, 'The Micronesian Islands,' *Tribune*, 15 June 1853; American Geographical and Statistical Society, *Bulletin of the AGSS*, 1856, 2:8. McCune Smith's friend Patrick Reason was one of two who created the maps McCune Smith referred to in his presentation. Also, two articles from 1854 and 1855 (respectively) refer to papers McCune Smith had recently presented to the AGSS on 'the South Sea Island' and the 'Sandwich Islands.' While it is possible that these refer to later papers in a series on islands, they are not mentioned in the AGSS's bulletins nor have reviews or texts of these papers been found in newspapers. It is more likely that the authors misidentified the islands which were the subjects of McCune Smith's paper. See William C. Nell, 'Honors Conferred on Colored Men,' *Liberator*, 8 September 1854; Gaines, 'Emigration.'

⁸²⁵ 'Memorial of the American Geographical and Statistical Society to the Legislature of the State of New York on the Subject of the Next Census,' in *Bulletin of the AGSS*, 1856, 2:14–18; 'A Colored Savan,' *FDP*, 5 May 1854.

McCune Smith often used statistical data from censuses and other sources to combat stereotypes and false claims about people of African descent, particularly African Americans. McCune Smith's refutation of claims in James Macdonald's physician's report for the Colored Orphan Asylum in 1839 and in Orville Dewey's 1844 lecture at NYC's Tabernacle, for example, relied heavily on statistical analysis.⁸²⁶ Macdonald had attributed the unusually high mortality rate that year among the Asylum's children in part to 'the peculiar constitution' of people of African descent, implying that it made them especially susceptible to disease. McCune Smith combatted Macdonald's assessment by comparing rates of death at the Asylum and official rates of death in NYC overall. Based on his statistical analysis, McCune Smith argued that African American children were at least as healthy as white children in NYC and were in fact less likely to die of many childhood diseases.⁸²⁷ Dewey had claimed that free African Americans fared poorly in Northern states and were happier, healthier, and altogether better off under slavery. On this basis, he argued against immediate abolition. McCune Smith subjected Dewey's claims to logical and statistical analysis, arguing that contrary to Dewey's assertions, slavery harmed African Americans' social, mental, and physical well-being.⁸²⁸

McCune Smith's interest in the science of census-taking as well as the data they supply appears to have been sparked by another 1844 claim that – based largely on the evidence of the most recent federal census – African Americans fared poorly when freed from slavery. Since

⁸²⁶ See Chapters Three and Five.

⁸²⁷ McCune Smith, 'Report;' Macdonald and McCune Smith, 'Physician's Report [and Reply].'

⁸²⁸ 'Dewey's Lecture;' McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery 1;' McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery 2;' McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery 3;' McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery 4.' See also Morgan, 'Education and Medical Practice,' 611.

that claim was made publicly by a powerful figure within the US government, McCune Smith felt all the more compelled to defend his fellow African Americans against the attack.

On 29 April 1844, McCune Smith headed ‘a Mass Meeting of people of color of the city of New-York’ held at Philomathean Hall’ in NYC. It was called ‘to consider the calumnies recently uttered against the free people of color by John Calhoun, Secretary of State, in a letter to the Hon. Richard Pakenham, Minister Plenipotentiary from Great Britain, at Washington.’⁸²⁹ Relating to alleged British attempts to help end slavery in Mexico and Texas through diplomatic means, Calhoun – a committed defender of slavery – wrote the letter in protest of a recent ‘avowal, for the first time made to [the US] Government’ by a British Secretary of State “that Great Britain desires and is constantly asserting herself to procure the general abolition of slavery throughout the world.”” Calhoun cited statistics from the 1840 census ‘and other authentic documents’ to argue that African Americans ‘have been invariably sunk into vice and pauperism, accompanied by the bodily and mental inflictions incident thereto’ in every state that had emancipated them. Abolishing slavery, therefore, would threaten the ‘safety and prosperity of this Union.’⁸³⁰ With this letter, Calhoun reiterated and reinforced his long-held doctrine that slavery was not an unfortunate accident of history or a necessary evil, as many defenders of slavery – in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson – believed. Rather, Calhoun argued, it was humane and necessary for civilization: a ‘positive good.’⁸³¹

⁸²⁹ ‘Hon. John C. Calhoun and the Free Colored People,’ *Tribune*, 8 May 1844.

⁸³⁰ John C. Calhoun, ‘Mr. Calhoun to Mr. Pakenham [18 April 1844],’ in *The Works of John C. Calhoun: Reports and Public Letters*, ed. Richard K. (Richard Kenner) Crallé, vol. V (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1864), 333–35, 337–38.

⁸³¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787), 229, 236, 240; John C. Calhoun, ‘Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions, Delivered in the Senate, February 6th, 1837,’ in *The Works of John C. Calhoun: Speeches*, ed. Richard K. (Richard Kenner) Crallé, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and

At the meeting, McCune Smith 'read extracts from the official correspondence of Calhoun and Upshur, in which they take grounds that the perpetuity of... slavery, depends on the annexation of Texas to the United States' and Calhoun's fears that slavery 'should be disturbed.' After an 'able exposition of Calhoun's slanders' – which, among other things, emphasized the self-serving nature of the slaveholding Calhoun's arguments – McCune Smith moved that a committee of nine be appointed 'to examine and refute' Calhoun's claims. Many other speakers then 'gave direct evidences that the charges... were falsehoods of the blackest hue.' One of these was 'Mr. Wright,' a fugitive from slavery whose eloquence made him – according to one reporter – 'the star of the evening.'⁸³²

A few days later, McCune Smith presented a memorial on behalf of the committee. He was likely its principal author: his recent refutation of Dewey shows that he had already studied the 1840 census and uncovered some of its errors.⁸³³ The memorial showed how 'an examination of the census of 1840' revealed that it was riddled with flaws, rife with contradictions, and made striking omissions. In some places, the census data were contradicted by statistics from institutions such as insane asylums, seminaries, and churches. In other places, the census contradicted itself: for example, it 'assert[ed] that there are 74 free colored afflicted with [deafness, dumbness, and blindness], in towns which contain no colored inhabitants.' As a source of claims about the relative health and longevity of enslaved people, the census was also of little use: in some places, 'There are no records of the mortality among the slaves!' The

Company, 1853), 631. Though Jefferson viewed slavery as ultimately unfortunate for all concerned, he came to view it as necessary and in some ways justified. His negative portrayal of people of African descent in his *Notes* will be discussed below.

⁸³² Philip A. Bell, 'The Great Meeting,' *Liberator*, 10 May 1844; 'Hon. John C. Calhoun.'

⁸³³ McCune Smith, 'Freedom and Slavery 3.'

memorial cited further errors in the census regarding everything from pauperism to literacy to religiosity. In light of these facts, the memorial called on Congress to ‘cause the Census of 1840 to be re-examined, and, so far as is possible, corrected anew’ so that the Secretary of State ‘may have facts upon which to found his arguments.’ Plans were made to have the memorial submitted to the Senate and widely disseminated.⁸³⁴

Within a year, McCune Smith’s deep dive into the 1840 census also helped inspire him to write ‘The Influence of Climate on Longevity.’⁸³⁵ As we have seen in Chapter Three, ‘Climate’ was his answer to one of two annual ‘Medical Prize Questions’ posed by Harvard’s Boylston Medical Committee for 1845.⁸³⁶ While originally written with a professional medical audience in mind, ‘Climate’ was primarily a statistical analysis of population and climate data.⁸³⁷ This analysis was used to support McCune Smith’s developing theory of the origins and nature of racial diversity as well as what happens when people move to places with different climates or come together through emigration. (These theories will be discussed at length below.) Besides being a medical and ethnological work, ‘Climate’ continued McCune Smith’s statistical defense of African Americans, especially those subjected to chattel slavery. McCune Smith’s dissertation did not win the Boylston prize. It went instead to his colleague Edward Jarvis. Jarvis was a white abolitionist and physician who had also uncovered racial-bias-based errors in the 1840 census; McCune Smith had cited some of Jarvis’s findings in his rebuttal of Dewey in the *Tribune*.⁸³⁸ As

⁸³⁴ ‘Hon. John C. Calhoun.’

⁸³⁵ Morgan describes ‘Climate’ as a response to Calhoun. See Morgan, ‘Education and Medical Practice,’ 611.

⁸³⁶ Forry, *NY Journal of Medicine*, 3:277.

⁸³⁷ Morgan describes ‘Climate’ as McCune Smith’s ‘most distinguished statistical research;’ Bruce Dain describes ‘Climate’ as ‘the culmination of his statistical work.’ See Morgan, ‘Education and Medical Practice,’ 611; Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 248.

⁸³⁸ McCune Smith, ‘Freedom and Slavery 3;’ Morgan, ‘Education and Medical Practice,’ 611.

Patterson argues, McCune Smith and Jarvis both ‘implicitly... questioned the intentions of those who created the questionnaire as well as the census takers who recorded the data’ in their investigations of the census’s errors.⁸³⁹

‘Climate’ was far from the last time McCune Smith relied on his skill in statistical analysis to defend African Americans from pro-slavery attacks. In 1854, McCune Smith was pained to find ‘at least ten or fifteen pages devoted to the most cruel abuse and misrepresentation of the free colored people of our free States!’ in David Ansted’s book *Science, Scenery and Art*. An admirer of Ansted for an earlier work on geology, McCune Smith suspected that he must have “[fallen] among thieves” ... who fatten in robbing the colored man of his good name;’ otherwise, he would never have made such poorly informed and ill-reasoned claims. Arguing that Ansted had wilfully ignored ‘the highest authority in vital statistics, Quetelet’ – who he relied on heavily for his own work – McCune Smith marshalled statistics to show that African Americans in the freest states had, in fact, thrived ‘not only in their ratio of increase, but also in the proportions of the living at different ages,’ which made them ‘physically and intellectually, the superior class in our land.’⁸⁴⁰ In 1859, McCune Smith again used statistical analysis to show that, contrary to the claims of a pro-colonialist Republican politician, African Americans belonged in the US and could live in a state of equality with white Americans.⁸⁴¹

McCune Smith also found it necessary to use his statistical expertise to defend African Americans from negative stereotyping by abolitionists, generally white. In 1851’s ‘African

⁸³⁹ Patterson, ‘Archaeology,’ 470.

⁸⁴⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Schoolmaster (Continued).’

⁸⁴¹ McCune Smith, ‘F.P. Blair’s Lecture in Boston.’

Colonisation – The Other Side,’ McCune Smith used statistical arguments to show that Horace Greeley was unjustified in comparing African Americans’ intellectual development unfavorably to that of other Americans.⁸⁴² McCune Smith was not at all hesitant to attack ill-informed pro-colonialist abolitionists such as Greeley and was delighted when others did so as well; when Henry James referred to Greeley as ‘a stupid man,’ McCune Smith enthusiastically agreed.⁸⁴³

However, other instances of white abolitionist attacks on African Americans were personally hurtful. McCune Smith’s friend Gerrit Smith, finally giving into frustration with years-long difficulties with his land grant scheme, wrote in an 1857 letter to the editor of the *Tribune* that “the mass of [African Americans] are ignorant and thriftless.”⁸⁴⁴ McCune Smith took nearly eight months to reply to Smith’s attack, at first privately in a letter. Pained, he rebuked Smith for ‘endors[ing Greeley’s] foulest charge against us that could have been uttered.’ He added that Smith should have, for his own sake as well as that of the African American community, ‘ascertained, by the widest examination of facts, that your statement was true, before you ventured to make it.’ To do otherwise was to stoop to Greeley’s level: ‘It may do very well for the heartless politician of the *Tribune* to libel the blacks in order to aid the Republican party, – but I have always been of the belief you had a heart – a belief this reckless statement has greatly staggered.’⁸⁴⁵ The insult rankled; nearly a year later, McCune Smith upbraided Smith again, this time in the press. He cited the kind of statistical evidence that he had scolded Smith

⁸⁴² McCune Smith, ‘Other Side.’

⁸⁴³ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [23 April 1859].’

⁸⁴⁴ Smith, ‘Letter from Mr. Gerrit Smith: To the Editor of the N.Y. Tribune.’ See Chapter Five for discussion of Smith’s land grant scheme.

⁸⁴⁵ James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith, 9 April 1858, GSP.

for not having bothered to consult before making his 'reckless' attack: 'It is a strange ignorance which is manifested by the attendance of 25 per cent. more of colored than of white children in the Public Schools of New York City; a strange thriftlessness which shows a smaller proportion of colored than of white persons supported at the Alms-Houses and other charities in New York and Philadelphia.' McCune Smith partially excused Smith on the grounds that 'his view... was syllogistic rather than a result of a study of the facts.' Nevertheless, he called on Smith to 'wipe off the stigma which he has cast upon himself and his like by withdrawing, as publicly as he made it, his unfortunate statement in regard to the mass of the blacks.'⁸⁴⁶

While McCune Smith was sometimes patient with such failures of white abolitionists, he was not always so. In 1864, he angrily denounced an article by Elizur Wright which argued that since the climate of much of the US was more like that of Europe than of Africa, 'the European races will have the advantage' and that there was 'no doubt of the relative decrease of our black populations.' McCune Smith criticized Wright, in part, for relying on Josiah Nott's work, whose false statistics were 'introduced into the census of 1840 by Mr. Calhoun.'⁸⁴⁷ Wright was also wrong to argue that African Americans failed to thrive even where they enjoyed 'equal protection "before the law."' McCune Smith insisted that African Americans enjoyed no such thing, unlike Wright who – 'covered with the chrysalis of his smooth, white skin, hiding thereunder even the odor of abolitionism' – did. McCune Smith again turned to statistics to show that African Americans, despite the oppression they faced throughout the US, had long outpaced their fellow citizens of European descent in population growth. McCune Smith's initial

⁸⁴⁶ McCune Smith, 'Jennings.'

⁸⁴⁷ James McCune Smith, 'A Curious Inquiry,' *AA*, 20 February 1864.

compliments for Wright – in which he praised his past abolitionism and his role as the ‘leading authority in vital statistics... in New England, if not the United States’ – gave way to righteous anger: ‘You sharp-nosed, hatchet-faced, lank-haired people, aided by science and the “hub,” have vainly tried to crush the manhood out of [the black man], and failed; do give up; you cannot lie him out of his manhood.’⁸⁴⁸ In the face of Wright’s apparent attempt to do so, the dispassionate tone McCune Smith initially adopted, as one man of science to another, deserted him.

6.4 The Unity of the Human Race

For all McCune Smith’s interest in statistical analysis and comparisons of populations, his larger project was to understand how differences between them fit with his overarching theory that humankind consisted of a single race. As he wrote in 1843, McCune Smith considered the ‘unity of the human race’ to be a ‘primary fact.’⁸⁴⁹ Unlike ethnicities or differentiated populations generally referred to as ‘races,’ the essential quality of humanness was fixed and equally present in every member of the human race. Differences such as skin color, ‘stature,’ or variations in bone structure were not; these were only mutable and superficial traits caused by environment. All humans were equally subject to such environmental influences.⁸⁵⁰ Every human population exhibited varieties in skin color, language, customs, and other such characteristics whether they were classified as races or not. Therefore, it was ‘illogical’ to conclude that ‘there is a permanent difference between’ races because of them. The selection

⁸⁴⁸ James McCune Smith, ‘A Curious Inquiry – No. II,’ *AA*, 27 February 1864.

⁸⁴⁹ McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 16. McCune Smith was one of many African American intellectuals who espoused this theory. In 1856, friend and fellow physician John Rock delivered his lecture ‘The Unity of the Human Race’ at Rochester’s Corinthian Hall. See ‘Dr. J. S. Rock’s Lecture,’ *FDP*, 1 February 1856.

⁸⁵⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Civilization,’ 6, 7; McCune Smith, ‘Fourteenth Query,’ 229, 235.

of traits on which to base racial classification was also arbitrary, generally conforming to socially instilled prejudice or personal preference. Such selections were therefore manifestly unscientific: 'This argument is about as conclusive as if we were to select all the white men in this city who have grey eyes, and to argue that because the color of their eyes differs from that of the remainder, therefore the two classes belong to different races.'⁸⁵¹

Due to the prevalence of such irrational thinking, McCune Smith was concerned by popular and scientific discourse on race. As he observed, the language of race far more often led to confusion than to understanding. Those who should be especially concerned with accuracy and consistency, such as scientists, scholars, and journalists, were as prone as anyone else to classify humans into groups in inconsistent, arbitrary, or self-interested ways. As McCune Smith observed, 'Learned men, in their rage for classification and from a reprehensible spirit to bend science to provoke popular prejudices, have brought the human species under the yoke of classification, and having shown to their own satisfaction a diversity in the races, have placed us in the very lowest rank.'⁸⁵² Tavia Nyong'o quotes this to argue that McCune Smith 'warned of the coming storm of scientific racism, which as a man of science he was in a privileged position to recognize.'⁸⁵³ As we have seen, McCune Smith dedicated much of his career to combatting this 'reprehensible spirit,' from that discernable in reports of the colonialist physician Macdonald to that in the Congressional addresses of the pro-slavery politician Calhoun.

⁸⁵¹ McCune Smith, 'Fourteenth Query,' 227.

⁸⁵² McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 9.

⁸⁵³ Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: U-M Press, 2009), 21.

McCune Smith also charged the influential newspaper editor Horace Greeley with sloppy thinking and ulterior motives when writing about race.⁸⁵⁴ In an 1851 *Tribune* editorial, Greeley referred to all people of African descent – African Americans included – as the ‘African Race.’ McCune Smith argued that this was no more accurate than referring to African Americans as ‘Connecticut Irishmen’ since ‘Africa... is considerable of a peninsula’ and thus produced ‘every variety of human kind, from milk white to jet black, the Caucasian, Mongolian and Negro type.’ Sloppy racial generalizations such as Greeley’s were even more nonsensical in places like America since the ancestries of its people were of even greater variety than those of Africa. McCune Smith pointed out that his son Henry’s ancestors included ‘Korymantee in Africa, Carib and Iroquois in America, Spanish, French and old Puritan in Europe.’ Yet this ‘child has a white skin, grey eyes and flaxen hair;’ no one who observed him would categorise him as ‘African.’ Any system of racial classification that would place McCune Smith in one category and his son in another was confused indeed. Yet, McCune Smith charged, Greeley and his ilk were happy to classify people in such broad and arbitrary ways since it served their own racial prejudices and political interests to do so.⁸⁵⁵

McCune Smith was acutely aware that incoherent and biased thinking on race was not limited to pro-slavery advocates such as Calhoun or pro-colonialist abolitionists of white European descent such as Greeley. In an 1852 exchange of public letters with African American professor William Allen, McCune Smith challenged Allen’s recent negative generalizations of Jewish people. He also requested that Allen explain how his remarks fit in with his ‘single race

⁸⁵⁴ Other examples include Greeley’s pro-colonialist articles considered in Chapter Five.

⁸⁵⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Other Side.’

theory,' which held that only racially diverse nations achieved greatness. Allen insisted that he had meant 'no disparagement of the Jews' when he claimed that 'The Jews in modern times have accomplished next to nothing in the great world of science, literature and art;' he acknowledged that they had done so in the past. He also explained that 'the modern Jews are not a mixed race, because they do not inter-marry with other races, nor in any way mingle its blood with the blood of other races.' McCune Smith was not satisfied. He asked Allen how, given the theory of race he had described previously, he could 'make out that there is "a single race of mankind in contradistinction to any other, or all other races of mankind?"' Given that they shared the view that racial diversity was essential for national greatness, Allen responded, McCune Smith was indulging in 'sophism' and merely 'trying his skill at raising a point' in repeatedly pressing him on his 'single race theory.'⁸⁵⁶ Yet despite Allen's impatience, McCune Smith's insistence that he clarify his thinking on race was reflective of McCune Smith's ongoing project to improve discourse on the subject.

For McCune Smith, the prime example of sloppy, biased, and self-interested theorizing on race was the slaveholding Founding Father Thomas Jefferson. McCune Smith critiqued Jefferson's hierarchical views of race harshly and at length in one of his most well-known essays. In 1859's 'On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia,' McCune Smith argued that Jefferson's self-interest in proving that 'blacks' and 'whites' had incompatible racial differences rendered him unable to make his case in a reasoned and orderly fashion. Instead, Jefferson's 'arrangement of [his] views [on the physical and mental differences

⁸⁵⁶ James McCune Smith, 'Heads of the Colored People - No. 4: The Sexton,' *FDP*, 16 July 1852; William G. Allen, 'William G. Allen to Frederick Douglass [19 July 1852],' *FDP*, 10 July 1852; William G. Allen, 'William G. Allen to Frederick Douglass [9 August 1852],' *FDP*, 13 August 1852.

between blacks and whites] is so mixed and confused, that we must depart from it' to be able to 'examine' them at all. Like all other attempts to impose political and social hierarchies based on race, Jefferson's self-interested 'views, speculations, and reasonings' on race could not be sustained in the face of evidence and logic. They were clearly motivated by Jefferson's desire that those he held as slaves should never be free.⁸⁵⁷

For McCune Smith, the only alternative to incoherent, contradictory, and biased conceptions of race – and the one best supported by evidence – was the theory of a single human race. Although human populations could be broadly distinguished from one another by characteristics such as skin color and culture, these sorts of traits were transitory and nonessential. (We shall consider this at length below.) Therefore, the only true human race, in the sense of possessing innate and permanent traits of the kind which differentiated one kind of living beings from another, was the single human race. All other uses of 'race' in referring to human beings was imprecise and potentially confusing since they were used to refer to nonessential differences.

Despite his concerns about the incoherence and contradictions that plagued discourse on race, McCune Smith only later, and only occasionally, made significant efforts to substitute a more precise terminology, particularly in essays for the scholarly *Anglo-African Magazine* (AAM). In early 1859, McCune Smith wrote a series of four essays for the AAM (one in two parts) which explained and developed his theories on race in detail. The first of these, 'Civilization: Its Dependence on Physical Circumstances,' was based on the aforementioned

⁸⁵⁷ McCune Smith, 'Fourteenth Query,' 225, 226, 227, 236–37.

lecture he wrote in 1844 and delivered in 1845 under a similar title.⁸⁵⁸ These were followed by ‘The German Invasion’ (parts one and two) and ‘On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on Virginia.’⁸⁵⁹

As Dain explains, McCune Smith’s writing on race sought to discredit and disprove polygenism, a theory promoted by the American School of ethnology led by Samuel Norton, Josiah Nott, George Gliddon, and Louis Agassiz. This theory held that humankind consisted of three separately created species or “great races:” the Caucasian, the Mongolian, and the Ethiopian.⁸⁶⁰ In ‘Civilization,’ McCune Smith addressed the problem of polygenist misinterpretations of the meaning of ‘race’ directly when he wrote of ‘certain so-called ‘races’ of mankind – the term races meaning, not merely, a distinct breed, but even a separate and distinct creation of the genus *homo*.’⁸⁶¹ McCune Smith mocked this view, writing that Jefferson, like ‘other writers – Dr. Nott, of Mobile, for example,’ enumerates [the short, curly, or crisp hair of the negro] among the reasons which led him to believe that the two races are of a distinct species.’⁸⁶²

Conscious of the polygenist and other possible interpretations of the term ‘race’ – such as that which the American School employed – McCune Smith looked for terms that would not carry that connotation, especially in his later writings on race. In ‘German Invasion,’ McCune Smith employed other phrases and terms such as ‘race or tribe’ or ‘people;’ more often, he

⁸⁵⁸ McCune Smith, ‘Civilization;’ McCune Smith, ‘Fourteenth Query,’ 237.

⁸⁵⁹ McCune Smith, ‘German Invasion;’ McCune Smith, ‘German Invasion [Continued];’ McCune Smith, ‘Fourteenth Query.’ McCune Smith, as he was wont to do, supported the arguments he offered in these essays with statistics.

⁸⁶⁰ Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 197–99, 211, 229–33, 245–49, 256–63.

⁸⁶¹ McCune Smith, ‘Civilization,’ 15.

⁸⁶² McCune Smith, ‘Fourteenth Query,’ 230.

simply referred to peoples by their places of origin without reference to race.⁸⁶³ In 'Fourteenth Query,' McCune Smith used terms such as 'population,' 'class of men,' and 'variety of mankind' in place of 'race,' though he generally reverted to the latter term once he had clarified what he meant by it.⁸⁶⁴ In a later article, McCune Smith used the adjective 'ethnically' in referring to African Americans rather than using the term 'race' as commonly used to refer broadly – 'by universal consent' – to peoples originating in Africa and Europe.⁸⁶⁵

Generally, however, McCune Smith continued to use the blanket term 'race' to refer to ethnicities, other groups and populations popularly referred to as 'races,' and the human race itself. At times, this appeared to contribute to others finding his views on race unclear, as in his exchange with Allen on this topic. In 1865, McCune Smith had to explain to a bemused reader what he meant when his remarks on race seemed to undermine his own arguments in favor of there being a single human race whose members were all fully equal to one another.⁸⁶⁶ His use of generalized language may even have contributed to a lack of clarity in his own thinking on the subject at times, such as on those occasions in which he lapsed into poorly evidenced or apparently prejudiced theorizing on race similar to the sort for which he criticized others. (We shall consider more examples of this in the discussion of 'Miscegenation' below.)

Throughout his life, McCune Smith adhered to his theory of a unified human race and remained convinced of its central importance. He treated this as a given throughout his years of writing and speaking, as in his 1841 lecture 'Destiny.' In 1852, McCune Smith described

⁸⁶³ McCune Smith, 'German Invasion,' 44; McCune Smith, 'German Invasion [Continued],' 86.

⁸⁶⁴ McCune Smith, 'Fourteenth Query,' 225, 226, 234.

⁸⁶⁵ Tilton and McCune Smith, 'Note from Mr. Tilton.'

⁸⁶⁶ White, 'Equality of Races;' James McCune Smith, 'Remarks [Reply to H. H. White],' AA, 28 January 1865.

common ‘enjoyment[s]’ which served as ‘positive evidence in behalf of the *unity* of the Human race.’⁸⁶⁷ In his 1849 lecture ‘On the Bushmen,’ McCune Smith argued ‘We have here, too, another link in the grand chain of facts and arguments which go to prove the unity of the human race.’⁸⁶⁸ In 1859, McCune Smith wrote – when discussing evidence from studies of skulls – ‘From these and similar facts, it is evident that, far from there being any great and uniformly marked differences in the elementary shape, form, or size of the skulls of the African and the white, there exists in reality a uniform resemblance, proving that, from the bony structure of the human frame, there can be deduced the sublime argument of the unity of the human race.’⁸⁶⁹ In the 1860’s – up to the final months before his death – McCune Smith continued to write regularly in terms of a single human race which shared a single common nature.⁸⁷⁰ This remained true even as he grew more interested during this period in exploring how and why humans also came to differ from one another.

6.5 Facets of Humanity: Ethnology, Civilization, and Race

McCune Smith was no less interested in describing and accounting for human variety than he was in proving the unity of humankind. While understanding that the human race shared one common origin and its members were essentially the same, he considered their diversity to be both a positive good and necessary for human flourishing. Though McCune Smith wrote much

⁸⁶⁷ James McCune Smith, ‘Heads of the Colored People - No. 2: The Boot-Black,’ *FDP*, 15 April 1852.

⁸⁶⁸ James McCune Smith, ‘On the Bushmen [Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Colored Orphan Asylum, 14 February 1849],’ *NASS*, 22 February 1849.

⁸⁶⁹ McCune Smith, ‘Fourteenth Query,’ 229.

⁸⁷⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Loyalists;’ McCune Smith, ‘Word for a Thing;’ McCune Smith, ‘Curious Inquiry – No. II;’ McCune Smith, ‘Sixth Ward;’ James McCune Smith, ‘The Southern Field and the Proper Agents,’ *AA*, 9 September 1865.

throughout his career about both, his later works on race increasingly focused on how human populations come to differ over time and how this affects the institutions they create.

In McCune Smith's view, diversity of skin colour, culture, and other nonessential adaptations were caused by the environments in which populations lived. As McCune Smith argued in 1843, 'Taking man as a unity, ...circumstances [such as climate, soil, and mode of living] are amply sufficient to account for all the diversity in appearance, language, conduct, &c. &c.' which the various portions of the human race now present.⁸⁷¹ McCune Smith also elaborated on this theory in his 1859 *AAM* articles on race. In 'Civilization,' he wrote, the existence of 'men of different mental and physical endowments... does not infer difference of race, for there is but one human race, made *ekeinou aimatos* "of the same blood." The difference, we mean, is such as springs from the difference in the climate or geographical position of mankind.⁸⁷² When human populations experienced a change in climate or geography – through emigration, for example – their 'physical... and intellectual characteristics' gradually changed as well. Populations which remained in one place tended to change little over time.⁸⁷³ In 'Fourteenth Query,' McCune Smith considered how climate and geography affected the development of bodily structures such as bones, hair, and skin.⁸⁷⁴

Civilization was another adaptation to external circumstances. As McCune Smith argued in 'Civilization,' it was the product of physical strength, intellectual power, and the 'adventitious' circumstances in which a sufficiently large population found themselves. First,

⁸⁷¹ McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 16.

⁸⁷² McCune Smith, 'Civilization,' 12.

⁸⁷³ McCune Smith, 11–12.

⁸⁷⁴ McCune Smith, 'Fourteenth Query,' 227–36.

civilization depended on climate and geography favorable to physical and intellectual flourishing, with the latter depending on the former. Though it was a 'prevalent opinion that physical strength is a matter so distinct from and independent of intellectual power, that the presence of the one implies the absence of the other,' McCune Smith argued that the evidence of history and statistics showed that physical strength and intelligence were intrinsically linked.⁸⁷⁵ Once civilization took hold, it enabled people to render their circumstances even more 'adventitious' for physical and mental development.⁸⁷⁶ But this was not enough. Civilization also depended on 'the frequent intercourse of men differing in physical and mental endowments' – in a word, 'diversity.'⁸⁷⁷

Because the advancement and persistence of civilizations depended on advantageous circumstances, McCune Smith warned, they could not be taken for granted. While changes in climate or geography could destroy civilizations from without, human beings could destroy them from within. 'The more men mingle, the larger the dwelling together, the greater is their advancement: and whatever has prevented men from coming together, [including] self-imposed laws... these do constitute barriers against civilization.'⁸⁷⁸ Chief among these 'self-imposed... barriers' is caste, a means by which people systematically attempt to enforce separation from one another: 'Wherever caste is established civilization is arrested, and either remains stationary... or sinks back into barbarism.'⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁵ McCune Smith, 'Civilization,' 7–8. For more on McCune Smith and the links between physical and intellectual power, see Blight, 'Search of Learning,' 11; Stauffer in *Works*, 195, 246.

⁸⁷⁶ McCune Smith, 'Civilization,' 5.

⁸⁷⁷ McCune Smith, 13.

⁸⁷⁸ McCune Smith, 5.

⁸⁷⁹ McCune Smith, 15–16.

Caste's power to arrest or destroy civilization is explained by McCune Smith's most influential theory of race: that people, like the civilizations they create, benefited enormously from being the products of racial or ethnic diversity. In 'German Invasion,' he argued that it took 'the frequent admixture or amalgamation of variously endowed men' to create 'a composite intellect, greater in force, wider in grasp, more active in detail, than could have grown up out of any one tribe or race.' McCune Smith presented England and the US as prime examples of this process. Due to successive 'invasions' which included the Celts, Angles, Normans, Romans, Norse, and Magyars, the Anglo-Saxons of England developed one of the world's greatest civilizations – albeit slowly and sometimes painfully – over more than two thousand years. America's successive 'invasions' of 'men with endowments more distinct and salient... have mingled most freely' and produced an even greater civilization in a fraction of that time. The diverse combination of Native Americans, Spanish, French, English, 'Negro,' Irish, German, and Chinese contributed to the greatness and progress of American civilization. When and where the US was held back in its development – from the self-isolating Spanish in Florida to the 'Anglo-Saxons [who] interdict[ed] marriages with [American] Indians and negroes' – it was due to 'the same want – an infusion of new blood.' It was the US Declaration of Independence and its doctrine of equality, a product of the 'composite genius of the American people,' that had the power to save the nation from its self-imposed, civilization-threatening efforts to prevent natural amalgamation. Yet because amalgamation was natural it was unpreventable: despite the racial caste system imposed through law and custom, natural

interracial attraction amongst its diverse population meant that amalgamation was a defining feature of US society.⁸⁸⁰

The origins of McCune Smith's amalgamation theory can be traced back at least to 1832. In his travel journal written *en route* to Glasgow that year, he used his comparison of 'profitable tho' clumsy' British and 'swift' American ships to make a larger point: 'an American ship is an epitome of the great and rising country... "From many nations" were the men who gathered who felled the trees and chipped the timbers and moulded them into "one" harmonious and beautiful craft...' In this entry, he also first discussed caste's power to undermine civilization, arguing that the 'malignant prejudice which is a canker and a curse to the soil, whence she sprung' threatened to serve 'like the fated box of Pandora' to undermine America promise to be 'a representative of a land of the free.'⁸⁸¹

McCune Smith's amalgamation theory is best known from Douglass's famed 1854 lecture 'The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered.'⁸⁸² As discussed earlier in this chapter, McCune Smith's ideas on race – some of which he presented in the original 1845 version of 'Civilization' – greatly influenced Douglass's own. In 'Claims,' Douglass credits McCune Smith with this theory which so deeply informed his own ideas about race and

⁸⁸⁰ McCune Smith, 'German Invasion,' 44–46. As we have seen in Chapter Five, McCune Smith used the example of frequent race-mixing in the South as evidence of natural interracial attraction in his rebuttal to Greeley's claims to the contrary. McCune Smith elsewhere offered evidence that this was endemic in the North as well: in 1852, McCune Smith wrote: 'The "natural antipathy" of the celt to the negro, is an artificial affair generated by the mutual strife, in these United States... And even here in New York city, many marriages, founded on and blessed by the purest and holiest of human affections, give the lie to this libel on the constructive Irishman and Negro.' See McCune Smith, 'Nicaragua - No. II.' In this essay and in his 1844 exchange with Greeley, McCune Smith characterized claims of natural racial antipathy as 'libel' and referred to interracial attraction as 'holy.'

⁸⁸¹ McCune Smith, 'Journal [23 August - 3 September 1832].'

⁸⁸² Blight, *Prophet*, 772.

civilization: ‘Dr. James McCune Smith... alledges, [sic] and not without excellent reason – that this, our own great nation, so distinguished for industry and enterprise, is largely indebted to its composite character.’⁸⁸³ Douglass was also influenced by McCune Smith’s environmentalism.

For example, Douglass observed that Americans of various ancestral heritages – especially European – increasingly took on typical traits of Native Americans over time. In ‘Claims,’ just as McCune Smith did in ‘Civilization,’ Douglass attributed this to the influence of climate.⁸⁸⁴

William Wilson, writing in 1852, indicates that it was McCune Smith, not Douglass, who originated the latter theory. Wilson agreed with McCune Smith that the typical non-aboriginal American ‘when unaided does not propagate here... his cheek bones begin to stick out, and his skin becoming tawny, and his hair coarse and black.’⁸⁸⁵

Dain – who has written most extensively on McCune Smith’s amalgamation theory – argues that McCune Smith waited to publicly espouse his theory of race in 1859’s published version of ‘Civilization,’ and then only reluctantly. His reluctance, Dain argues, was born of his general resistance to discussing people in terms of race rather than as individuals. As evidence for this reluctance, Dain cites the fact that the original 1845 version of ‘Civilization’ never appeared in Douglass’s newspaper though Douglass would surely have been happy to publish it.⁸⁸⁶ However, this could simply have been due to the fact that *The North Star* was not founded

⁸⁸³ Frederick Douglass, *The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered* (Rochester: Lee, Mann & Co., 1854), 33; McCune Smith, ‘Civilization,’ 12–13, 16–17. McCune Smith, in turn, complimented Douglass for his own ‘new and fresh thoughts on the dawning science of race-history’ offered in ‘Claims.’ See McCune Smith, ‘Introduction,’ xxviii.

⁸⁸⁴ Douglass, *Claims*; McCune Smith, ‘Civilization,’ 12. While climate is invoked by both as the cause of immigrant American descendants’ increasing resemblance to Native Americans, Dain argues that unlike McCune Smith, a ‘thoroughgoing environmentalist’ who ‘never had racial differences as innate,’ Douglass ‘acknowledged the existence of two very real, possibly innate black and white racial entities.’ See Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 249, 252.

⁸⁸⁵ Wilson, ‘Br. Corr. [10 January 1852].’

⁸⁸⁶ Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 229, 237, 239, 256–57.

until 1847 and it did not occur to McCune Smith at the time to dust ‘Civilization’ off and submit it for publication two years later. In 1851, McCune Smith wrote at length about the theory Douglass cited in ‘Claims’ in an open letter to Greeley: the ‘Higher Law of Progress... demands as its first condition the free admixture of varieties of human kind. No single variety of man is capable of continued development without admixture with other varieties of the species. Look over History and this will appear. I affirm further, that whenever, by any cause, this admixture ceases in any nation, there occurs arrest of progress.’⁸⁸⁷ Dain also appears to have missed McCune Smith’s May 1855 letter as correspondent for *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* in which he presented his theory of race at the heart of ‘Civilization:’ ‘the variety in the conformation of her crust – geology – is the source of variety not only in natural scenery... but also of those variations in the physical appearance, the instincts, and the best of men which are popularly called diversities in the human race, and we may add of the variety in man’s mode of worship and theory of the future.’⁸⁸⁸ Regardless, ‘Civilization’ was first presented publicly as a lecture in 1845, as Dain acknowledges. It is difficult to see how McCune Smith was reluctant to offer his amalgamation or any other theory of race when he was willing to present those from ‘Civilization’ in more than one public forum before 1859.

Other sources also indicate that McCune Smith’s theories on race presented in ‘Civilization’ were well known even before ‘Claims’ was written. For example, in 1852, Wilson – as we have seen – refers to McCune Smith’s argument that climatic influences were causing immigrant Americans to look more like Native Americans.⁸⁸⁹ Allen’s and McCune Smith’s

⁸⁸⁷ McCune Smith, ‘Other Side, No. II.’

⁸⁸⁸ James McCune Smith, ‘From Our New York Correspondent [May 1855],’ *FDP*, 11 May 1855.

⁸⁸⁹ Wilson, ‘Br. Corr. [10 January 1852].’

exchange on race later that year – also discussed above – indicates that Allen was familiar with McCune Smith’s amalgamation theory. Finally, McCune Smith wrote frequently and passionately about the issue of race throughout his career, as we have seen throughout this thesis. It may simply have been that he saw the *Anglo-African Magazine* as the earliest and best opportunity to write freely on the topic in a series of scholarly essays of adequate length to explore the subject in depth.

In his discussion of McCune Smith’s amalgamation theory, Dain also argues that McCune Smith foresaw for ‘the Negro... a progression toward whiteness’ and that ‘In the only conceptual terms he had available, that would mean that in the end blacks would have to whiten up to count as Americans.’ Dain surmises that this prospect may have been welcome to McCune Smith: ‘Perhaps beneath all, he welcomed an end to blackness and the possibility of typological thinking and racial classification.’⁸⁹⁰ It is true that as early as 1852, McCune Smith occasionally surmised that over time, the complexions of Americans of African descent would lighten with amalgamation.⁸⁹¹ However, Dain’s language of ‘progression towards whiteness’ is not a helpful or useful way of characterizing McCune Smith’s environmental or amalgamation theories of race. McCune Smith’s descriptions of phenotypical change and racial progress, including his argument in ‘Civilization’ that ‘The American people, descended from early emigrants, are typically assuming the physical type of the Aboriginal [Native American] inhabitants of this continent’ can just as well describe ‘a progression towards [blackness].’⁸⁹² In ‘Fourteenth Query,’ McCune Smith argued that ‘under climactic influences of a peculiar kind,

⁸⁹⁰ Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 262.

⁸⁹¹ McCune Smith, ‘Communi paw [6 March 1852].’

⁸⁹² McCune Smith, ‘Civilization,’ 12.

the complexion of the dark races... can be changed to a lighter, even a white hue' *and* that 'the hue of a white man can be greatly changed by a residence in a torrid climate.' Dark skin, McCune Smith observed, was an adaptation commonly correlated with health and strength. White skin could either signify the 'combination of all colors' as described in 'physics' or could indicate a loss of 'vigor,' a process observable in the loss of 'coloring matter' in the hair as people age. After all, he argued, 'Persons of very fair complexion are often less robust than those of a more swarthy hue.'⁸⁹³ In these articles, McCune Smith surmised that amalgamation and changing environment as people moved from place to place might eventually lead to widespread reversion of the human race to their original skin tone, darker than 'white' and lighter than 'black.' Dain is right, however, that McCune Smith would have welcomed the end of 'typological thinking and racial classification.' As we have seen, McCune Smith believed that the 'rage' to classify people into racial types was generally harmful.

By early 1860, McCune Smith discovered a work that, to him, provided a model for evidence-based scientific inquiry; validated his own theories on race; and promised to provide an alternative to divisive forms of racial classification. He read Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* shortly after it was first published and gave it a glowing review a 'A Word for the "Smith Family"' in March 1860. He praised Darwin's fidelity to the evidence, which he had long argued was the surest route to truth: 'Darwin is a profoundly learned naturalist. He has devoted twenty years of close and ardent study to the profound problem of the manner in which living beings, from the sponge up to mankind, have peopled the earth from the dawn of creation until now;

⁸⁹³ McCune Smith, 'Fourteenth Query,' 233–36.

why they differ so much in appearance, in functions, in relations and in the end subserved by their being.⁸⁹⁴

McCune Smith also interpreted Darwin as a fellow environmentalist who successfully demonstrated that differentiation and improvement in all living things was ultimately attributable to outside influences: ‘the Creator simply set in motion the earliest form of organism... and out of this, favored by concurrently favoring circumstances, grew a higher and a higher organism.’⁸⁹⁵ As Rusert writes, McCune Smith’s environmental theory held that ‘the races look different because of superficial differences produced by the environment.’ Rusert argues that his theory here ‘starts to look closer to Darwin’s evolutionary theory of natural selection than to the climatism of natural history: through his insistence on the importance of geographical variety and microclimates on the development of a people, he gets surprisingly close to the theory that ecological niches affect the descent and differentiation of a species.’⁸⁹⁶ Yet McCune Smith never sought to reconcile his observations of family resemblances passed down through generations – such as those he alluded to in an earlier critique of Jefferson’s hypocritical fathering of children with Sally Hemings, a woman he held in slavery – with Darwin’s theory of descent, his own environmentalist theory, or with his non-environmentalist theory of amalgamation.⁸⁹⁷

McCune Smith believed that Darwin proved his theory of the unity of the human race as well. With his evidence for the common descent of all species, Darwin had – if not overtly –

⁸⁹⁴ McCune Smith, ‘Smith Family,’ 79.

⁸⁹⁵ McCune Smith, ‘Smith Family,’ 79–80.

⁸⁹⁶ Rusert, *Fugitive Science*, 52.

⁸⁹⁷ McCune Smith, ‘Black News-Vendor.’

overturned the polygenist theory of human races espoused by the ‘bungling philosophers’ of the ‘American School of Ethnology with its leaders, Nott, Leconte and Agassiz.’ In contrast to their ‘puerile ideas,’ Darwin’s ‘Catholic’ theory was sublime in not only connecting all human beings to one another but to every other living thing on earth.

Finally, McCune Smith argued that Darwin’s findings provided further evidence in favour of his amalgamation theory:

According to Nott & Co.’ the *alleged* short-livedness and sterility of the great mulatto race... arises from the fact that they *are the products of two different species of mankind*, the negro one species and the white man the other species. This very plausible theory is contradicted utterly by the fact shown by Darwin that a crossing of different species of the same genus is often, and of the mongrel offspring, is most frequently fertile: *while, on the other hand, in and-in-breeding, that is an admixture of closely allied individuals, produces a short-lived, imbecile, decaying offspring.*⁸⁹⁸

Darwin’s theory, in other words, proved McCune Smith right in arguing that diversity of ancestry led to greater health, strength, and intelligence.

However, McCune Smith – like Darwin – resisted the notion of biological perfection. Neither subscribed to the idea that there was a hierarchy of living things categorisable according to how well they approached a predetermined or ideologically imposed standard of excellence. As James Secord writes, ‘[Darwin] reminded himself not to mention terms like “higher” and “lower,” but rather to speak of organisms being “more complicated.”’ The language of ‘progress,’ Darwin believed, could too easily mislead readers. However, as Secord observes, ‘Darwin never really learned’ his own ‘main lesson... [which] was to play down

⁸⁹⁸ McCune Smith, ‘Smith Family,’ 79–80.

progress in nature.⁸⁹⁹ However, when Darwin did write in terms of excellence or ‘perfection,’ he did so in reference to adaptations favourable for survival or to traits preferred by humans because they served their wants or needs.⁹⁰⁰ Both McCune Smith and Darwin argued that nature favoured only those characteristics which enabled individuals or groups to thrive in whatever circumstances they found themselves. Unlike Darwin in *Origin*, McCune Smith argued that this was as true for human beings as it was for other living things.⁹⁰¹ As McCune Smith wrote in August 1859’s ‘Fourteenth Query’ – several months before *Origin* was published – ‘The standard of [human] excellence is not fixed. The question of elevation must therefore be an indeterminate question.’ He provided several examples of very different kinds of human excellence which required many different capabilities and very different mental and physical qualities, all of which human beings benefited from equally though in very different ways. Given the variety of ‘excellence,’ McCune Smith dismissed attempts to classify differently constituted individuals and groups as more or less ‘elevated’ than others as both pointless and futile.⁹⁰²

McCune Smith’s subsequent references to Darwin show that while he was impressed by *Origin*, it did not appear to significantly shift his own theories on race or the process of biological change. After ‘Smith Family,’ McCune Smith referred only occasionally – though

⁸⁹⁹ Secord, *Victorian Sensation*, 433.

⁹⁰⁰ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 1st ed. (London: John Murray, 1859), 3, 38, 39, 53, 102, 152, 172, 182–83, 186–90, 459.

⁹⁰¹ Darwin did not specify in *Origin* that his theory of natural selection applied to human beings in the same way it did to all other living things ‘as I thought that I should only add to the prejudices against my views.’ He only went as far as suggesting that in the future ‘Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.’ However, McCune Smith was among those who understood that Darwin’s theory was clearly intended to apply to humankind as well. Darwin went on to throw this light on the ‘descent of man’ in 1871. See Darwin, 488; Charles Darwin, *The Descent Of Man and Selection in Relation To Sex*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871), 1.

⁹⁰² McCune Smith, ‘Fourteenth Query,’ 225.

approvingly – to Darwin. In 1863, McCune Smith again characterized Darwin as a fellow environmentalist and amalgamationist.⁹⁰³ The following year, McCune Smith referred to *Origin* in passing as a ‘remarkable book.’⁹⁰⁴ McCune Smith apparently continued to view *Origin* as a confirmation of theories he already held rather than a new theory that might require him to reconsider or revise his own. As Dain argues, McCune Smith ‘always remained a thoroughgoing environmentalist.’⁹⁰⁵

6.6 The *Miscegenation Controversy*

McCune Smith was so convinced of the truth of his amalgamation theory and so eager that it be widely accepted that, late in his life, he endorsed a work of pseudoscience that appeared to promote it. In this episode, McCune Smith’s ardent abolitionism, scientific thought, and politics collided very publicly, spilling even into the halls of Congress. The resulting controversy appears to have chastened McCune Smith. His over-eagerness led him to promote a work of pseudoscience of the sort he had refuted for decades and his poor judgment in the matter had potentially harmful political ramifications – though apparently short-lived – for the abolitionist cause. As he had on some earlier occasions, McCune Smith allowed his frustration over the slow pace of racial progress to undermine the scientific aplomb he generally tried to maintain. Because this episode represents an unusual and telling confluence of consistencies and inconsistencies in the ways McCune Smith tended to think and write, it is worth exploring at length here.

⁹⁰³ McCune Smith, ‘Problem of American Destiny [Book Review].’

⁹⁰⁴ James McCune Smith, ‘A Philosophical Pike,’ *WAA*, 17 March 1860.

⁹⁰⁵ Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 252.

It began with his 23 January 1864 editorial for *The Anglo-African* (AA) on the pamphlet *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*. The story of the pamphlet's publication and of the journalistic and political controversy it engendered also encapsulates the social and political turmoil of the time over fears of what would happen if the Civil War brought about the end of legal slavery. As Sidney Kaplan writes, 'This pamphlet, a curious hash of quarter-truths and pseudo-learned oddities, was to give a new word to the language and a refurbished issue to the Democratic Party....' The word was '*miscegenation* (from the Latin *miscere*, to mix, and *genus*, race).'⁹⁰⁶

P. T. Barnum provided the earliest comprehensive account of how and why *Miscegenation* was published. In his 1865 article 'Ancient and Modern Humbugs of the World,' Barnum explained that the anonymous book was 'a clever political quiz' – in other words, a hoax. He identified its authors as 'D. G. Croly, George Wakeman, and E. C. Howell,' three journalists associated with the *New York World*. As Kaplan tells us, the *World* was 'violently anti-Abolitionist.' Barnum wrote, 'The design of "Miscegenation" was exceedingly ambitious, and the machinery employed was probably the most ingenious and audacious ever put into operation.... The object was to make use of the prevailing ideas of the extremists of the Anti-Slavery party, so as to induce them to accept doctrines which would be obnoxious to the great mass of the community, and which would, of course, be used in the political canvas which was to ensue.' Central amongst the 'doctrines' the pamphlet purported to espouse was the

⁹⁰⁶ Sidney Kaplan, 'The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864,' *Journal of Negro History* 34, no. 3 (1949): 277. Kaplan notes that *Miscegenation* was first available for sale shortly before Christmas of 1863. Its given year of publication is 1864; see David Goodman Croly, George Wakeman, and E. C. Howell, *Miscegenation; the Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* (New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton & Co., 1864), title page.

desirability and inevitability of race-mixing – commonly referred to at the time as ‘amalgamation’ – in America. To make them more convincing, Barnum wrote, ‘it was necessary to give the book an erudite appearance, and arguments from ethnology must form no unimportant part of its matter. Neither of the authors being versed in this science, they were compelled to depend entirely on encyclopedias and books of reference. ...There was but one writer on ethnology distinctly known to the authors, which was Pritchard; but that being secured, all the rest came easily enough.’ After apparently establishing the pamphlet’s scientific *bona fides*, the authors widely distributed *Miscegenation* to abolitionists and reformers – including President Abraham Lincoln and McCune Smith – with letters soliciting their endorsement. To allay any fears or misgivings that the pamphlet’s theories might give rise to in its hoped-for supporters, the authors coined the term *miscegenation*. This, they hoped, would buttress *Miscegenation*’s scientific pretensions while avoiding a term that had become widely distasteful and politically inexpedient.⁹⁰⁷

While a relative few – such as William Wells Brown and a reviewer for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* – immediately embraced *Miscegenation* and its ideas with little or no reservation, most who endorsed it publicly did so cautiously or with significant caveats. This included white abolitionist Theodore Tilton, whose racially progressive speech for an American Anti-Slavery Society event at NYC’s Cooper Institute in May 1863 helped inspire the hoax. As Barnum observed, Tilton was the first to publicly suggest that *Miscegenation* was likely

⁹⁰⁷ P. T. Barnum, ‘Ancient and Modern Humbugs of the World,’ *New York Mercury* 27, no. 2 (14 January 1865): 4–5; Kaplan, ‘The Miscegenation Issue,’ 284.

insincere. Lincoln was among those who, regardless of their feelings on the pamphlet's merits or on the issue of race-mixing in general, remained prudently silent.⁹⁰⁸

McCune Smith, however, demonstrated no such circumspection. He quickly responded to the anonymous author's solicitation, praising their 'acuteness, vigor, and learning.' His and others' letters of support – cautious or otherwise - were promptly published in the *World's* weekly edition.⁹⁰⁹ Though it was becoming increasingly clear to many that *Miscegenation* might have been written as a trap for abolitionists, McCune Smith doubled down. He wrote a largely glowing review of the pamphlet for *The Anglo-African* while serving as editor. 'The first impression of several judicious friends of progress,' McCune Smith wrote, was 'that the book was written as a hoax, or a "*reductio ad absurdum*," of Emancipation doctrines; but a more careful perusal shows that the writer is in dead earnest.' This earnestness, McCune Smith argued, was revealed by the way the author recognized and celebrated an essential truth about humanity in general and US society in particular. Their proposed social and legal legitimization of race-mixing merely acknowledged the fact that it was historically common and perfectly natural, however hard proponents of the US racial caste system tried to argue to the contrary.⁹¹⁰

McCune Smith's eagerness to embrace the pamphlet despite its obvious flaws was due to the way it (apparently) aligned closely with his 'own belief in the doctrine now christened

⁹⁰⁸ 'New Publications – Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro,' *NASS*, 30 January 1864; William Wells Brown, 'Wm. Wells Brown on Miscegenation,' *AA*, 6 February 1864; Theodore Tilton, 'The Union of Races (From The Independent),' *NASS*, 5 March 1864; Barnum, 'Humbugs;' Kaplan, 'Miscegenation Issue,' 286–90.

⁹⁰⁹ Kaplan, 'Miscegenation Issue,' 286–90.

⁹¹⁰ James McCune Smith, 'Miscegenation,' *AA*, 23 January 1864.

“*miscegenation.*” Like other cautiously approving reviewers of *Miscegenation*, McCune Smith observed that it employed unverifiable statistics, doubtful “laws,” and poorly formed or supported arguments. He attributed those to the author’s haste to get their views published.⁹¹¹ However, McCune Smith’s willingness to excuse these flaws is startling given his long history of strenuously criticizing physicians, scientists, and authors for poor scientific reasoning, problematic or insufficient evidence, and misuse of statistics. His endorsement of *Miscegenation* thus appears explainable only in light of an almost desperate desire that its overarching theory on the benefits of race-mixing be accepted by the public.

Perhaps even more startling are some of the solutions that McCune Smith offered in his review for other problems suggested by *Miscegenation*’s central theory. For one, while it might have satisfactorily explained why African Americans thrived mentally and physically in the Americas, McCune Smith believed it did not do so for all groups. He wrote: ‘For a long while, our own belief in the doctrine now christened “*miscegenation*,” was staggered by the evident deterioration of the mixed bloods in Central America. Now, we think the solution of the question, is, in the fact that the races there mixed – Indian and Spanish – are not complementary of each other.’ As we have seen and will continue to see throughout the rest of this chapter, this takes a very different tone than that which McCune Smith generally took in his other writings on the advantages of race-mixing. McCune Smith also commented that ‘The education and improvement should begin with the marriage of parties who instead of strong resemblances should have contrasts which are complementary of the others. It is disgraceful to

⁹¹¹ McCune Smith; Kaplan, ‘*Miscegenation Issue*,’ 286–90.

our modern civilization, that we have societies for improving the breed of sheep, horses and pigs, whilst the human race is left to grow up without scientific culture.’ It is unclear here whether he was advocating scientific education to aid selection of marriage partners conducive to healthier offspring or something else. Lastly, McCune Smith offered another question that he had puzzled over but had not found a satisfactory answer to: ‘Why is it, that very distinguished men either leave no progeny, or a progeny which soon dies out? e.g., Washington, Napoleon, Shakespeare, etc.’⁹¹²

While some agreed with McCune Smith’s appraisal of *Miscegenation*, others disagreed in part or in whole – some strenuously. One anonymous author, approvingly, confidently predicted that the Civil War would certainly end slavery. As it did, the legitimization of mixed-race unions – which strengthened social cohesion and made people of European descent better suited to the American climate – was inevitable. They also agreed with McCune Smith’s view of the divine approbation of such unions: God had a purpose in placing the white and black races in close proximity.⁹¹³ However, most letters to the editor of *AA* respondents criticized McCune Smith’s endorsement. ‘Scripsi’ played on phrenological and ethnological themes when they observed sarcastically ‘I have noticed that “a little learning” is conducive to much writing, and that however dangerous it may be to the rest of mankind, it is very profitable to the paper-maker... The nineteenth century, ethnologically considered, is prognathous, having jaw in excess, therefore, addicted to babbling...’ Rather than advocating race-mixing, they would ‘advise that we stand by our color.’ In the end, ‘Scripsi’ wrote, ‘I would suggest that it is not safe

⁹¹² McCune Smith, ‘Miscegenation.’

⁹¹³ ‘Miscegenation [Letter to the Editor],’ *AA*, 13 February 1864.

or honorable to heed the doctrine of amalgamation, come whence it may.⁹¹⁴ 'J. W.' agreed with 'Scripsi' that 'that the present is a very unseasonable time to discuss questions of that nature. Miscegenation has no connection with liberty and equality of rights, but rather has a tendency to divert attention from this all-important concern.'⁹¹⁵ 'Smith' of New Jersey took issue with McCune Smith's negative characterization of people of mixed Spanish and Native American descent: 'The deterioration of the mixed races in Mexico ... [is] an assumption unwarranted by facts' and also agreed that approval of *Miscegenation* could do nothing but harm the emancipation cause.⁹¹⁶

The controversy that McCune Smith helped engender with his enthusiastic support of *Miscegenation* made it all the way to the House of Representatives. Less than one month after McCune Smith published his positive review in *AA*, Representative Samuel S. Cox, a Copperhead Democrat from Ohio sympathetic to pro-slavery interests, delivered his speech 'Miscegenation or Amalgamation: Fate of the Freedman' to the House of Representatives on 17 February 1864 when they gathered to consider a bill 'to establish a Bureau of Freedmen's Affairs.' In it, Cox argued that the 'idea of miscegenation as now heralded by the abolitionists, who are in the van of the Republican movement' could neither 'change [the negro's] inferior nature, or save him from his inevitable fate' which was 'to perish.' Slavery, he insisted, was the only political or social institution which could 'save the black.' In the debate which followed the speech, Cox cited abolitionists who wrote or spoke in support of the idea of miscegenation or 'amalgamation,' arguing that these endorsements revealed what they were really after – to

⁹¹⁴ 'Scripsi,' "'Miscegenation" [Letter to the Editor], ' *AA*, 5 March 1864.

⁹¹⁵ 'J. W.,' "'Miscegenation" [Letter to the Editor], ' *AA*, 12 March 1864.

⁹¹⁶ 'Smith,' 'Miscegenation [Letter to the Editor], ' *AA*, 2 April 1864.

degrade the white race and destroy the ‘negro’ through race-mixing. Among Cox’s main targets of attack was McCune Smith, whom he referred to as ‘half-and-half – *miscegen*.’ Cox quoted McCune Smith’s AA review at length, including the latter’s comments about those of mixed Spanish and Native American descent. Like ‘Smith,’ Cox argued that McCune Smith’s assessment of their racial degradation ‘is as absurd as it is untrue.’ As Cox continued to assail *Miscegenation* and its supporters, a ‘Mr. Washburne, of Illinois’ charged Cox with writing the book himself.⁹¹⁷

Again, McCune Smith did not back down. In his editorial ‘Hon. S. S. Cox of Ohio’ – which appeared one week after Cox’s diatribe – McCune Smith confirmed his authorship of his anonymous review: ‘[Cox] took the trouble, in his place in the House of Representatives, to inform the Assembly that the editor of this paper is a *miscegen*, about half and half.’ However, he sought to walk back his negative characterization of those of mixed Spanish and Native American descent which Cox had seized on: ‘What we mean by complementary is this: a perfect man, or race, is made of a variety of characteristics, or races: wanting of any of these characteristics he falls short in so far of perfection. These characteristics, or several of them, are therefore complementary to the perfection of the individual, or race. Hence, two races, holding nearly the same characteristics, can make little if any improvement on either. The Indian and Spanish races, especially in Mexico, have strong physical and intellectual resemblances; hence, they are not *complementary* of each other.’⁹¹⁸ Here, McCune Smith here appears to have assumed – strangely, given his frequent allusions to race-mixing in the US – that the ‘strong

⁹¹⁷ Cox, *Miscegenation or Amalgamation*, 1, 3, 5–7.

⁹¹⁸ McCune Smith, ‘S. S. Cox.’

resemblances' between Native American and Spanish people in Mexico were not due to amalgamation having already taken place. These passages also appear to show that Darwin's arguments on the benefits of having racially diverse ancestry continued to influence him.⁹¹⁹ Lastly, McCune Smith appears to have forgotten his own prior arguments against applying the concept of 'perfection' to races.

In his continuing defence of the benefits of interracial marriage and procreation, McCune Smith cited the 'the two publishers of *The Anglo-African*' – the Hamilton brothers – as prime examples of this: 'They] have had born to them, in lawful wedlock, no less than twenty-nine children, of whom twenty are now living.' He cited statistics, other scholarship, and newspaper reporting which showed that people of mixed African decent tended to thrive, live long, and exhibit outsize population growth – even under slavery and oppression – from the ancient Egyptians to the present day. Finally, he harshly criticized those who argued, contrary to scientific and statistical evidence, that race-mixing was deleterious to African Americans.⁹²⁰ However, McCune Smith no longer referred explicitly to *Miscegenation* in this editorial and soon dropped the issue altogether. He may have been embarrassed by critics who identified the ways in which his defence of *Miscegenation* sometimes contradicted his own theories on race he more clearly and consistently expressed elsewhere. He also may have come to believe, as most of his critics did, that it was impractical to promote such a politically and socially divisive theory while the national abolition of slavery hung in the balance.

6.7 'Negro Nationality' and African Americans

⁹¹⁹ McCune Smith, 'Smith Family,' 80.

⁹²⁰ McCune Smith, 'Curious Inquiry;' McCune Smith, 'Curious Inquiry – No. II.'

In his 1865 biographical 'Sketch' of lifelong friend and sometimes ideological foe Henry Highland Garnet, McCune Smith wrote: 'The tall form of the pastor of Shiloh... [took] newer and, as he believed, broader grounds for our people in whose behalf he claimed perfect equality in all things, until, by what seemed to him a logical necessity, he proclaimed the doctrine of "negro nationality." From this idea grew the organization of the "African Civilization Society," intended to develop [sic] the energies of our race wherever found: in the United States, Africa, or elsewhere.'⁹²¹ In these reconciliatory passages, McCune Smith praised the purity of motive behind all Garnet's undertakings even when McCune Smith disagreed with them, as he had so publicly and harshly regarding Garnet's support for emigrationist movements such as the African Civilization Society (AfCS).⁹²² At the same time, McCune Smith wanted to make it clear to his readers that there were important differences in their views. With his careful insertions of the phrases 'as he believed' and 'what seemed to him,' McCune Smith indicated that he, unlike Garnet, did not accept the 'doctrine of "negro nationality."'

'Negro nationality,' as McCune Smith used the phrase, describes the concept that came to be known as Pan-Africanism. A correspondent to the *Anglo-African* in 1861 described "Negro Nationality" or 'the negro nation' as originating in unconquered Africa and spreading across continents. 'From the time when the good Abbe Gregoire benevolently published a book to prove that negroes were men, to the time when Mott, Glydon [sic] and Van Evrie [of the American School] have published other books to prove that negroes are not men, "negro nationality" has been very assiduously discussed...' The writer argued that 'all men' had come

⁹²¹ McCune Smith, 'Sketch,' 56–57.

⁹²² See Chapter Five.

to admit that the negroes are “a nation” or, in other words, that African Americans and their friends and foes alike agreed that people of African descent were a people apart wherever they were except when they were in Africa.⁹²³ Hakim Adi writes that the idea that people of African descent all over the world constituted a ‘common Pan-African identity’ only ‘fully emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.’ Yet as the anonymous correspondent makes clear, this concept had been developed decades earlier. While Adi places the emergence of Pan-Africanism *per se* much later, he argues that Pan-Africanism’s origins can be traced to the activism of such eighteenth-century abolitionists of African descent as Prince Hall, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, Daniel Coker, and George Liele. Their ‘initiatives... identified positively with Africa’ and sometimes included efforts to help those who wished ‘to return to Africa.’⁹²⁴ Though Adi’s history of Pan-Africanism does not include Garnet among its foundational figures, Garnet’s efforts on behalf of the AfCS would place him squarely in what Adi describes as a ‘new African form of Christianity [which] often linked communities, and therefore contributed to a growing Pan-African consciousness.’⁹²⁵

McCune Smith did not disapprove of the concept of ‘negro nationality’ insofar as it referred to the feeling of pride in shared African ancestry. In his ‘Sketch’ of Garnet’s life, McCune Smith referred nostalgically to ‘The people [in NYC] of those days [who] rejoiced in their nationality, and hesitated not to call each other “Africans,” or “descendants of Africa...”’⁹²⁶

⁹²³ ‘Negro Nationality,’ WAA, 9 November 1861.

⁹²⁴ Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 7–8.

⁹²⁵ Adi, 8. The anonymous writer of ‘Negro Nationality’ would not agree: they scornfully dismissed the African Civilization Society as a ‘begging institution’ unworthy of being associated with the ‘original, forceful, energizing idea’ of ‘negro nationality.’

⁹²⁶ McCune Smith, ‘Sketch,’ 24.

For decades, McCune Smith had called on his fellow African Americans to ‘learn to love, respect and glory in our Negro nature!’⁹²⁷ In 1839, he wrote: ‘That hue of the skin which is to the white man a source of hate or pity, may by us be gloried in as the token which distinguishes us as the soldiers of the truth, selected by our Heavenly Father.’⁹²⁸ In 1855, he asked ‘Why are we clothed in black skins unless it be to ennoble God Almighty's black man?’⁹²⁹ McCune Smith declared in 1861 that he was ‘proud of [his] African descent...’⁹³⁰

Some African Americans objected that the call to take pride in the African aspect of their identity was divisive. In 1855, Uriah Boston wrote that while it was perfectly acceptable to use the phrase ‘Colored Americans,’ they should not separate themselves from other Americans by describing themselves as ‘African.’ Boston likened McCune Smith’s and his fellow *FDP* correspondent William Wilson’s call for racial pride to colonialist propaganda: ‘Did I not know personally, "Ethiop" [Wilson] and "Communipaw," [McCune Smith] I should suspect that they were colonizationists in disguise, urging the colored people to preserve their identity with the African race, that thereby the propriety and necessity of African colonization might be made to appear most plain to all men...’ Boston offered his own solution: ‘The true policy, in my opinion, for the colored people to pursue is, lessen the distinction between the whites and colored citizens of the United States’⁹³¹

Yet McCune Smith did not believe – as Boston would have it – that it was appropriate or truthful for African Americans to see themselves as no different from other Americans in any

⁹²⁷ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [March 1855].’

⁹²⁸ McCune Smith, ‘Petition.’

⁹²⁹ McCune Smith, ‘NY Corr. [March 1855].’

⁹³⁰ McCune Smith, ‘Narrowing.’

⁹³¹ Uriah Boston, ‘Friend Douglass: Dear Sir [April 1855],’ *FDP*, 20 April 1855.

way that mattered. Neither did he believe – as Garnet might argue – that having African descent or taking pride in it was the same as being part of a single ‘negro nationality.’ For McCune Smith, African Americans’ origins and unique history made them a people both distinct within US society and too essentially American to be accurately described as anything but that.

Rather, McCune Smith believed African Americans to be an indigenous American ethnicity. This ethnicity was a product of the beneficial process of amalgamation and the particular set of historical circumstances that brought it about. However unjust the circumstances in which this amalgamation took place, African Americans had arisen as a new people on the face of the earth. McCune Smith outlined this theory most clearly in his 1851 critique of Greeley’s ‘confusion of terms’ in referring to African Americans as part of a singular ‘African Race.’ McCune Smith wrote:

what nation in Europe, having an offshoot in America, has not mingled its blood with the negro, thereby producing in our free blacks the most thoroughly mixed of the human species? ...this mixture, indigenous to the American soil, is an American race if you will, but surely not the African. ... It is quite as easy to show that we do not come under the term ‘free blacks,’ for a downright [sic] black man is getting scarce as Indians; nor ‘coloured people,’ for we have every variety of complexion; nor do we truthfully bear any name except that of ‘Americans,’ to the manor born.⁹³²

In 1863, Tilton wrote a letter to the editor of the *Anglo-African* complaining – as Boston had over the issue of racial pride – that its title emphasized foreign ancestry rather than American-ness. This, he argued, served to undermine African Americans’ struggle to be treated equally with other citizens. As acting editor, McCune Smith retorted sharply, arguing that the wording of Tilton’s critique revealed a deep bias held by many allies and foes of the African American

⁹³² McCune Smith, ‘Other Side.’

community alike: 'We are sorry that our name gives offense; the more sorry because our friend's dislike is one-sided, trampling with both heels upon *African*, while he lets *Anglo* pass unscathed...' In other words, Tilton had characterized ancestry from one non-American continent as indicative of foreignness while assuming that ancestry from another was somehow more American. The fact of the matter was, McCune Smith argued, that African Americans shared (at least) two sets of ancestors, inheriting characteristics and cultural influences from both: 'The term *Anglo-African* is truthful, ethnically speaking; and we suffer as a race, the product of two great races [African 'Negro' and Anglo-Saxon] each of which, by universal consent, represents a continent.'⁹³³

McCune Smith's view of African Americans as an indigenous American people and, consequently, in some ways *more* entitled to claim full rights of US citizenship, was not unique to him, nor was it new. In 1837, Cornish also found himself compelled to respond to readers of the *Colored American* – African American readers, in this case – who complained that the title of the newspaper was racially divisive. Cornish wrote: 'The editor, aware of the diversity of opinion in reference to the title of this "Paper," thinks it not amiss here to state some reasons for selecting this name... Many would gladly rob us of the endeared name, "AMERICANS," a distinction more emphatically belonging to us, than five-sixths of this nation, and one that we will never yield. In complexion, in blood and in nativity, we are decidedly more exclusively "American" than our white brethren'⁹³⁴ The similarity of the arguments in McCune Smith's

⁹³³ Tilton and McCune Smith, 'Note from Mr. Tilton.'

⁹³⁴ Cornish, 'Title of This Journal.'

reply to the reader of the *Anglo-African* reveals the depth of Cornish's influence as much as it does McCune Smith's own anthropological and political thought.

McCune Smith significantly developed and expounded the indigeneity theory throughout his decades of authorship. While McCune Smith disagreed with the view that acknowledging African Americans' unique ethnicity undermined their Americanness, he did agree with Boston that they were 'American citizens by birth, by habit, by habitation, and by language' and could therefore no longer accurately be described as simply 'African.'⁹³⁵ McCune Smith employed similarly nativist language to make the same argument. In 1839, he wrote: 'We are not temporary sojourners in a foreign land, nor aliens seeking citizenship, nor slaves begging for liberty - no! we are an integral portion of this Republic, bred and born with it...'⁹³⁶ On another occasion, McCune Smith quoted his friend Philip Bell to make this point: 'there "are chords which bind us to our home, the soil of our birth, which has been wet by the tears, and fertilized by the blood of our ancestors; and from which, while life lasts, in spite of the oppressor's wrong, we shall never be seduced or driven ..."'⁹³⁷ McCune Smith later described the US in similar terms as 'our home, richly ours by toil and tears and blood.'⁹³⁸

Like Boston and other leading African Americans, McCune Smith was also concerned with establishing their Americanness on historical as well as anthropological and nativist grounds. He emphasized African Americans' essential roles in making the US what it was. McCune Smith argued – like Alexander Crummell, William Nell, Douglass, and others – that

⁹³⁵ Boston, 'Friend Douglass.'

⁹³⁶ McCune Smith, 'Petition.'

⁹³⁷ McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 5–6.

⁹³⁸ McCune Smith, 'Other Side.'

African Americans had helped found the country by fighting against the British in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.⁹³⁹ In slavery, in freedom, and in war, African Americans had also arguably done more than any other group in the nation to build its wealth and to save it from its own self-destructive tendencies. In August 1865, McCune Smith wrote (referring to his 1841 lecture 'Destiny'): 'We have entertained the belief that the Anglo-African is destined to improve upon the Anglo-Saxon's type of civilization...'⁹⁴⁰ The following month, McCune Smith added: 'The black man's position in the history of this nation is just as plainly defined as that of any other man... He has borne the nation's yoke as a slave... He has fought the nation's battles... and saved the Government from being overthrown [in the Civil War].'⁹⁴¹

Proud as he was of African Americans' origins and history, McCune Smith believed that African Americans might be destined, like the rest of humanity, to lose characteristics which could be used to identify them as a unique people. As a scholar of world history and a theoretician on race, McCune Smith was deeply cognizant of the fact that peoples and civilizations came and went, rose and fell. His era was marked by advances in technology and the resulting accelerated movement of peoples all over the globe. Over time, this movement would likely cause all humankind to lose the differences that enabled people to classify themselves and each other according to race or ethnicity through amalgamation and changed environmental and cultural influences.

⁹³⁹ 'Free Suffrage Meeting,' *Williamsburgh Gazette and Long-Island Advertiser*, 15 April 1846; McCune Smith, 'Jennings;' McCune Smith, 'On Deck!;' McCune Smith, 'Perils;' James McCune Smith, 'The New Year,' *AA*, 2 January 1864.

⁹⁴⁰ James McCune Smith, 'American Journals and Negro Capital,' *AA*, 19 August 1865.

⁹⁴¹ James McCune Smith, 'Hon. Horace Greeley and A. O. P. Nicholson on the Black Man Again,' *AA*, 9 September 1865.

Yet McCune Smith did not believe African Americans should fear this: regardless of what changes may come, they had a special destiny of their own. In 1841, McCune Smith predicted that whether or not the 'time may come, when the descendants of our people shall no longer be distinguished by any physical peculiarity... a destiny awaits them which they must fulfil, and which will greatly affect whoever may live during and after its fulfilment.' African Americans' destiny was twofold. They would lead the way in ending slavery and would thereby 'save the [US] form of government' by transforming it into a 'pure Republic.' And as the creators of the United States' only fully original forms of literature, music, and oratory – born of their struggle for liberty – they would use these to 'spread over our common country the holy influence of principles, the glorious light of Truth.'⁹⁴² African Americans' mark on history would be indelible even if, as an ethnicity, they no longer existed.

Conclusion

McCune Smith's interest in what he called the 'dawning science of race-history' lasted until the end of his life.⁹⁴³ In 1864, McCune Smith was offered a professorship at Wilberforce University, the United States' first African American institution of higher learning. Rev. Daniel Payne, who co-founded Wilberforce in 1856 and led its revival following its financial collapse during the Civil War, 'invited [McCune Smith] to fill a professorship, with the privilege of choosing his chair, and he made choice of Anthropology.'⁹⁴⁴ Wilberforce's invitation to allow McCune Smith to choose

⁹⁴² McCune Smith, *Destiny*, 4, 10, 15–16.

⁹⁴³ McCune Smith, 'Introduction,' xxviii.

⁹⁴⁴ Daniel Alexander Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, ed. Charles S. Smith (Nashville: A. M. E. Sunday School Union, 1888), 151–52, 325–26; William A. Joiner, *A Half Century of Freedom of the Negro in Ohio* (Xenia: Press of Smith Adv. Co., 1915), 3, 41, 47. As Dain writes, 'the term "anthropology" came into use as a synonym for "ethnology" in the mid-1850s.' See Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 263.

to teach on any subject, scientific or otherwise, demonstrates the extent to which McCune Smith was regarded as a consummate scholar and disseminator of knowledge by his peers. Even as much about his life and work came to be widely forgotten, McCune Smith continued to be memorialized regularly in the press as a scientist, statistician, and anthropologist.⁹⁴⁵

McCune Smith accepted the post at Wilberforce but feared he could not fill it due to his ailing health. As he wrote to Gerrit Smith on 17 February 1865, 'You may have seen a statement in the *Anglo-African*... that I had accepted a call to a Chair in Wilberforce College, Xenia, Ohio, in case my health should permit. I feel a deep interest in that college; it represents the largest religious body among one people (itself not sectarian), and I have felt anxious to labor there, should it please God to grant me sufficient strength. But I am afraid that such strength is beyond possibility.'⁹⁴⁶ McCune Smith died on 17 November 1865, still at home in Williamsburg, exactly nine months after writing this letter.

⁹⁴⁵ For example, see 'Negro History Week Observed,' *Daily Times*, 10 February 1949; 'Heroes of Emancipation: Dr. James McCune Smith Was Writer for Freedom,' *Tampa Bay Times*, 3 September 1963; 'Stories of Black Americans,' *Rock Island Argus*, 31 October 1977.

⁹⁴⁶ McCune Smith to Smith, 17 February 1865.

Conclusion

‘Neither ultra radical nor ultra conservative, but when the occasion was warranted refused taking a middle course, though like the logician of old, [James McCune Smith] could dispute, change sides and then dispute again. What he earnestly labored for was freedom, not license in argument, and the agreement to disagree without rancour.’

~ Maritcha Lyons, ‘Memories of Yesterdays’

James McCune Smith’s impact on the intellectual, cultural, and political history of the United States was extensive, deep, and profound, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate. In his efforts to improve the lives of his fellow New Yorkers – especially African Americans, the most marginalized among them – he arguably had as deep an impact on his native city as it had on him. As an intellectual and author, McCune Smith exemplified and championed the transformative power of a classical liberal arts education even as he expanded the boundaries of the ‘republic of letters’ by founding a new form of experimental writing and by chronicling African Americans’ creation of new forms of art and literature. McCune Smith provided an inspiring example for his fellow African Americans by breaking down racial barriers to aspiring physicians while his holistic practice – which sought to address social and political ills as well as physical – served as a model for all medical practitioners. His foundational roles within and often provocative writing styles for the African American press helped shape it as a vital forum for information, edification, solidarity, and debate. McCune Smith’s broad conception of slavery led him to oppose it in all its forms and helped others to see how – given its world history – it was both insidious and fully capable of being defeated. Lastly, McCune Smith’s empirical bent

of mind and restless scientific curiosity led him to devise or develop ingenious methods for understanding the world, especially in the nascent fields of statistics and anthropology.

As Lyons observed and as David Blight argues over five decades later, McCune Smith's quest for freedom – for himself and for all who were denied it – lay at the heart of all his endeavours.⁹⁴⁷ This was as true for his commitment to fearless, open, uncompromising, uncensored debate – however uncomfortable or controversial – as it was for social and political freedom. As we have seen, this was demonstrated both by securing for himself the best possible education he could get – in the face of all attempts to deny it to him – and the fearlessness of his writing and in debate. There was apparently no subject too sensitive or too controversial for McCune Smith to address, and no one he was afraid to offend in addressing it. The *ad hominem* language McCune Smith sometimes resorted to in debate might seem to undermine Lyons's claim that McCune Smith was committed to 'agreement to disagree without rancour.' Yet McCune Smith's enduring friendships with those he debated most often or most fiercely – such as George Downing, Wilson, and Garnet – indicates that others understood and accepted the terms of this 'agreement.'

Yet those who followed McCune Smith may not have understood or accepted these terms, which may be why his image in the public memory is so patchy. The primary explanation for the widespread public and scholarly amnesia regarding the whole of McCune Smith's rich legacy may not be that his papers were lost, or that the colour of his skin was inconvenient to any of his descendants, or that he did not publish a book, or that many of his readers found his

⁹⁴⁷ Lyons, 'Memories,' 78; Blight, 'Search of Learning.'

writing too experimental or arcane, or that many issues of the newspapers he wrote for eventually became hard to find.⁹⁴⁸ After all, Benjamin Banneker, another pioneering African American scientist, was also widely forgotten yet has come to be the subject of several biographies despite an even greater scarcity of extant primary sources.⁹⁴⁹ As one of his biographers observes, many also attempted to ‘obscure’ or side-line Banneker’s legacy because his race was inconvenient to them, albeit for very different reasons.⁹⁵⁰

Rather – as this thesis emphasises in the introduction to Chapter Four – McCune Smith may continue to be an inconvenient subject for biographers and historians because a full exploration of his life and views does not fit neatly into any one historical or political or social narrative. By the standards of his time and ours, McCune Smith – in Lyons’s words – cannot be consistently portrayed as an ‘ultra radical nor [an] ultra conservative;’ nor was he a centrist. He was all, one, or none of these as the situation warranted. This thesis has attempted to convey this as fully as can be accomplished within the space allowed. However, if the richness, variety, and depth of McCune Smith’s life and work is to be understood with anything approaching comprehensiveness, it can only serve – at most – as the first and least complete of such explorations. May it serve as an inspiration and a source for many more to come.

(Word count: 99,979)

⁹⁴⁸ Schomburg, ‘Dr. James McCune Smith,’ 41; Stauffer in *Works*, xvi. Stauffer suggests that ‘McCune Smith’s descendants *wanted* him erased from the historical record’ so they could ‘pass’ as white but does not provide direct evidence of this.

⁹⁴⁹ Angela McMillian, ‘Benjamin Banneker: A Resource Guide: Print Bibliography,’ <https://guides.loc.gov/benjamin-banneker/print-bibliography>; Charles A. Cerami, *Benjamin Banneker: Surveyor, Astronomer, Publisher, Patriot* (New York: J. Wiley, 2002), 209–13.

⁹⁵⁰ Cerami, *Benjamin Banneker*, ix.

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Note: All citations of works that may have been/were likely authored by McCune Smith but cannot yet be attributed to him with a high degree of certainty are preceded by an asterisk.

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Appendix: James McCune Smith and Family Map, Lower Manhattan/Five Points, 1811-1865



1. Lavinia Smith's earliest known address in New York City at Hester and Norfolk, 1811-1812
2. New York African Society for Mutual Relief/Lavinia Smith, 'Aunt Sally' McCune, and 'Grandma Weaver' at 44 Orange St, 1820-1822
3. St Philip's Episcopal Church on Centre St (previously Collect St), 1819-1857
4. African Free School No. 2, 137 Mulberry St
5. Peter Williams, Jr's house at 68 Crosby St, 1830
6. John W. Curtis' collegiate school, 76 Varick St, 1831-1832
7. Thomas & Son, blacksmiths, 63 Nassau St, 1830-1850

8. Smith family home at 29 Leonard St, 1840-1847
9. Smith family home at 15 North Moore St, 1847-1864
10. McCune Smith's pharmacy at 93 West Broadway (originally Chapel St), 1837-1847
11. McCune Smith's pharmacy at 55 West Broadway, 1849-1865

Background map: 'This actual map and comparative plans showing 88 years growth of the City of New York' (detail), David Longworth, 1817. From The New York Public Library (public domain).

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