Introduction
The Age of David Walker

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In 1830, the Boston-based Black activist, writer, and business owner David Walker published the "Third and Last Edition" of his *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829*. The eighty-eight-page pamphlet, which quickly came to be known as simply the *Appeal*, had quickly spread across the northern and southern United States and stunned white readers with its searing critique of Black oppression in the United States and vision of a Black freedom achieved, if necessary, through violent resistance. Nearly two decades after Walker published the "last edition" of the *Appeal*, his work again appeared in print. In 1848, the Black activist, religious leader, and newspaper editor Henry Highland Garnet paid to have the *Appeal* republished in a volume that included a sketch of Walker's life (written by Garnet) as well as Garnet's own "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," a militant call for armed resistance originally delivered in 1843. Attesting to the ongoing relevance of Walker's words and ideas, Garnet declared in his preface: "When the history of the emancipation of the bondmen of America shall be written, whatever name shall be placed first on the list of heroes, that of the author of the Appeal will not be second."[1]

David Walker's *Appeal*, with editions published in 1830 and then again in 1848, neatly bookends the period covered by this volume of the series. At the same time, Walker calls into question the fixed nature of such periodization by engaging with multiple pasts and futures. He broadly grounds much of his *Appeal* in a comparison between the biblical Israelites and (his) contemporary Black readers, a comparison that offers not only lessons from the past but also the divine promise of liberation, if at some unknown and perhaps unknowable moment in the future. In addition to helping readers imagine a better future by looking backward to biblical history, Walker devotes a substantial amount of his *Appeal* to an

engagement with Thomas Jefferson's writings. Through a series of reading lessons, Walker teaches Black Americans in particular how to refute the founding arguments of a white supremacist United States, a refutation that he argues is necessary to secure Black freedom in the future. Walker's *Appeal* thus helps readers (then and now) transition from their present to the past, future, and back again. Moreover, the multiple iterations of his work within and beyond the years from 1830 to 1850 point to the impossibility of consigning the *Appeal* to a certain time period. In practice and in print, then, the *Appeal* privileges temporal fluidity rather than fixity, and thus embodies a key concern of many of the chapters in this volume.

In addition to stretching temporal frames, the *Appeal* also points to the ways in which African American literature in general, and in the years between 1830 and 1850 in particular, can help readers transition across seemingly fixed geographical boundaries. As his title attests, Walker explicitly addressed his work to "The Coloured Citizens of the World" and declared: "It is expected that all coloured men, women and children, of every nation, language and tongue under heaven, will try to procure a copy of this Appeal."[2] Looking out to a Black community that extended beyond the boundaries of the United States, Walker adopted a transnational gaze that would be shared by much of the African American literature produced between the *Appeal*'s 1830 and 1848 editions. Path-breaking work by scholars such as Paul Gilroy and Ifeoma Nwankwo has cleared the way for a vast body of work on the transnational character of African American literature, and many of the chapters in this volume adopt that focus.

While underscoring the crucial ways in which African American literature can offer pathways for readers to transition from temporal and spacial fixity to fluidity the themes that Walker articulated in his pamphlet, and the ways in which his work emerged from and helped shape the world in which it appeared, exemplify the specific concerns and conditions of African American literary production during the period that ostensibly defines this volume. Scholars have often labeled the African American works written and published between 1830 and 1850 as primarily "literatures of slavery and freedom." This is the heading, for example, under which Gene Jarrett groups works published between 1830 and 1865 in his *Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature*, and closely echoes the name that the editors of the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* give to all of African American literature from 1746 to 1865.[3] The *Appeal*, with its relentless critique of slavery in the United States and millennial vision of Black freedom, certainly fits under such a rubric.

Scholars have also focused on the importance of formal abolitionism to the African American literature of the period. Dickson Bruce, for example, situates "the continuing growth of the movement for immediate abolition" as the most important influence on African American literary production between 1833 and 1849, a period he terms "the Age of Abolitionism."[4] To be sure, abolitionist organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society published and publicized dozens of slave narratives. At the same time, though, Black-organized and Black-led institutions such as churches, newspapers, and the Colored Convention movement produced and distributed reams of African American writing, prompting Jarrett to argue that "even African American texts written outside of the slave narrative genre owed their success to antislavery publications and institutions of protest within the northern free African American community."[5] The *Appeal* neatly demonstrates Jarrett's point, as Walker drew on his experiences with Black institutions such as the Prince Hall Masons and *Freedom's Journal* (a Black newspaper for which Walker acted as a subscription agent) as he composed and distributed his work. The *Appeal*'s reappearance in 1848 also owed much to Black organizing, in the specific form of the Colored Conventions movement. Garnet had first delivered his "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" at the 1843 National Colored Convention in Buffalo, New York. While rejected by that convention's delegates, after his address had been published alongside Walker's *Appeal* Garnet's militant approach to Black liberation garnered the official endorsement of the 1849 Ohio State Colored Convention. The Ohio delegates not only approved of the sentiments contained in Garnet's "Address" and Walker's *Appeal*, but also recommended that "five hundred copies of Walker's Appeal, and Henry H. Garnet's Address to the Slaves, be obtained in the name of the Convention, and gratuitously circulated."[6]

The form and content of the *Appeal* also invite us to read the African American literature of the period in light of a series of questions and concerns related to, yet distinct from, the familiar categories of slavery and freedom. For example, the pamphlet form of the *Appeal* made it easier for a network of Black and white sailors and clergymen to smuggle the text to the free and enslaved African Americans living in the southern United States. The relationship between the *Appeal* as pamphlet and its impact on Walker's target audience underscores the importance of studying the material form of African American literature produced between 1830 and 1850. A rich and robust body of work from scholars such as Frances Smith Foster, Carla Peterson, Joycelyn Moody, and Eric Gardner (to name but a few) has charted a Black print culture studies approach to

the literature of this period, which has been followed by a number of the authors in this collection.

Finally, the *Appeal* exemplifies the interplay between lived experiences and literature, a focus that this volume's chapters all share. Walker lived in Charleston, South Carolina, during the time that Denmark Vesey and his compatriots devised a plan for a large-scale uprising. Vesey's conspiracy was discovered in the summer of 1822, leading to the trial and execution of many of its leaders, and while it remains uncertain whether or not Walker had been directly involved in the plot, Peter Hinks points out that "[t]here is a remarkable similarity between the rhetoric and ideas expressed by Walker in his *Appeal* and those expressed by Vesey in the trial transcripts pertaining to him."[7] Walker also drew inspiration for his *Appeal* from his local community in Boston, as well as the broader world of Black print. Shifting from local to national events, Robert Levine has explored the relationship between the *Appeal* and the Missouri Compromise that negotiated the boundaries of slavery in the United States. And moving from the national to the transnational, Garnet's decision to reprint the *Appeal* in 1848 reintroduced Walker to readers grappling not only with the US invasion of Mexico, a war that many abolitionists saw as an attempt to expand the boundaries of slavery on the continent, but also with the antimonarchical uprisings that rocked Europe and directly led to the formal abolition of slavery in the French Caribbean.

Beyond providing an example of how African American literature responded to local, national, and transnational happenings, the *Appeal* also shows how African American writing and publication was itself an event that shaped the lives of women and men living within and beyond the borders of the United States. On December 11, 1829, police in Savannah, Georgia, seized sixty copies of the *Appeal* that had been delivered, via ship, to a local Black Baptist preacher. Terrified that the *Appeal*'s message of violent resistance would spread to the enslaved population, the Georgia State Legislature quickly passed laws quarantining Black sailors arriving at the state's port cities, imposing harsh penalties for distributing "seditious literature," and further restricting the education of enslaved men, women, and children. After copies of the *Appeal* were discovered in New Orleans, the government of Louisiana followed suit and banned the circulation of such incendiary material.[8] Responding to such efforts, Walker wondered in the *Appeal*'s 1830 edition, "why are the Americans so very fearfully terrified respecting my Book? – Why do they search vessels, &c. when entering the harbours of tyrannical States, to see if any of my Books can be found, for fear that my brethren will get them to read[?]"

"Is it," he wryly concluded, "because they treat us so well?"[9] Not content with limiting the spread of his written work, the Georgia legislature went so far as to offer $10,000 for Walker's capture, or $1,000 for his assassination. So, when Walker was found dead shortly after the publication of his *Appeal*'s 1830 edition, some understandably suspected that he had been murdered in retaliation for his pamphlet.

Taking the lives and afterlives of David Walker's *Appeal* as an inspiration, this volume charts the ways in which African American literature fosters transitions between temporal, spatial, and material cultures and contexts. Moreover, rather than simply reading a text as the product of a particular context, this volume showcases work that explores how African American literature and lived experiences shaped one another. African American writers responded to and helped shape experiences as nearby as the opening of a city school or as distant as a European revolution. Accordingly, the chapters in this volume are grouped together in three parts, each of which is focused on transitions within a particular geographic scale: the local, the national, and the transnational. These scales are, of course, fluid and overlapping, overtly imbricated, and the chapters within each section routinely push against the potential limits of such categories. But just as this volume's temporal markers of 1830 and 1850 invite readers to consider how African American literature creates transitions within and beyond the period, its spatial contours highlight the varied transitions that can occur between and among a range of places.

Part I, "Local Transitions," opens with Carla L. Peterson's "Antebellum Literary Societies, Polite Learning, and Traditions of Modernity," which places the literary societies that arose from the 1830s to the 1850s in Philadelphia and New York City at the center of a story of the development of a certain kind of literary style and philosophy in those two interconnected cities. Expanding her discussion to include the newspapers and schools that emerged in tandem with literary societies, Peterson underscores the crucial role of local Black institutions in the making of African American literature. Such institutions, she suggests, acted as spaces of transition by connecting African American intellectuals in Philadelphia and New York not only to one another but also to a variety of disparate times and places. Remaining focused on the ways in which institutions invite us to consider the various kinds of transitions that can occur between people and print, Jasmine Nichole Cobb's "'By a Young Lady of Color': Black Women and the Antislavery Press" recovers the key role that Black women writers in Philadelphia played in shaping the tone and content of abolitionist newspapers. With William Lloyd Garrison's

Liberator as her primary case study, Cobb focuses on the relationship between African American literature and Black as well as white institutions, reminding readers that some of the most powerful and influential institutions of the day not only inspired but were also shaped by African American women writers.

Moving to the southern United States, while remaining focused on the relationship between literature and institutions, Juliane Braun's "The Poetics of Education in Antebellum New Orleans" explores the ways in which a collection of poetry emerged from and helped articulate the specific concerns of New Orleans's francophone free people of color. In particular, Braun connects the 1845 publication of *Les Cenelles* to the struggles by the city's *gens de couleur* to establish and maintain educational institutions. This chapter explores the ways in which specific conditions in antebellum New Orleans helped shape local manifestations of an ongoing concern among African American communities across the United States with founding and supporting educational institutions. Moreover, the importance that the *gens de couleur* placed on poetry as a potential agent of social change anticipates the efforts of African American poets in the early twentieth century. Staying in the South, and again focusing on poetry, Faith Barrett's "Gentility, Resistance, and Nat Turner's Rebellion in Early African American Poetry" looks closely at the ways in which Nat Turner's 1831 insurrection in Virginia impacted African American poetry in general and the poetry of the North Carolina–based enslaved poet George Moses Horton in particular. Barrett shows how Horton, forced to navigate the increased restrictions on the mobility and education of free and enslaved African Americans passed by the state legislature in the wake of Turner's uprising, used particular poetic devices to place his critique of white Southern society behind a veneer of deference. With Horton as her prime example, Barrett traces the fluid relationships between legislation and poetics in the decades following Turner's insurrection.

Part II, "National Transitions," explores the relationship between legal, legislative, and policy decisions made at the national level and African American literature. Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell's "Copyright, Fugitivity, and the Fight for Self-Ownership in Early African American Literature" brings together a series of Supreme Court rulings concerning the status of fugitive slaves and textual copyright and unpacks the impact of those cases on the physical and literary freedoms of African American writers such as James Williams and Frederick Douglass. Looking closely at the interplay between legal decisions and the forms of the slave narrative genre across two decades, Campbell shows how formerly enslaved African

American writers developed generic techniques that not only responded to but also helped shape legal constructions of blackness in the United States. Like the *gens de couleur* in antebellum New Orleans, these writers turned to literary genre as a way to enact social change, and in doing so laid the groundwork for a host of future African American artists. In "The Communications Revolution and the Networked Path to Freedom," Nihad M. Farooq connects developments in communications policy and technology between 1830 and 1850 to the life and literature of Harriet Jacobs, and teases out the ways in which Jacobs engaged with formal and informal networks during the period described in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Jacobs emerges in this chapter as a key theorist of information technology in general and its racialized elements in particular. Jacobs's keen understanding of how African Americans in the antebellum era engaged with and manipulated explicitly exclusionary information networks provides important lessons for readers then and now. Moreover, by focusing on the impact of events in the 1830s and 1840s on literature published decades later, Farooq pushes against the temporal parameters of this volume and underscores the permeable boundaries of periodization. Susanna Ashton's "The Fugitive Slave Act and the United States of Slavery" similarly slips this volume's temporal restraints by tracing the changes that occurred between editions of slave narratives published before and after the 1850 passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Comparing editions of the narratives of Henry Box Brown, William Grimes, and Josiah Henson, Ashton uncovers how notions of facticity and fugitivity in the slave narrative changed after the Fugitive Slave Act inaugurated a decade in which all African Americans could be presumed to be fugitives.

Part III, "Transnational Transitions," contains the most chapters of any part in this volume, an imbalance that illustrates not only the deeply transnational character of African American literature but also the influence of the transnational turn on current scholarship. In "Cosmopolitanism, Character, and the Theories of Early African American Literature," Hannah Spahn reads David Walker's work as a touchstone of cosmopolitan theory in the antebellum era, tracing the ways in which Walker's engagement with transnational communities shaped African American literature throughout the period and beyond. Moving to the specific transnational space of the British Caribbean, Pia Wiegmink's "Race, Slavery, and Emigration in Black Women's Life Writing" looks closely at the case study of Nancy Prince's work in order analyze how emancipation in the British West Indies shaped Black women's writing. Reading Prince's 1841 account of her travels to the West Indies as well as

her 1850 narrative, Wiegmink explores how the impact of West Indian emancipation spread across multiple geographic as well as temporal boundaries. In "The Impact of West Indian Emancipation on African American Poetry," Nicole N. Aljoe also underscores the close relationship between emancipation in the British West Indies and African American literature by tracing the ways in which freedom in the Caribbean helped shape the work of Frances Ellen Watkins and James Whitfield. Exploring not only how the content of certain poems reflected themes of West Indian Emancipation but also how celebrations of West Indian Emancipation in the United States provided occasions for Watkins and Whitfield to write and perform poetry, Aljoe offers a fresh perspective on two of the nineteenth century's most important poets. Her readings of printed as well as performed poetry also underscore how African American literature has navigated the transition between the written and spoken word.

Moving from the British to the Spanish Caribbean, David Luis-Brown's "La Escalera, Sentiment, and Revolution in the Nineteenth-Century Novel" looks at how the 1843–4 conspiracy among Cuba's enslaved and free Black populations to overthrow slavery on the island resonated in Black and white literature composed within and beyond the spatial borders of the United States and across the temporal boundaries of this volume. Reading an 1852 novel from a white Caribbean writer and an 1861–2 novel from an African American author together, and anchoring both in the events of the 1840s, Luis-Brown investigates how the event of La Escalera connects seemingly disparate works and troubles clear-cut periodizations. In his "Europe, Mexico, and the African American 1848," John Levi Barnard returns to the work of David Walker, this time with a particular focus on Henry Highland Garnet's 1848 edition of the *Appeal*, a work that appeared at the tail end of the US invasion of Mexico and the early days of the antimonarchical revolutions and counterrevolutions that would rock Europe in the coming years. Reading Garnet's "Address to the Slaves of the United States" and Walker's *Appeal* together, Barnard recovers the relevance of Walker's words to a new generation of revolutionary thinkers. In this volume's final chapter, "Frederick Douglass, the Irish Famine, and the Lessons of Environmental History," Ian Finseth looks closely at how the Irish Famine shaped Frederick Douglass's writing. Reading a wide array of Douglass's writings, from the 1840s and beyond, Finseth reveals the ways in which the Famine helped crystallize Douglass's understanding of the relationship between freedom, oppression, and the natural environment.

Whether occurring at the local, national, or transnational levels, world historical events occurring between 1830 and 1850 have profoundly

impacted the themes and forms of African American literature. At the same time, the literature produced during that period helped shape the world into which it emerged. David Walker's *Appeal*, in both its 1830 and 1848 editions, exemplifies this interplay between text and context, and each chapter in this volume offers a crucial account of how African Americans used the written word to respond to and drive the events and institutions of the 1830s, 1840s, and beyond. Like Walker's *Appeal*, the African American literature explored in this volume is theory as well as practice. It is literature simultaneously anchored in and refusing to be bound by specific times and places, inspired by the past, and inspiring to the future.

Notes

1 Henry Highland Garnet, ed., *Walker's Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life. By Henry Highland Garnet. And also Garnet's Address to the Slaves of the United States of America* (New York: J. H. Tobitt, 1848), iii.
2 David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829* (Boston: David Walker, 1830), 2.
3 *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature, vol. 1: 1746–1920*, ed. Gene Jarrett (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 138; *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. et al., (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).
4 Dickson D. Bruce, *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680–1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 211.
5 Gene Jarrett, "Introduction," in *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature, vol. 1: 1746–1920*, ed. Gene Jarrett (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 142.
6 "Minutes and Address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio," in *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions: 1840–1865*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner and George Elizur Walker (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 229. For an innovative take on Garnet's speech and the Colored Conventions, see Derrick Spires et al., "Henry Highland Garnet's 'Address to the Slaves' and Its Colored Conventions Origins," *Colored Conventions Project*, https://coloredconventions.org/garnet-address-1843/.
7 Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 30.
8 Ibid., 119.
9 Walker, *Walker's Appeal*, 82.

PART I

Local Transitions

Chapters in this part explore the local events and institutions that shaped and were shaped by African American literature. In these four chapters, the local operates at the level of the city and the region. Carla L. Peterson looks closely at how literary societies in New York and Philadelphia served as engines of the creation of a particular kind of Black modernity, as expressed in the speeches, essays, and poetry of the members of such societies. Jasmine Nichole Cobb remains in Philadelphia, with a particular focus on a community of Black women writers who contributed essays and poetry to the *Liberator* newspaper. The *Liberator* provided a venue for such writings, but Philadelphia's free Black women also decisively shaped the tone and politics of the nation's leading abolitionist newspaper.

Moving to the southern United States, New Orleans provides the context for Juliane Braun's reading of *Les Cenelles* in relation to the concerns of the city's community of francophone free people of color. As Braun shows, the 1845 collection of poetry not only emerged from discussions over how to provide an education to the city's Black francophone children, but also articulated a specific theory of education that would later find an institutional home in the city's first school for free children of color. In Faith Barrett's chapter on the poetry of George Moses Horton, the local expands to encompass not only the city of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, but also the states of North Carolina and Virginia. Barrett shows how the 1831 Nat Turner insurrection and its aftermath profoundly shaped the enslaved Horton's later poetry.