Performing Freedom in Antebellum New York: The New York African Free School

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> When’er to Afric’s shores I turn my eyes,
> Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise,
> I see by more than Fancy’s mirror shown,
> The burning village, and the blazing town
> See the dire victim torn from social life,
> The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife—
> The weak forlorn is dragg’d by hostile hands,
> . . . The sole sad heritage her child obtains;
> Ev’n this last wretched boon their foes deny,
> To weep together or to die.[1]

The poem I’ve just read touches upon many of the themes we have come to identify with antislavery literature, with its extended focus on an orphaned, suffering child. The circumstances of its delivery gives that metaphor a particularly vivid frame, one in which representation, race and childhood are articulated in complex and contradictory ways. The selection was written by Hannah More, an influential white writer. In all likelihood, it was performed aloud for like-minded white patrons in New York City. The words were spoken however, by a fourteen year-old black youth named Joe Anthony as he participated in “Examination Day” at the New-York African Free School in 1815. As he stood on stage, Joe Anthony simultaneously occupied several subject positions. As he spoke in More’s elevated prose, he illustrated his elocutionary talents, and the potential of young black children to achieve intellectual prowess. But, inevitably, his own physical presence altered the meaning of the poem for the audience. His youth, and his color, facilitate a metonymic process in which Anthony stands in for the shrieking babe, or at the very least, embodies the “weak forlorn” victim, the youth who stands heir to the “sole sad heritage the child obtains.” In doing so, Joe Anthony materializes the “deadliest guilt” that Moore describes.

The performance, and the school at which it was performed, occupied a volatile position in the changing landscape of antebellum New York. The New York African Free School was created in 1787, by the New York Manumission Society, a group dedicated to advocating for African Americans. The school's explicit mission was to educate black children to take their place as American citizens. It began well before the gradual manumission law of 1799 as a single room schoolhouse with about 40 students, most of whom were the children of slaves. By the time it was absorbed into the New York City public school system in 1835, slavery had been outlawed in the state, and the school had educated thousands of children, a number of whom went on to become well-known in the United States and Europe, including the physicians James McCune Smith, internationally-known actor Ira Aldridge, missionary Alexander Crummell, and abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet.

Yet in spite of the vital role this school played in the creation of the first generation of a black leaders, few historians have paid attention to it—those that have have focused largely on assessing the motives of the white New York Manumission Society, who created and funded the school for over forty years. The Society was created in 1785 by some of New York's most wealthy and influential white citizens. Its members included luminaries such as John Jay and Alexander Hamilton. As John Rury has recently noted, to a "great extent, this organization was the white community's principal agency for dealing with a growing black minority."[2] And the records of this school provide an intriguing map to the interactions between the white elite and a young group of African Americans heading towards the 1827 emancipation in New York City. Certainly, the Society did many good things for the black community, creating and funding the African

Free School among them. Yet historians such as Robert Swan and Leslie Harris have noted the Society's often ambivalent stance towards the very New Yorkers they pledged to help.[3] For instance, many members were slaveholders when they joined the society, and some continued to be slaveholders throughout their tenure. The society fought on behalf of the good treatment, and eventual freedom, of black New Yorkers, but often disapproved of how black New Yorkers chose to celebrate these victories.[4]

In this talk, however, I am more interested in exploring what Joe Anthony's performance may have meant to Joe Anthony, and the other students at the New York African Free School. In doing so, I want to explore how the school itself participated in the metaphorical process through which blackness and childhood were mutually defined categories. Exploring this archive, I suggest, complicates the notion of representation, and more specifically, of our continued desire for an authentic "speaking subject" who can wholly resist the narratives imposed upon him or her. The words of these students—performed for powerful whites, often written by white schoolteachers, yet also mediated by their own experiences, disallow any easy moments of pure oppression or resistance. Instead, we witness a densely mediated process in which children were taught their role as living metaphors—linking blackness to childhood in ways that would have repercussions for abolitionists and black leaders in the next generation.

Shane White has suggested that in 1820's New York was a place where freedom had to be explicitly performed. As White has demonstrated powerfully, antebellum New York was rife with conflicts about how, where, and under what circumstances black people could try on the role of free adults, of cultural consumers, or of future citizens.[5] For the children who attended the New York African Free School, the act of public

representation was often an act of ventriloquism, as they literally performed the scripts provided for them by their white teachers. Most of the students whose work we have were between 11-14 years old, poised between childhood and adulthood, as well as between slavery and freedom. Their education and their performances, I suggest, position these students somewhere between what Toni Morrison has called the "described and the describers." [6]

Both their race and their childhood were central to the roles they would play. Childhood was a place where narratives of dependence and resistance collided spectacularly in early republican New York—and throughout the nation. We are familiar with the tactic of comparing African Americans with children in order to disempower them. The African American-as-child metaphor was so pervasive, and has been so hard-fought that it seems hardly worth analyzing. But of course, the metaphor was never stable. Instead, its development and deployment depended on mutually constituting and devaluing both African Americans and children.[7]

The truth of it was that childhood itself was not yet defined as a state of utter vulnerability and dependence during the time the NYAFS students were performing. The Enlightenment model of the child as a source of boundless potential still held considerable sway. Remember, this was a model used extensively in Revolutionary rhetoric, arguing that the child-colonies had come of age and deserved independence.[8] For black New Yorkers, the rhetoric of childhood was particularly freighted. As the 1799 manumission law made clear, freedom was for the young. As it granted freedom only to those born after a certain date, the legislation carried with it many of the most radical ideas about childhood and freedom found in Enlightenment and Revolutionary rhetoric—

that childhood was a time of incredible potential, that the job of a child was to come of age after careful monitoring. (Of course, the law also deferred the cost of manumission for several years.) The law itself refers to those about to be free as children, even when they are clearly adults.[9]

The New York African Free School represented an investment in the Enlightenment stress on education, and the potential of the young. Such a belief was a double-edged sword in the debate over slavery. Against the backdrop of Revolutionary rhetoric, inspired by Locke and others, insisting that education was the key to equality, writers ranging from Thomas Jefferson and the lawmakers of New York State culled these very theories about early childhood to argue against immediate emancipation. Jefferson, as just one example, wrote to Edward Bancroft in 1788, as far as he could judge "from the experiments which have been made, to give liberty to, or rather, to abandon persons whose habits have been formed in slavery is like abandoning children."[10] In this formulation, the impressionability of children becomes a liability rather than a claim to future equality. Early habits—the brutal lessons of slavery taught largely by white men--arguably warped slave children so completely that they are trapped in the tyranny of early influences. The answer, then, for pro-manumission New Yorkers was to free children first, and to provide a form of education that would allow these children to assume the mantle of freedom.

The remarkable records and writings of the students who attended this school offer a glimpse of the experience of those who were explicitly poised between dueling metaphors of childhood. That experience engaged the contesting pairings of blackness with *both* childhood potential *and* childhood vulnerability and dependence. The records

preserve the work offered on Examination Days from about 1812-1827. Examination Days were a yearly gathering that anticipated the modern practice of school plays. On these occasions, the New York African Free School treated benefactors, parents, and the local press to a series of performances and presentations designed to showcase the students' blooming abilities. It was at these moments of performance that the students, their work, and the efforts of their instructors, were put on display for the approval of those who were footing the bill. A successful day would display intellect, and elicit sympathy.

Reading these documents necessitates what William L. Andrews has called "creative hearing"—listening to the silences and pauses between script writer and performer, between lesson and learner.[11] When looking at the beautiful sketches of charming scenes, exciting renditions of warships, and respectful portraits of Benjamin Franklin, our first impulse might be to see these images as the extemporaneous expressions of young children recording what interested them.[12] However, the process of drawing instruction in the early nineteenth century emphasized skill in copying over originality. The vast majority of the images found in this volume were copied out of a drawing instruction manual. Simply put, we have a portrait of Benjamin Franklin before us today because the drawing instructor felt that Benjamin Franklin was a suitable subject for that day.

Yet, in spite of these limitations, these images offer us insight into the experience of these young students. To begin with, moral instruction was central to the pedagogy of the era, and was particularly important to the trustees of the New York African Free School, who felt that they needed to instill good habits in the sons and daughters of

slaves. As in other schools that used the Lancasterian method of education, there was a great emphasis on imitation, as we can see from the many copied poems and images.[13] The numerous speeches and performances indicate how the curriculum stressed oratory skills. Indeed, several of the graduates made the most of those lessons as they achieved success as powerful speakers on African American issues.

Second, we can glean the priorities and values of the instructors by considering the choices that they made. For instance, we have a portrait of Benjamin Franklin, but no portrait of *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, the black leader of the Haitian Revolution, and, who, like Benjamin Franklin, was a major player on the world stage in the late eighteenth century. Certainly, the students would have been familiar with him—New York had an influx of post-revolutionary slaves and masters from Haiti during this era. Indeed, nowhere in the records do we find a portrait of any black subject. These images, remember, were copied from drawing manuals, which were unlikely to have any models of African descent. Many of these drawing exercises sought to capture particular emotional states. This attention to body language was also an important part of the school curriculum. Two schoolbooks in use at the school, Lindley Murray's 1800 *The English Reader*, And Caleb Bingham's *The American Preceptor* coupled transcribed poems with performance instructions.[14] Students were taught how to modulate pitch, emphasis and gestures to help to convey the proper meaning of the text, and to convince the reader of the speaker's sincerity.

But even if they had little control over the subject matter of their lessons, the students invariably brought their own experience to the work before them, and, I would suggest, the work took on new meanings in their hands. The image of the hunter and his

dogs, for instance, was a standard scene for European artists enamored with romanticizing country life. However, the image takes on a different tone when we remember that students such as Henry Highland Garnet had, with his family, run away from slavery. For a student like the young Garnet, who went on to become a radical abolitionist, the picture of a white man with dogs on a hunt was more likely to elicit nightmarish associations with the slave-catcher, than the idyllic image of pastoral leisure that whites would likely feel the piece conveyed. Similarly, a portrait of Napoleon Francois, Charles Joseph, takes on particular layers of meaning when executed by New York African Free School students. Caught up in the political turmoil of his father, Napoleon Bonaparte's, life, Charles Joseph was exiled to Vienna at the age of four, and encouraged to forget all ties to France. One wonders how young black students, who may well have had their own family histories stolen from them through slavery, might have felt about this young, dispossessed prince, exiled far from his native land.

The written texts pose a similar set of questions about authorship, intent and reception. Because the record-keepers were meticulous about authorship, we can feel fairly confident about discerning between adult-and student-authored texts. What to do with that information is a more difficult question. How did the white-authored scripts teach students to see themselves, their heritage, and their future? In Volume Three of the AFS records, the 1822 valedictory address of 14 year old Margaret Addle reveals tension between the metaphors casting the child-as-potential and of the child-as-victim. Addle's speech shifts between pride in her accomplishments and anxiety over her family's continued vulnerability as black people in a slave nation.

The speech—written for Margaret by white schoolmaster Charles C. Andrews—begins by having her display her elocutionary talents, and by asking the audience to consider those talents as evidence of the potential of black people throughout the nation:

> I appear before you, as regards myself under very interesting circumstances. It is to take my leave of my School Mates and much endeared teachers. In doing this, I feel it difficult to suppress those feelings which such an occasion is calculated to produce on a heart sensible of obligations so numerous as those which I am under to the gentlemen who support, and the teachers who have had the immediate superintendence of, the institution.
>
> The advantages which this school is calculated to afford to the children of color, have on former occasions been presented to your view. I therefore shall be excused from repeating them. I need only to point you to those specimens, and remind you of the exercises this day exhibited before you, to demonstrate a truth which must at no distant period find its way to the hearts of the most incredulous viz. That the African race, though by too many of their fellow men have long been, [and] still are, held in a state, the most degrading to humanity, and nevertheless, endowed by the same almighty power that made us all, with intellectual capacities, not inferior to any of the grater human family.[15]

Then the speech takes a decided turn. From what we can know of the school's emphasis on performative delivery, Margaret's demeanor likely altered as her words shift from the proud valedictory address of a schoolgirl, to the panicked pleadings of a child for whom the auction block poses an unbearable threat:

> In looking round on my school mates, I observe one among them who excites my most tender solicitudes.
> ---It is my Brother.---
> John, this I feel to be an occasion which calls up all those tender emotions which he ever has designed should be felt by brother and sister towards each other.
> What shall I say to you?
> Oh, if I were called to part with you as some poor girls have, to part with their equally dear kindred, and each of us (like them) to be forcibly conveyed away into wretched slavery never to see each other again---but I must forbear--Thank heaven it is not, no is not the case with us; nor have I ever the anxiety which the circumstances of leaving you under the charge

> of strangers would produce. No, I leave you to receive instruction, advice reproof, and every other salutary means of informing your mind and correcting your morals, from well known, and long tried friends. . .

Reading this scripted performance now, it's frustrating to chart how the adult-authored speech undermines Margaret's abilities by raising the specter of slavery in the midst of a valedictory speech, a tactic that reduces the proud graduate to a helpless child. Yet when we consider the context in which the speech was given, the juxtaposition of slave and student might not be so contradictory. Although slavery was on the wane in New York, the fears Margaret describes were very real for many black New Yorkers. Kidnapping of free blacks by unscrupulous traders was a grave and persistent danger. In numerous cases, the Manumission Society used the legal and financial clout of its prestigious membership to prosecute kidnappers, and to aid kidnapping victims. Nonetheless, one wonders whether Margaret, if left to write her own speech, would have included a breathless lapse into an imaginary slave auction in the midst of receiving an honor she clearly had worked hard to earn.

James Field's 1819 valedictory address explicitly contrasts the Lockean ideals of childhood potential with the vision of perpetually dependent childhood emerging in both pro- and anti-slavery discourse. According to the records, this speech was spoken by Field, but written by Rueben Leggett, a school trustee. Field begins, much like Margaret, with a traditional gesture of gratitude and pride. His tone then changes, and like Margaret, he asks for the audiences' sympathy. In this instance however, it is not the imagined peril of slavery that poses the problem, but rather the everyday experience of prejudice and attendant poverty that faced young black graduates who had difficulty finding work:

> But I crave your sympathy for myself and for my School mates, for I feel that we need it.
> Had I the mind of a Lock[e] and the eloquence of a Chatham
> Still would there not be in the minds of some an immense distance that would divide me from one of a White Skin—
> What signifies it? Why should I strive hard, and acquire all the constituents of man, If the prevailing genius of the land admits as such, but in an inferior degree, —Pardon me if I feel insignificant and weak—Pardon me if I feel discouragement to oppress me to the very earth. Am I arrived at the end of my education? Just upon the event of setting out in the world? Of commencing some honest pursuit by which to earn a comfortable subsistence?
>
> What are my prospects? And to what turn my hand?
>
> Will I be a mechanic? No one will employ me, White boys won't work with me—will I be a merchant? No one will have me in his office—white clerks won't associate with me—Drudgery and servitude then are my prospects—can you be surprised at my discouragement? [16]

James Field's lament was written for him by Rueben Leggett, a white man who likely had motives of his own. As a trustee of the school, he may well have been one of a growing number of the Manumission Society who were sympathetic towards the idea of sending free blacks to colonize Africa, rather than to fight for equal rights in the U.S. Descriptions of the hardships blacks faced here were often a central part of the argument. The African American community however, was so deeply offended by growing colonizationist sentiment at the school, that, according to Manumission Society records, they effectively forced the school to replace the white colonizationist principal with black teachers.[17]

At an Examination Day in 1822, we have another troubling depiction of black childhood—one in which black parents, and black mothers in particular, are portrayed as an obstacle to a black child's hope of success. Again, this is a script performed on Examination Day by black students, but written by the white principal. This scene unfolds as two boys meet up on the path to school. One boy, William, tells his classmate

James (played by James McCune Smith—one of the school's most famous alumni) that he will be late for school that day. James assumes that William's tardiness results from his own lack of interest in school. He soon learns however, that the fault lies with William's mother:

> **William—**
>
> [Arriving late is] [n]ot altogether my pleasure either James, for I have been teazing my Mother for my breakfast for some time, and she says, "no hurry child, no hurry," and sends me to play a little longer.

The words of William's mother, ventriloquized here through a script that has been written for her son to perform for a room full of white fathers, echoes with the strategy of a slave who knows the value of taking one's time to do the master's bidding. Of course, the dialogue implies, this woman cannot grasp the difference between a slave master and a schoolmaster. Her inability to distinguish between the two, the narrative suggests, renders her trapped in a slave economy. William's connection to her, his willingness to operate within her sphere of influence, dooms him to a continuation of the misery of slavery. The memory of slavery here, embodied in a slothful mother figure, likely as fictitious as Margaret's horrific auction block scene—is once again contrasted—and deeply entangled with—an alternate scene of adult-child interaction. As a student at the New-York African Free School, William owes allegiance to another set of parents. The choice is clear who deserves his obedience:

> **James—**
>
> Well I love to be obedient to my parents and know it to be my duty, but I really think that if I could not get my breakfast in time for early school, I

> should run off without it, for half an hour's study over my sum or over any art of my other exercises at school, is of more consequence to me than even my breakfast—

When William responds that he has tried this, but only winds up going hungry the whole day together, because his parents "take but little concern," James is even more explicit in his renunciation:

> **James—**
>
> Why William, you both please and distress me. I am pleased to find that the later hours at which you are noted for going to school is not your fault and am at the same time greatly distressed to hear that your parents being so much older and who ought to—
>
> **William—**
>
> Stop James! I can't hear a word against my dear parents. I can excuse them, because they have but little learning themselves, and don't know the value of it, nor do they know how much time it takes to make one a good scholar.[18]

The clash between the imperatives of narrative and the experience of the player cast in a role here creates excruciating tension. The character of William cannot bear to hear his parents disparaged, yet the child William finds himself on stage exposing them to shame.

What were the feelings of young William Hill as he stood before his peers, and his betters, and spoke of his mothers' sloth and ignorance? Certainly, William could well have distanced himself from his stage role, comforting himself with the differences between his actual parents and the slothful and careless people he complained about on

Examination Day. It would be particularly cruel if William was chosen for the role because his teacher felt that his family situation deserved to be held up as an example. Yet the lack of distance between role and player—the child and Free School student named William *plays* a child and Free School student named William—suggests that this might be the case. The school had a policy of posting the names of truant and chronically late children for public display, so arguably, insisting that one perform a skit describing his own failures would not have been a big leap.

In some respects, the scripted performances of these children might seem hopelessly conflicted, posing a particularly thorny problem for those of who wish to separate script from speaker, white administrator from young black student. Studying the highly mediated voices of these children forces us to relinquish the satisfying—if deeply unrealistic—framework of clearly delineated oppression and resistance, or even of a black message and a white envelope. Yet as blurred as the boundaries are between script and speaker, I suggest that this archive reveals that children, particularly these children, were not simply passive receptors of the lessons adults wanted them to internalize.

Because a good number of the alumni went on to achieve roles of historical significance, we can trace how the influences of these lessons were absorbed, or perhaps repudiated, by these children in adulthood. Ira Aldridge, an internationally known actor who pushed racial boundaries by playing opposite a white leading lady in Europe said that he first caught his love of performance at the AFS. Another graduate, Henry Highland Garnet, certainly capitalized on the emphasis on public speaking although his rousing speech urging violent resistance may not have reflected the sort of elocution his teachers had hoped for.

I'd like to close with a close look at star student James McCune Smith, who as a young boy, acted in the skit that focuses on the general sloth and ineptitude of black mothers. As an adult, Smith was a force to be reckoned with—called the most educated Negro in America by Alexander Crummell. He received his medical degree from Scotland, and wrote widely on a variety of subjects. [19] As one of the leading voices of an emerging black elite, Smith was keenly invested in the black child's role in rhetoric, and in reality. By the mid 1840's, he was the Treasurer for the Society for the Promotion of Education Among Colored Children and the staff physician for the Coloured Orphans Asylum.[21] In 1848, he wrote that he would "fling whatever energy I have into the cause of colored children."[22] He wrote often about his experiences at the African Free School. "In all cases," James McCune Smith wrote, "the school-house, and school-boy days settle the permanent characteristics, establish the level, gauge the relative, mental and moral power of the man in after life; especially it was so in this school [The New York African Free School]."[23] In this retrospective, McCune Smith echoes the Lockean stress on the power of education to instill early habits—either good or bad—that would determine the abilities and character of the adult for life.

Yet, in one of his most widely-read essays—the 1855 introduction to Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Smith suggests a model of education that rewrites the notion of a wholly passive child at the mercy of whatever lessons he or she is given. Instead, he, building on Douglass's revamping of his own childhood, offers a vision of education in which *the child* discerns the merit of the influences and instructions placed before him, often gaining knowledge and power that the instructor did not envision.

In his introduction, he refers to Douglass's early life as a slave as "an education" and argues that Douglass, rather than being crushed by slavery and its dehumanizing training, actually used his own intelligence and will to take lessons from these experiences that thwarted the slaveholders' intentions:

> let us look at his schooling; the fearful discipline through which it pleased God to prepare him for the high calling on which he has since entered--the advocacy of emancipation . . . . And for this special mission, his plantation education was better than any he could have acquired in any lettered school. What he needed, was facts and experiences, welded to acutely wrought up sympathies, and these he could not elsewhere have obtained, in a manner so peculiarly adapted to his nature. His physical being was well trained, also, running wild until advanced into boyhood; hard work and light diet, thereafter, and a skill in handicraft in youth. For his special mission, then, this was, considered in connection with his natural gifts, a good schooling; and, for his special mission, he doubtless "left school" just at the proper moment.[24]

Smith, who thirty years earlier had stood on a stage in front of a predominantly white audience to perform a script decrying the sloth of black mothers, and insist on the importance of listening to the wise advice of white patriarchs, takes pains to write a different story to account for Douglass's success. Quoting Douglass's own assertions, Smith expands upon the proposition that it is to his black mother, not his white father, to whom Douglass owes his success:

> for his energy, perseverance, eloquence, invective, sagacity, and wide sympathy, he is indebted to his Negro blood. The very marvel of his style would seem to be a development of that other marvel -- how his mother learned to read.[25]

Finally, Smith, himself a remarkable example of success, and of a very different set of lessons given by a better-intentioned group of white fathers, makes it quite clear to whom he credits his own ability to flourish in a hostile world, and finally, closes his introduction

with a model of achievement in which black women begin a tradition of education that can now be passed down in print as well is in blood:

> The son of a self-emancipated bond-woman, I feel joy in introducing to you my brother, who has rent his own bonds, and who, in his every relation -- as a public man, as a husband and as a father -- is such as does honor to the land which gave him birth. I shall place this book in the hands of the only child spared me, bidding him to strive and emulate its noble example.[26]

In returning to the question of early education, Smith reworks both the Enlightenment notion of the child of potential and the antebellum perversion of the Lockean ideal—the permanently scarred and dependent slave-child in perpetuity. And in the process, Smith offers a perspective for us on his own childhood lessons. Both free and black children in antebellum U.S. were indeed exposed to many instructions from white fathers intending to teach them their given roles. But, Smith insists, building on Douglass's own assertions, that black children were capable of processing, absorbing and recreating those lessons in ways unanticipated—and depending on your perspective, unintended by the educators. In so doing, Smith cannily dismantles the disempowering metaphor of the perpetual slave-child—not by distancing blackness from childhood, but by reworking *both* blackness *and* childhood as sites of resilience.

In closing, I suggest the skits and speeches the students of the New York African Free School provide a means of thinking through the performance of race and the performance of childhood itself, and how the two were intertwined in the antebellum U.S. One thing the African Free School did for its students was to make them acutely aware of the narrative their very being invoked, and the effect that shifting that narrative might have on people in power. And, if the careers of many of the alumni are any indication,

they learned two sorts of lessons of the African Free School: the explicit messages found in the text *and* the messages they themselves gleaned while trying to discern the difference between their own reality and the social script that they were handed to perform. Perhaps, I hope, these records can allow us to revisit the still prevalent vision of the damaged child-in-need-of-rescue in the service of a resilient, intelligent vision of youth—one that does not equate temporary dependence or vulnerability with an abdication of personal strength, power, or the right to respect.

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[1] "Verses on the Slave Trade by Joe Anthony at the Examination in William Street," 1815 *Records of the New-York African Free School* Volume III p. 7 The selection is a passage taken from Hannah More's 1788 poem "Slavery." ll-95-104.

[2] John Rury, "Philanthropy, Self-Help and Social Control: The New York Manumission Society and Free Blacks: 1785-1810, *Phylon* 46.3 (1985) 231.

[3] Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery, African Americans in New York City, 1626-1815* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2004), Robert J. Swan, "John Teasman: African American Educator and the Emergence of Community in Black New York City 1785-1815." *Journal of the Early Republic* 12.3 (1992): 331-356.

[4] For instance, Black New Yorkers claimed their right to the streets of the New York by holding a lavish parade to celebrate the abolition of the slave trade in 1808. In 1809, the Manumission Society was concerned that "the method of celebrating the abolition of the Slave trade was improper" and worried that such demonstrations would "cause [detrimental] reflections to be made on this Society" demanded that such parades be discontinued. Qtd in Shane White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York*, p.62.

[5] Shane White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York,* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002).

[6] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (Vintage, 1993) 90.

[7] I discuss the ways in which this metaphor evolves—and is resisted—in early America in my book-in-progress, *Suffering Childhood in America: Metaphors of Power and Resistance*. (working title)

[8] See Caroline Levander, "Let Her White Progeny Offset Her Dark One: The Child and Racial Politics of Nation Making." *American Literature* 76.2 (2004) 221-246 for the use of child imagery in Revolutionary rhetoric. For an analysis of the impact of Enlightenment theory on the lives of actual children, see Holly Brewer, By *Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Durham, UNC Press, 2005)

[9] Laws of the state of New-York. Passed at the twenty-second session, second meeting, of the Legislature, begun and held at the city of Albany, the second day of January, 1799. (Albany: Printed by Loring Andrews, printer to the state), 1799

[10] Thomas Jefferson, Leter to Edward Bancroft, January 26, 1788. http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/jefferson_s_01.html

[11] William L. Andrews*, To Tell a Free Story: the First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 9.

[12] The images of Volume IV of the NYAFS records are available for online viewing at https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/
[13] The school depended on the Lancasterian system of instruction, created and implemented by Joseph Lancaster in 1798 in London. Under Lancaster's system, student-monitors acted as teaching assistants, allowing one adult teacher to supervise hundreds of children.
[14] Thanks to Thomas Thurston of the Gilder Lehrman for uncovering these important sources.
[15] I have made silent punctuation corrections where necessary. Records of the New York African Free School. Volume III, p. 36 & 37. New-York Historical Society
[16] *Records of the New York African Free School*, Vol. III, 27-29.
[17] Records of the New York Manumission Society, Vol VIII. p 78 New-York Historical Society
[18] *Records of the New York African Free School* Vol III. p. 41.
[19] David Blight first brought McCune Smith to historian's attention in his illuminative 1985 essay. More recently, John Stauffer has elucidated Smith's contacts with some of he most prominent activists of his day. David W. Blight, "In Search of Learning, Liberty, and Self-Definition: James McCune Smith and the Ordeal of the Antebellum Black Intellectual," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 9: (July 1985)," John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004)
[21] , Blight, "In Search of Learning," 9.
[22] Smith to Gerrit Smith, May 12, 1848, Gerrit Smith Papers, University of Syracuse Library. qtd in David Blight and James O. Horton, Introductory Essay, in *Hope is the First Great Blessing: Leaves from the New York African Free School* (tentative title) Gilder Lehrman Institute and the New-York Historical Society, 2007.
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[24] James McCune Smith, "Introduction, Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* New York and Auburn:Miller, Orton & Mulligan. New York: 25 Park Row.--Auburn: 107 Genesee-St. 1855. xxxii.
[25] James McCune Smith, "Introduction" *Bondage* xxxi.
[26] James McCune Smith, *Bondage*, xxxii.