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Constituting Antebellum African American Identity: Resistance, Violence, and Masculinity in Henry Highland Garnet's (1843) "Address to the Slaves"

James Jasinski

In August 1843 Presbyterian minister Henry Highland Garnet delivered his "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" to the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, NY. While often read (and almost as often dismissed) as either an unqualified call for a violent slave rebellion or, at the least, a celebration of prior acts of militant resistance which suggested that such methods deserved further consideration than they were currently receiving, the "Address" might profitably be approached within the context of an identity–action dialectic. Garnet's discussion of resistance and violence is more complicated than many scholars have recognized; one way in which we might recuperate these contested ideas and recognize their implications for African American identity and agency is to examine the way Garnet engaged and negotiated some of the antebellum African American community's dominant discursive traditions. The image and the accompanying idiom of a frequently submissive, emasculated "suffering servant" as well as the image/idiom of a violent, potentially brutish "avenging messiah" have long occupied prominent positions in the African American cultural imagination. Garnet's "Address" negotiated the disjunctive logics of submission/resistance, emasculation/brutish violence, and "suffering servant"/"avenging messiah" by drawing on and exploiting the resources of these and other performative traditions in order to fashion a tertium quid, a middle course of action capable of constituting a new mode of African American agency and an alternative form of civic identity.

Keywords: Henry Highland Garnet; African American Identity; Resistance; Nonresistance; African American Masculinity; Performative Traditions

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Introduction

Approximately one month after he assumed editorial responsibility for the *Colored American* in 1837, the Rev. Samuel Cornish composed an editorial addressed to “Our Brethren in the Free States.” In the editorial’s second paragraph he identified what he took to be the central question for the free northern African American community: “What manner of people ought we to be?”¹ Cornish’s question explicitly acknowledged a crucial issue in the African American public sphere: the dialectical relationship between civic identity and action. Who and what the free northern African Americans and the African American community might be or become depended on the forms of collective conduct in which individuals as well as specific communities engaged, while at the same time the forms of conduct or courses of action individuals and communities could imagine and undertake depended on their incipient self-understanding of who they were and what place they occupied in the early republic.

Through convention speeches and addresses, sermons, other occasional addresses, newspaper editorials, and letters reprinted in abolitionist publications, the free northern African American community engaged, if only indirectly, Cornish’s question. Scholars studying this community have described a fundamental tension which structured how its members responded to Cornish’s query and negotiated the identity–action dialectic. Surveying the scholarly literature prior to 1980, George Levesque argued that interpretations of antebellum African American ideology have emphasized an integration/assimilation vs. emigration/nationalism antithesis. But this dichotomy, Levesque maintained, “has serious shortcomings as a typology for studying black life. . . . These seeming polarities,” he continued, “did not begin to exhaust the strategic possibilities of black people during the antebellum years.”² More recent scholarship has abandoned a narrow integrationist/nationalist interpretive frame as it has more carefully probed the various controversies and disputes that animated the free African American community (e.g. issues such as emigration, boycotting products of slave labor, self help projects, organizational “names,” organizational inclusivity, etc.). The resulting body of scholarship discloses some of the important modes of public conduct and forms of communal action on which the African American community deliberated as well as the emerging civic identities such courses of action entailed.³

A range of disjunctive ideological structures both enabled and constrained northern African Americans as they negotiated the identity–action dialectic. Ideological constructions of gender, especially masculinity, assumed a prominent role in the early nineteenth century. Antebellum Americans, southerners as well as many northern abolitionists, imagined and, therefore, comprehended African American masculinity in terms of a binary opposition that juxtaposed two dominant “subject positions” or social identities: a childlike, emasculated “boy” versus an uncontrollable savage brute.⁴ Drawing on studies of American masculinity, James and Lois Horton maintain that most antebellum Americans “associated manhood with power, physical strength, and self-determinism,” yet if African Americans engaged in

aggressive or physical action to assert their manhood, their actions would, according to the Hortons, “reinforce white stereotypes of the ‘brutish African nature’ restrained only by slavery.” But Horton and Horton continue: when African Americans adopted the pacific “nonresistance message of ‘submission and peace’” urged by Garrisonian abolitionists of both races, they came “uncomfortably close to [accepting] the injunctions of slavery” and the subject position of the emasculated child. The Hortons quite correctly note how this identity binary “was a major dilemma for African Americans” in the antebellum north.⁵

As the Hortons and other scholars have demonstrated, in the 1830s most northern African Americans endorsed a moral reform/moral suasion program,⁶ and in the process they asserted a subject position for free African Americans (and, by extension, southern slaves) that navigated the constraining binary identity dilemma. For example, C. Peter Ripley maintains that “Black abolitionists made moral reform the philosophical underpinning of their struggle during the 1830s.” The moral reform/moral suasion program combined the pursuit of African American self-elevation and self-development (a “politics of respectability” and “benevolent agency” that promoted “education, temperance, religion, and economy—while cautioning against lotteries, dancing, public processions, frequenting court trials,” and other forms dissipation) with a commitment to Christian benevolence, virtue, and morality (especially the moral virtue of nonresistance). Moral reform advocates such as Philadelphia’s William Whipper reconstituted such attributes of emasculation as passivity and submission into virtues, encouraging “nonresistant Negroes” to interpellate themselves into or position themselves within the Christian archetype of the “suffering servant.”⁷

While many African American and white abolitionists continued to preach nonresistance and promote the “suffering servant” archetype,⁸ by the late 1830s voices of dissent arose within the northern African American community. In an 1839 speech to the New York City African Clarkson Association (a mutual aid society founded in 1825), Peter Paul Simons acknowledged that for the past decade free blacks had been preoccupied with “moral elevation.” But, he argued, as moral elevation “has progressed, it has carried along with it blind submission. . . . Yes brothers,” he continued, “this moral elevation of our people is but a song, it is nothing but a conspicuous scarecrow designed expressly, I may safely say, to hinder our people from acting collectively for themselves.” Moral elevation, Simons maintained, “carries . . . with it. . . [the] roots of [our] degradation.” In this speech Simons joined with other northern African Americans in an effort to rearticulate passivity, submission, and nonresistance with emasculation. Simons told his fellow Clarksons,

Remain inactive, and you but raise another generation of slaves, and your children’s children to the last posterity will spend their lives in as bitter oppression as ye do now today. Remain inactive and your children will curse the day of their birth. . . . Remain inactive, and the almighty himself will spurn you, for lack of courage, and nor properly using your agency. . . . Physical and political efforts are the only methods left for us to adopt. . . . [W]e must show ACTION! ACTION!

ACTION! and our will to be, or not to be; this we must study, this we must physically practice, and we will be in truth an independent people.⁹

According to Simons, authentic manhood and civic identity could only be attained by rejecting the assumption that aggressive action might reinforce white stereotypes, recognizing that all African Americans—even slaves—possess agency, and embracing political struggle and physical action. Doing so would allow African Americans to inhabit a second archetypal “face” of Christianity: the virile, militant Christian soldier and holy warrior (what Wilson Moses refers to as an “avenging messiah”) personified in such slave rebels as Nat Turner.¹⁰

In August 1843 Presbyterian minister Henry Highland Garnet delivered his “Address to the Slaves of the United States of America” to the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, NY.¹¹ While often read (and almost as often dismissed) as either an unqualified call for a violent slave rebellion or, at the least, a celebration of prior acts of militant resistance which suggested that such methods deserved further consideration than they were currently receiving,¹² the “Address” might profitably be approached within the context of the identity–action dialectic described above. Garnet’s speech engaged the ongoing debate in the African American community regarding moral reform and moral suasion through a nuanced discussion of resistance and violence that many scholars have failed to recognize. One way in which we might recuperate these contested concepts and recognize their implications for African American identity and agency is to examine the way Garnet appropriated some of the antebellum African American community’s dominant discursive traditions. The image and the accompanying idiom of a frequently submissive, emasculated “suffering servant” as well as the image/idiom of a violent, potentially brutish “avenging messiah” have, as Wilson Moses has argued, long occupied prominent positions in the African American cultural imagination.¹³ Garnet’s “Address,” I argue below, negotiated the disjunctive logics of submission/resistance, emasculation/ brutish violence, and “suffering servant”/“avenging messiah” by drawing on and exploiting the resources of these and other performative traditions in order to fashion a *tertium quid*, a middle course of action capable of constituting a new mode of African American agency and an alternative form of civic identity.

In order to perceive the ways in which Garnet crafted a provisionally stable middle ground which traversed a range of dominant disjunctive logics, we need to recover his available discursive constraints and potential resources. The essay’s next section begins this process by reconstructing the frequently misunderstood “suffering servant” tradition within the African American and abolitionist communities. Having established this tradition’s prominence within the African American and abolitionist communities, the essay’s third section analyzes the way in which Garnet engaged this ideological constraint. Extending extant scholarship, the analysis in this section seeks to expand Garnet’s performative context, recovering neglected historical resources such as Garnet’s exposure to reformation theology in order to reassess his relationship to antebellum nonresistance and begin reconstructing his *tertium quid*. The essay’s penultimate section examines the often-repeated charge that Garnet’s

“Address” advocated armed violence. Following the lead of Harry Reed and Stanley Harrold, I take seriously Garnet’s expedience and morality arguments against violence. But doing so threatens the integrity and coherence of Garnet’s critique of nonresistance and his call to action. I argue that we can appreciate the coherence and innovativeness of Garnet’s middle course by comparing the “Address’s” call for slave resistance with the “passive obedience” represented by the literary character Uncle Tom. This comparison reveals that Garnet crafted his middle course by reformulating and radicalizing elements of his African American and Protestant Christian heritages. I hope to demonstrate in the essay’s two major analytic sections that attention to specific discursive forms and the presence of multiple discursive traditions illuminates elements of the “Address” previously unrecognized or under-appreciated. In the essay’s concluding section, I speculate on the *a fortiori* potential of Garnet’s apostrophic form for his immediate audience. Additionally, I introduce evidence to suggest that the “Address” may have contributed to a significant reconstitution of the doctrine of nonresistance.

The Nonresistant Negro/the Suffering Servant: From Jupiter Hammon to William Whipper and Beyond

In his 1829 *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, David Walker recounted an episode which had received attention in some northern newspapers. While being transported to a slave market for sale, a group of approximately sixty slaves orchestrated their escape. One female slave, however, refused to flee and remained with one of the injured slave traders. After helping the trader to a local farm, the female slave provided additional assistance as the trader organized local farmers to recapture the fugitive slaves. According to Peter Hinks,

[This] scenario stood [for Walker] as a paradigm of “the force of degraded ignorance and deceit among us.” How could one be so disoriented and degraded as to protect these people? This question tormented [Walker] . . . and was key to his understanding not only why blacks were failing to determine themselves and resist more regularly and in larger numbers, but also what had to be overcome before he could effectively rouse them.

In Hinks’ analysis, Walker developed a folk psychological concept—“servile deceit”—to explain the slave woman’s behavior. Servile deceit was

an internal process that led individual blacks . . . to deceive themselves about who they were and what the reality of their environment was. . . . This deceit led them almost ineluctably to their being servile . . . and to their belief that they owed certain duties to whites.¹⁴

But Walker’s explanation of the slave woman’s behavior, a variation on the false consciousness thesis, may have neglected other motivating forces at work in the scenario he recounted. To understand fully the constraints Garnet faced in 1843, we need to recover the ideological perspective that may have animated the female slave’s action.

The recovery process can begin with the case of Jupiter Hammon. In the fall of 1786, Hammon, enthralled to John Lloyd of Queen's Village, Long Island, composed "An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York" which was published by the New York firm of Carroll and Patterson in the spring of 1787. Hammon's objective was "to say something to you for your good . . . [which will] promote your happiness." His first "particular" was on the topic of "obedience." He wrote:

Now whether it is right, and lawful, in the sight of God, for them to make slaves of us or not, I am certain that while we are slaves, it is our duty to obey our masters, in all their lawful commands, and mind them unless we are bid to do that which we know to be sin, or forbidden in God's word.¹⁵

After quoting a passage from Paul's (purported) letter to the Ephesians which directed slaves to obey their masters, Hammon continued:

Here is a plain command of God for us to obey our masters. It may seem hard for us, if we think our masters wrong in holding us slaves, to obey in all things, but who of us dare dispute with God! He has commanded us to obey, and we ought to do it cheerfully, and freely.¹⁶

Hammon addressed the interrelated topics of "honesty and faithfulness" in his second "particular." In this portion of his "Address," Hammon critiqued the rationalizations slaves employed to justify various forms of local resistance.¹⁷

We cannot have any excuse . . . for taking anything that belongs to our masters without their leave, or for being unfaithful in their business. It is our duty to be faithful. . . . All that we have to mind is our own duty. If God has put us in bad circumstances, that is not our fault and he will not punish us for it. . . . Nothing will serve as an excuse to us for not doing our duty.¹⁸

While David Walker most likely would have criticized the nonresistance sentiments expressed by Hammon, these sentiments were very familiar to many Americans at the time, white as well as black. In her book *The Dominion of Voice*, Kimberly Smith identifies a "language of governance" which, she suggests, functioned as a principal performative tradition in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America. This tradition relied heavily on the Bible, especially as it was explicated in certain strands of reformation theology. According to Quentin Skinner, early reformation advocates such as Martin Luther and John Calvin were emphatic in their commitment to the Biblical doctrine of submission and absolute nonresistance. Thanks to Luther, Skinner argues, St. Paul's injunction to "submit ourselves to the highest powers" at the beginning of chapter thirteen of his "Letter to the Romans" became "the most cited of all texts on the foundations of political life throughout the age of the Reformation."¹⁹ Submission emerged as a fundamental obligation because, as Smith explains, "Christian morality emphasized submission as a spiritual discipline necessary for salvation." Through performative vehicles such as New England election sermons, Americans were inundated with accounts of "the virtues of obedience and submissiveness." "The language of governance," Smith concludes, "celebrated submissiveness as a political virtue."²⁰

David Walker condemned the idea that submission and nonresistance might be a slave’s duty because, in all likelihood, he believed that these norms functioned to repress and control African American agency and identity. But if only indirectly, in the context of antebellum African American culture, a number of scholars have illustrated Michel Foucault’s contention that power is “much more than a negative instance whose function is repression.” Norms such as duty, obedience, submission, and nonresistance were part of, in Foucault’s terms, a “productive network” which enabled particular subject positions or modes of African American identity.²¹ While Walker intimated that internalizing such norms would emasculate African Americans,²² scholars such as Nathan Huggins describe the way in which nonresistance and submission helped produce a “stoical ethic” which shaped the identity of many slaves. “The central ethical demand [or ‘imperative’] for the slave,” Huggins writes, “was duty.” But “the duty the slaves honored,” he continues, “was inward and, if anything, a respect for their heavenly master.” Guided by this stoical ethic, a slave’s duty was not necessarily to obey his or her corporeal master; it was a duty “to do right.” In Huggins’ account, slave stoicism was not simply a conditioned response to external pressures (something forced upon slaves); stoicism was a creative response, a form of agency, that allowed slaves to transcend their repressive material conditions through virtuous action.²³

In the antebellum period the image and surrounding idiom of the “suffering servant” encompassed the tradition of nonresistant slave stoicism. Theophus Smith argues that Daniel Coker, an African American Methodist minister who helped found the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, composed the first extant literary example of this image in his 1810 *A Dialogue between a Virginian and an African Minister*. Consistent with Huggins’ account of slave stoicism, Smith notes the way Coker’s “suffering servant” functions redemptively on two levels. On a personal level, the servant “virtually redeems—gets back restored or even exalted—his formerly mangled humanity”; obedience and submission—virtuous suffering—provide the servant with a mode of agency through which he reclaims his civic identity and Christian manhood. On an interpersonal or social plane, the servant’s Christ-like suffering induces an emotional transformation in the slaveholder to whom the story is told (the slaveholder proceeds to manumit his stock of slaves).²⁴ This image and its message of redemption would continue to circulate and resonate with Americans across racial lines.

In the same year that David Walker published his *Appeal*, Robert Alexander Young published *The Ethiopian Manifesto*, a work which, in addition to helping inaugurate a black nationalist tradition in the United States, contributed to the “suffering servant” ideal by articulating submission and Christian manhood. Deploying a commonplace among early leaders of the Protestant Reformation,²⁵ Young counseled slaves to trust in the Almighty and wait for the leader “that God has prepared for them.” He also urged them to display “such government of yourselves as should be responsible but to God, your maker, for the duty exacted of you to your fellow-men.” Given the nature of slavery in the United States and the slaves’ condition therein, Young wrote that “it then behoves the depressed and vilely injured to bear his burthen with the firmness

of his manhood:—So that at this time, we particularly recommend to you, degraded sons of Africa, to submit with fortitude to your present state of suffering.”²⁶ But perhaps the most elaborate and eloquent African American defense of nonresistance and the ideal of the “suffering servant” came in 1837 when William Whipper addressed the American Moral Reform Society’s annual convention in Philadelphia.²⁷

Whipper’s speech animated a nonresistant idiom (whose key terms included fortitude, self-denial, tranquility, patience, perseverance, pacific attitude and principles, etc.) as it elaborated two rationales for the practice. While Whipper indicated in the speech’s second paragraph that he would not “give proofs for my belief by quotations from holy writ” (239), he nevertheless developed a theological argument which asserted that nonresistance was a form of “Christian duty.” Whipper maintained:

The doctrine evidently taught by the scriptural quotation [in the previous paragraph Whipper introduced passages from Luke and Matthew] . . . instructs us that resistance to physical aggression is wholly unnecessary as well as unrighteous, and subjects the transgressor to the penalty due from a wilful [*sic*] departure from the moral and Divine law. (243)

In addition to arguing that Christian duty requires nonresistance, Whipper also maintained that nonresistance enabled its practitioners to realize a form of “moral power” (248). Consistent with Young’s commitment to self-government, Whipper’s idea of moral power emerged when individuals “reform[ed]” or “control[led]” their passions; embracing such power would allow all Americans to

cease . . . be[ing] guided by the influence of a wild and beguiling passion—the wicked and foolish fantasies of pride, folly and lustful ambition—the alluring and detestable examples of despotism and governments—the sickly sensibility of those who from false notions of honor, attempt to promote the ends of justice, by placing “righteousness under their feet.” (247)

While insisting that nonresistance was universally applicable, Whipper opined that “if there be a single class of people in these United States on which these duties are more imperative and binding than another, that class is the colored population of this country, both free and enslaved.” African Americans, he continued,

must be prepared at all times to meet the scoffs and scorns of the vulgar and indecent—the contemptible frowns of haughty tyrants and the blighting mildew of a popular and sinful prejudice. If amidst these difficulties we can but possess our souls in patience, we shall finally triumph over our enemy. (245)

Whipper acknowledged that maintaining a “pacific attitude” could be extremely difficult. But succumbing to physical force, even in cases of self-defense, is counterproductive. Whipper explained:

In every possible and impartial view we take of the subject, we find that physical conflict militates against the interest of the parties in collision. If I, in conflict with mine enemy, overcome him with the superior physical powers, or my skill in battle, I neither wholly subdue him, or convince him of the justice of my cause. His spirit

becomes still more enraged, and he will seek retaliation and conquest on some future occasion that may seem to him more propitious. (244)

Whipper imagined that his interlocutor might reply: “[T]here will be no safety nor security in this [nonresistance] method, from the insults of the vulgar and the brutal attacks of the assassin.” Whipper countered with “the evidence of those that have pursued this Christian course of conduct” (244). In addition to Quakers and Shakers, Whipper stressed the illustrative value of “modern abolitionists.” Recounting their mistreatment, he noted how they have

been beaten and stoned, mobbed and persecuted from city to city, and never returned evil for evil, but submissively, as a sheep brought before the shearer, have they endured scourgings and scourges for the cause’s sake, while they prayed for their persecutors. . . . Had they set out in this glorious undertaking of freeing 2,500,000 human beings, with the war-cry of “liberty or death,” they would have been long since demolished. (248–49)

Deploying the comparative strategy of “the loss not sustained,”²⁸ Whipper concluded:

Now let us suppose for a single moment what would have been the case if they had started on the principle that “resistance to tyrants is obedience to God?”—what would have been our condition, together with that of the slave population? Why, we should have doubtless perished by the sword, or been praying for the destruction of our enemies, and probably engaged in the same bloody warfare. (249)

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Garnet may have been familiar with Whipper and Whipper’s ideas.²⁹ But two important and widely circulated precursor texts also expressed similar sentiments in the twenty months preceding Garnet’s 1843 “Address.”

On January 19, 1842, Garnet’s friend and fellow New Yorker Gerrit Smith delivered a speech to the Anti-Slavery Convention of the State of New York in which he directly addressed his “afflicted brethren,” southern slaves.³⁰ Smith’s apostrophic address anticipated the strategy Garnet would employ in August 1843, but the apostrophic form the two texts shared interpellated southern slaves in dramatically different ways. Helping inaugurate what Stanley Harrold has come to call the tradition of “aggressive abolitionism,” Smith “call[ed] on every slave, who has the reasonable prospect of being able to run away from slavery, to make that experiment” (157). By urging such a course of action, Smith recognized if only implicitly that slaves possessed a degree of agency along with some capacity to innovate, but elsewhere in the “Address” he undercut the possibility of agency and innovative action by reaffirming the image and idiom of the nonresistant Negro. Smith began a long section on the slaves’ “duties” by remarking:

Woeful as is slavery, and desirable as is liberty, we entreat you to endure the former—rather than take a violent and bloody hold of the latter. Such, manifestly, was the teaching of Paul to the slaves of his time. Whatever was his, the reason for our similar teaching is that recourse to violence and blood-shed for the termination of slavery, is very likely, in the judgment of a large portion of us, to result in the confirmation and protraction of the evil. (156)

While Smith, unlike Whipper, warranted his position "not on the high ground of absolutely morality, but on the comparatively low one of expediency" (156), he nevertheless routinely interpellated slaves into a position of passivity and submission. He praised the slaves' "remarkable forbearance" (156) and advised that "the heaviest load of life, which the malignity and ingenuity of oppressors can devise, is to be borne patiently" (159). Echoing Robert Young and earlier Protestant reformers, Smith urged slaves to "trust in God" (159) and the northern abolitionists who were acting as His instrument in America.

Not quite one and half years later, William Lloyd Garrison stood before delegates to the New England Anti-Slavery Society's annual convention meeting in Boston's Faneuil Hall and replicated not only Smith's apostrophic form but also its interpellative consequences.³¹ Much like Smith, Garrison urged slaves to "assert your manhood" and "transform yourselves from things into men by flight" (177). But again, like Smith, Garrison tempered this more assertive posture by advising slaves "to be patient, long-suffering, and submissive, yet awhile longer—trusting that, by the blessing of the Most High on their [abolitionists'] labors, you will yet be emancipated without shedding a drop of your masters' blood, or losing a drop of your own" (176). Garrison reinforced the submissive position into which he had interpellated southern bondsmen and women by juxtaposing slaves patiently waiting "yet a little while" longer for promised assistance to their northern abolitionist allies who "have proved themselves to be truly courageous, insensible to danger, superior to adversity, strong in principle, invincible in argument, animated by the spirit of impartial benevolence, [and] unwearied in devising ways and means for your deliverance" (175). Even as they cautiously began to imagine new modes of African American agency and identity, Smith and Garrison's "Addresses" nevertheless reinforced the nonresistant logic of the suffering servant.³²

Garnet's "Address to the Slaves" I: Manhood and Identity through Resistance

Writing from Buffalo, NY to Garrison on August 24, 1843, A. E. Marsh described the recently-concluded "Colored Convention" in some detail. When he turned to the events of August 16, he wrote: "In the afternoon, Rev. H. H. Garnet introduced *his* address to the slaves" (emphasis in original).³³ Given that there would be no reason for Garrison or anyone associated with typesetting the *Liberator* to have italicized the word, it appears safe to assume that Marsh emphasized the term in his original letter, and the most likely reason for him to do so was because Garnet had somehow sought to distinguish *his* "Address" from the Smith and Garrison precursor "Addresses." While Smith and Garrison's "Addresses" were prominent elements of Garnet's "persuasive field,"³⁴ the two texts did not encompass the range of linguistic contexts and rhetorical traditions Garnet's "Address" negotiated. Given Garnet's desire that slaves "let [their] motto be RESISTANCE! RESISTANCE! RESISTANCE!" (410), it seems reasonably clear that he designed his "Address" to engage the idiom and image of the nonresistant Negro. But what discursive resources did Garnet employ to subvert the doctrine of nonresistance?

Garnet acknowledged the image and idiom of nonresistance most clearly towards the end of his "Address" when he remarked:

But you [slaves] are a patient people. You act as though you were made for the special use of these devils. You act as though your daughters were born to pamper the lusts of your masters and overseers. And worse than all, you tamely submit, while your lords tear your wives from your embraces, and defile them before your eyes. (410)

Garnet predicated the passage's appeal on what James and Lois Horton refer to as "universal images of manhood . . . [such as] the responsibility of men to protect their family,"³⁵ and he concluded this emotionally draining passage with a call to action rooted in filial piety (expressed in the weak prosopopoeia "Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves") as well as a revitalized African masculine identity: "In the name of God we ask, are you men?" (410).

Should scholars conclude from this passage that Garnet's primary strategy for confronting the nonresistant suffering servant was emotional exhortation? Did he respond to the sentimentalism and romantic racialism of the period through more aggressive emotional appeals, often accompanied by violent imagery, if not outright appeals for violence? While many scholars have emphasized Garnet's "emotive language" and vehement images,³⁶ neither strategy adequately encompasses the manner in which Garnet negotiated the challenges of nonresistance. In the most perceptive analysis of the "Address" to date, Eddie Glaude, Jr. has argued that "Garnet's address is best understood in Christian terms." More specifically, Glaude maintains that Garnet deployed "an ironic use of moral reform" rhetoric in an "attempt to redirect the Christian energies of the slave" and redefine the nature of "Christian duty." While Glaude's emphasis on the "Address"'s ironic relationship to moral reform and abolitionist theology reveals the way Garnet subverted the interlaced constraints of nonresistance and the suffering servant, his reading overlooks the deeper performative and theological roots on which Garnet's "Address" drew.³⁷ In order to appreciate the way in which Garnet negotiated the logic of nonresistance and the image of the suffering servant, scholars need to recognize the way in which he exploited resources made available through the tradition of reformation theology in which he had been trained.

In the early 1830s, while a teenager living with his family in New York City, Garnet began a relationship with Presbyterian minister Theodore S. Wright, pastor of the First Colored Presbyterian Church and the first African American to receive a degree in theology from Princeton, which would last until Wright died in 1847. Scholars commonly credit Wright with introducing Garnet to Presbyterianism and with influencing Garnet's decision to enter the ministry.³⁸ In his book *Black and Presbyterian* Gayraud Wilmore notes that Presbyterians had difficulty appealing to African Americans in the early nineteenth century thanks to the denomination's reputation as a "cold, unornamented, duty-bound religion." In a different context he notes the Presbyterian's tendency to engage in "intellectual sermonizing." Wilmore also observed that Presbyterianism was recognized for its belief in "legitimate

resistance to religious oppression” which, he suggests, made it appealing to some African Americans.³⁹ Henry Garnet appears to have been one of those African Americans, and in his “Address to the Slaves” he draws upon key attributes of the overlapping Presbyterian/Protestant reformation traditions to subvert the logic of the suffering servant.⁴⁰

With Wright’s assistance, Garnet was able to spend three years in the late 1830s studying at Oneida Institute under Beriah Green, noted abolitionist and moral philosopher. Green’s biographer Milton Sernett explains that where “evangelicals appealed to the conscience, informed by reason and, when pressed, to the ‘naked will’ of God as revealed in Scripture[,] Green had subsumed Scripture to the self-evident principles of reason.” Green’s emphasis on “the light of Reason” probably reinforced Garnet’s Presbyterian rationalism.⁴¹ Another aspect of Green’s teaching probably resonated with Garnet’s reformed Protestant theology. Sernett notes that in the mid-1830s “[c]onservative theologians were attempting to thwart abolitionism by erecting a wall of separation between religion and politics.” In response, “Green invoked the legacies of Luther, Calvin [*sic*], Knox, and even Jesus himself, in defense of the proposition that the great reformers all disturbed worldly arrangements for the sake of doing good.”⁴² Green’s reliance on early leaders of the reformation (especially John Knox, one of the architects of a radical Calvinist theory of resistance) to justify political activism most likely helped shape Garnet’s thinking on the relationships among politics, resistance, and abolitionist agitation.⁴³

Garnet’s radical rationalist reformed Protestantism emerged most clearly in a long paragraph located in the middle of the “Address” which began with the crucial proposition: “TO SUCH DEGREDDATION IT IS SINFUL IN THE EXTRME FOR YOU TO MAKE VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION” (407; emphasis in original). As Eddie Glaude and Steven Shiffrin have noted, Garnet advanced two interconnected claims: he subverted the logic of nonresistance by demonstrating that submission to slavery was sinful (hence submission cannot be the slave’s duty) and then affirmed the slave’s positive duty to resist.⁴⁴ The paragraph exuded a rigid deductive progression.⁴⁵ God “requires [the slaves] to love him supremely” and “to obey the divine commandments” but, Garnet observed, “slavery sets all these at naught.” From Martin Luther to Christopher Goodman, early leaders of the Protestant Reformation drew on the language of Acts 5:29, in which Peter urged early Christians to obey God rather than man to, in Quentin Skinner’s terms, “establish a decisive limit” on a Christian’s obligation to obedience.⁴⁶ Radical Protestant appropriations of Acts 5:29 created a performative tradition on which Garnet relied as he sought to use the slave’s obligations to God to overturn his or her purported divine duty to obey earthly authorities. Garnet’s initial, unstated conclusion then emerged: slavery prevented the slaves from fulfilling their duty to God.⁴⁷ Given the implicit warrant that anything which prevented a Christian from serving God is, of course, evil, Garnet continued the deductive chain by drawing the standard abolitionist conclusion: slavery was evil. Garnet had already introduced the terminus of his argument’s initial phase in his opening proposition, and the final deductive movement completed this phase: since

slavery is evil and submitting to evil is sinful, submission to slavery is sinful, and hence cannot be the slave’s duty.

But demonstrating that slaves were not required to submit to slavery was not the same as establishing that they had a positive duty to resist their masters. In order to overcome the logic of nonresistance, Garnet could not simply “reverse,” as Glaude and Shiffrin suggest, the dichotomy thereby privileging resistance. Protestant reformers such as John Knox acknowledged that even when resistance was justified, not every Christian was obligated to resist. To engage nonresistance effectively, Garnet needed to overcome the desire to hesitate or procrastinate and establish the slave’s positive obligation to resist continued bondage. In the argument’s second phase, Garnet sought to address this problem by raising a potential counterargument which absolved slaves of any duty to resist because of their “condition” (407).⁴⁸ He engaged the issue of the slave’s material circumstances directly: “The forlorn condition in which you are placed does not destroy your moral obligation to God. . . . Your condition does not absolve you from your moral obligation.” Garnet’s emphasis on obligation reanimated a line of argument that would, as Skinner observes, be familiar to many Calvinists because it extended their “concept of the covenanting community.” Sixteenth-century radical Calvinists such as Christopher Goodman and John Knox, Skinner explains, constructed their “defence of popular revolution” on the foundation of the covenanting community’s constitutive promises. Goodman and Knox’s arguments, Skinner continues, took

the form of the familiar claim that to promise to do something is to incur an obligation to do it. Each individual citizen is taken to have promised God to uphold his laws. Each is accordingly taken to have a sacred duty to help resist and remove all idolatrous or tyrannical magistrates.⁴⁹

When Garnet insisted that it was the slaves’ “solemn and imperative duty to use every means, both moral, intellectual, and physical, that promises success,” he revoiced and reaccentuated the cycle of terms\promise/obligation/duty—which shaped covenant theology.⁵⁰

By the time of the American Revolution, this terministic cycle had become encapsulated in a maxim with which Americans were familiar: rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God. While William Whipper and other advocates of nonresistance condemned this maxim as antithetical to Christianity’s “moral power,” Garnet embraced it.⁵¹ There is some dispute about the maxim’s origins, but at least one contemporary scholar suggests that the maxim’s basic logic had been “given religious sanction in Jonathan Mayhew’s famous 1750 sermon, ‘A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers.’”⁵² Mayhew’s “Discourse” and Garnet’s “Address” employed the same dialectic of subversion and affirmation; each subverted the doctrine of submission and nonresistance while affirming the necessity of resistance. Mayhew’s reversal of the Biblical injunction to submit developed in ways quite similar to Garnet’s argument roughly one hundred years later:

I now add . . . that the Apostle's [Paul's] argument is so far from proving it to be the duty of people to obey and submit to such rulers as act in contradiction to the public good . . . that it proves the direct contrary. . . . [W]hen he [the King/ruler] turns tyrant and makes his subjects his prey to devour and to destroy instead of his charge to defend and cherish, we are bound to throw off our allegiance to him and to resist, and that according to the tenor of the Apostle's argument in this passage.⁵³

Mayhew and Garnet did not belong to the same denomination, but because of their respective denominations' commitment to rigorous argument, Mayhew's Congregationalism and Garnet's Presbyterianism can be located on the rational side of the piety–reason spectrum that Alan Heimert used to describe the different wings of reformed Protestantism in late eighteenth-century North America.⁵⁴ Perhaps more importantly, they shared the same Calvinistic heritage which maintained that a person's duty to God might require them to resist secular authority, and each minister drew upon that heritage to combat the voices of nonresistance and submission within their respective communities. Mayhew and Garnet were not, however, dogmatic Calvinists; each had been infected with the spirit of Arminianism, a religious doctrine that granted humanity a greater role in achieving salvation.⁵⁵ Harry Reed indirectly acknowledges Garnet's Arminianism when he suggests that the "Address" sought "the transformation of the slave from chattel to catalyst." We can appreciate the way Garnet sought, in Reed's words, to reconstitute the slave as "the agent of his own liberation" by returning to the "Address"'s apostrophic structure. While Gerrit Smith and Garrison had both employed the same structure, they nevertheless, with the exception of the possibility of escape, reconstituted slave docility. In Garnet's case, by inserting "the slaves" as the apostrophic addressee, he in effect interpellated them into a new subject position: people who possess agency. In typical Arminian fashion, he identified the slaves' role in their own redemption and salvation.⁵⁶ This new, more masculine role required slaves to abandon blind obedience, nonresistance, and the logic of the suffering servant in order to obey God's command to resist tyranny.

But what exactly did Garnet call upon the slaves to do? While Garnet's "Address" enacted a form of rhetorical violence, it is a mistake to read the "Address" as an appeal for a violent slave rebellion. Such readings, I argue, are based on a tradition of disjunctive thinking which tends to obscure and exclude efforts to craft a *tertium quid* or middle course of action. Like revolutionary-era figures such as John Dickinson, Garnet rejected a disjunctive logic and struggled to imagine and defend a course of action that navigated, in Calvinesque fashion, between the positions of Jupiter Hammon and Nat Turner.⁵⁷

Garnet's "Address to the Slaves" II: Manhood, Identity, Violence, and the Problem of a Middle Course

On November 24, 1850, white Presbyterian minister Ichabod Spencer delivered a sermon urging his congregation to fulfill their religious duty and obey the 1850 fugitive slave law. Spencer acknowledged, "There is indeed a *limit* to the obedience

due to human government. Such government may become . . . so unjust, oppressive, tyrannical, and cruel, as not to answer the designed, and righteous, and beneficial purposes of government." A government of this sort, Spencer continued, "deserves no respect as an ordinance of God, for it is then acting contrary to the will of God and the necessity of society; and the injured and oppressed people may justly rise in rebellion against such a government, and overthrow it, if they can."

Spencer's rationale for rebellion was consistent with the premises established in the tradition that stretched from John Knox to John Locke.⁵⁸ But Spencer's subsequent observations merit attention. He continued:

Let it be carefully remembered, that any violent resistance is positive rebellion against the government; and either that resistance must be crushed, or the government must be overturned. There is no middle way—there can be none. . . . [G]overnment must crush that violence, or that violence must crush the government. . . . [V]iolent resistance to Law cannot be justified, when there is no righteous design to overthrow the government itself; for no man owes *half*-allegiance to government, or can commit *half*-high-treason. . . . Law is too important and delicate a thing to have its majesty trifled with, by the wicked nonsense of a *half*-obedience.⁵⁹

Spencer's critique of anti-fugitive slave law agitation deserves consideration because of its typicality. Two additional examples can help illustrate the prominence of this disjunctive logic in antebellum America. Consider this passage from Daniel Webster's "Second Reply to Hayne" (1830), delivered in response to South Carolina's emerging doctrine of "nullification":

I cannot conceive that there can be a middle course between submission to the laws, when regularly pronounced constitutional, on the one hand, and open resistance, which is revolution or rebellion, on the other. . . . I maintain that, between submission to the decision of the constituted tribunals and revolution, or disunion, there is no middle ground—there is no ambiguous condition, half allegiance and half rebellion.⁶⁰

Abraham Lincoln would repeat these sentiments thirty-one years later in his "First Inaugural": "If the minority will not acquiesce, the majority must, or the government must cease. There is no other alternative. . . . Whoever rejects it [the majority principle], does, of necessity, fly to anarchy or to despotism."⁶¹ Lincoln does not equate resistance and violence (revolution and rebellion) as clearly as Webster, but the shared disjunctive logic is evident. And this logic, an offshoot of the language of governance Kimberly Smith has identified, structured the cultural imagination of many antebellum Americans just as it had structured the imagination of most Britons in the eighteenth century.

This disjunctive logic helped structure both the "Address" and its reception. Textual cues such as Garnet's appropriation of Patrick Henry's disjunctive "liberty or death" or his litany of rebellious heroes seemingly invoked this logic and, according to his critics, situated Garnet on the side of Nat Turner and other historical crusading avengers (409–10). If the choice was Jupiter Hammon or Nat Turner, Garnet's critics insinuated that he appeared to embrace a kind of violent hypermasculine identity

that would link him to Turner. But scholars should take seriously Garnet's numerous qualifiers and attend to the "Address"'s language in order to appreciate how his call for resistance enacted a particular performative modality: an effort to locate a conceptually innovative middle course. In crafting his *tertium quid*, Garnet harnessed elements of the nation's revolutionary and Protestant heritages.

Garnet expressed his appreciation of, if not simple identification with, the American Revolution early in the "Address" (406), so it should not be surprising that he might have tried to emulate one of the revolutionary movement's rhetorical strategies. Leaders of the colonial resistance movement in the 1760s and early 1770s helped inaugurate this performative modality as they struggled to escape the constraining power of disjunctive thinking. Pauline Maier observes: "The need to reconcile the impulse toward resistance with the injunction to restraint became, in fact, one of the central intellectual and practical problems of the American revolutionary movement."⁶² Maier and Kimberly Smith both employ the slightly oxymoronic expression "ordered" or "orderly resistance" to represent the middle course which emerged in the 1760s. Smith suggests that John Dickinson, especially in works such as his "Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados" published in Philadelphia in 1766, or his more famous "Farmers" letters published the following year, exemplifies this discursive strategy. Dickinson, Smith argues, "refused to grant the point that subjects must be either obedient or rebellious" and, in so doing, performed a series of disarticulations: orderliness was disconnected from obedience and resistance was disconnected from violence. Once these key terms became untethered, Dickinson was able to rearticulate them and fashion the conceptual innovation: orderly resistance.⁶³

If Dickinson's slightly oxymoronic performance of orderly resistance provided Garnet with a potential resource, the disjunctive logic illustrated by Webster, Lincoln, and Spencer posed a serious obstacle. Garnet faced a rhetorical problem similar to that faced by the nation's founders: how to construct a middle course between unmanly submission⁶⁴ and violent rebellion. Garnet's more particularized challenge was to imagine a middle course between two trajectories of African American evangelical Christianity: Jupiter Hammon and the suffering servant and Nat Turner and the avenging messiah. Garnet rejected the path of the avenger most clearly toward the end of the "Address." Like Gerrit Smith, Garnet argued pragmatically, maintaining that "a revolution with the sword" would be inexpedient due to white America's superior numbers (410).⁶⁵ And in what was most probably an acknowledgment of William Whipper's nonresistant pacifism, Garnet admitted that "the rising spirit of the age, and the spirit of the gospel, are opposed to war and bloodshed" (410). Garnet's moral and pragmatic critique of violence and his repudiation of passivity and absolute nonresistance framed the conceptual space from which a middle ground could emerge.

But what specific course or courses of action did Garnet imagine that would allow slaves to realize their agency and constitute their identity? As Glaude notes, Garnet "rejected Exodus as a model for black liberation" and, in so doing, he further distanced his "Address" from Smith and Garrison's precursors. "It is," Garnet

remarked, "impossible, like the children of Israel, to make a grand Exodus from the land of bondage. THE PHAROES ARE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BLOOD-RED WATERS!" (409, emphasis in original).⁶⁶ While the allusion to Exodus continued the negative trajectory of rejected possibilities, Garnet also provided auditors both general and specific instructions. Tapping into the tradition of local slave resistance, Garnet concluded the "Address" by encouraging slaves to select particular modes of resistance based on their concrete "circumstances." But Garnet's specific directive to the slaves initially emerged approximately half way through the "Address" at the conclusion of a long passage in the imperative mood: "Inform them [your enslavers] that all you desire is freedom and that nothing else will suffice. Do this, and forever after cease to toil for the heartless tyrants, who give you know other reward but stripes and abuse" (408). Then, late in the speech, Garnet reiterated this directive: "But from this moment cease to labor for tyrants who will not remunerate you. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered" (410).

In calling on slaves to "cease to labor for tyrants," Garnet echoed the appeal of Protestant Reformers such as John Knox who urged the people of Scotland to "withhold the frutes and profetts which your fals Byshoppes and Clergie most unjustly receyve of you, unto such tyme as they be compelled . . . to do theyr charge and dueties, which is to preach unto you Christ Jesus truly [*sic*]."⁶⁷ Garnet understood that a general strike on the part of slaves would most likely result in bloodshed. Slave-owners would, no doubt, retaliate against the slaves but, Garnet insisted, "[I]f they then commence the work of death, they, and not you, will be responsible for the consequences." In fact, he admitted that "[h]owever much you and all of us may desire it, there is not much hope of Redemption without the shedding of blood. . . . If you must bleed," he continued, "let it all come at once—rather, die freemen, than live to be slaves" (408–9).

Despite the prevalent imagery of bloodshed, it is essential to acknowledge that Garnet never called upon slaves to arm themselves even in self-defense, let alone encouraged slaves to attack white southerners.⁶⁸ While Garnet repeatedly legitimated resistance and urged his apostrophic audience to engage in it, he carefully avoided any direct call to violence, even in self-defense. Even though he invoked the memories of such violent rebels as Turner, Joseph Cinqué, and Madison Washington, Garnet never embraced the role of avenger. By linking redemption and slave suffering, he remained firmly grounded in the tradition of Christian martyrdom.

But resituating Garnet's plan of action—a general strike—within this tradition raises an important conceptual problem. If, as I have tried to argue, Garnet's alternative embraced redemption through martyrdom, then he may not have imagined a coherent alternative to William Whipper's patient, nonresistant Negro. The coherence of Garnet's *tertium quid* becomes visible, however, if we juxtapose the logic infusing his call to action with the paradigmatic instance of Christian African American martyrdom: the literary figure Uncle Tom.⁶⁹ The key question that needs to be explored is how exactly the behavior of Garnet's apostrophic addressee—the slave who refuses to "toil for the heartless tyrants"—would differ from the behavior of Stowe's literary character. When Wilson Moses labels Uncle Tom's behavior

(specifically his refusal to obey Legree's commands) as "passive rebellion,"⁷⁰ he suggests that Tom embodied a conceptual innovation along the lines of John Dickinson (a type of oxymoron via enactment). But Tom's behavior in the novel can be explained more accurately by drawing upon a prominent sixteenth-century concept—passive obedience—which retained its relevance well into the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

John Dickinson and other leaders of the colonial resistance movement were not the first public advocates who felt constrained by the obedience/rebellion disjunctive logic. As contemporary scholars have suggested, the need to imagine a middle course between obedience and rebellion confronted the early leaders of the Protestant Reformation. In works such as Martin Luther's 1523 *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed* and William Tyndale's 1528 *The Obedience of a Christian Man and How Christian Rulers Ought to Govern* [*sic*], reformers sought to reconcile Paul's injunction to submit to higher powers with Peter's admonition (in Acts) to obey God and not man. The concept of "passive obedience" emerged, and it functioned as a middle course between simple, abject submission and overt rebellion.⁷¹ Reformers believed that passive obedience would allow reformed Christians to negotiate a double bind situation where (a) they are enjoined by God to obey their superiors but (b) their superiors have ordered them to engage in a type of action which violates God's commandments. Passive obedience directed Christians to disobey the superior's order but willingly submit to any punishment their superior might choose to inflict. As Luther explained in *Temporal Authority*, whatever "outrage" a Christian's superior might inflict, it "is not to be resisted but endured."⁷² Enduring outrage situates a Christian in the position of "suffering servant" described in 1 Peter 2:18–25; such a Christian enacts Peter's directive "to follow in His [Christ's] steps" and "patiently endure" unjust punishment. And as readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* well know, this is precisely what Uncle Tom does near the novel's end when he refuses to "betray the helpless" by disclosing Cassy and Emmeline's whereabouts, choosing instead to endure Legree's savage beating patiently as punishment for his disobedience.

Recognizing that, via the doctrine of passive obedience, the suffering servant was itself a type of middle course helps us understand that Garnet was not so much imagining *sui generis* a new mode of conduct and identity as he was reformulating and radicalizing elements of his African American and Protestant Christian heritages. Two specific aspects of Garnet's reformulation merit further attention. First, as initially conceptualized passive obedience only became relevant in a particular context (when a superior ordered a Christian to engage in behavior that violated God's directives to humanity); absent the externally imposed double bind, Christian submission remained the norm. Garnet's version of resistance resembled Maria W. Chapman's distinction between "passive" and "active non-resistance."⁷³ His reformulation was "active" in that it did not depend on an externally-imposed double bind. Slavery's inherent sinfulness, its tendency to prevent slaves from following "divine commandments," enabled southern slaves to act boldly in any context (subject only to Garnet's expediency qualifier) and embrace their agency by refusing

to inhabit the slave subject position any longer. Second, Garnet's reformulation provided slaves with a way to maintain their Christian piety—in fact, given the way it embodied the concept "resistance to tyrants is obedience to God," it promised to become the principal mechanism for slaves to display their religious devotion—while also pursuing their political emancipation. Garnet's vision of nonviolent slave resistance fused the sacred and the secular as it invited slaves to realize their agency by embracing a new identity. He imagined a reconstituted African American identity that energized and radicalized the patient suffering servant as it moderated the righteous anger of the avenging messiah. In so doing, he promoted a vision of African American manhood that transcended antebellum America's debilitating feminized child/savage brute dichotomy; African American men would, Garnet hoped, become known for their ability to engage in strenuous yet restrained public action.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Given that Garnet's fellow delegates meeting in Buffalo refused (by a razor-thin one vote margin) to endorse the "Address," and considering that even after Garnet had the "Address" published in 1848, it had little, if any, impact on southern slaves, it would be reasonable to conclude that it had a very limited instrumental impact. But attention to the immediate performance/situation dynamic might require some modification to this conclusion. Additionally, attention to subsequent "nonresistance" literature suggests that Garnet's "Address," especially his innovative effort to articulate an alternative to the more traditional Christian *tertium quid* of passive obedience, may have achieved a degree of constitutive significance.

Garnet's apostrophic form tends to occlude his real audience: a convention of free, northern African Americans. But that same form might have engaged some of that audience's concerns. While the 1843 Buffalo meeting was not the first of its kind, it was the first "national" effort since the 1835 National Negro Convention sanctioned William Whipper's proposed interracial American Moral Reform Society whose national meetings in the late 1830s effectively displaced the original convention movement.⁷⁵ Given both the divisions within the northern African American community and recurrent mob violence against members of that community, it would not be surprising if the proposed Buffalo convention generated some anxiety and apprehension among potential delegates. Could a new convention movement overcome communal divisions? Could that movement function as an effective vehicle for combating northern racism and southern slavery? By enacting an *a fortiori* argument, Garnet's apostrophic form encouraged northern African Americans to recognize their agency as well as employ it in order to revitalize the moribund convention movement. If southern slaves possessed some capacity to act on their own behalf, Garnet intimated, then surely free blacks in the north possessed the requisite agency to become of potent political force.

We can find traces of Garnet's constitutive influence in the nonresistance literature of the 1840s and 1850s. In an anonymous 1845 essay "A Thought on Emancipation," the author expressed his/her hope that "slaves through out the land will assert their

claims to humanity with the omnipotent might of non-resistance.” But the author did not advise passive obedience; rather she/he urged slaves to act in ways entirely consistent with Garnet’s “Address”:

Let the terrible determination go forth through all Slavedom, that the slaves, *will not work—will not eat—will not rise up or lie down at the bidding of an owner and will be free or die*, and it is done. Tomorrow’s sun beholds a nation of freemen indeed.⁷⁶

Coming to the defense of noted nonresistant advocate Henry C. Wright, Micajah T. Johnson published a letter in *The Liberator* in 1852 which tried to explain the Christian basis of “true non-resistance.” Johnson disputed the claim that “the duty of a slave [is] to surrender himself voluntarily to his master.” Consistent with Garnet’s position, he instead insisted:

A slave is not bound to surrender himself voluntarily to any man, neither is he bound to work without wages; and the truth does not require that he hide himself from his pursuer, but walk boldly forth as a man, preaching the gospel, and earning his living by the sweat of his brow; and if tyrants oppress him, it is not his fault—he is not censurable. . . . A few such examples of true piety and moral heroism among the slaves would disarm the slaveholder more completely than all the revolvers Colt ever made.⁷⁷

An original member of the New England Non-Resistance Society in 1838 and Garrison cohort, Charles Whipple, published a pamphlet “The Non-Resistance Principle” in 1860 which displayed the concept’s clearest antebellum reconstitution. Whipple reconfigured nonresistance and revealed it to be fully consistent with Garnet’s 1843 position. Echoing the Calvinist tradition dating to John Knox, Whipple—like Garnet—maintained that “no labor, or service, or duty is due from the person thus robbed to the robber.” Whipple struggled to locate a course of “positive action by which [slaves] can contribute to the real welfare of the slaveholder” which, he maintained, the doctrine of nonresistance required. Whipple concluded, *à la* Garnet, that the slave’s “first duty of good-will to the slaveholder is utterly to refuse any longer to be a slave!” He then contrasted his course of action with another alternative and wrote: “I do not consider ‘Uncle Tom’ to be the highest type, either of manly character or the Christian character, in the relation he bore to various slaveholders.” Whipple acknowledged Uncle Tom’s “heroic self-control,” but nevertheless rejected passive obedience, maintaining that “[q]uiet, continuous submission to enslavement is complicity with the slaveholder.” He insisted that

[T]here is another duty . . . to be performed by the true man, the true Christian, who is claimed as a slave. . . . It is the duty of a man and a Christian not only to protest against this but, if he is able, acting in the right way, to put a stop to it. The slave is able to put a stop to it, and to do this in the right way, by utterly refusing to be a slave.

In Whipple’s creative hands, passive nonresistance was transmuted into Garnet’s vision of nonviolent slave resistance.⁷⁸

A few months after Whipple published his pamphlet Abraham Lincoln was elected the nation's sixteenth president, and the final steps toward civil war were taken soon thereafter. Given the available information, we can never be certain if Garnet's "Address" inspired Whipple's fusion of nonresistance and resistance. Nor can we know what might have happened had Garnet/Whipple's vision of aggressive, nonviolent slave resistance energized northern abolitionists and, perhaps, been able to direct the efforts of southern slaves. Even though it took a little over one hundred years, we can, however, appreciate the fact that Martin Luther King, consciously or not, recovered central features of this neglected American tradition and installed them as central principles of the nonviolent civil rights movement in the late 1950s and 1960s. In so doing, King realized more fully Garnet's conceptual innovation and provisionally stabilized the identity–action dialectic in a way that Garnet, most likely, would endorse.⁷⁹

Notes

- [1] Samuel Cornish, "Our Brethren in the Free States," *Colored American*, April 22, 1837, n.p.
- [2] George A. Levesque, "Interpreting Early Black Ideology: A Reappraisal of Historical Consensus," *Journal of the Early Republic* 1 (1981): 281.
- [3] See especially Tunde Adelke, "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830s," *Journal of Negro History* 83 (1998): 127–42; Jacqueline Bacon, *The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 2002); Jacqueline Bacon and Glen McClish, "Descendents of Africa, Sons of '76: Exploring Early African-American Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36 (2006): 1–29; Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Dexter B. Gordon, *Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003); Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); R. J. Young, *Antebellum Black Activists: Race, Gender, and Self* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996). These seven studies extend earlier explorations of the antebellum African American community in the north. Among these earlier works, see especially Howard Holman Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement 1830–1861* (1953; rpt., New York: Arno Press, 1969); Frederick Cooper, "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827–1850," *American Quarterly* 24 (1972): 604–25; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, "Negro Conventions and the Problem of Black Leadership," *Journal of Black Studies* 2 (1971): 29–44; Harry Reed, *Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775–1865* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. Chapters 1–4.
- [4] Stanley Harrold describes the pervasive

racialism in [antebellum] American culture that affected both the North and South. Americans commonly assumed that black men were more *feminine* than white men, more sedentary, more inclined to forgive their oppressors than confront them, more inclined to the Christian virtues. Yet Americans also assumed that a capacity for violent action resided not far beneath black men's peaceful demeanor.

- Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 36. Other scholars who have observed this tendency in American culture include: Nancy Bentley, "White Slaves: The Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction," in *Subjects and Citizens: Nation, Race, and Gender From OROONOKO to Anita Hill*, ed. Michael Moon and Cathy N. Davidson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 195–216; Christopher B. Booker, *"I Will Wear No Chains!" A Social History of African American Males* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2000), esp. 1–65; George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (1971; rpt., Middleton, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), esp. 1–129; Ronald Takaki, "The Black Child-Savage in Ante-Bellum America," in *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America*, ed. Gary B. Nash and Richard Weiss (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 27–44. On the specific issue of northern abolitionists, see also Lewis Perry's observation that these reformers "sometimes attributed submissive 'feminine' qualities to Negroes" in Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (1973; rpt., Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1995), 233.
- [5] James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, "The Affirmation of Manhood: Black Garrisonians in Antebellum Boston," in *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston*, ed. Daniel M. Jacobs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 143, 133, 137. See also Horton and Horton, "Violence, Protest, and Identity: Black Manhood in Antebellum," in James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 80–96, and James Oliver Horton, "Freedom's Yoke: Gender Conventions Among Antebellum Free Blacks," *Feminist Studies* 12 (1986): 51–76.
- [6] Following Eddie Glaude's idea that northern African Americans adopted "an outside-and-inside approach" to political struggle in the 1830s (see *Exodus!*, 114–15), I understand "moral suasion" to be an "outside" strategy through which African Americans engaged external (non-African American and non-abolitionist) audiences while "moral reform" was the "internal" strategy that shaped and guided African American self-development (including the self-development of southern slaves).
- [7] C. Peter Ripley, "Introduction to the American Series: Black Abolitionists in the United States, 1830–1865," in *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, ed. C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), III, 16. On moral reform and "the politics of respectability," see Glaude, *Exodus!*, 114–42. For a discussion of African Americans and "benevolent agency," see Susan M. Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7, 163–86. On "moral reform" and the American Moral Reform Society (an organization that evolved out of the early 1830s Conventions of People of Color), see Adelke, "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion," and Howard H. Bell, "The American Moral Reform Society, 1836–1841," *Journal of Negro Education* 27 (1958): 34–40. On William Whipper, see Richard P. McCormick, "William Whipper: Moral Reformer," *Pennsylvania History* 43 (1976): 23–46. On the importance of the "suffering servant" archetype to African Americans, see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (1982; rev. ed. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), esp. 49–66, and Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. 183–95.
- [8] For example, see Fredrickson's discussion of white abolitionist "romantic racialism" in *Black Image*, 97–129.
- [9] Simons delivered the speech on April 23, 1839, but Cornish refused to print it in the *Colored American*. The speech appeared in the June 1, 1839 edition when Simons published it as a paid advertisement. See *Black Abolitionist Papers*, III, 288–93, emphasis in original. For another example of a northern African American urging aggressive action, see an open letter

addressed to “Colored Americans” by David Ruggles published in the August 13, 1841 issue of *The Liberator*. Ruggles concluded the letter by exhorting his readers:

Rise, brethren, rise! Strike for freedom, or die slaves! . . . In our cause, mere words are nothing—action is everything. Buckle on your armor . . . remembering that our cause demands of us union and agitation—agitation and action, from the east to the west, from the north to the south.

See also Bacon, *Humblest*, 59.

- [10] See Moses, *Black Messiahs*, esp. 54–55.
- [11] National meetings of “People of Color” had been held from 1830 to 1835. At the 1835 meeting held in Philadelphia, William Whipper orchestrated the creation of the American Moral Reform Society, which held conventions from 1836 to 1841 when the organization dissolved. The 1843 national convention was the first meeting with that scope since the collapse of the AMRS, although African Americans had organized a number of state meetings in the early 1840s (perhaps most notably the August 1840 New York state convention of Colored Citizens in which Garnet was an active participant). See Howard H. Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement 1830–1861* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), esp. 10–99. See also Howard H. Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions 1830–1864* (New York: Arno Press, 1969) and Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, eds, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840–1865* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), I, 2–26. Among other places, Garnet’s “Address” is available in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, III, 403–12. Subsequent references to the “Address” will come from this version and be made parenthetically in the text.
- [12] Scholars reading the “Address” as an unqualified call for a violent slave rebellion or revolt include (in rhetorical studies) Arthur L. Smith, “Henry Highland Garnet: Black Revolutionary in Sheep’s Vestments,” *Central States Speech Journal* 21 (1970): 93–98 and Steven H. Shiffrin, “The Rhetoric of Black Violence in the Antebellum Period: Henry Highland Garnet,” *Journal of Black Studies* 2 (1971): 45–56. More recent rhetorical scholarship continues this interpretive trajectory; Dexter Gordon (see *Black Identity*, 128) argues that Garnet “advanced an appeal to violence as a viable option for emancipation.” A number of Garnet’s biographers promote this interpretation; see, for example, Earl Ofari [Hutchinson], *“Let Your Motto Be Resistance”: The Life and Thought of Henry Highland Garnet* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), esp. 38–39, and Martin B. Pasternak, *Rise Now and Fly to Arms: The Life of Henry Highland Garnet* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), esp. 46, 54. Theophus Smith (in *Conjuring Culture*, 61) maintains that Garnet’s “Address” “explicitly incited slaves to revolt and violently overthrow their masters,” while Eddie Glaude, Jr. (in what is probably the best available reading of the text) concludes that Garnet “attempted to articulate a national politics that violently challenged the nation-state. In other words, he interpreted the call for an immanent conversation as a call for general slave insurrection in the South” (*Exodus!*, 158).

Another interpretive tradition recognizes Garnet’s ambivalence regarding violence, but still concludes that the “Address” sought to reappraise violent means. In rhetorical studies, Kenneth Mann acknowledges that Garnet’s “suggested course for the slaves was not violence” (17). Nevertheless, at the end of his essay, Mann concludes that “Garnet urged the rising up of slaves in mass, the throwing off of bonds of servitude, and the murdering of masters, if necessary, to terminate slavery in America” (20). Kenneth Eugene Mann, “Nineteenth Century Black Militant: Henry Highland Garnet’s Address to the Slaves,” *Southern Speech Journal* 36 (1970): 11–21. Among biographers, Joel Schor advances a more qualified reading of the “Address” when he discusses Garnet’s “greater acceptance of violence” (53, 58); he nevertheless suggests that Garnet’s concluding exhortation was “an encouragement of violence” (55). See Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the*

Nineteenth Century (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1977). Historian Sterling Stuckey evinces a similar ambivalence about Garnet's purpose. In a 1988 essay he reads the "Address" as a "plea for a slave revolt"; see "A Last Stern Struggle: Henry Highland Garnet and Liberation Theory" in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. L. Litwack and A. Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 138. In his book *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Stuckey qualifies that claim when he acknowledges that Garnet's "Address" was not "calling exclusively for a massive insurrection across the whole South" (157).

Finally, a handful of scholars take seriously Garnet's expedience and morality arguments against violence, and construe his admonition that slaves should "cease to toil" (408) as a literal appeal for a general strike. See Stanley Harrold, *Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism*, and Harry Reed, "Henry Highland Garnet's 'Address to the Slaves of the United States of America' Reconsidered," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 6 (1982): 186–92.

- [13] According to J. Albert Harrill, the archetypal images of the "suffering servant" and an "avenging messiah" (what Harrill terms "an abolitionist warrior Jesus") are variations on a Biblical "hermeneutics of typology" common among African Americans. See Harrill, "The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 10 (2000): 149–86, esp. 162–63.
- [14] See Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 218–19. For Walker's account of episode, see Peter Hinks, ed., *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829; rpt., University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 25–28.
- [15] Jupiter Hammon, "An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York," reprinted in Dorothy Porter, ed., *Early Negro Writing, 1760–1837* (1971; rpt., Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1995), 315.
- [16] Theophus Smith (*Conjuring Culture*, 192) argues that African Americans in the nineteenth century sought "to discern the difference between obedience as a theological virtue and obedience due to psychosocial conditioning" (Walker's sense of "servile deceit"). Hammon would appear to exemplify the former.
- [17] See, for example, Herbert Aptheker's discussion in *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943; rpt., New York: International Publishers, 1993), esp. 140–49. William Cheek reproduces slave testimony on the subject of local resistance. See Cheek, *Black Resistance before the Civil War* (Beverly Hills, CA: Glencoe Press, 1970).
- [18] Hammon, 316–17. Hinks discusses Hammon's "Address" in his study of Walker's *Appeal* (155, 173), but focuses exclusively on Hammon's "moral reform" message (the need for literacy), neglecting his endorsement of nonresistance.
- [19] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought Volume Two: The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 15.
- [20] Kimberly K. Smith, *The Dominion of Voice: Riot, Reason, and Romance in Antebellum Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 16–20.
- [21] See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 119.
- [22] Walker lamented in Article II of the *Appeal*: "Oh! Coloured people of these United States, I ask you, in the name of that God who made us, have we, in consequence of oppression, nearly lost the spirit of man, and, in no very trifling degree, adopted that of brutes" (28). He later urged his readers "to prove to the Americans and the world, that we are MEN, and not brutes, as we have been represented" (32). The mode of representation to which Walker refers at this point of the *Appeal* does not equate "brute" with violence, but instead articulates "brute" with an emasculated "groveling submission" (30).

- [23] Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey: The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 234–36. On this idea, see also Albert Raboteau’s discussion of the way Christianity provided slaves with a resource for “inner resistance.” Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 302.

There is a strong family resemblance between Huggins’ description of slave stoicism and Raboteau’s sense of “inner resistance” and Jane Tompkins’ reconstruction of “sentimental power” in antebellum women’s fiction. As is the case with slave stoicism, women’s sentimental fiction features “an ethic of submission.” But, Tompkins argues, submission “is never submission to the will of a husband or father . . . [it is] a self-willed act of conquest of one’s own passions.” Female submission in these novels should be understood, Tompkins insists, as “the mastery of herself, and therefore, paradoxically, an assertion of autonomy.” See Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 161–62. Noticing this connection between stoical slaves and self-willed submissive women does not lead to the conclusion reached by advocates such as Walker (stoical nonresistance emasculates or feminizes African Americans). Walker evidently understood emasculation or feminization as conditions of abjection and powerlessness, whereas Huggins, Tompkins, and other scholars urge us to recognize a differently modality of power at work among some women and African Americans in antebellum America.

- [24] Theophus Smith, 184–90; quote on p. 188.

- [25] In the final chapter of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin wrote:

[I]f we are inhumanly harassed by a cruel prince; if we are rapaciously plundered by an avaricious or luxurious one; if we are neglected by an indolent one; or if we are persecuted on account of piety, by an impious and sacrilegious one,—let us first call to mind our transgressions against God. . . . Let us, in the next place . . . implore the aid of the Lord, in whose hands are the hearts of kings and the revolutions of kingdoms. . . . [Here] is displayed his wonderful goodness . . . for sometimes he raises up some of his servants as public avengers, and arms them with his commission to punish unrighteous domination, and to deliver from their distressing calamities a people who have been unjustly oppressed.

Institutes (1559; rpt., Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1928), II, 660–61. Similarly, in 1554 John Knox sent epistles to Protestants in England and Scotland suffering under the yoke of the Catholic Queen Mary Tudor. In these epistles Knox counseled patient suffering, alluding to the Old Testament when he promised his readers that God would “raise up a Jehu” who would deliver them from their suffering. See, for example, John Knox, “Faithful Admonition,” in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (1855; rpt., New York: AMS Press, 1966), III, 309.

- [26] Young’s *Manifesto* is reprinted in Sterling Stuckey, *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 30–38 (quotations on 37–38).

- [27] Whipper’s address was reprinted in the *Colored American* in the September 9, 16, 23, and 30, 1837, issues, and has been reprinted in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, III, 238–51. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text. Few contemporary analyses of American nonresistance recognize the degree to which African Americans engaged this issue; see, for example, Dan McKanan, *Identifying the Image of God: Radical Christians and Nonviolent Power in the Antebellum United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). A subordinate objective of this essay is to situate both Whipper and Garnet within the antebellum nonresistance tradition.

- [28] See Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 245.
- [29] Samuel Cornish's decision to reprint Whipper's 1837 AMRS speech provided Garnet and other New Yorkers with access to it. Whipper's decision to reprint one of Garnet's orations in the October 1839 edition of the *National Reformer* further suggests some familiarity between the two men. Finally, Sterling Stuckey suggests that it very well may have been Garnet who, under the pseudonym "Sidney," responded to Whipper's early 1841 critique of the August 1840 Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York which Garnet helped organize; see Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 212.
- [30] Originally reprinted in both the *Liberator* and the *Emancipator and Free American* in February 1842, the "Address" can be found in Harrold, *Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism*, 153–61. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text.
- [31] Garrison's "Address" was initially published in the *Liberator* on June 2, 1843, and reissued as a pamphlet in Boston by O. Johnson. It can be found in Harrold, *Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism*, 169–78. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text.
- [32] As scholars such as Wilson Moses and Theophus Smith have noted, the paradigmatic manifestation of the nonresistant slave "suffering servant" was in all likelihood Harriet Beecher Stowe's character "Uncle Tom." I will discuss Stowe's literary character in relation to Garnet's call to action later in the essay.
- [33] A. E. Marsh, "The Colored Convention," *Liberator*, September 8, 1843, n.p.
- [34] Rod Hart uses this expression to refer to all of the messages which impinge on a speaker or writer's audience, and by extension on speakers and writers. See *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 51–52. See also Kirt Wilson's sense of "discursive field" developed in his "Interpreting the Discursive Field of the Montgomery Bus Boycott: Martin Luther King's Holt Street Address," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 299–326.
- [35] Horton and Horton, "Violence, Protest, and Identity," 89; see also "Affirmation of Manhood," 135, 144.
- [36] On "emotive language," see Cynthia King, "Henry Highland Garnet" in *African American Orators: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Richard W. Leeman (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), 147. While Stanley Harrold argues that Garnet called on slaves to undertake a general strike, he nevertheless focuses on his "violent imagery" (*Rise*, 35, 57).
- [37] Glaude, *Exodus!*, esp. 146, 156, and 158. Glaude's analysis echoes Shiffrin's (1971) discussion of the way "Garnet's argument had transformed physical violence from cardinal sin to divinely ordained responsibility. The values of a religious movement were suddenly turned upside down. . . . Garnet had again turned the arguments of abolitionists such as William Whipper upside down" (50–51). Shiffrin appears to be the first scholar to perceive a connection between Whipper's 1837 AMRS address and Garnet's 1843 "Address to the Slaves."
- [38] See Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet*, 10; *Black Abolitionist Papers*, III, 187–88.
- [39] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope* (Philadelphia: The Geneva Press, 1983), 54; Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 90. See also Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro—A History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966).
- [40] In his study of Walker's *Appeal*, Peter Hinks devotes a few pages to comparing Walker's text with Garnet's "Address" (see *To Awaken*, 234–35). He argues that Garnet "fell far short of Walker's impressive effort to speak directly to the slaves through simple and concrete language, powerful emotional liaisons, and emphatic cadences yoked to religious yearning. Garnet often sounded formal, distant, and even admonishing of the slaves." Garnet sounds, Hinks concludes, "like an admonishing schoolmaster" or, following Wilmore's observations, we might modify Hinks' conclusion and conclude that Garnet sounded like what he was: a

Presbyterian minister. In his brief discussion of Garnet, Hinks seems unable either to appreciate or to recognize how an individual could advocate radical action without relying on the very emotional, enthusiastic cadences of evangelical revivalism, but that is precisely what we need to do if we are to understand the texture of Garnet’s “Address.” While Walker transformed Christianity into “a radical egalitarian evangelicalism” through which he could urge resistance, and Harriet Beecher Stowe and many other sentimental evangelicals of the period sought to combat, in George Fredrickson’s terms, the “doubting intellect” with the emotional, evangelical piety (or “religion of the heart”) which energized the nonresistant Negro, Henry Highland Garnet fashioned an alternative to both appropriations of Christianity by drawing upon his Presbyterian/reformed Protestant heritage and educational training. See Fredrickson, 111–12.

- [41] Milton C. Sernett, *Abolition’s Axe: Beriah Green, Oneida Institute, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 125, 73. Given the leanings of Garnet’s Presbyterian mentor, Theodore Wright, he was probably a member of the more enthusiastic “new school” Presbyterians which emerged in the 1830s. But on the rational/enthusiastic spectrum employed by historians of American religion such as Alan Heimert, new school Presbyterians such as Garnet are much more rational than the highly enthusiastic Methodists and Baptists (denominations which had a large following among nineteenth-century African Americans). See Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).
- [42] Sernett, 44.
- [43] As numerous scholars have demonstrated, by the early 1800s most American Protestants, including such enormously influential Presbyterians as Charles Finney, had abandoned a strict Calvinist confession (e.g. human depravity, absolute dependence on God’s grace, etc.) in favor of a much more liberal, “Arminian” theology (which acknowledged humanity’s capacity to achieve salvation through human agency). My analysis leads me to propose a slight modification to this accepted interpretation. On the interlaced topics of resistance and nonresistance, American Protestants remained in an argumentative trajectory established in the writings of sixteenth-century radical Calvinists such as Knox and Christopher Goodman. Part of Garnet’s conceptual and rhetorical innovation resides in the way he imbricated the tradition of Protestant resistance with an Arminian emphasis on human, and specifically African American, agency.
- [44] My analysis of this passage parallels Glaude’s discussion of how Garnet “turned religious benevolence on its head . . . [by focusing] on the duties of black Christian slaves to forsake the obstacles to obtaining the grace of God.” Garnet, Glaude continues, shifted the focus “from the sinful character of slavery . . . to the sinful aspect of the slave’s submission” (152–54).
- [45] Cynthia King also notes the deductive texture of this passage in her entry on Garnet in *African-American Orators: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Richard W. Leeman (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), 145.
- [46] Skinner, 17. Goodman’s most influential tract, *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed of their Subjects: And Wherin they may Lawfully by Gods Worde be Disobeyed and Resisted* [sic] originated as a 1557 sermon on Acts and, according to Jane E. A. Dawson, “completely redefined the doctrine of obedience as a Christian duty.” See Dawson, “Trumpeting Resistance: Christopher Goodman and John Knox,” in *John Knox and the British Reformations*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), esp. 146–53 (quote on 147).
- [47] Idolatry was the pre-eminent evil against which Reformation figures such as John Knox did battle. Nineteenth-century African Americans did not judge pro-slavery theology to be idolatrous. David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet did not argue that Southern slaveholders worshipped false gods (although they repeatedly castigated southern “avarice”); they insisted, in Walker’s words, that slaveholders did not acknowledge “that God made man

to serve Him *alone*, and that man should have no other Lord or Lords but Himself—that God Almighty is the *sole proprietor* or *master* of the WHOLE human family” (*Appeal*, 7, emphasis and typography in original). Walker went further than Garnet in suggesting, “If it were possible, would they [slaveholders] not *dethrone* Jehovah and seat themselves upon his throne?” (19).

- [48] Early Protestant reformers in England and Scotland such as John Knox continually engaged the question of who might be required or have a duty to resist evil. For example, see Knox’s 1558 “Letter Addressed to the Commonality of Scotland” in which he argued that the people’s degraded condition did not remove their obligation to act. See David Laing, ed., *The Works of John Knox* (1855; rpt., New York: AMS Press, 1966), IV, esp. 526–27. Scott Dolff argues that Knox employed a principle of “divine pragmatism” to supplement an appeal to covenant theology in order to argue that, contra English nobility, Scottish nobles and the Scottish people were not required “to overthrow the reigning national government.” Garnet, I argue, also exploited the resources of covenant theology to assert that slaves had a duty to resist, but—like Knox—he pragmatically advised against “a revolution with the sword” (410). See Dolff, “The Two John Knoxes and the Justification of Non-Revolution: A Response to Dawson’s Argument from Covenant,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55 (2004): 71–73.
- [49] Skinner, 236–37.
- [50] Regarding Knox’s “reversal” or reformulation of Christian obedience, Richard Greaves writes: “There is nothing in Knox’s theology itself—or in Reformed or Protestant theology in general—that made such a reversal inevitable, although his conception of covenant responsibilities made the reversal extremely likely.” Similarly, we cannot fully understand Garnet’s reconstruction of Christian duty if we only treat it, as Glaude does, as an ironic reversal of antebellum moral reform rhetoric; the force of Garnet’s “Address” emerged in part from its reanimation of covenant theology. See Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1980), 127.
- [51] While the maxim did not appear in the “Address,” A. E. Marsh reported that Garnet introduced this and other “axioms” into the ensuing debate. See Marsh, “The Colored Convention,” *Liberator*, September 8, 1843, n.p. Patrick Rael notes the connection between Garnet and the radical tradition of English Protestantism from which the maxim emerged. He writes:

[Garnet] transformed the problem from one of justifying resistance in the face of a Christian commandment to obey to one that posed a tension between obedience to God and obedience to masters. Now, by heeding the words of English radicals who insisted that ‘rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God,’ the oppressed had a duty to resist, openly and actively.

See *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 273.

- [52] Dean Hammer, *The Puritan Tradition in Revolutionary, Federalist, and Whig Political Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 93. Julian Boyd, editor of Thomas Jefferson’s papers, reviews Jefferson’s fascination with the motto. In the original manuscript in which Jefferson discussed his first encounter with the motto, it isn’t clear if Jefferson attributed the motto to Benjamin Franklin’s “hand” (handwriting, suggesting that Franklin was the author) or his “hands” (suggesting that he passed it along to Jefferson). Julian Boyd, “Bradshaw’s Epitaph’: The Source of ‘Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God,’” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, I, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 677–79. The Library of America’s volume *Benjamin Franklin, Writings* includes the complete “epitaph” as it appeared in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* on December 15, 1775, and attributes it to Franklin. (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc., 1987), 743–44.

- [53] Jonathan Mayhew, “A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers,” in *Pamphlets of the American Revolution*, ed. Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 231–32.
- [54] Heimert argues that Mayhew’s reputation as a “fiery liberal” is without foundation (274). His critical evaluation of Mayhew’s style resembles Hinks’ negative evaluation of Garnet
- [55] According to Alan Heimert,

“Arminianism,” a name derived from that of the Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), had originally referred to the belief that grace is not irresistible, as Calvin had argued, but conditional [it could be refused]. By the eighteenth century, however, the term was used less rigorously . . . to refer to any of a number of vague ideas expressive of impatience with the “rigid” and “harsh” doctrines of Calvinism. (4)

In short, Arminianism maintained that on the question of salvation, humanity possessed considerably more agency than traditional Calvinism taught. On Mayhew’s Arminianism, see Charles W. Akers, *Called Unto Liberty: A Life of Jonathan Mayhew, 1720–1766* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 61ff.

- [56] Reed, “Henry Highland,” esp. 190–91. On the Althusserian concept of interpellation, see Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133–50. Dexter Gordon, in *Black Identity*, also notes the “Address”’s interpellative potential, but he argues that it is a consequence of Garnet’s incipient “black nationalist narrative” which “posits a transhistorical subject” (144–45). Following Glaude’s advice to approach the text “in Christian terms” and comparing it to Smith and Garrison’s precursor texts reveals additional interpellative possibilities.
- [57] John Calvin certainly did not invent the middle ground argument strategy, but he employed it regularly in the context of secular matters. For example, he began the final chapter of his *Institutes* by distinguishing between the “infatuated and barbarous men [who] madly endeavor to subvert this ordinance [civil government] established by God” and the “flatterers of princes, extolling their power beyond all just bounds, [who] hesitate not to oppose it to the authority of God himself” (633). Skinner (*Foundations*) reads the first passage (translated as “insane and barbarous men”) as a reference to the radical Anabaptist movement of the 1520s and 1530s which rejected all secular authority as part of its quest for religious purity (193). But if Calvin sought to distance himself from the radical Anabaptists, he also sought to distance himself from the apparently Catholic “flatterers of princes” who sought to wield “the authority of God himself.” Seeking a *tertium quid*, I suggest, is an element of reformed Protestant teaching on secular authority.
- [58] On the compatibility of religious and liberal defenses of a people’s right to revolution, see Alex Tuckness, “Discourses of Resistance in the American Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 547–63.
- [59] Ichabod Spencer, *Fugitive Slave Law: The Religious Duty of Obedience to Law* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1850), 14–15.
- [60] Daniel Webster, “Second Reply to Hayne,” January 26–27, 1830, in *The Papers of Daniel Webster Speeches and Formal Writings*, ed. Charles Wiltse (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1974), I, 329, 337.
- [61] Abraham Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address,” in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, ed. Roy P. Basler (1946; rpt., New York: Da Capo Press, n.d.), 585.
- [62] Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (1972; rpt, New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 28.
- [63] Maier, 51–76; Smith, 33–39. On Dickinson’s quest for a middle course, see James Jasinski, “Idioms of Prudence in Three Antebellum Controversies: Revolution, Constitution, and

- Slavery,” in *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice*, ed. Robert Hariman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), esp. 150–53.
- [64] Kimberly Smith notes the way gender constructions functioned in the quest for a middle course: “Colonists were to be neither riotous nor submissive; rather, they were to behave in a manner befitting freemen—and the gendered term is appropriate here. Attempts to legitimate resistance typically relied heavily on . . . masculine . . . virtues” (36). Richard Yarborough discusses the centrality of masculinity in African American advocates such as David Walker, Henry Garnet, and—especially—Frederick Douglass in “Race, Violence, and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass’s ‘The Heroic Slave,’” in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 166–87.
- [65] He reiterated this point in the “Address”’s final paragraph.
- [66] Glaude, *Exodus!*, 156. See also Harrold, *Rise*, 34.
- [67] Knox, “Letter to the Commonality,” in *Works*, IV, 534.
- [68] I part company with Harry Reed on this point. I agree with Reed’s claim that “Garnet’s plan entailed militant but nonviolent civil disobedience,” but I think Reed mistaken when he emphatically claims that Garnet “advocated militant self-defense” in paragraphs fourteen and fifteen.
- [69] It may seem odd to introduce *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* into a discussion of Garnet’s “Address” since the first serial installment of the novel did not appear until June 1851—almost eight years after Garnet addressed the delegates in Buffalo. And it might seem odd to juxtapose Garnet’s logic with that represented by a fictional character. But *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was an unusual work of fiction; second in popularity in the free states to the Bible, it represented the attitudes and sentiments of the North’s evangelical culture with considerable clarity. Late twentieth-century scholars have recognized the novel and character’s cultural significance. Wilson Moses notes the way Uncle Tom represented “the model of the submissive Christ” (52, 65). Richard Yarborough describes the way Stowe’s character “approaches the Christlike in his passivity, piety, and resigned refusal to challenge the apparent will of God.” See Yarborough, “Strategies of Characterization in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel,” in *New Essays on Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 54. According to George Fredrickson, Uncle Tom “is not simply a Negro but a spokesman for the evangelical ‘religion of the heart’ which Harriet Beecher Stowe was recommending as the only path to salvation.” Stowe, Fredrickson concludes, advocated “evangelical piety and Uncle Tom served as a weapon in her war against the doubting intellect” (111–12).
- [70] Moses, 56. George Fredrickson makes a similar observation; see 117.
- [71] Abednego Seller prepared the earliest conceptual history; see *The History of Passive Obedience since the Reformation* (Amsterdam: Theodore Johnson, 1689). Many well-known British intellectuals including George Berkeley and Samuel Johnson discussed the concept in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. During the Revolutionary period, loyalists such as Jonathan Boucher advocated the doctrine (see especially his 1775 sermon “On Civil Liberty, Passive Obedience, and Nonresistance”) while radical Whigs typically denied passive obedience the status of a middle course by equating it with abject submission. Some nonresisters in the 1840s, recognizing the concept’s pejorative connotations, sought to distinguish more clearly “passive obedience” and nonresistance. See, for example, Adin Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings* (1846; rpt., New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), esp. 2.
- [72] Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed* in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Conrad Bergendoff and Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), XL, 125.
- [73] In the June 15, 1839, issue of the *Non-Resistant*, Chapman wrote: “Passive non-resistance is one thing; active non-resistance another. We mean to *apply* our principles. We mean to be

bold for God. Action! Action!—thus shall we overcome the violent.” Quoted in Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 247. There is, of course, some irony in suggesting that Chapman’s 1839 “active non-resistance” might resemble Garnet’s 1843 call for resistance, given the former’s negative reaction to the latter’s “Address” in the September 22, 1843, edition of *The Liberator* (Chapman was serving as editor that fall in Garrison’s absence).

- [74] See also Harrold’s discussion of the way Garnet embodied “an assertive black masculinity” (*Rise*, 96) in both the “Address” and his subsequent response to Chapman’s editorial.
- [75] See Bell, *Survey*, 38–68.
- [76] Anonymous, “A Thought on Emancipation,” in *Liberty Chimes* (Providence, RI: Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society/R. W. Potter, 1845), 80.
- [77] Micajah T. Johnson, “Non-Resistance,” *The Liberator*, July 23, 1852, n.p.
- [78] Charles K. Whipple, *The Non-Resistance Principle: With Particular Application to the Help of Slaves by Abolitionists* (Boston, MA: R. F. Wallcut, 1860), 18, 21–22.
- [79] Harry Reed argues that Garnet “anticipated” Henry David Thoreau’s call for passive resistance in 1848 and was, therefore, a domestic precursor to Martin Luther King’s militant nonviolent civil disobedience. See Reed, “Garnet’s ‘Address’ Reconsidered,” 190.