

Dear workshopers:

Thank you for taking the time to read a dissertation proposal still in draft. Please excuse the state of the footnotes and what I'm sure are an embarrassing amount of typos and awkward syntax.

Some brief explanation about the state of things. This draft much longer than the proposal I expect to turn in. I've chosen to be expansive here, especially in the "Historical Problem" part, in order to provide you with meatier examples, with the hope that they will be clear about the nature of my project where my more declarative claims are not, or at least provide fertile ground for discussion.

I would very much appreciate advice on my historiography section. In this case, the length reflects my indecision about how I want to situate my own project and to direct my argument. The sections on methodology, research strategy & sources, and chapters are all provisional but I hope provide a useful sketch of my theoretical, archival, and narrative choices and investments at this early stage.

Thanks again—I look forward to your comments, criticisms, and suggestions!

CD

The Reproduction of Slavery and the Transformation of American Culture: 1863-1913

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.¹

The Negro has of late developed a capacity as a stock character of fiction which no one ever dreamed that he possessed in the good old days when he was a merchantable commodity.²

Northern as well as Southern writers have found the days of the old plantation *régime* a fruitful source of inspiration for their pens, and the negro an artistic model for their skill to pose in attitudes that should prove interesting as well as lucrative....[They] make truth subordinate to fiction, in that they gather together a dozen types or more, as circumstances may demand, and proceed to make composite photographs after some peculiar method of natural selection.³

[F]orty years of national life, forty years of renewal and development, and yet the swarthy spectre sits in its accustomed seat at the Nation's feast.⁴

Richmond, [Virginia,] in a word, looked to me simply blank and void—whereby it was, precisely, however, that the great emotion was to come....There were no *references*—that had been the trouble; but the reaction came with the sense that the large, sad poorness was in itself a reference, and one by which a hundred grand historic connections were on the spot, and quite thrillingly, re-established....I was tasting of the very bitterness of the immense, grotesque, defeated project—the project, extravagant, fantastic, and to-day pathetic in its folly, of a vast Slave State (as the old term ran) artfully, savingly isolated in the world that was to contain it and trade with it.⁵

¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* 2nd. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 595.

² Albion W. Tourgée, "The South as a Field for Fiction," *Forum* 6 (December 1888), 409.

³ W[illiam]. S. Scarborough, "Negro Dialect in Fiction," *The Unitarian Review* 32 (July 1889), 78.

⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 6.

⁵ Henry James, *The American Scene*, ed. Leon Edel (1907; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 370-71 (original emphasis).

I. Introduction

After Emancipation, the American nation built itself anew with memories of slavery. Though wartime abolition made the practice of slavery illegal, Americans looked to the products of an emerging mass culture not only to remember but also to reproduce slavery in the present. This dissertation will examine the transformation of the memory of slavery into cultural products, and how this transformation shaped American responses to modernity. The ascendant ideologies of national reconciliation and racial segregation sought to unburden the “sin” of slavery from the nation’s conscience. Yet from the moment of emancipation through to the turn of the century, cultural producers and performers, as well as their audiences and critics, attempted to capitalize on slavery’s nostalgic, racial, and illicit meanings for a modernizing nation. At first conjuring soothing fantasies of the Old South plantation for white Americans weary of the racial and sectional politics of emancipation and reconstruction, the cultural reproductions of slavery—manifested most vibrantly in the ephemeral and experimental forms of mass culture, particularly advertisements and popular theater—came to signal the thrilling and perilous prospects for American modernity itself. For certain self-consciously modern, urbane, and cosmopolitan performers, literary artists, and social scientists, black and white, the disjuncture opened by the cultural reproduction of slavery was a locus not only for nostalgic indulgence but also for critical, hallucinatory, and utopian contemplation of national pasts and futures. Examining the cultural work of blackface minstrels and black vaudevillians, professional historians and corporate advertisers, popular novelists and cosmopolitan aesthetes, this dissertation will explain how Americans, as they stepped toward the twentieth century, attempted to incorporate slavery into the national past as they confronted their desire to witness it again.

II. Historical Problem: Remembering and Reproducing Slavery in Modern America

In 1895, the cultural impresario Nathan Salsbury produced *Black America*, an extravaganza designed to match the spectacle of his previous triumph, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Advertized as "A Gigantic Exhibition of Negro Life and Character," and employing hundreds of African American musicians, actors, and dancers, *Black America* blended modern vogues of ragtime music and cakewalk dances with depictions of plantation life and labor—including live reenactments of cotton ginning and baling. Staged in Ambrose Park, Brooklyn, and touring major cities on the East Coast in a short six-month run, it proved less successful than the Wild West Show but nevertheless revealed the culturally productive power of the memory of slavery. While audiences were quick to recognize the nostalgic depiction of "the happy, careless life" of the "fun-loving darky," they were drawn to and bemused by the curiously modern ways in which "the cotton fields, the negro cabins, the songs and dances of slavery days [were] reproduced." Indeed, the reviewer for the *New York Times* focused less on the historical content than on the techniques of its production: the scale of the performance, the originality and costumes of the performers, the "infectious" melodies. In *Black America*, the scene of slavery condensed the "historic" with the modern, the fleeting, the unreal. To describe the experience the reviewer was reduced—or raised—to playful onomatopoeia: emitted from the past of slavery was "a low whistle that sounds like 'a-whip, a-whip, a-whip, a-whee.'" ⁶

⁶ "Wild Negro Chants and Dances: In 'Black America,' Brooklyn, May Be Seen the Fun-Loving Darky of Old Slavery Days," *New York Times* (25 May 1895), 9. The fullest historical reconstruction of the event is Roger Allen Hall, "Black America: Nate Salsbury's 'Afro-American Exhibition,'" *Educational Theatre Journal* 29 (March 1977), 49-60. Much of the extant scholarship focuses on its place in the history of African American culture and especially musical and theatrical performance. See Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 288; Robert C. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 262-263; Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 391-395; Barbara L. Webb, "Authentic Possibilities: Plantation Performance of the 1890s," *Theatre Journal* 56 (May 2004), 63-82. For a consideration of *Black America* as a part of a national "antimodernist, amnesiac will-to-preservation," which constructs a material space for the memory of slavery while

Black America was at the vanguard of modern mass amusement; but it also followed in a long line of cultural reproductions of slavery which emerged in the wake of abolition. More than presenting a soothing racial pastoral of a timeless black folk, Salsbury's extravaganza illustrates how the popular delight in the "reproduction" of new sensations served to incorporate and subsume the troubling memory of slavery for the nation. It also shows that the memory of slavery was not easily "forgotten." To make sense of cultural products like *Black America*, the impulses which animated their production and the aesthetic and cognitive experiences which shaped their consumption, this dissertation will situate the cultural reproduction of slavery within a broad historical context of postbellum American modernity. The sectional reunification and racial segregation of the nation-state, the growth and legitimization of burgeoning industrial capitalism, and the imperial expansion of national markets and culture, made the memory of slavery into a contradictory emblem of the modern—a nostalgic and racially harmonious preserve from the rapidly accelerating history, but also a past disowned for its troubling associations and even "presence" in contemporary American life.

From the moment of emancipation, the national memory of slavery in the postbellum United States was shaped by the politics of race and reunion. The martial victories of the Union army, the legislative successes of the radical Republicans, and the individual and collective acts of self-emancipation by black slaves, seemed to promise not only abolition and revolutionary reconstruction, but also a vision of the future memory of slavery. Though he would not fully address the question of the fate of freed African Americans in national political and social life, Abraham Lincoln asked the nation to account for the "sin" of slavery in the nation's past: slavery

excluding (defacing) the modernity of the African American urban performers, see Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 220-221. For Salsbury and the Wild West Show, see Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000).

was not Southern but “American,” the horrors of war a common punishment for nation which owed its material progress and freedom to “the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil.”⁷ In the “emancipation moment,” the prospect and emerging reality of a new racial and political order held aloft slavery as the animating “crime” around which a resilient and modernizing United States waged war to abolish. The trials of Reconstruction, however, diminished the national will to adopt the radical implications of the abolitionist and emancipationist memory of slavery.⁸ As acts of anti-black violence and the forces of rising industrial capitalism curtailed the political achievements, social incorporation, and economic progress of southern African Americans, the nation increasingly came to accept Reconstruction as a “failure” and sought sectional reconciliation with a “New South” dedicated to material productivity and white supremacy.⁹ Though it would take several more years for the legislative and political achievements of Reconstruction to be dismantled in the South, and Jim Crow to be made complete, the national culture would quickly “forget” the claims of slavery and freed

⁷ Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, 4 March 1865.

⁸ For Dorothy Ross, the ideology of nationalism and progress would make slavery an anomaly in American historical consciousness after Emancipation; see “Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation,” *Journal of American History* 96.2 (September 2009), 379-399. As historians have shown, the “emancipation moment” was tragically perishable. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, while they embodied the humanist values of universal liberty and human rights, were shaped and constrained by the intense political debate in the flux of war; the President and the Congress made ad hoc and contingent responses to the new conditions of freedom, such as the mass crossing of former slaves over union lines, as much as they created them. Within these debates, the prospect of slave emancipation gained new popular legitimacy as a war measure necessary for union victory; yet even in this triumph of universal liberalism, the practical freedoms of former slaves were already being abridged by conventions of race and gender in the name of national unity. See also David Brion Davis, *The Emancipation Moment: 22nd Annual Robert Fortenbaugh Memorial Lecture* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1983); Amy Dru Stanley, “Instead of Waiting for the Thirteenth Amendment: The War Power, Slave Marriage, and Inviolable Human Rights,” *American Historical Review* 115.3 (June 2010), 732-765; Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877* (1988; rpt. New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998); Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

⁹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (1988); Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 2010).

slaves to the nation's history. By 1876, the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia could present America on the vanguard of continental expansion, technological modernity, and cultural refinement—cleansed of the bondsman's toil.¹⁰

Except as a vehicle for African American protest or as a fading refrain of surviving abolitionists, the radical association of black slavery with American wealth, progress, and freedom would be a memory lost as the nation launched itself into the twentieth century.¹¹ The radical memory of slavery would be replaced by an idyllic fantasy of the "Old South" plantation. The plantation fantasy, with its harmonious labor regime and racial hierarchy, provided white Americans, northerners and southerners, with a soothing reprieve from the troubling "problem" of race and the alienating forces of industrial and corporate capital. The disappearance of slavery from the Centennial Exposition was matched in the same year with the publication and enormous success of Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus Tales*, in which the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* proffered narratives of national reconciliation through the "dialect" of a kindly old slave. While in the South local organizations would erect monuments to the "faithful slave," Northern audiences of popular literature and theater, from the 1870s right through the turn of the century, sought out images of the antebellum plantation in postcards, stereographs, blackface minstrel shows and vaudeville revues, and serialized tales of "negro folklore" rendered in "negro

¹⁰ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 135-139; Philip S. Foner, "Black Participation in the Centennial of 1876," *Phylon* 34.4 (Winter 1978), 283-296; Robert W. Rydell, *All The World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 9-37.

¹¹ What was lost can be seen in contemporary African American culture and politics, which more openly grappled with the implications of remembering slavery in an age of progress. For the postbellum African American memory of slavery, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 311-337; Blight, *A Slave No More: Two Men Who Escaped to Freedom Including Their Own Narratives of Emancipation* (Boston: Mariner, 2007); Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For abolitionist memory, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies and the Unfinished Work of Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

dialect” and illustrated with lithographs of the “old time darky.”¹² By the turn of the century, the image of the slave would be used to market mass-produced pancake flour and instant oatmeal, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would be adapted to film, and the idyllic Old South would be granted the legitimacy of “objective” scrutiny by professional historians and of literature by novelists of the historical romance.¹³ American modernity would be advertised, purchased, and consumed with the sale of slaves—not as bodies but as reproductions.

This dissertation seeks to explore the memory of slavery as a site in which the ideologies of racial segregation and national reconciliation allied with the cultural needs of burgeoning capitalism and imperial expansion. As cultural historians have explained, the plantation fantasy of slavery served two important functions in postbellum America: as it sanitized the “crime” of

¹² For monuments, see Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldier, Kneeling Slave: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); for popular culture, see William Van Deburg, *Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); for material culture, see Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectables and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994); for literature and folklore, see Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 216-231.

¹³ For advertising—in which the case of Aunt Jemima is paradigmatic—see Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994); M. M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008). For the place of Aunt Jemima—and of race and the “folk” more generally—in the modernization of American advertising, see Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. New York: Basic Books, 1994), 122-26, 384; Lears, “Packaging the Folk: Tradition and Amnesia in American Advertising, 1880-1940,” in Jane S. Becker and Barbara Franco, eds., *Folk Roots, New Roots: Folklore in American Life* (Lexington, Mass.: Museum of Our National Heritage, 1988); Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 121-31.

For theater and film, see Michele Wallace, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Before and After the Jim Crow Era,” *TDR* 44.1 (Spring 2000), 137-156; Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994); Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater & Film before World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Professional historical science turned to the study of slavery to provide the ultimate confirmation its “national” purpose and “objective” perspective by overcoming “sectional” partisanship and “romantic” depictions which had characterized the pre-professional historiography; but to achieve a national historical consensus meant conceding the grounds of objectivity to a “scientific” racism which legitimated the ideology of white supremacy in the South and, in effect, severely circumscribed the role of African Americans in the national narrative; see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: the “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 72-80; see also John H. Smith, *Slavery, Race, and American History: Historical Conflict, Trends, and Method, 1866-1953* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999).

slavery into an anodyne regional heritage and the war as a romance of national regeneration, it also provided an outlet for nostalgic “escape” from the distressing and darker aspects of modernity. The impulse for national reconciliation easily answered the need for “therapeutic” accommodations to the alienating effects of mass consumer culture.¹⁴ In this view, the politics of nation, race, and capital hastened the American “forgetting” of slavery. The drives for national reconciliation and cultural modernization reduced slavery to pastoral fantasy and racial caricature, and marginalized abolitionist and emancipationists voices—and especially the memories of ex-slaves themselves—from the public accounting for the “cost” of postbellum American modernity.¹⁵

This dissertation, however, modifies and departs from this view. The joining of the politics of race and reunion with the rise of cultural modernity risked tensions and contradictions which the memory of slavery reveals but current scholarship only partly addresses. While the ideologies of national reconciliation and racial segregation sought to fix slavery into a past sequestered from historical and contemporary conflict, the emerging mass consumer culture continually and compulsively sought to unmoor slavery from the past by transforming it into ephemeral and dehistoricized cultural products. What did it mean that the nostalgic plantation fantasy was almost always delivered in brazenly modern forms of cultural production? Did the modernity of the production complicate the antimodern content and ideological function for

¹⁴ For nostalgia, antimodernism and the “therapeutic” accommodation to mass consumerism, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

¹⁵ The nostalgic lure and therapeutic function of the plantation fantasy frames Blight’s discussion in *Race and Reunion*: “[t]he age of machines, rapid urbanization, and labor unrest produced a huge audience for a literature of escape into a pre-Civil War, exotic South that, all but ‘lost,’ was the object of enormous nostalgia” (211). Blight’s interpretation—national reconciliation requires a “forgetting” of slavery—is in turn adopted by Jackson Lears synthesis, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009): “For the North-South merger to take place, there had to be an alchemical change in the meaning of the Civil War itself, a change that would promote reunion between whites by transforming wartime longings for regeneration into an Anglo-Saxon quest. Emancipation dissolved in a discourse of reunion” (25-26).

producers, performers, consumers, audiences, and critics? Unlike other objects of antimodern nostalgia—such as the medieval knight—the modern reproduction of the slave and the scene of slavery hazarded a past only recently “lost” from American life. And unlike similar objects of American attention to the racialized “primitive”—such as the Indian—black slavery evoked an ongoing legacy not of conquest, removal, and disappearance but of forced productivity, commodification, and racial transgression.¹⁶ In the postbellum period, the “forgetting” of slavery required its reproduction; slavery was not only figured as a creature of a bygone “Old South” but reanimated as a creature of *fin-de-siècle* cultural experiment, extravaganza, and empire. Its reproduction exceeded its ideological functions of forgetting and nostalgia to circulate in service of the new, from the stages of New York and Paris to the imaginations of novelists and historians.

Forgetting requires work: silences must be produced.¹⁷ This dissertation will argue that the manifest ideological function of the cultural reproduction of slavery—nationalism, racism, and nostalgia—belies a politics of modernism which animated its production and style.¹⁸ The argument will proceed along two fronts. First, it will show that the process by which slavery was transformed from memory into cultural product, occurring largely in the urban north, called into being complex relationships between producers, performers, audiences, and critics—southerners and northerners, white and black. Secondly, the dissertation will demonstrate that this engagement with the memory of slavery left its trace on the aesthetic and cognitive styles of the

¹⁶ For the case of Indian masquerade as a site for the making of modern American identity, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 95-127.

¹⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

¹⁸ As historians and theorists of modernity have explained, the cultural production and aesthetics of modernism was an expression of power—of new over the old, of the present and the future over the past—which for modernism as an ideology of novelty, by which the metropole appropriates and expresses its hegemony over the hinterland and colony, see Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989); for modernism as an ideology of aesthetic play which submerges the historical referent, see Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), ch. 5: “Romance and Reification: Plot Construction and Ideological Closure in Joseph Conrad.”

cultural products themselves. The cultural reproduction of slavery, inviting and even requiring participation from a wide range of black and white producers and performers, opened space for questioning and contesting what was “modern”; yet its style could also expose disturbing disjunctures within the “modern.” As the epigraphs from Albion Tourgée, William S. Scarborough, and W. E. B. Du Bois, and Henry James begin show, the equivalence between the cultural product and its historical reference could appear “uncanny,” and mark a repetition or a return of what the cultural reproduction of slavery was designed to suppress.¹⁹ If the black body was no longer a “merchantable commodity,” its dematerialized and spectral forms akin to a “composite photograph” renewed its “lucrative” traffic; if slavery marked an “emptiness” in the memory of the modern, the “thrill” of its historical recreation risked the “taste” of the “immense, grotesque, defeated project” itself. The cultural reproduction of slavery was a process and a problem which manifested in less “trivial” forms than crude racial iconography and theatrical extravaganzas; it penetrated the shaping of the modern “selves” of the artist and the historian, who desired to redeem American modernity by recovering the “real reference” to slavery while hazarding a discomfiting return of the black slave and the “merchantable commodity” to the heart of cultural creation.

By asking how the memory of slavery was reproduced in culture, this dissertation hopes to show not only that the American nation was actively engaged in suppressing and displacing slavery from historical consciousness—the ubiquitous and repetitive fantasy of slavery a response to a palpable “presence” of slavery. It also hopes to make visible how the cultural reproduction of slavery was a contested site for the construction of “memories of the modern”

¹⁹ See Bill Brown, “Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny,” *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Winter 2006), 175-207.

with potential for utopian visions or even oppositional critique.²⁰ Most famously, Czech composer Antonin Dvorak declared in 1892 that slave songs would be “the future music of this country” and America’s signal contribution to world civilization; true to his claim, he incorporated melodies and rhythms from African American and Amerindian folk songs into his *New World Symphony*. Dvorak gave voice to a wide and transatlantic interest in America’s potential to incorporate the history of slavery into its culture of progress. Writers as different as W. E. B. Du Bois and Hamlin Garland would take up this claim to advance, respectively, the belonging of the African American in American modernity, and the incorporation of folk culture in the development of modern American art.²¹ In the bohemian little magazine *M’lle New York*, literary critic Vance Thompson and music critic James Huneker imagined the realization of black

²⁰ That the fashioning of modern subjectivity involves an alienation from memory (and its reification in history) but also the possibility for reengaging with memory in momentary “sites” has been argued by Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 7-24; for a study which adopts Nora’s framework to the case of *fin-de-siècle* France, see Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

For the relationship between cultural production and memory in the American case, see George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 6-12. Lipsitz focuses on memory in post-WWII popular culture but locates the divide between history and memory at the end of the nineteenth century, marked particularly by the invention of the telegraph: as technologies of mass communication, along with the forces of industrialization and the building of the nation state disrupted traditional forms of communal memory, a split occurred between professional historians, who sought to discipline the ruptures of modernity through objective recreation of the past, and popular culture, which sought to imbue commodities with new forms of memory within growing market of commercial leisure. For how an ethnic, urban working class responded to commercial modernity in this time, see Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*; and Piess, *Cheap Amusements*. For the recovery of meaning in the use of things exceeding the logic of commodity exchange, and of history, see Brown, *The Material Unconscious* and *The Sense of Things*. The language of “utopia” and “compensation” is drawn from Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, which follows a long line of Marxist thinkers who have attempted to locate new modes of (utopian, messianic) historical self-creation in spaces of modern commodity exchange [Benjamin, Lukacs, etc.].

²¹ Dvorak made this pronouncement while teaching at New York’s National Conservatory and composing the *New World Symphony*; it was repeated by Thomas Seward following a performance by the Fisk Jubilee Singers at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. See “Congress on Africa: Large Audiences are Interested in the Dark Continent,” *Daily Inter Ocean* (16 Aug 1893), 8; for Dvorak as a figure inspired by and inspiring contemporary African American musicians, see Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 131-132; see also Curtis, *Dancing to a Black Man’s Tune*. Almost certainly following Dvorak, Garland prophesized that African Americans would one day “contribute a poetry and a novel as peculiarly his own as the songs he sings” to national literature; Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art, Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting and the Drama* (Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1894), 71. Du Bois took the implications of Dvorak’s claim not only for the futurity of American culture but for the historicity of African American’s place in it, that the slave’s “sorrow song” had always been a font of American racial appropriation and cultural innovation; *The Souls of Black Folk*, 250-57.

poetry in France, where the plantation fantasy could appear as a hallucination amid Parisian urban decadence.²² Carl Van Vechten, future impresario of the Harlem Renaissance, recalled his attraction to the minstrel show put on by black vaudevillians Bert Williams and George Walker in 1898: “There were reminiscences of the plantation, reminiscences of the old minstrel days, and capital portraits of the new coon, who was in those days a real figure.” Plastered on “South Side fencing and boardings” in Chicago, poster advertisements showed a parodic pastiche of Williams & Walker taking tea with Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle. In this instance, the cultural reproduction of slavery not only collapsed distances in space (Chicago/London) and time (“reminiscence”/“new”) but both distended and nationalized the black body itself: Williams—who “reblackened his face, enlarged his mouth, wore shoes which extended beyond the limits of even extraordinary feet, but never transcended the precise lines of characterization”—was “America’s finest actor.”²³

The cosmopolitan key of the cultural reproductions of slavery was in tune with a nation undergoing a transition from the Age of Capital to the Age of Empire.²⁴ The economic need for new markets and the spiritual need for psychic regeneration compelled Americans to expand

²² Vance Thompson, “Two Nigger Poets of Paris,” *M’lle New York* 1.4 (Sept. 1895), 9; James Gibbons Huneker, “The Dream of a Decadent,” *M’lle New York* 1.3 (Sept. 1895), 10; Charles Eugene Hamlin, “Black Music,” *M’lle New York* 1.1 (Aug. 1895), 8-9. *M’lle New York* was short lived, and the careers of Thompson and Huneker nearly forgotten by the next generation of American writers and critics, yet they were important precursors to aesthetic modernism as translators of French symbolism, champions of the stylistic experiments of Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Henry James, and unabashed critics of conventional liberal politics and genteel aesthetic realism promoted by Richard Watson Gilder and William Dean Howells; they also rehearsed modernism’s formative indulgence in nativism, anti-black racism, and anti-Semitism. See Ziff, *The American 1890s*, 141-45; see also Michaels, *Our America*.

²³ Carl Van Vechten, “The Negro Theatre,” in *In The Garret* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), 312.

²⁴ Eric Hobsbawm characterizes this transition as one from an age of triumphant liberalism (at least in Western Europe after 1848 and in the United States after the Civil War) by which nation states committed their progress to an ideal of domestic free trade, to one of imperialism, in which nation states committed to corporate organization of the domestic economy whose profits would be guaranteed by acquiring cheap foreign sources of raw materials for domestic commodity production. In other words, it moved from an era dominated by British industry and empire, to one “of international competition between rival national industrial economies [British, German, and American]...sharpened by the difficulties which firms within each of these economies now discovered...in making adequate profits”; see Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, 304-305 and *The Age of Empire*, 34-55. As Eric Foner argues, the ascendance of the American “Age of Capital” was at first vitiated by, but ultimately superseded, the prerogatives of slave emancipation and radical reconstruction; see Foner, *Reconstruction*.

commercially, martially, and imaginatively into foreign territories.²⁵ The American bohemian fantasy had a correspondence on the Parisian stage. For a white French music critic of the *belle époque*, the African American cakewalk performers then in vogue magically birthed an image not only of the American plantation but also of a “lost Africa”:

A memory came to them of the old continent, the old motherland, where their ancestors lived. The inhospitable earth of America was transformed in a momentary mirage; it became the soil itself of this lost Africa. In imagined contact with this much loved land, the naked feet of the blacks trembled, moved in a rhythm of joy: extraordinary bamboulas were born.²⁶

This dissertation will not attempt a full study of the Atlantic traffic in and reception of American cultural reproductions of slavery. However, the Atlantic—and the imperial, commercial, and cultural circuits which gave the ocean its shape in this period—will be an important context in which to understand how Americans turned the burden of slavery’s past into emancipatory visions of modernity. In particular, it points to the necessary a role played by African Americans, whose images, voices, bodies, and minds were called on to enact these parodies of the past and prophecies of the future.²⁷ Scores of African American entertainers (supplanting white Americans in blackface) who migrated to northern urban centers and who traveled across the

²⁵ In Lears’s interpretation, the stability of corporate capitalism, its disruptive potential exposed in the depression of 1893, was contained by imperial expansion into Latin America, Asia, and Africa (for raw goods) and into Western Europe (for affluent markets); *Rebirth of a Nation*, 279-91; see also Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism*, 78-85, for an efficient explanation of the growing alliance between corporate imperialism and the missionary ideology of the U.S. state. This nexus of capitalism and empire would create new constraints and possibilities for African Americans and subjects of American and European colonialism: elites and workers had access to the routes and imaginaries made possible by the circuits of imperial and capitalist power, but were also subject to the coercions of the ideologies of the nation. Gary Wilder shows the complex dynamics of this process for twentieth-century France and the emergence of Negritude in *The French Imperial Nation State*. For the case of cotton in an age of emerging global capitalism, and the alliance between Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute and a German corporation’s ambitions for colonial commodity production, see Beckert, “From Tuskegee to Togo”; see also Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire.”

²⁶ Raoul Sainte-Marie, “Le Cake-walk,” *La Revue théâtrale* 2 (March 1903), 190; qtd. and trans. in Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir*, 19.

²⁷ Cultural and literary historians have argued that African American cultural producers used the spaces opened by commercial leisure and racial desire not only to negotiate entry into modernity and shape American culture, but also to subvert or transcend dominant ideologies and discourses of racial identity. See Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*; Curtis, *Dancing to a Black Man’s Tune*; Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*; Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*; Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky”*.

Atlantic to perform in minstrel shows and vaudeville revues, and promote vogues in spirituals, ragtime, and the cake-walk; they were seen by mass audiences in London, Paris, and even Pretoria, South Africa not simply as embodiments of a primitive folk but also as a projection of modernity's magical recomposition of new and old, of time and space.²⁸

III. Historiographical Context: Modernity and the Memory of Slavery

"Black slavery," writes Toni Morrison, "enriched the country's creative possibilities." Black writers Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, writing in the 1950s, similarly argued for a reconsideration of American modernism—as an aesthetic and as a habitual striving for newness—to account for an implicit, if silent, reference to the history of slavery.²⁹ While scholars have gleaned the outlines of the cultural processes by which the memory to slavery was reproduced in post-Emancipation American culture, a historical study of the problem has not been attempted. What I term the cultural reproduction of slavery has been taken by historians of race as "false" memories which reflect the retrograde and reactive racism of the postbellum era; and cultural historians treat them as exceptions to, rather than constitutive parts of, the advance of American modernism and antimodernism.³⁰ Why were Americans compelled to revisit the

²⁸ For African Americans in Paris, see Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*; Stovall, *Paris Noir*; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*. An important counterpoint is Orpheus McAdoo, a graduate of Hampton University, and his 1890-1899 tour of South Africa with his Jubilee Singers, which garnered popular receptions by white administrators and black audiences who saw in the American slave song and minstrel show a deep reference to an original African culture; see James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 125-133.

²⁹ Toni Morrison, *Playing with Darkness: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 38; Ralph Ellison, "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," and "Stephen Crane and the Mainstream of American Fiction," in *Shadow and Act*; James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," in *Notes of a Native Son*.

³⁰ Scholars have also fallen heavily on the other extreme, treating representations of slavery as transhistorical (rather than historically constructed) "presences" of slavery itself. Morrison, for instance, supports her argument by reading Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, written over the period from 1876 to 1884, as a "combative critique of antebellum America" rather than of postbellum America—particularly, a postbellum America defined at one end by the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and the retreat of Federal enforcement of Reconstruction governments in the South, and at the other end the curtailing of black civil rights in the South and the rise of the national cult of "reconciliation." For a critique of this critical habit of treating *Huckleberry Finn* as "about" antebellum slavery

difficult past of slavery rather than simply erase it from memory? What memory did they seek or hope to displace by turning to modern forms of cultural production? How did modernist artists and intellectuals relate their quests for aesthetic and cognitive regeneration to a nation which advertised its newness in no small part by reproducing images of slavery? This dissertation will venture answers by following Hazel Carby's observation that each era comes to the history of slavery anew; the age after Emancipation recreated the past of slavery with the modes of cultural production of its epoch.³¹ But more so: the emerging forms of cultural production took their shape and promoted their legitimacy by recreating slavery. The cultural reproduction of slavery managed the potentially difficult memory of slavery for a nation striving for sectional reconciliation, racial segregation, industrial progress, corporate reconstruction, and imperial expansion; but it also ironically renewed slavery's presence in the setting of mass consumer culture, giving an unexpected foothold for oppositional and utopian responses to modern capital and empire.

The relationship between the memory of slavery and modernity has been given wide attention by historians, art historians, literary critics, anthropologists, and sociologists. Particularly for scholars of the Atlantic World, the memory of slavery is seen as a presence shaping the social formations, cultural practices, racial politics, and everyday life of post-Emancipation and postcolonial societies. This presence has been conceived of as having

without mediation by its post-Reconstruction context, see Steven Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), XX-XX.

Art historian Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw's recent study of Kara Walker's silhouette installations provides another example of this tension. In one chapter, Shaw argues that Walker's silhouettes are a site for the play of "nostalgic postmodernism"; the artist "redraw[s]" the self by revising the tradition of racial iconography of both collective commodification in the slave trade and communal "uplift" in ideologies of racial progress. Yet in the next chapter, the silhouettes are the "return of the repressed"; they seem to provide the grounds for collective consciousness of slavery, if not a referent to slavery itself, an antidote to the postmodernist play previously celebrated: "they remind us as postmoderns living in an increasing diverse image world, we are all haunted by slavery." *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 5, 24, 61.

³¹ Hazel V. Carby, "Ideologies of Black Folk: The Historical Novel of Slavery," in McDowell and Rampersad, eds., *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*, 125-143.

transformative even emancipatory possibilities. For Paul Gilroy, the memory of slavery is on one hand a memory of the inexpressibly violent trauma visited on black slaves by the scientific rationality of modernity; on the other hand, it is a political and aesthetic “instrument with which to construct a distinct interpretation of modernity. Whether or not these memories invoke the remembrance of terror which has moved beyond the grasp of ideal, grammatical speech, they point out of the present towards a utopian transformation of racial subordination.”³² For Rosalind Shaw, in her anthropology of present-day Sierra Leone, the memory of slavery is reproduced in cultural practices of divination, folding postcolonial globalization and the Atlantic slave trade into the same frame of “vampiric modernity.”³³ These stances assume the need to overcome the prevailing “forgetting” of slavery as an origin and formative phase for modernity. Philosopher Susan Buck-Morss, following the anthropologist and historian of Haiti Michel-Rolph Trouillot, recovers the Haitian slave revolt as a forgotten but formative moment in Hegel’s (and Western) universalist philosophy of freedom; recovering that memory is tantamount to recovering not a counter-modernity but “human universality...in the historical event at the point of rupture.”³⁴ Art historians such as Marcus Wood, and critics of contemporary art such as Darby

³² Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 71; and for his reading of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, 218-223. See also Braxton and Diedrich, eds., *Monuments of the Black Atlantic: Slavery and Memory*. A line of scholarship has followed Gilroy in thinking about slavery as the foundation of black consciousness experienced as a distinct temporality or chonotope within modernity (“counter-modernity”): Walter Johnson, “Time and Revolution in African America: Temporality and the History of Atlantic Slavery,” in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 148-167; Frank Kirkland, “Modernity and Intellectual Life in Black,” *Philosophical Forum* 24 (1992-1993), 136-65; Michael Hanchard, “Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora,” *Public Culture* 11.1 (1999), 245-268

³³ Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Though they both conceive of slavery as “interior” to modernity, Gilroy argues that the memory of slavery is a memory of a severance from an origin (therefore making black slaves the first modern, fragmented subject), whereas Shaw argues that the memory of slavery is an accretion, rather than a break, of historical experience. For a literary study which conceives of slavery’s presence as the result of “temporal accumulation” through the “long modernity” of global financial capital, from the eighteenth to twenty-first century, see Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

³⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 133; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*. See also Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. The implications of the history of slavery and emancipation for Hegelian, and more broadly Enlightenment and Western

English and Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, have made important inroads to recovering these connections through artworks and aesthetic artifacts, showing how representations of slavery can yield traces of their subject's modernity through aesthetic modes of revision and parody.³⁵ As classicist Page Dubois shows, through readings of material culture from ancient Greece and Rome, the figure of the slave was at the heart and horizon of modernity, an object "impossible" to represent yet ubiquitous for its malleable and reproducible form.³⁶

Though not taking memory as their central problematic, legal, labor, and intellectual historians have documented the waning influence of antislavery legislation in postbellum American life. In the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the ideal of universal liberty enshrined in the Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction Amendments became abridged by class and race, liberalism coming to rephrase freedom from bondage as the freedom of contract. African Americans who celebrated Jubilee in the 1860s had by the 1870s and 1880s seen their civil and political rights curtailed; those in the rural South became increasingly vulnerable to anti-black violence and subject to coercive labor contracts akin to slavery. As Michael Vorenberg suggests, postbellum Americans could believe in freedom by forgetting the troubling

philosophy, have been previously discussed in Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* and *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*; and Paterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

³⁵ Wood, *Blind Memory*, 142-178, for instance, considers the slave advertisement as a form that legitimizes the master's ownership over and commodification the slave, yet represents the slave as a sovereign human subject through descriptions of her physique, her escape, and often the physical markings of the master's violence. See also Albert Boime, *Art of Exclusion*; and for an apposite study of French painting of colonial subjects, including slaves, see Grigsby, *Extremities*. For an a portion of the immense art historical archive of slaves in Western art, see *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume One: From the American Revolution to World War II*, 2 parts (1989); and Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: the Black image in American art, 1710-1940* (San Francisco, Calif.: Bedford Arts, 1990). Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable* and English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, consider the silhouette installations of Kara Walker, which turn the racial tropes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone with the Wind* into a reimagining of the history of slavery and its "presence" today, particularly in for the identity and valuation of black work in the contemporary art market.

³⁶ Page Dubois, *Slaves and Other Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

legacy of slavery, “perhaps out of shame for having allowed slavery to survive so long.”³⁷

Though their key theme is the disappearance of the history of slavery from the mainstream of liberal ideology, these historians emphasize that slavery and the contradictions of emancipation were not simply “erased” from the mind of the modern American. If slavery was excluded from the triumphal narrative of American progress and freedom, it remained partly visible in the dark corners of the modern American life. In her study of postbellum political economy and social ideology, Amy Dru Stanley shows how the figure of the prostitute gained new meaning as an disturbing vestige of slavery at home in the world of free contract, a transitional figure between the age of emancipation and the coming of twentieth-century urban modernity. In the words of Saidiya Hartman, the “freedoms” of post-Emancipation capitalism required contact with historical slavery’s “scene of subjection.”³⁸

Perhaps to compensate for its disturbing, haunting, and shameful presence, the memory of slavery was not entirely forgotten; it gained striking visibility, even ubiquity, as an object of nostalgia and consumption. Slavery’s metamorphosis from memory into the historical productions of the emerging mass culture—particularly in advertising, theatre, literature, and folklore—has been detailed by a number of cultural historians.³⁹ David Blight’s analysis is especially helpful in clarifying the cultural service of the memory of slavery. In place of a morally and politically problematic history of slavery which threatened national narratives of

³⁷ Though as Foner and Stanley note, the rhetoric of slavery continued to animate the protests of organized labor, the Populists, and social reform. Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 115-137; Vorenberg, *Final Freedom*, 239-244; Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, *passim*.

³⁸ Stanley, *Bondage to Contract*. Histories such as Dylan Penningroth’s *The Claims of Kinfolk* and cultural studies such as Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* and Jessica Adams’s *Wounds of Returning* have considered the form of property as a site of memory and forgetting of slavery, both for its material connection to the past (e.g. the plantation) and for its abstract equation between ownership of things and self-possession. See also Sven Beckert’s study of the consolidation of the Manhattan bourgeoisie suggests the significant relays between the politics of Reconstruction and the cultural power of the urban aristocracy: *Monied Metropolis*.

³⁹ Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy*; Van Deburg, *Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture*; Smith, *Slavery, Race, and American History*.

progress and reunion, Americans preserved slavery as a premodern idyll which was both distantly past and ever-present myth. Nostalgic fantasies like *Uncle Remus* and *Black America* compensated for the elision of slavery from national memory: “How could a nation reunify itself by telling its epic through the experience of slavery and its consequences? Far better to root the new national narrative in a heritage of mutual heroism and in yearning for a lost civilization crushed by industrialization and an unavoidable war.” In Blight’s analysis, the memory of slavery was a fatality of modernity, of which national reconciliation was only one mode. Blight writes of the period following the end of Reconstruction as “[t]he age of machines, rapid urbanization, and labor unrest [which] produced a huge audience for a literature of escape into a pre-Civil War, exotic South that, all but ‘lost,’ was the object of enormous nostalgia.” Vital for the realization of these “sentimental, imaginative journeys Southward” was the figure of the “faithful slave,” who functioned in this literature not only as a guide to antimodern escape but also as a narrator of sectional reunion.⁴⁰

By considering the modernity of the memory of slavery, this dissertation will contribute to the historiographical debate about the nature of memory in turn-of-the-century “cultural transformation.” On one hand, the cultural reproductions of slavery served as an object of nostalgia and confirmed notions of American progress and racial hierarchy. As cultural historian T. J. Jackson Lears has described it, the turn-of-the-century world seemed “unreal,” historical experience seemed “weightless,” and Americans with positions of cultural authority attempted to rejuvenate their hegemony with “antimodern” imagery and “authentic” experience. Yet, as Lears

⁴⁰ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 313, 211. For the rise of nostalgic plantation literature in the popular literary market, see 211-254; for the dilemmas faced by African Americans in making their individual and collective memories of slavery public, see 311-319. See also Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*; Brundage, *The Southern Past*. Blight suggests an economy of national memory akin to Benedict Anderson’s (and Ernest Renan’s), in which the memory of collective solidarity precludes—forgets—dissenting memories of antagonism and violence from the national historical imagination. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; and Renan, “What Is a Nation?”

additionally argues, this “antimodern” impulse by a Northeastern bourgeoisie rehearsed the process by which Americans would come to accept modernity—especially the “unreal” forms of mass consumption—as the source of “authentic” experience.⁴¹

Yet the haunting memory of slavery, and the often spectral presence of their cultural reproduction, suggest that they could be sites not only for renewing the cultural hegemony of bourgeois elites but also for limited possibilities of cultural opposition. Historian James Livingston has argued that the “weightless” world of urban modernity and mass consumer culture made possible the fashioning of subjectivities that were determined neither by the specter of the traditional republican freeholder nor the looming “management” of the self by industrial automation; the modern self instead had the freedom of the advertisement or “modern credit, refer[ing] less to any particular or substantial use values than to the imagined and unrealized desires that commodities signified as the apparatus of autobiography.” The romantic excess generated by the credit economy and represented by the form of the advertisement signaled the possibility of “cultural revolution.” The tenor of historical change compelled “the invention of social roles that neither the corporate bureaucracies nor the category of productive labor could accommodate”; and modernist actors (pragmatically “artificial persons”), instead of succumbing to the deadening constraints of the corporate-managerial ethos, could “stand at the heart of contemporary change, and accordingly to grasp the possibilities residing in both the disintegrating past and the impending future.”⁴²

⁴¹ Lears, *No Place of Grace*. See also Robert Weibe, *The Search for Order*; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*.

⁴² Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution*, 57-83, 132-180; quotations on 148, 177. Livingston amplifies the implications of Martin Sklar’s argument that the rise of corporate capital required “a broad capitalist-socialist, reformer-revolutionary, intellectual consensus” and a capacious social movement which legitimated the revolutionary power of the corporation in a distinctly American liberal tradition; the movement “transpose[ed] the concept of freedom from its old moorings in the self-employed producer to the new environs of the self-reliant worker accorded equality of opportunity.” The corporate reorganization compelled modernist capacity to wrench transcendent value out of the flux of rapidly accelerating history, “the perennial search for

The memory of slavery and its cultural reproduction offers a unique site with which to consider the question of cultural transformation and revolution. It questions specifically the relationship between memory, history, and modernity in the age of capital and empire. In the form of the plantation romance, the memory of slavery could satisfy nostalgic, antimodernist longings for pre-industrial tranquility and racial order; but the excessive, theatrical, and spectral productions which delivered this fantasy in popular literature, theatre, film, and advertisement compelled audiences and producers to encounter the past aesthetically, cognitively, and even erotically.⁴³ As historians of American memory show, the “politics of memory” included not only conflict over the enumeration of events from the past, but also anxiety and experiment with the distended and disembodied ways the past was being represented and marketed.⁴⁴ Considered this way, the “weightlessness” of turn-of-the-century historical experience appears less of a lapse than a shifting of the ground on which historical memory could be constructed and contested. That ties to the past were increasingly mediated by forms of cultural reproduction did not prevent the possibility of for new styles of memory to be created. Historian George Lipsitz argues that collective memories of traditional social forms survived their translation into mass culture, and literary scholar Alison Landsberg argues that the mechanical reproduction of memories, such as African American slavery, allowed them to be “prosthethically” experienced by mass audiences.⁴⁵ At the same time, the memory of slavery carried with it the haunting possibility of an economy

order...the handmaiden of the perennial impulse of American corporate capitalism to disruption and change.” See *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism*, 431-441; quotations on 439, 437.

⁴³ One especially vivid example of the far-reaching influence of cultural reproductions of slavery is offered by Karen Halttunen in her study of humanitarian depictions of violence: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in addition to satisfying nostalgic longings for the lost plantation, also aroused erotic desires in its turn-of-the-century transatlantic bourgeois readership, including in the patients of Sigmund Freud. See Halttunen, “Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture,” *AHR* 100.2 (April 1995), 331.

⁴⁴ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*; Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War*; Fahs and Waugh, eds., *The Memory of Civil War in American Culture*; Gilbert, *Whose Fair?*; Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*; Railton, *Contesting the Past, Reconstructing the Nation*.

⁴⁵ Lipsitz, *Time Passages*; Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.

sustained by the commodification of people; if abolition outlawed the practice, the metamorphosis of people into things seemed to return, and even be embraced, in the displaced cultural forms of the corporate economy. The ubiquity of the cultural reproduction of slavery must therefore be measured against the ambivalence with which postbellum Americans regarded the history of slavery. The cultural reproduction of slavery coalesced longings for memory and the impulse for modernity into a symbol potent for modernity's constraints on American freedom.

In studying the cultural reproduction of slavery, this dissertation therefore also queries the history of American modernism. It posed the hazards of the "modernist impulse" in stark terms: by turning the memory of slavery into a cultural product, producers and audiences could fantasize about returning to the era before slave emancipation while at the same time experimenting with ways to "emancipate" themselves from the burdens of the past. This dissertation understands modernism as a spectrum of cultural responses emerging at the end of the nineteenth century not only to changing historical conditions but to changing experiences of history itself. It follows historians and cultural critics who have variously considered it as a genre of self-consciously innovative cognitive and aesthetic styles of perception and representation of the present; as an ideology staking the "new" against the "old"; and as a product of the rapid transformations in economy and society wrought by burgeoning capitalism and imperial expansion.⁴⁶ As Americans in the 1860s and 1870s managed their contradictory desires to witness slavery and unburden its claims on the nation's historical conscious in the spectral forms

⁴⁶ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Raymond Williams, "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism," in *Politics of Modernism*, 37-48. See also Lears, *No Place of Grace*, in which the oppositional possibilities of American antimodernism are absorbed into a "therapeutic culture" appropriate for corporate capitalism and its modes of mass consumption and empire. However, Lears focuses on the psychological responses of New England bourgeois elites, and their preservation of cultural hegemony, rather than on the cultural minorities in the metropolis, and the creation of new aesthetic forms.

cultural reproduction, they anticipated the emergence of what Dorothy Ross, in her interpretation of turn-of-the-century “modernist impulse” in the arts and social sciences, calls the “freedom of artifice”:

If aesthetic modernists, having denied the power of history and nature to yield values for the present, celebrated the artificial, the freely created art of the modern person, so too American social scientists’ technocratic science was premised on the denial of the normative foundation of nature and history and on the hope of recreating the human world.⁴⁷

American modernists—whether literary artists, historians, or sociologist—took the memory of slavery both as an ideal object of reproduction and as a problematic reminder of an anomalous past. The memory of slavery evoked in the forms of cultural reproduction falls into the categories of the “spectral,” “supplemental” or “enchanted” recently pursued by historians of modernity. “It may be that memory,” writes historical theorist Alan Megill, “has emerged in part as a response to an anxiety arising from the failure of modernity, with its focus on the pursuit of the new, to provide an adequate account of what is past yet continues to haunt the present.”⁴⁸

Even when the slave was presented in the mythic setting of an racially harmonious plantation

⁴⁷ Dorothy Ross, “Modernist Social Science in the Land of the New/Old,” in Ross, ed., *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 187.

⁴⁸ Alan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, 57. My conception of the history of slavery as a “supplementary” rather than simply forgotten history draws from related work in Subaltern Studies, especially Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), ch.4: “Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts,” 97-113. See also Michael Saler, “Modernity and Enchantment,” *AHR* 111.3 (June 2006), 692-716. For haunting as “not other or alterity as such,” but “pregnant with unfilled possibility” and desires for the present—and slavery specifically as a haunting presence in the American sociological imagination, revealed particularly in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987)—see Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), quotation on p. 183. However, Gordon’s reading of *Beloved* seems to elide the difference between the historical context of its subject matter (the 1850s-70s) and its writing and reception (the 1980s).

This line of thought follows from Jacques Derrida’s critique of the history of language in *Of Grammatology* [trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (corrected ed., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)], particularly pp. 140-164, in which he shows that a reading of a text (in this case Rousseau’s *Confessions*) will not arrive at a reference “outside” the text but instead can only follow the chain of supplements by which the text constitutes its references to the real. These supplements mark the difference of the “real” but also exceed it and threaten its transcendent identity. Derrida’s later work demonstrate the work of “dangerous supplements” of historical difference—the specter, the archive—to constitute but also to interrupt and make demands on the “present”: *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

landscape, it referenced a history that was not yet past, that was still occurring in the modern “present.” The cultural reproduction slavery had the potential to interrupt and supplement the experience of post-Emancipation modernity even as the history of slavery was “forgotten” in public commemoration of the nation’s history.

The ambivalence of the memory of slavery in the historiography of cultural transformation and revolution can be helpfully supplemented by African American cultural history of the period. Because slavery was not simply erased or forgotten, but rather reproduced in cultural forms, it became a part of and had lasting influence on American cultural life. Even though, as David Blight observes, the voices and memories of ex-slaves were excluded from the national memory (and seemed to be a topic often avoided by ex-slaves themselves), the market for the cultural reproduction of slavery sought out “authentic” representations of black slave culture and the “real” memories of ex-slaves, however scripted or framed by white racial desires and scientific criteria for historical knowledge.⁴⁹ As Eric Sundquist has shown, the cultural memory of slavery was a marketable commodity and a productive force. While popular depictions of slaves did reinforce racial hierarchies and violence, capacious conceptions and representations of slave culture could also provide African American literary artists and performers a reservoir for creative production and their white audiences with novel experiences.⁵⁰ Cultural historian Susan Curtis, in her biography of ragtime musician Scott Joplin, and literary scholar Michael North, in his study of the influence of racial dialect on the development of literary modernism, for instance, show that residues of slave culture, real and imagined, were powerfully entwined with the making of both highbrow and lowbrow modern

⁴⁹ Indeed, the popularity of reproduced memories of slavery continued a tradition of American racial masquerade, which cultural and labor historians have proved to be essential hedging the power of radical political dissent in times of rapid economic transformation. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; and Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*

⁵⁰ Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*.

American culture.⁵¹ As literary scholars have shown, the postbellum writers who sought a new American literary language attempted to bring African American slave culture under the gaze of objective study in the transcription of folklore and literary rendering of “negro dialect”; a later generation of literary modernists found in the history of slavery a reservoir of ahistoric linguistic play and a counter-history of autochthonic self-generation.⁵²

An important arm for the production and reception of memories of slavery were a rising generation of “New Negroes” who found in slavery a useful but vexed resource for cultural advancement and political opposition. Many African Americans, committed to ideologies of racial uplift and progress, were at best ambivalent about being associated with slave culture and the expressive forms of a growing black urban life; vaudevillians such as George Walker and Bert Williams, writers such as Charles Chesnutt and Paul Dunbar, and musicians such as Joplin and J. Rosamond Johnson, walked a fine line between marketing their value as purveyors of historically “authentic” black culture and representing racial progress.⁵³ Black women intellectuals such as Francis Harper, Ida Wells, Pauline Hopkins, and Anna Julia Cooper were especially invested in the difficulties of fashioning “modern” identities as authors while constructing narratives of slavery.⁵⁴ Recent historical studies by Jacqueline Stewart and Davarian Baldwin have also shown the importance of vaudeville and film spectatorship for black urban audiences who were dexterous at producing alternative and oppositional meanings out of the techniques of mass cultural production.⁵⁵

⁵¹ North, *The Dialect of Modernism*; Curtis, *Dancing to a Black Man’s Tune*.

⁵² Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*; Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*; North, *The Dialect of Modernism*; Michaels, *Our America*.

⁵³ Gates, “The Trope of the New Negro”; Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*.

⁵⁴ Claudia Tate; Hazel V. Carby; Goldsby.

⁵⁵ Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*; Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*.

Historians from fields of African American cultural production and of French mass culture, colonial and racial ideology, and modernism have analyzed the complex dynamics by which black Americans sought out racial egalitarianism abroad, while French received American racial iconography as emblems of American modernity and African American slave culture. Though this historiography focuses on the period following World War I, which saw an enormous influx of African American servicemen to Europe, it is clear that imaginary and material traffic in memories of slavery had a significant prehistory in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁶ The “spectacles” of race and empire manufactured for the domestic mass market, as historians of American imperial culture have shown, helped to sanction and naturalize imperial adventures abroad, Jim Crow racial segregation at home, and the alienating effects of corporate capitalism through modern technologies of mass reproduction. While historical and cultural studies of the confluence between American empire and corporate culture in this period has received extensive and recent attention, the significance of the memory of slavery as a key product of and for the imperial market—and perhaps as a space for imagining its implications on everyday life and conceiving dissenting alternatives—has not received full attention.⁵⁷ However, literary scholars of local color and regional fiction, especially of the South, are providing potential inroads for understanding the memory of slavery as a product of the “cultural field of empire.” Insofar as the “Reconstruction South served as a rehearsal or a training ground for the

⁵⁶The French case has the most extensive historiography but is also an important point of comparison because for its contemporary experience with empire and mass culture and for its particular legacies with slavery and emancipation. For the French fascination with African Americans in relation to anxiety about colonial racism and to the development of aesthetic modernism, see Archer-Shaw, *Negrophilia*; Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir*; Blanchard et al., *Le Paris noir*; Holt and Auslander, “Sambo in Paris.”

⁵⁷Lears suggestively describes plantation-fantasy “coon songs” and the exhibitions of colonial subjects at the Chicago (1893) and St. Louis (1904) world fairs as “advertisements” for Jim Crow racism domestically and imperialism abroad, though he does not probe what these American advertisements would have meant in France or South Africa, nor why bohemian white Americans would fantasize about witnessing them across the Atlantic; *Rebirth of a Nation*, 287-88. For the traffic and reception of American cultural imperialism abroad, see DeGrazia, *Irresistible Empire*; Rydell and Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*. For the reception of foreign empire and its affect on everyday life in the United States, see Bender, *A Nation among Nations*; Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire*; Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium*; Rauchway, *Blessed among Nations*; Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*.

hemispheric expansion of US power,” then the early cultural reproductions of slavery following Emancipation might also be considered less reflections of retrograde and nostalgic sensibilities than as fantastical projections of the future power of American capital and empire.⁵⁸

In other words: as the American nation tested and shaped its modern productive and expansive energies, its cultural producers expanded their field to include slavery as an emblem of the historical and racial other but also as a perfect object for cultural innovation. What did it mean for modernizing Americans to present the “new scene” of history in the “borrowed language” of slavery?

IV. Methodology and Approach: The Production of History, Culture, and Memory

As the nation reconstructed its culture in the half-century after Emancipation, Americans felt the impulse to witness slavery in the present even as they attempted to contain its threatening implications for the nation’s historical identity. The task of reproduction fell to the writers, performers, critics, and social scientists who, as they followed their impulse to reproduce slavery, attempted to navigate, resist, and experiment with various transforming fields of cultural production. These memories of slavery were produced far from the sites of former plantations and slave auction houses, mainly in Northern metropolitan centers—from their bohemian enclaves to their academic institutions—that were also producing the “new.” To explain this

⁵⁸ The quotations are from Jennifer Rae Greeson, “Expropriating *The Great South* and Exporting “Local Color”: Global and Hemispheric Imaginaries of the First Reconstruction,” *American Literary History* 18.3 (2006), 497, 515. Greeson, appropriating Albion Tourgée’s metaphors of colonial extraction in “The South as a Field of Fiction,” focuses on the experience of the defeated white South, rather than on the experience of black slavery and emancipation, as a “mine” for national myth, though the thrust of Tourgée’s essay is to include the black slave and freedman in national literature. For other recent literary and cultural studies of the Reconstruction and “New” South as a “rehearsal” of American commercial and imperial expansion—where what is extracted and exported is not only raw materials and consumables but also myth and fantasy—see Duck, *The Nation’s Region*; Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi*; Patterson, *Race, American Literature, and Transnational Modernisms*; Stanonis, ed., *Dixie Emporium*; Stecopoulos, *Reconstructing the World*; Wexler, *Tender Violence*. For the classic historical account, see Foner, *Reconstruction*; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*; and Gaston, *The New South Creed*.

congruence means asking more than how slavery was represented in visual, material, and literary cultures. Instead this dissertation will probe slavery's place in the intersection of processes which anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot calls the "production of history" and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls "the field of cultural production." As the advance of modernity called into being the need for the production and sanitization of difficult pasts, so did the memory of slavery help produce and shape new cultural forms of representing the past.

To analyze this dual motion, this dissertation's methodological framework will hazard the tension between history as a context for the production of culture, and culture as a "habitus" or "field" for the production of history. Historical anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot has noted the tension between the dual meaning of history as "what happened" (historicity 1) and the story or knowledge of what happened (historicity 2). The historical production of slavery at the turn of the century was a historical event in both senses: it was a story which took as its referent the past of slavery in the southern states.⁵⁹ But it was also a "happening" in itself, an activity by which postbellum cultural producers attempted to position themselves within and reorganize the hierarchy of contemporary culture through the use of the image of the slave. This level of historical production might be helpfully understood as what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls a "field" of cultural production. The "field" is embedded in, but separate from, Trouillot's conception of history as both a process of social power and as a retrospective narration of that process for social power. An agent of cultural production (a writer, artist, or critic) seeking to establish cultural authority or accrue cultural capital does so by taking a position within the field,

⁵⁹ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 17-19. Though observing that in the present-day United States the impact of slavery as a story (memory, trauma, or analytic reference) outweighs the quantitatively smaller impact of slavery as it "happened" (compared to Brazil and the Caribbean colonies, which imported far greater numbers of African slaves and whose entire societies were organized around the maintenance of the plantation slave system), Trouillot also points out that the history of slavery was "silenced" in the half-century immediately following Emancipation. Trouillot phrases the question succinctly: "Why is the symbolic relevance of slavery as trauma and the analytical relevance of slavery as a sociohistorical explanation so much more prevalent today in the United States than in Brazil or the Caribbean?" (18).

which has been defined by positions previously taken. As a cultural producer seeks to advance a wholly new position, the field reorients the meaning of the positions which came before. In effect, history is both “immanent to the functioning of the field,” and the object which producers and consumers must possess and re-orient “to meet [its] objective demands” of production.⁶⁰ New cultural positions hazard the production of new cultural histories. This schema helps to frame the historical parallax posed by the unique “position” taken by reproductions of slavery in culture. To produce a history of slavery meant narrating “what happened” in order to express the social power to reinforce the ideological boundaries of what was “thinkable” as history; yet these productions were also enmeshed in fields of cultural production which made “history” both more ubiquitous in appearance and malleable in form.⁶¹

This dissertation thus takes a different approach from the more familiar studies of the “politics of memory” in American culture.⁶² It investigates the memory of slavery in the context of the changing cultural conditions by which memory was produced. This is not to trivialize political discourse and ideology in the shaping of memory, but rather to emphasize the “unconscious” motivations which shape the symbolic language of cultural politics—an “unconscious” originating particularly in the context of turn-of-the-century modernity. This

⁶⁰ Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production,” 60-61.

⁶¹ My gloss exploits a slight difference between Bourdieu and Trouillot’s conceptions of production, though they are not necessarily foreign to one another. Indeed, Bourdieu’s division of history into fields of social relationships, power (institutions), and cultural production, seems to undergird Trouillot’s own division of history into process of “what happened” and “what is said to have happened.” This might be a long way of saying that history itself could be contested and remade on the level of culture creation rather than, or in addition to, political practice. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework suggests parallels between the creation of aesthetic value in the field of cultural production (as different from economic value in the field of class relations), and the way in which historic value was similarly preserved against the forces of commerce in the age of “invented traditions.” What makes history believable in an age when capital revolutionizes ties to the past? Perhaps, like the work of art, protected historical value was/is protected by an “authorless trickery” of its field of production which is only momentarily unconcealed by critical scrutiny: “if the pleasure of the love of art has its source in unawareness of producing the source of what produces it, then it is understandable that one might, by another willing suspension of disbelief, choose to ‘venerate’ the authorless trickery which places the fragile fetish beyond the reach of critical lucidity” (73).

⁶² See, for instance, Blight, *Race and Reunion*; and Savage, *Standing Soldier, Kneeling Slave*, which illuminate the manifold political and motivations behind the cultural production of memory.

dissertation takes its cues partly from cultural historian Matt K. Matsuda's illuminating study of the novel forms of memory produced in sites of the modern in *fin-de-siècle* France; from the stock market to early cinema to the contemporary vogue of the Argentinean tango, metropolitan France grappled with the exuberant but often unreal modes of experiencing the past in the midst of accelerating commercial, financial, and imperial expansion.⁶³ [This dissertation also draws on cultural critics who have explored the implications of Marx's observations about the repetition of historical forms in the midst of historical change, particularly Walter Benjamin and Frederic Jameson.⁶⁴ **Expand?**] Most proximate to the locales and problems of this dissertation, American studies scholar Jacqueline Goldsby offers an instructive model for how we might comprehend the difficult congruence between the retrograde and the modern in her study of the representations of lynching in turn-of-the-century cultural production. Organized around specific genres of cultural production, Goldsby's *A Spectacular Secret* demonstrates through close readings of literature and photography in contexts of professionalizing social science and emerging mass culture, that a "cultural logic" tied together "anti-black mob murders" in the South to wider "registers of the nation's ambivalences attending its nascent modernism." Though Goldsby focuses on the distortions of our sense of historical time caused by the contemporary convergence of lynching and cultural modernity, her analytic strategy of reading history "out" of cultural products—particularly literary genres—has particular resonance for uncovering an alternative engagement with the past which may not be apparent from their manifest functions or content. "Gaps" and "silences" within the attempted narratives of the history of slavery might

⁶³ Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern*; see also Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade*, for an apposite anthropological study of present-day Sierra Leone, which argues that slavery is remembered less in a discursive political representation than in cultural practice.

⁶⁴ See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "Theses on the Philosophy of History"; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*.

themselves comprise historical evidence, a trace or residue of an unspoken genealogy between slavery and the modern.⁶⁵

V. Sources and Research Strategy

My research goals are to reconstruct the processes by which slavery was transformed from a memory into a tangible cultural product; and to illuminate how these products shaped the way Americans responded to modernity. Towards the first aim, I will rely on a mix of sources, from the cultural products themselves to the biographical (memoir and correspondence) accounts of their making, institutional records of their marketing and sale, and critical accounts of their consumption. The second aim will require critical readings of the products themselves, treating them not as inert reflections of the processes of their production but rather as “texts” (whether a visual advertisements, a work of literature, or historiography) in “dialogical” relationship to their historical contexts.⁶⁶ I will restrict my research to several cases emblematic of certain fields of cultural production and of key periods of transformation, in which the memory of slavery materializes at the same time with the appearance of new aesthetic and cognitive forms. Aunt Jemima (c. 1889-1893) appeared at the advent of corporate advertising; *Black America* (1894) at the crossroads of minstrelsy’s diffusion into vaudeville and cinema; *Uncle Remus* (c. 1876) at the cusp of the popularization and professionalization of folklore studies; *Huckleberry Finn* (1876-1885) in the nationalizing literary market; and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) at the waxing of “modernism” in professional historical science.

By conceiving these as “cases,” I mean to treat each as a vehicle to illuminate a wider field of cultural work—how the creative expression of a writer or performer was enmeshed in

⁶⁵ Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 24, 34-35.

⁶⁶ See Dominick LaCapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,” in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*, 23-71.

social relationships of production and responded to previous efforts to incorporate slavery into American culture. Literary products in this period have left partial or full correspondence between authors and editors, for whom the marketing and sale of even the most “highbrow” books required deft management. W. E. B. Du Bois’s correspondence with Francis G. Browne, editor at A. C. McClurg & Co. in Chicago, for example, reveals that the chapter most focused on the memory of slavery—“The Sorrow Songs”—was made at Browne’s urging and the last to be composed.⁶⁷ Often, the whole range of activity which went into the production of a theatrical performance can be recovered. Nathan Salsbury’s *Black America* of 1894, for instance, stands as a capstone of the “modernization” of blackface minstrelsy into a professional extravaganza while also revealing the tensions between the managers, performers, and critics who joined to reproduce slavery as a modern spectacle: Salsbury’s papers at Yale, a memoir of one of its African American performers, the famous minstrel Tom Fletcher, and critical accounts of its reception in the *Boston Globe* and *New York Times*.⁶⁸ An important and hoped-for outcome will be not only to identify the role played by African Americans in the cultural reproduction of slavery, but also to recover their perspectives, desires, and agency: what did it mean to be asked to image, embody, and voice slavery for a modernizing American culture?

In pursuit of these aims, this dissertation has completed research in the Newberry Library, Princeton University, the New York Public Library, and Columbia University; has secured funds for a research trip in March 2011 to Yale; and will require future trips to Columbia, Schomburg, and the NYPL Performing Arts Libraries in New York City and the Library of Congress and the Washaw Collection of Business Americana at the Smithsonian in

⁶⁷ See A. C. McClurg & Co. Records, Newberry Library, Chicago; and W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (microfilm).

⁶⁸ Nathan Salsbury Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; the script for *Black America* is housed at the Harris Collection of American Poetry and Plays, Brown University Library; Tom Fletcher’s memoir is published as *100 Years of the Negro in Show Business* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984).

Washington, D.C. The trips to New York and Washington would ideally be conducted over two separate summers (after my fourth and fifth years), but can also be done piecemeal during breaks between quarters, depending on what funding is available. If funding and time allow, I will also try to consult the ephemera collection at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Mass. (Please see the bibliography for a detailed list.) Much of this dissertation's source base consists of published material, from novels to authors' correspondence, to serials (in Regenstein and digitized on ProQuest), which I can study and consult while in Chicago.

VI. Chapter Outline

- **Prelude: Histories, 1863**

This dissertation will begin with a brief survey of how Americans on the eve of abolition and during the "emancipation moment" thought about a future memory of slavery as they envisioned an America without slaves. Before Lincoln asked a nation to consider the sin of "American slavery" in his second inaugural address, cultural critics and producers including Alexander de Tocqueville, Theodore Parker, Walt Whitman, and the performers and audiences of blackface revues in the urban North, had considered slavery as object and other of American modernity. Closely tied to the political culture of abolitionism, on one hand, and of working class popular culture, on the other, the antebellum cultural reproduction of slavery, as it produced both the authentic (in the slave narrative) and the inauthentic (blackface minstrelsy), presented slavery as the antithesis of freedom and progress as it entwined racial difference into the modern American identity. As slavery was made illegal and the figure of the slave an anachronism, how would Americans understand their nation's history with slavery and how would they comprehend their culture without it?

- **Chapter 1: Images (Advertising)**

This chapter will consider the wide reproduction of slavery in visual culture: in cartoons, in photographs and stereograph views, culminating in advertisements for the products of mass consumption (Aunt Jemima). It asks how the image of pastoral slavery which emerged in the 1870s compensated for the cultural "loss" of slavery through nostalgia and racial caricature; and how these images became allied in the 1880s and 1890s with the rise of corporate industry. The reach of the reproducible image of the slave across the postbellum cultural landscape provides an ideal initial site in which to test the project's claims about the memory of slavery was appropriated for the production of the new. It will track the wide cultural implications of this transition in two novels serialized in the *Century Magazine* in 1884-6: Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, its ironic narrative of emancipation in tense relationship with its production (begun in 1876) and marketing

(illustrated by the racial caricaturist E. W. Kemble); and Henry James's *The Bostonians*, which represents sectional duel over the meaning of slavery between the ex-slaveholding and ex-abolitionist protagonists through narrating the transformation of a young feminist protégé into a "walking advertisement"—a prescient counter-image to the former-slave Nancy Green making Aunt Jemima's "live" debut at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

- **Chapter 2: Bodies (Theater)**

Americans sought productions of slavery in which its "image" in visual and material culture would be matched by "live" reenactments. This chapter will examine how slavery was embodied by white and black performers on the stage. Following the evolution of staged performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the chapter will first track the transformations in the venues and techniques of performance itself, from blackface minstrelsy (professional and later amateur), to vaudeville and early cinema, and as it intersected and fostered "vogues" of cakewalk and ragtime. It will supplement the history of these formal evolutions with the history of the performers themselves, turning to *Black America* as a contested co-production of slavery with African American minstrels, vaudevillians, musicians, and dancers whose careers took them from the rural South to Northern cities, Europe, and Africa. Drawing on critical accounts of black performers by white avant-garde critics—Hamlin Garland, editors of *M'lle New York*, and Carl Van Vechten—the chapter will conclude by asking how audiences reconciled the witnessing of slavery with its evident modernity in the work of urban, cosmopolitan African American performers with the most modern of theatrical techniques.

- **Chapter 3: Minds (Folklore)**

This chapter will explain the American interest in reconstructing the "mind" of the slave (often phrased as "negro genius") in the context of the late-nineteenth century fascination with and professionalized study of folklore. Like that of the Medieval mystic and the Indian, the world of the slave was constructed as a repository of antimodern experiences and sensations of magic, superstition, and the unreal. Beginning with abolitionist missionaries compiling the songs of freed slaves in wartime South Carolina Sea Islands (published in 1867) and continuing through the professional folklorists in the American Folk-Lore Society (founded 1888), the Yet by indulging in the "irrational" lifeways of slaves, Americans raised difficult questions about the nation's real relationship with freed African Americans, who were the necessary interlocutors for their own "folk" life. This relationship could be used by elite African Americans to argue for the value of black folklife to the race and the nation, such as in Daniel Murray's curation of "Negro Genius" at the U.S. pavilion at the Paris Exposition of 1900. But it could also hazard disturbing equations between the slave mind and the mind of the modern black urbanite, such as hazarded in James D. Corrother's *Black Cat Club* (1900). The folklore of slavery not only served the purposes of an antimodern impulse, it also conjured the presence of slavery at the heart of urban modernity.

- **Chapter 4: Voices (Literature)**

This chapter will follow the reconstruction of the "mind" of the slave folk to the

particular problem of incorporating the voice of the slave into American literature. The construction of a literary slave was a matter of wide import for cultural elites who sought to make postbellum American art authentic, real, or modern; it involved discussion by writers about the proper technique of transcribing the voice of the slave into "negro dialect" readable on the page. This transcription took shape in the 1880s in the context of a burgeoning literary market for "local color" fiction and in public debate about the verisimilitude and social uses of realism, naturalism, and romance. While the authentic "voice" of the black folk was seen an antidote to the reproducible and heavily marketed images of slaves and to the circulating bodies of African Americans who were appearing at the center of popular American culture, the techniques of its reproduction and the racial and historical difference of its subject matter made it a particularly valuable but unattainable aesthetic object. Focusing on episodes of literary production and reception--Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Charles Chesnutt's *Conjure Tales*, to the construction of the "Sorrow Song" in W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*--this chapter will show how these writers attempted to preserve a "voice" of slavery against the traffic of images of slaves and the social "problem" of free African Americans.

- **Chapter 5: Memories (Historiography)**

This chapter will ask how the professional historicization of slavery worked to differentiate its objective project from subjective "memory"; it corresponded with a formative moment in the making of the discipline as well as a broader "crisis" of historicism. It will follow the work of professionally-trained Ph.Ds in history who attempted to incorporate the history of slavery into national history while containing its difficult "presence" in contemporary life: Ulrich B. Phillips, Frederic Bancroft, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Among the first cohort of "professional historians," they each made research trips to the South from the 1880s to the 1910s whether to archive plantation records (Phillips), interview former slaves and slaveowners and photograph former plantations and auction blocks (Bancroft), or to experience the "poetry" of the slave song and the "present-past" of the landscape (Du Bois). In confronting the "presence" of slavery these historians hazarded the unclaimed modernism of slavery's cultural reproduction anathema to both the "ideal" of objectivity.

- **Coda: Futures, 1913**

The fiftieth anniversary of Emancipation coincided with the ending of one cultural moment but also yielded glimmers of the one to come. On the eve of the First World War, Woodrow Wilson promised a "New Freedom" on the campaign trail; and New York's 69th Regiment Armory hosted the International Exhibition of Modern Art which introduced Picasso, Braque, and Duchamp to American viewers. Though each promised "emancipation" from the political, intellectual, and aesthetic conventions of the past, though they left unacknowledged any reference to the place of racial slavery and emancipation in the shaping of the modern nation. While the moral and political meaning of slavery was unevenly honored and commemorated, the generation of images, bodies, minds, and voices of slavery continued in popular culture, mass entertainment, high literature, and in the social sciences. W. E. B. Du Bois staged a pageant of African American progress on a huge scale in *The Star of Ethiopia*, which included a lengthy

procession of American slavery ("The Valley of Humiliation"); D. W. Griffith began to adapt and film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). The slave was a continuous symbol throughout the transformation of culture from the Civil War to the turn of the century; and it would remain present in the modernisms, black and white, of the 1920s and 1930s, from William Faulkner and Jean Toomer to the Atlantic audience that continued to find its own modern meanings in the American reproduction of slavery.