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Emancipatory Cosmology: *Freedom's Journal*, *The Rights of All*, and the Revolutionary Movements of Black Print Culture

Gordon Fraser

Building on the foundational work of Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter, Anthony Bogues, and others, recent scholarship in black studies has sought to grapple with the inadequacy of nationhood, identity, or even the human as a way to understand political formations, collectivities, and concerted action.¹ In characterizing (and echoing) Wynter's work, for instance, Alexander Weheliye suggests that, by fully engaging with colonial and racist histories, one refigures the past in ways that depend neither on narrow identity claims nor on universal, fixed claims about human beings. Rather, what emerges is "a ceaselessly shifting relational assemblage that voyages in and out of the human."² Similarly, Britt Rusert writes that antebellum black scientists enabled the rejection of "traditional categories of personhood, and of the human itself, as the horizon of the political."³ In short, scholars have revealed that a fulsome attempt to grapple with racialized assemblages makes clear the contingency, mobility, and, ultimately, porousness of identity claims, whether founded in race, nation, or the supposed universality of classical liberalism. This scholarly tradition has focused attention on how material practices shape what Fred Moten calls the "generative force" of the "freedom drive."⁴

I suggest that this critical turn demands that we engage the archive of black print culture differently by considering the intersections of black authorship, distributive agency, and textual consumption. These material practices enable a mobile, continually transforming collective politics. This article turns to a brief period between 1827 and 1829 as an emblematic example of such practices, and in particular it examines the emergence of the first two African American newspapers in the United States: *Freedom's Journal* (1827–29) and its short-lived successor, *The Rights of All* (1829). Both periodicals were edited, written, read, and distributed by black people throughout the United States, Canada, Haiti, and the United Kingdom. This print distribution is ideal for

study, in part, because it was both far-reaching in its political consequences and temporally limited. After *The Rights of All* folded in 1829, it would not be until Philip Bell founded the *Weekly Advocate* in 1837 that a black-edited periodical circulated once more.⁵ Nonetheless, the black writers, editors, and distribution agents who emerged from this early phase enabled later radical, emancipatory movements.⁶

This history has been largely overlooked. When scholars have examined the interstate and international dimensions of *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All*, they have done so largely through the analytics of editorship and authorship.⁷ Their work neglects the fact that to disseminate the more than eight hundred issues of *Freedom's Journal* published each week, editors Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm built a network that included forty-seven authorized agents and extended from Waterloo, Ontario, to rural North Carolina, from Port-au-Prince to Liverpool to Richmond, Baltimore, and New Orleans (see fig. 1).⁸ *The Rights of All* largely continued this network. Importantly, readers from these locations wrote back—and the result is an archive of largely unacknowledged black writers offering firsthand accounts of life in the antebellum South. I suggest that the circulation and distribution of these newspapers, particularly in the South, brought a quasi-national collectivity briefly into being.

I call this collectivity *quasi*-national because it can be distinguished from nations in key ways. As students of nationalism have long acknowledged, the newspaper enables a person to envision herself as one member of a larger, “imagined” community, joined by the simultaneity of experience across geography.⁹ And yet recent work on both print culture and African American history, literature, and orature have told a much more complicated story. For Lloyd Pratt, the black nation’s imagined simultaneity crosses temporal boundaries, linking the past and present in a shared deferral of “messianic justice.”¹⁰ The community is linked not only geographically but across time. Trish Loughran, moreover, points out that early nineteenth-century print culture did not produce an imagined simultaneity at all. The unreliability of the post meant that print was either consumed locally or received from far-flung locales at irregular intervals and through ad hoc networks.¹¹ I am suggesting, then, that we read black print cultural practices as enabling a mobile, continually transforming communal affiliation that is not national in the conventional sense. *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* allowed readers in New Salem, North Carolina, and Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Norwich, Connecticut, to imagine their community as crossing temporal, spatial, and biopolitical borders, not just geographic ones. This not only produced “an everyday globality” (to borrow Stephen Knadler’s apt expression) but an emancipatory cosmology.¹²

Cities	<i>Freedom's Journal</i> March 1827 to March 1829	<i>The Rights of All</i> 1829
North Yarmouth, ME	Calvin Stockbridge	Calvin Stockbridge
Portland, ME	Isaac Talbot; Reuben Ruby	Isaac Talbot
Waterloo, Ontario	Rev. Samuel George	Rev. Samuel George
Rochester, NY	Austin Steward	Austin Steward
Utica, NY	Tudor E. Grant	Tudor E. Grant
Buffalo, NY	Frederick Holland	Frederick Holland
Albany, NY	Rev. Nathaniel Paul	Rev. Nathaniel Paul
Hudson, NY	Joseph Pell	Joseph Pell
Schenectady, NY	Rev. R.P.G. Wright	R.P.G. Wright
Troy, NY	William Rich	William Rich
Brooklyn, NY	George DeGrasse	Wm. Thomas
Flushing, NY	Paul P. Williams; Rev. W.P. Williams	Rev. W.P. Williams
Salem, MA	John Remond (sometimes "Remmond")	John Redman (later "Remmond")
Boston, MA	David Walker; Rev. Thomas Paul	David Walker
Providence, RI	George C. Willis	George C. Willis
New Haven, CT	John Shields; S.C. Augustus	S.C. Augustus
New London, CT	Isaac Rodgers; Isaac Glasko	N/A
Norwich, CT	Isaac Glasko	Isaac C. Glasko
Trenton, NJ	Leonard Scott	Leonard Scott
Princeton, NJ	Theodore Wright	N/A
New Brunswick, NJ	James Cowes	James C. Cowes
Newark, NJ	Rev. B.F. Hughes; Charles Anderson	Rev. Mr. Charles Anderson
Philadelphia, PA	Francis Webb	Francis Webb; Charles Leveck
Columbia, PA	Stephen Smith	Stephen Smith
Carlisle, PA	J.B. Vashon	J.B. Vashon
Baltimore, MD	R. Cowley (sometimes "Cooley"); Charles Hackett; Hezekiah Grice	Thomas Green
Washington, DC	John W. Prout	J.W. Prout
Alexandria, DC	Thomas Braddock	Thomas Broddock
Fredericksburg, VA	W.D. Baptist	W.D. Baptist
Richmond, VA	Rev. R. Vaughn; John Shepherd	W.D. Baptist
New Bern, NC	John C. Stanley	John C. Stanley
Elizabethtown, NC	Lewis (Louis) Sheridan	Lewis (Louis) Sheridan
New Salem, NC	Seth Hinshaw, P.M. (Postmaster)	N/A
New Orleans, LA	Peter Howard	Peter Howard
Port-au-Prince, Haiti	W.R. Gardiner; Wm. Bowler	Wm. Bowler
Liverpool, England	Samuel Thomas; Thomas Dickinson	R. Dickinson and Samuel Thomas

Figure 1.

The table lists the cities to which *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* were distributed.

This phrase—emancipatory cosmology—is appropriate because, since the eighteenth century, “cosmology” has been operative in both science and philosophy as an account not simply of the movement of bodies through space and time but of the laws that govern these movements.¹³ *Freedom’s Journal* and *The Rights of All* described (in their pages) and modeled (through their circulation, distribution, and seriality) a broader, revolutionary historical pattern. Both newspapers depicted a black collectivity that—like a moon in orbit—waxed and waned with each revolution, all the time drawing new bodies into its gravitational field. Readers, North and South, encountered a textual space that mapped the celestial and political universes onto each other by accounting for recent scientific discoveries about the heavens and offering histories of the political revolutions that were their worldly corollaries. Accounts of *political* orbits, which predicted the return of black power, were validated by an ever-widening circulation of black-authored print, made legible in the expanding list of circulating agents and cities of distribution on each newspaper’s final page (see fig. 2). The overlap—celestial, political, textual—produced a cosmology: a mobile, interconnected system of bodies governed by a set of predictive laws.

Figure 2.

The first issue of Samuel Cornish’s *Rights of All* featured many of the same authorized agents as had appeared in the last issue of *Freedom’s Journal*—and listed them in the same location, the bottom-right corner of the newspaper’s final page. See “Authorized Agents,” *The Rights of All*, June 12, 1829.

The present study is not the first to note the link between antebellum black science and antebellum black politics. Ruserst suggests, for instance, that we consider a later phase of black interest in astronomy—the 1840s and 1850s—as emblematic of “fugitive science.” This practice allowed black writers and readers to counter the scientific racism of the nineteenth century; to instrumentalize scientific technologies, like the compass, to promote the freedom of individuals; and to consider a “rich imaginative landscape” that allowed individual people to “meditate on slavery and freedom.”¹⁴ Additionally, this interest in astronomy produced complex, networked maps that accounted for time and space. The central problem of imagining a black nation in 1827, or even today, is that it has none of the conventional markers of nationhood. It has no territory, no state, and no hierarchical political organization. It is a nation of shared dispossession and affiliation across the borders of geography and temporality. Although black writers frequently made comparisons between their freedom struggle and similar struggles in Greece, Poland, or France, they also recognized that an emancipatory assemblage joined by blackness was different. Blackness was geographically mobile and temporally fluid. It would have to be imagined,

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BOOTS AND SHOES.

CHARLES MORTIMER,
No. 21 Leonard street, Between Hudson & Chapel streets, where he continues to Manufacture and repair **BOOTS AND SHOES** as usual of a superior quality, at the reduced prices.
As a generous public by their patronage hitherto have given him hopes that the work, manufactured by him was of a superior quality, he hopes by more continued exertions, and the employment of none but the first rate workmen, to merit a continuance of the same.
BOOTS AND SHOES repaired at the shortest notice.
New-York, May 29, 1829.

BOARDING & LOGGING.

DAVID SLAUGHTER,
Respectfully informs his friends and the public generally, that his House, No 62 Leonard street, (next door to Zion Church,) is still open for the accommodation of respectable persons of colour, with **Boarding & Lodging**, on the most reasonable terms.
His House is in a pleasant part of the city, and no pains will be spared on his part to render the situation of all who honour him with their esteem, as comfortable as in any other house in the city, and at one half the expense.
New York May 29, 1829.

Money is the Road to wealth—And a penny saved is as good as two pence earned. Then call at the United States *Clothes Dressing Establishment*.

JAMES GILBERT,
Who has removed from 411 to 422 Broadway, and continues as usual to carry on the *Clothes Dressing* in correct and systematic style, having perfect knowledge of the business, having been legally bred to it, his mode &c. is by **STEAM SCOURING**, which is the only correct system of **CLEANING**, which he will varnished, extract all kinds of **STAIN** Gaiters spots, Tar, Paint &c. or no pay will be taken.
N. B. The public are cautioned against the imposture of those who attempt the *Dressing* of clothes, by **STEAM SPONGING**, who are totally unacquainted with the business as there are many Establishments which have recently been opened in this city.
All kinds of *Tailoring* Work done at the above place.
All clothes left to be cleaned or repaired will be good for one year and one day if not claimed in that time, they will be sold at public auction.

BOARDING.

LEWIS HARRISON,
Respectfully informs the public in general, that he has opened his House for the accommodation of gentle persons of Colour, with **Boarding & Lodging**, at No. 90 Mulberry street.
There shall be no pains spared to render their situation as agreeable as possible on his part.
N. B. he also opens a **Head Garden** at the same place, where his friends and customers, may be served with **Meats** Cakes &c. of the best quality.
New York May 29, 1829.

TO PRINTERS.
A Font of second-hand *Pica Type* for sale, weighing 175 lbs. cheap for cash, enquire at this office, or at 68 Bayard-st.

LEGHORN BONNETS

MRS. SARAH JOHNSON,
No 551 PEARL STREET, respectfully informs her Friends and the Public, that she has commenced **DI. EACING, PEAKING, and RE-FITTING** LEGHORN and STAW HATS, in the best manner. Ladies dresses made, and **PLATS** Sewing done on the most reasonable terms.
Mrs. J. beg leave to assure her friends and the public, that those who patronize her may depend upon having their Work done faithfully, and with punctuality and despatch.
New York May 29, 1829.

W. M. P. JOHNSON,

Successor to James P. Johnson.
No. 551 PEARL STREET, near Broadway, that old and well known establishment, Respectfully informs his friends and the public generally, that he still continues to make **BOOTS and SHOES** to order, at reasonable prices; and as it is generally known that assiduity and despatch are the life and spirit of his profession, he has no need to publish, at the shortest notice.
ALSO—He keeps constantly on hand a superior quality of **LIQUID LEATHERING**, of his own manufacture, free from the use of vitriol, all of which he will sell cheap for cash.
W. P. J. returns his sincere thanks to his friends and the public for the very liberal patronage that he has previously received.

AFRICAN FREE SCHOOL.

NOTICE—Parents and Guardians of Coloured Children, are hereby informed, that a Male and Female School has long been established for coloured children, by the *Municipal Society* of this city, where the pupils receive such an education as is calculated to fit them for usefulness and respectability. The male school is situated in mulberry street, to which is attached a female school, and another female school in William street, near Duane street; all under the management of experienced teachers. The boys are taught Reading, Writing, arithmetic, Geography and English Grammar—and the Girls, in addition to those branches, are taught Sewing, Marking, and Knitting, &c.
TERMS OF ADMISSION.
Pupils of 5 to fifteen years of age are admitted by the Teachers at the School, at the rate of twenty-five cents to one dollar per quarter according to the circumstances of the parents; and the children of such as cannot afford to pay any thing are admitted free of expense, and enjoy the same advantages as those who pay.
Each School is visited weekly by a committee of the trustees, in addition to which a committee of Ladies pay regular visits to the Female schools. Care is taken to impart moral instruction, and such have been the happy effects of the system pursued in these schools, that although several thousand have been taught in them since their establishment (now more than thirty years) there has never been an instance known to the trustees where a pupil having received a regular education has been convicted of any crime in our Courts of Justice.
By order of the Board of Trustees,
PETER S. TUTTS,
RICHARD FIELD.

WANTED.

Wanted, a situation as Teacher in an Academy, or Tutor in a Family, by a Gentleman who received his education at one of the first Colleges in our country, and who can produce the best of recommendations.
Enquire at this office.

ST. SCOURING & TAILORING

J. C. THOMSON,
No. 103 1-2 LOWERY,
(Between Hester & Grand street.)
Where he will continue as usual, to carry on the *Clothing and Dressing* Establishment, and perform his work in a correct and systematic style, having perfect knowledge of the business, and brought up to it. His mode of cleaning and dressing Coats, Fustians, &c. is by steam scouring, and springing, the only way of cleaning. He respectfully informs his friends and the public, that he extracts all kinds of stains, grease, paint, tar, &c. on a plan different from the dyers; red, and altar, to any size or shape, with new collars, cuffs, &c. at reduced prices. He will not boast of his art, but leave the world to prove itself. Where the seams have worn white in black or blue Coats, they can be restored to their original colour.
New York May 29, 1829.

SCIPIO C. AUGUSTUS,

Respectfully informs his friends and the public in general that he recently opened his house for the accommodation of genteel Persons of colour, with **Board & Lodging**. His house is in a beautiful part of Neck Lane, facing State and Hope street. There will be every energy used on his part to render the situation of those who honour him with their patronage agreeable.
New Haven, May 29, 1829.

CLOTHING

Kept constantly on hand, for sale by David Walker, No. 42 Brattle-street, Boston, and a great variety of New and second-handed Clothing.
He also cleans all kinds of Woolen Clothing in the neatest manner, and on the most reasonable terms.
May 29, 1829.

AUTHORISED AGENTS.

- Maine—C. Stockbridge, Esq. North Yarmouth Isaac Talbot Portland, Me.
- Massachusetts—David Walker, Boston John Redman, Salem.
- Connecticut—S. C. Augustus, New-Haven, Isaac C. Glanko, Norwich.
- Rhode-Island—George C. Wilts, Providence.
- Pennsylvania—Francis Webb, Philadelphia; Stephen Smith, Columbia; J. B. Vashou, Pittsburgh.
- Maryland—Thomas Green, Baltimore.
- District of Columbia—J. W. Prout Washington; Thomas Brodbeck, Alexandria.
- New-York—Rev. Nathaniel Paul, Albany; R. P. G. Wright, Schenectady; Austin Stearns, Rochester; Rev. W. P. Williams, Flushing; Wm. Thomas, Brooklyn, L. I.; Frederick Holland, Buffalo; Joseph Pell, Hudson; William Rich Trigg, Tudor E. Grant, Utica.
- Louisiana—Peter Howard, New-Orleans.
- New Jersey—James C. Coates, New-Brunswick; Rev. Mr. Charles Anderson, Newark; Leonard Scott, Trenton.
- Virginia—W. D. Baptist, Fredericksburgh; Richmond.
- North Carolina—John C. Stanley, Newbern; Levi Sheridan, Elizabethtown.
- Upper Canada—Rev. Samuel George, Waterloo.
- England—R. Dickinson & Samuel Thomas, Liverpool.
- Hayti—Wm. B. Bowler, Port-au-Prince.

then, as a collectivity in motion over time: revolving, transformational, and circling toward renewed greatness. *Freedom's Journal* offered this. So did *The Rights of All*. And the distribution networks of both publications made material the print cosmos that the texts themselves articulated.

Methodology: An Ephemeris for the Print Cosmos

The study of early nineteenth-century black print culture poses a set of difficult problems, not the least of which is the complex relation between editorship, authorship, readership, circulation, distribution, seriality, history, and scientific prediction. Both *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* published original writing and reprinted items from other newspapers, from scientific texts, and from histories. Moreover, many articles were serialized, appearing across multiple issues. Finally, these texts were both circulated (to agents who received their copies through the post) and distributed (or passed from agent to reader, or among readers themselves). The geographic distance between sites of circulation and distribution makes matters more complicated. The postal service in the 1820s remained highly irregular. While some routes had been significantly expedited (the Washington, DC, to Nashville route took eleven days, for instance), weather often disrupted service, and service to rural areas remained intermittent at best.¹⁵ The consumption of black print culture was not “almost precisely simultaneous,” as in Benedict Anderson’s model of print nationalism.¹⁶ Rather, a newspaper might take weeks or months to reach a particular reader. The content of early black newspapers modeled this failed simultaneity, focusing as much on scientific predictions for the distant future and historical accounts of the distant past as on news in the present. Explaining how printed ephemera shaped an emergent racial assemblage in a period without a truly national print culture, then, requires an *ephemeris*. In astronomy, an ephemeris is a kind of map, but one that accounts for the mobile, intersecting movements of bodies in the cosmos. It is a predictive map accounting for time and space.

To fashion such an ephemeris, the present article examines three important print-culture practices. First, it considers how *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* positioned their readers not only within a political context but within a cosmic one. Both newspapers reported on the movements of the heavens, offering scientific predictions for the distant future and commenting on the political ramifications of these predictions. Second, this article traces how reading practices shaped the reception of each newspaper in the South. While *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* were published in New York and widely

distributed throughout the North, they were also read in Southern states by communities of free and enslaved people. Some accounts of these reading practices were published in other venues. Finally, this article recuperates the stories of Southern distribution agents. By relying on census data, Southern newspapers, private correspondence, and other textual sources, it explores how the agents listed in the pages of *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* distributed their newspapers.

Recuperating the Southern circulation and distribution of these two newspapers adds to an already rich archive of scholarship, particularly pertaining to *Freedom's Journal*. Frances Smith Foster, for instance, calls attention to how *Freedom's Journal* moved beyond the narrowly political concerns of the present to address issues that crossed cultures, geographies, and time periods.¹⁷ Foster suggests that by mining the periodical press for narrowly political claims or by ignoring it entirely in the name of “literary” study, contemporary scholars have obscured the interconnectedness of geographies, genres, and temporalities. Foster is intervening, moreover, in a broader conversation about *Freedom's Journal*, one in which a small cohort of scholars has been doing extraordinary work. Charlton W. Yingling, for instance, has uncovered how the editors of *Freedom's Journal* engaged with an international politics, one attentive to revolutionary Haiti's implications for the US political sphere.¹⁸ Timothy Helwig, meanwhile, has examined the interconnections between the black periodical press and the print culture of the white working class.¹⁹ Each of these scholars, in short, has considered how *Freedom's Journal* provided a venue through which authors and editors could access a networked, interconnected black assemblage.

I add to this by considering the relation between authorship, distributive agency, and textual consumption. The far-flung racial assemblage enabled by *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* was instantiated through the complex relation between textuality and materiality, through an emergent black print culture and its widespread distribution. This relation, moreover, formed just as a national print culture began to emerge in the United States. As Trish Loughran points out, abolitionist projects were often leaders in the experiment of widespread print distribution. Benjamin Lundy famously expanded the distribution of his newspaper, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, by hand-carrying it to far-flung locales.²⁰ Martha Schoolman adds that abolitionists deployed geographic discourses—often anachronistic or fictional discourses—as a way to marshal counterhegemonic power.²¹ I am suggesting that these experiments were preceded by an effort to circulate a black print culture. This earlier experiment depended on the material relation between print production, distribution, and readership, and enabled the collected—if not wholly unified—politics of an emergent assemblage.

Ultimately, fractures appeared in this collectivity. In September 1827 Cornish stepped down as senior editor to become a “General Agent.” Russwurm then guided the financially struggling newspaper until March 1829, when he officially shuttered the publication to depart for Liberia.²² This outraged a number of readers and agents, who viewed the American Colonization Society’s plan for settlement in Liberia with repugnance. Cornish responded by founding *The Rights of All*, which restored the anticolonization stance of the original *Freedom’s Journal*.²³ Cornish’s attempt failed within a matter of months, however. Only six issues of *The Rights of All* were published, and the newspaper folded by autumn 1829.²⁴ But in their time, and despite the appearance of ideological fissures, these two newspapers offered something radically new. In their inaugural editorial, Cornish and Russwurm write: “It is our earnest wish to make our Journal a medium of intercourse between our brethren in the different states of this great confederacy.”²⁵ By the 1820s stable black institutions—especially churches and mutual aid societies, but also schools and literary societies—existed in many Northern cities. While these institutions were sometimes effective in responding to the marginalization and segregation of African Americans, they were nonetheless geographically isolated. Many, moreover, hewed closely to a spiritually isolating uplift ideology.²⁶ Cornish and Russwurm suggest here more than an effort to create local support networks. Rather, their goal is to create an interconnected network between states and to combine divided communities into something resembling, but not precisely continuous with, a national community.

The Cosmological Assemblage

Southern slave owners were troubled by—probably *should* have been troubled by—the potential for political solidarity brought about by the distribution of *Freedom’s Journal* and *The Rights of All*. While neither newspaper promoted radicalism (the violent overthrow of the slave system, for instance), both promoted black unity. More significantly, articles in both newspapers treated black political emancipation as *revolutionary* in every sense: latent potentials that traced political orbits modeled on their celestial corollaries. Black politics was always depicted as existing in motion, having emerged from a past of political power and tracing a path toward renewed greatness. One result of the orbital metaphor was that all political orders were depicted as temporary *because* they were in motion. And this is one reason, I suggest, that the journals devoted as much attention to scientific discoveries as to political history.

Consider, for instance, a short article about Encke's Comet, which appeared in *Freedom's Journal* early in 1829. This essay, excerpted from an 1828 essay by the Scottish astronomer David Milne, is emblematic of much of the scientific writing that appeared in the two New York newspapers. The article is worth quoting at some length because it suggests for the celestial sphere precisely the movement that *Freedom's Journal* suggested for the political sphere:

Others have computed that in the course of 18,000 years this comet will come as near to us as the moon; that in four millions of years it will pass at the distance of about 7,700 geographical miles, when if its attraction should equal that of the earth, the waters of the ocean will be elevated 12,000 feet that is, above all European mountains except mount Blanc. The inhabitants of the Andes and the Himalaya mountains therefore, would alone be able to escape such a deluge; which would probably, leave upon our globe, records of its existence, similar to those discoverable at the present day.—After a lapse of two hundred and nineteen millions of years, according to the calculation of the same astronomer, an actual collision will take place between this comet & the earth, severe enough to shatter its external crust, alter the elements of its orbit, and annihilate the various species of animated beings dwelling on its surface. Hence we may conclude that, in the course of two hundred and nineteen millions of years, our globe will certainly be smashed by a comet.²⁷

In 1829 this was cutting-edge astronomical research. Milne had won the astronomy prize at Edinburgh University and was one of a growing body of astronomers to recognize that, although the relative mass of comets was less than previously imagined, their velocities nonetheless made them threatening to planetary bodies.²⁸ Milne and others revealed the contingency of the world as it appears in the present. And yet if, as Laura Dassow Walls writes, mid-nineteenth-century science was increasingly committed to “separating the object of science from the human observer,” Russwurm's use of scientific research here could not be more out of step with contemporary trends.²⁹ Russwurm shares scientific discoveries because they bear directly on human politics. Excerpted in this way, Milne's writing reveals that the past and, more significantly, the future, were and would be radically different from the world today. In four million years, the only civilizations on earth will sit atop the Andes and the Himalayas. In two hundred nineteen million years, there will be no human civilization at all. This is grim news, in many ways. But it fits into a larger cosmological pattern—one that treats all positions as contingent and mobile. Moreover, these changes over time were *revolutionary*. Encke's Comet would return and return and return again, each time producing a new organization of bodies and bringing about catastrophic changes in the human lifeworld.

This view makes more sense when we consider the proliferation of articles that discussed the other varieties of revolutionary movement—personal, political, historical—and discussed them in terms of orbital contingency. In 1828, for instance, *Freedom's Journal* printed an article suggesting that “man is not the same being today that he was yesterday. His mind, like his body, is in a constant state of revolution.”³⁰ The revolutionary orbits of a contingent universe, then, applied directly to the lives of individual human beings. Likewise, these same orbits applied to the political world. In an article from the previous year, reprinted from the *Christian Spectator*, an anonymous author traced patterns in political revolutions worldwide, writing:

I appeal then to Sierra Leone, to Hayti, to Colombia, and say that slaves have been liberated, in so great numbers as to form the mass of the population, particularly in Hayti, and that the difficulties and dangers of the process have always arisen, not from the turbulence and disorder of the liberated slaves, but from the vexatious, unreasonable conduct of their masters, struggling to retain or recover their power to oppress. And so it has been in all revolutions where the struggle was between liberty and despotic power.³¹

The author's primary point deals with the liberation of slaves and how a white fantasy of black civil unrest had been used to forestall black emancipation. Yet in making this argument, the author makes an *implicit* claim: that revolutions in the political sphere are ongoing and that black emancipation has happened, is happening, and will happen again. As John Ernest points out in discussing a later phase of writing about Haiti, the island nation offered outsiders “revolution as a lesson in destiny.”³² In this passage, Haiti is one revolutionary body among many. Here *Freedom's Journal* treats both past and future as part of an explicable, ordered, and mobile set of patterns—patterns that cut across Haiti, Sierra Leone, Colombia, and the United States, and that tend toward justice and emancipation.

This way of thinking about the political and cosmological universe was by no means original or unique. As early as 1758, historians had been referring to the “revolutions of history,” treating the movement of time as a set of explicable, regular, and curved patterns.³³ And this line of thought became central to emancipatory political movements, as Stephen Hall suggests.³⁴ The Unitarian minister Theodore Parker called on this metaphor of political action as cosmological calculation in an 1853 sermon, in which he said: “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe. The arc is a long one. . . . I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by experience of sight. I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.”³⁵ Parker's metaphor would be made famous by Martin Luther King

Jr.'s 1965 speech on the steps of the Montgomery, Alabama, capitol building, in which he said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."³⁶ In compressing—and, arguably, improving—the expression, King elided a nineteenth-century way of thinking about the universe that drew on a metaphor of political revolution as orbital and subject to calculation. The moral universe would not have an arc at all, in other words, if it were not traveling in an orbit—if it were not revolutionary. When Parker said that he could not "calculate the curve and complete the figure," he was invoking a cosmological way of reading history and the future.

Freedom's Journal and *The Rights of All* serve as forerunners to this revolutionary pattern of thought in emancipatory black politics. But they would be a mere footnote if they had not combined this mobile, cosmological worldview with an equally mobile and capacious plan of distribution. The newspapers strove to become "a medium of intercourse between . . . brethren in the different states."³⁷ Contrary to the assumptions made by reactionary Southerners, neither newspaper openly advocated rebellion. But both proposed something perhaps more dangerous: a cosmological worldview in which equality and justice would be the inevitable consequence of mobile, predictable political transformations. They offered an alternative to a fixed, hierarchical politics, suggesting instead that powerful civilizations wax and wane as they predictably revolve. And the two newspapers proposed this, finally, by reaching into the heart of the slave system and speaking directly to enslaved and free blacks. In one editorial, for instance, Samuel Cornish warned against state and local governments defying federal authority, writing that "if the proper authorities do not check this evil disposition while in embryo we soon shall have 24 Independent Republicks or petty Kingdoms."³⁸ Cornish's specific complaint was with the economic and political exclusion faced by African Americans in the Cincinnati area—in response to which, more than one thousand would leave and begin a colony in Canada.³⁹ But Cornish's implicit point is more radical. The United States is, like all nations, subject to the revolutionary vicissitudes of history. The current arrangement of political bodies is temporary and contingent. The future arrangement of these bodies, Cornish suggests, may be radically different.

Southern Reading as Radical Reading

The ability of Cornish and Russwurm to distribute their newspaper to the slave states gives lie to the claim that *Freedom's Journal* was a relatively conservative mouthpiece for gradualist, Northern abolition—although this gradualist perspective certainly found a forum in the newspaper's pages.⁴⁰ By narrating a

cosmological worldview in which the distribution of black-authored print, the mobile organization of the universe, and the orbits of black history all tended toward emancipation, *Freedom's Journal* brought about a radical, if not necessarily unitary, assemblage. A number of scholars have noted the importance of geographic imaginaries to political organization. Martin Bruckner notes that geography's material practices shaped the "construction of the American subject" in the early Republic. Paul Giles suggests that the study of geography allowed early US nationalists to grapple with the spatial indeterminacy of the United States.⁴¹ Hsuan L. Hsu suggests, moreover, that "spatial feelings"—about the home, the nation, the globe, and the universe—"have concrete effects."⁴² I suggest something similar here. By providing a forum for debate that moved geographically, early black newspapers created a mobile, transformative space as accessible to people in New Bern as in New York.⁴³

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this development. Consider, for instance, an account from William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, from May 1831:

A few years since, being in a slave state, I chanced one morning, very early, to look through the curtains of my chamber window, which opened upon a back yard. I saw a mulatto with a newspaper in his hand, surrounded by a score of colored men, who were listening, open mouthed, to a very inflammatory article the yellow man was reading. Sometimes the reader dwelt emphatically on particular passages, and I could see his auditors stamp and clench their hands. I afterwards learned that the paper was published in New-York, and addressed to the blacks.⁴⁴

The Northern, white correspondent—identified only as "V."—does not tell the reader where this act of quasi-illicit reading took place, but the details he does provide allow contemporary scholars to identify the newspaper as either *Freedom's Journal* or *The Rights of All*. There were simply no other "New-York" newspapers "addressed to the blacks" circulating in the South at that time. (Most scholars suspect he was referring to *Freedom's Journal* and not to its short-lived successor.)⁴⁵ Moreover, the setting of this illicit reading seems urban or semi-urban: his chamber window opens onto a backyard. But the impressiveness of the *Freedom's Journal* distribution network leaves us with several options: Fredericksburg or Richmond, Virginia; Baltimore, Maryland; New Bern, New Salem, or Elizabethtown, North Carolina; or New Orleans, Louisiana.⁴⁶

Freedom's Journal and *The Rights of All* were distributed to places in which free African American populations lived alongside slave populations, and the newspapers were consumed by communities of literate readers and often nonliterate auditors. This was a common practice in the antebellum South. The white Southerner J. G. Clinkscales remembered of his childhood on a South Carolina

plantation, for instance, that the slave Dick “spent the long winter evenings reading to the other slaves. Sometimes a score or more of them would assemble in his cabin to hear him.”⁴⁷ Moreover, most nineteenth-century readers shared periodicals, regardless of their level of literacy. Nineteenth-century newspapers are replete with articles by editors and publishers decrying this practice, and *Freedom’s Journal* was no different.⁴⁸ In the South, however, these practices of reading aloud and sharing newspapers would have political ramifications.

In 1830 an article in the *Recorder*, of Wilmington, North Carolina, identified *The Rights of All* as part of a vast conspiracy by free blacks in the North to radicalize the Southern black population. The *Recorder* reported that “emissaries have been dispersed, *for some time*, throughout the Southern states, for the purpose of disseminating false principles and infusing the poison of discontent.”⁴⁹ *The Rights of All* had been defunct for eleven months by the time this complaint was published.⁵⁰ But *Freedom’s Journal* had been traveling to New Bern and Elizabethtown, delivered by the same agents, since at least 1828. In many ways, the writer for the *Recorder* was overreacting. *Freedom’s Journal* and *The Rights of All* never overtly advocated violence or rebellion. And yet the black-authored newspapers did offer messages to their Southern readership that would have been shocking to slave owners. These messages, moreover, were distributed through private, partially invisible reading networks.

When considered in relation to a Southern slave readership, the two publications appear more subversive than they would otherwise. The October 9, 1829, issue of *The Rights of All*, for instance, included a consideration of the Virginia constitutional convention. The convention was primarily held to consider political representation. The Tidewater and lower Piedmont counties had a political advantage in that their enslaved population were counted toward their legislative representation. Representatives from the western counties, which had relatively fewer enslaved people, resented this.⁵¹ But when *The Rights of All* reported on the “ABOLITION OF NEGRO SLAVERY IN VIRGINIA,” it took news of this debate more than a little out of context. The article’s anonymous author reports: “We have received sundry letters, and verbal information, from various parts of that Commonwealth [of Virginia]; and we are rejoiced to learn that this subject will be pressed upon the consideration of the Convention, as one of paramount importance.”⁵² This article was distributed to enslaved and free African Americans in Fredericksburg and Richmond, in addition to other Southern cities.⁵³ Peter Hinks writes that reports of emancipation “directly contributed to renewed and large-scale slave resistance” throughout the state. One correspondent to Virginia governor William Giles reported that some enslaved people in Mathews County had “advocated insurrection” if the

convention failed to abolish slavery.⁵⁴ Although many of those resisting must have received news of the convention and its attendant rumors of emancipation from other sources, it is unsurprising that the *Recorder* would be troubled by an African American newspaper, distributed throughout the South, reporting on the imminent end of slavery.

Patterns of Distribution

The cosmological assemblage imagined in the pages of *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* was made manifest through patterns of distribution. Just as the United States was—ostensibly—being pulled apart by the violent, radical orbits of history, simultaneous forces were pulling a far-flung black assemblage together. In the May 29, 1829, issue of *The Rights of All*, Cornish published an essay suggesting that Southern enslavers could begin a process of buying people, setting them to work at wages, and allowing them to earn their freedom by refunding their purchase price. In Cornish's account, "A plan something like this has been followed by two very respectable coloured men in North Caroline."⁵⁵ Many of Cornish's facts about these two men, whom he does not identify, are incorrect. But Cornish *was* correct in stating that there were two North Carolina enslavers—both "coloured"—who had freed people. In fact, both men were readers of and agents for Cornish's newspapers.

John Carruthers Stanley and Louis Sheridan were wealthy, free African Americans living in the South—Stanley in New Bern and Sheridan in Elizabethtown. They were added to the *Freedom's Journal* roster of agents on January 11, 1828.⁵⁶ When Cornish launched *The Rights of All* in May 1829, Stanley and Sheridan remained distribution agents.⁵⁷ Contrary to Cornish's account, however, these men were not the entirely benevolent workers for emancipation. They were business owners—at times, ruthless ones. Yet by intentionally or unintentionally fictionalizing Stanley's and Sheridan's emancipatory politics, Cornish offers his readers a picture of increasing political solidarity—solidarity that drew enslavers together with their slaves.

If Stanley was a philanthropist, he was an unconventional one. As the distribution agent for New Bern, he provided *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* to readers in what was, at the time, the largest urban center in the state.⁵⁸ Craven County, of which New Bern was the county seat, had 10,474 people as of the 1830 census, of whom 3,663 were slaves and 337 were free blacks.⁵⁹ John C. Stanley (as he was identified in *Freedom's Journal*) was the wealthiest black man in Craven County, and possibly even in the entire South. But, as one of the county's 337 free African Americans, his position was precarious.

By 1828 Stanley owned 2,600 acres of rural land, in addition to multiple properties in New Bern proper. An economic depression in the region, brought about partly by an 1827 hurricane and subsequent banking crisis, had created business opportunities, and Stanley bought several state-confiscated properties at auction, paying as much as \$800 for an individual lot. Loren Schweninger suggests that Stanley was typical of enslavers in that he divided families by selling individuals away and advertised rewards for runaways. As of 1828, he was the lawful owner of fifty-eight people, and a Craven County deed from 1830 lists 125 enslaved workers—owned and hired out—employed on his plantations. Despite this, Stanley had freed members of his own family, and in 1829 he petitioned the Craven County court to emancipate four people who were not related to him: Brister, Boston, Money, and Betty.⁶⁰ It is not clear whether this was an experiment in gradual emancipation, as *The Rights of All* suggests, or whether it was instead an indication that he favored particular individuals. His motivations might have been mixed.

What *is* clear is that Stanley remained ambivalent about slavery. Despite business misfortunes brought about by his white half-brother, John Wright Stanley, and the subsequent process of mortgaging and downsizing that hollowed out his small plantation empire by 1840, Stanley worked throughout the 1830s to legally free individuals attached to the estates of his deceased neighbors and acquaintances. One such effort resulted in a lawsuit argued before the state Supreme Court.⁶¹ In many ways, Stanley's wealth and position separated him from other African Americans in the South, slave or free. In a time of increasing restrictions on black movement, Stanley enjoyed relative mobility and independence. (Lyon's Pasture, his Jones County plantation, was eight miles from New Bern.)⁶² Yet Cornish made an effort in *The Rights of All* to bring individuals like Stanley into an emerging black collectivity. Stanley's decision to remain a distribution agent for this newspaper, even after *Freedom's Journal* folded, indicates that he desired this connection, as well.

Through the pages of *Freedom's Journal*, moreover, we know something about the relation between readership and editorial content. In 1828 an anonymous correspondent in New Bern—Stanley's city—reported on the domestic slave trade. The correspondent writes: "A few days ago a vessel was launched from a public wharf in that place [New Bern], with a cargo of Slaves, bound for Elizabeth city, N.C., or Norfolk, Va., thence to be re-shipped for New-Orleans. To hear the screams and moans of them and of their bereaved parents left behind was enough to pierce the hardest heart."⁶³ We will likely never know if the correspondent was Stanley or one of his subscribers. *Russwurm* published only an anonymous fragment of this letter, adding below it an unsigned editorial

commentary. This unsigned editorial is radical, suggesting that if the domestic slave trade does not cease, then “the day will come, when all we have read of Spartacus and his servile band—of the horrors of the revolutionary scenes of St. Domingo, will be reacted before our eyes.”⁶⁴ Consider the complexity of this interaction. *Freedom’s Journal* moved from New York to New Bern to Elizabethtown to New Orleans. Reports from readers, likewise, doubled back on the same network, with messages returning to New York. In addition, readers and editors recognized that black suffering was enabled by the movement of bodies along *other* networks: from New Bern to Norfolk to New Orleans. And this recognition prompts a writer for *Freedom’s Journal*, possibly Russwurm, to suggest an alternative system of movement—one that is not merely geographic but temporal. From ancient Rome to eighteenth-century Saint Domingue to present-day New Bern, the revolutions of history will continue, according to the newspaper. Political bodies, revolving through time, will collide in geographic space, transforming the politics of the present.

The radical potential of such networks is amplified when we consider how many African Americans in the South may have read this article or others like it. To that end, consider the distribution network in nearby Elizabethtown. Sheridan, the agent there, was similar to Stanley. Sheridan was an enslaver and was described at the time as a free mulatto with a fair complexion. (Despite this, he was recorded in the 1810, 1820, and 1830 censuses as white.)⁶⁵ Like Stanley, Sheridan was a successful merchant and landowner, although the development of “Free Black Codes” in the 1830s significantly curtailed his rights.⁶⁶ Also like Stanley, Sheridan’s position vis-à-vis slave ownership was complicated. Although Sheridan continued to own slaves until his emigration to Liberia in 1837, there are vague accounts that he freed at least some individuals “for conscience sake.”⁶⁷

We can discern slightly more about the extent of Sheridan’s distribution network in Elizabethtown, however, because he wrote about it. When news reached North Carolina of David Walker’s radical *Appeal*, both Sheridan and Stanley were suspected of having a connection to the pamphlet’s distribution. The *Recorder*, of Wilmington, reported in 1830 that there was “now no doubt in our minds that a conspiracy for exciting insurrection in the South is carrying on, by the free coloured people of the North . . . and that emissaries have been dispersed, *for some time*, throughout the Southern states.”⁶⁸ Stanley and Sheridan, as agents for *The Rights of All*, were named along with Walker as members of this conspiracy. Sheridan immediately distanced himself from the project of African American print circulation by writing a letter to the editor of the *Recorder*, which was published in the subsequent issue.⁶⁹ The letter is

revealing, although some of what Sheridan writes is almost certainly false. In the letter, Sheridan claims to have no knowledge of Walker, the author of the *Appeal*. As Hinks points out, Walker's name had been listed as a Boston agent in every issue of both newspapers; advertisements for his Boston clothing store were likewise frequent; and, finally, Walker wrote several articles for *Freedom's Journal*.⁷⁰ In other words, it is extremely unlikely that Sheridan was unfamiliar with Walker's name.

But in downplaying his connection to the project of black radicalism, Sheridan reveals much about his role as a circulating agent. He writes, for instance, that he “*unadvisedly*” paid “\$15 or \$20” to the editor of *Freedom's Journal*, and that he paid only “\$10” to the editor of *The Rights of All*—and that merely because of Cornish's “complaints of ill health and want of money.”⁷¹ These payments would have provided Sheridan with twelve annual subscriptions to the former newspaper and ten to the latter. *Freedom's Journal* cost three dollars, but only half of that price had to be paid in advance. Moreover, for every five subscriptions ordered, the distribution agent was granted one free. For \$15, Sheridan would have been sent two sets of five annual subscriptions, with an additional two annual subscriptions gratis.⁷² *The Rights of All* was cheaper. Cornish charged two dollars per year, with one dollar payable in advance.⁷³ Sheridan might have sent ten dollars because he pitied Cornish's poverty—or he might have simply intended to keep his ten subscriptions coming.

Moreover, Sheridan claimed that the newspaper was not secret at all and that “it was always open for the perusal of travellers and other persons” at his boardinghouse.⁷⁴ At one level, this serves as a defense. He hardly appears to be the agent of a secret revolution if his seditious literature is publicly available. At another level, this practice reveals a means of distribution that would have greatly amplified the power of ten or twelve newspaper subscriptions. Wendy Gamber writes that African American–owned boardinghouses in the North played a powerful role in both the project of racial uplift and the project of emancipation. Travelers from various social classes could share news and discuss politics in these houses.⁷⁵ For Sheridan to suggest that the newspaper was harmless because it was circulated through a black boardinghouse in a major North Carolina metropolitan area is a strange suggestion indeed. I am hesitant to speculate about Sheridan's precise motives. Perhaps he hoped to obscure the subversive potential black print distribution. Alternatively, he might not have believed his actions were subversive at all. At the time, distributing a newspaper such as *Freedom's Journal* was lawful. Nonetheless, Sheridan's letter reveals how the newspaper circulated within an Elizabethtown subculture and how it would have enabled subversive reading practices regardless of Sheridan's intent.

Russwurm and Cornish produced in their newspapers a mobile and inclusive space. They brought black enslavers into contact with literate and nonliterate black people in the South. They linked the movements of the cosmos to political movements in the past and future. They made visible their newspapers' circulation by printing the names of their circulating agents. Of course, local politics were different in each city of distribution. Some agents were more radical than others.⁷⁶ At least one agent was white.⁷⁷ But unlike isolated mutual aid or literary societies in the North, *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* enabled a mobile network connecting North and South, slave and free, foreign and domestic, past and future. Couple these practices with a worldview that treats political hierarchy as changeable and in motion, and the stage was set for more radical acts of print distribution and slave resistance. This is not to suggest that Russwurm and Cornish promoted violent revolt or even less overt acts of resistance. Rather, inclusiveness was their goal. But in forging this inclusiveness, they revealed the possibility of black unity in motion across time—and, as a consequence of this unity, action.

Ongoing Orbits

The distribution agents and writers for *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* produced an emancipatory cosmology: a mobile network—revolutionary in multiple senses of the word—that linked the movements of textual and political bodies across geography and temporality. The present article suggests, in short, that scholars consider these newspapers as modeling through their circulation the historical patterns by which revolutionary transformation has occurred and will occur. We should consider this movement, moreover, alongside the revolutionary movements described in each newspaper's pages.

Recognizing the intersection of the material and immaterial is important, first and most simply, because political transformation and communal solidarity did indeed wax and wane. The white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison delivered his first issue of the *Liberator* on January 1, 1831, and in his first editorial he suggests that his newspaper will produce a “revolution in public sentiment.” He goes on to write that this “revolution” is required most particularly among New England whites, from whom “contempt [is] more bitter, opposition more active, . . . and apathy more frozen, than among slave owners themselves.”⁷⁸ While Garrison spoke in a register similar to that of Cornish and Russwurm—he hoped to produce a “revolution”—he imagined a different audience, and his primary goal was not the suturing of a global, temporally interconnected black assemblage. Moreover, although Garrison initially relied

on African American agents to distribute his newspaper, he gradually turned to a distribution network of white agents. (This was a cause for distress among Garrison's black supporters, including James McCune Smith, who writes: "Out of the forty [black men] who had stood by the *Liberator* . . . in the day of its struggling adversity, was there no one fit for the office of agent when that office *paid*? There were dozens, but they were passed over.")⁷⁹ Moreover, Garrison had few ties to the South. In a letter to Joseph Gales and William W. Seaton, in September 1831, Garrison writes, "Unfortunately I have not a single subscriber, white or black, *south of the Potomac*."⁸⁰ None of this is to suggest that Garrison did not make mighty efforts to draw on black writers and to encourage a black readership. In 1834, for instance, 75 percent of the *Liberator's* subscribers were black.⁸¹ Nonetheless, Garrison's project simply could not fill the role played by the work of Cornish and Russwurm.

Second, and more significantly, attention to the revolutionary movements of black-authored print reveals what Cedric Robinson more than thirty years ago called a revolutionary black "world-consciousness" that stood as an alternative to the exclusionary politics of white, bourgeois society.⁸² The black assemblage brought into being through the transformative and transforming movement of print between 1827 and 1829 was not merely a response to white print culture but a separate formulation of temporal and geographic mobility. Nikhil Pal Singh suggests that a key problem in thinking about black civic engagement is that "it is axiomatic in discussions of American history and politics that the U.S. nation-state has a universalizing propensity at its origin" and that "civic nations like the United States are theoretically open to anyone."⁸³ The problem, according to Singh, is that a false narrative of civic inclusion defines black people as either inside or outside this system of Enlightenment liberalism. Yet the formation I have described here was fundamentally different from the print nationalism of the US nation-state. The circulation of *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* brought into being an alternative imaginary in motion. The newspapers did not describe and bring about a nation modeled on the United States, or even a nation-within-a-nation, but an altogether different form of collective belonging—one that moved in arcs and orbits, connecting far-flung bodies through the power of unseen, inexorable forces.

A few years after *The Rights of All* folded, Maria W. Stewart responded to news of the first African American convention in Philadelphia. "The day-star from on high is beginning to dawn upon us," she writes, "and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God."⁸⁴ By suturing references to 2 Peter 1:19 and Psalms 68:31, Stewart bridges the past and the future, the mythic and the embodied, the celestial and the political. She connects, according to

Christina Henderson, the putatively private experiences of African American women and the print-public realm of abolitionist politics.⁸⁵ And Stewart draws on, according to Stephen Hall, a cyclical, revolutionary understanding of history.⁸⁶ In short, the rising day-star alerts Stewart's readers to the mobility of bodies within a political and moral universe. And the promise that "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God," which would become a commonplace among antebellum black writers, reminds her readers that this future arc of emancipation and freedom emerges from the distant past. Stewart's writing recalls Encke's Comet. It recalls the promise by *Freedom's Journal* that the horrors of Saint Domingue will come around again and again until the slave trade is finished.⁸⁷ The political universe, antebellum black writers agreed, was in motion. And it was, finally, bending toward justice.

Notes

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1. Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Black Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 14. Bogues writes that the problem with "identity" is that it is drawn from a Western discursive system and that black intellectuals are alive to the "profound disjuncture between the lived experiences of being a racial/colonial subject and the account of this experience by his or her learned system." For a discussion of the inadequacy of literary criticism to make sense of the material practices of freedom, see Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 261. See also Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 1–9.
2. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habes Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 21, 46. Weheliye's use of "assemblage" comes from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and he defines assemblages along three axes: they are "continually shifting," they are relational through "spasmodic networks," and they are defined by the mutually constitutive relation between content (what makes up the network) and expression (or acts and statements made through the network).
3. Britt Rusert, "Delany's Comet: Fugitive Science and the Speculative Imaginary of Emancipation," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2013): 821.
4. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 12.
5. Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African American Newspaper* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 268.

6. A fighter for John Brown at Harper's Ferry, Lewis Sheridan Leary, was named for *Freedom's Journal* distribution agent Louis Sheridan. See Willard B. Gatewood Jr., "'To Be Truly Free': Louis Sheridan and the Colonization of Liberia," *Civil War History* 29, no. 5 (1983): 332; William Cheek, "Copeland, John Anthony Jr.," *American National Biography Online*, February 2000. The rise of the black press in the late 1830s was built on the memory of *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All*. See Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 268. Finally, it was the Baltimore distribution agent Hezekiah Grice who, in April 1830, wrote to Bishop Richard Allen to suggest that leading African Americans host a national convention. Forty delegates met in Philadelphia that September, establishing the National Convention Movement. See Asafa Jalata, "Revisiting the Black Struggle: Lessons for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002): 92; and Marcia M. Matthews, *Richard Allen* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1963), 134–35.
7. See Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*. Bacon's excellent book constitutes an important effort to recuperate the story of how *Freedom's Journal* was edited and funded. It is not, however, an effort to trace the newspaper's distribution throughout the Southern states and internationally. I discuss other *Freedom's Journal* scholarship in section two.
8. Bacon offers this estimate based on known circulation figures for *The Rights of All* and concludes—plausibly, I think—that *Freedom's Journal* had a significantly higher circulation (*Freedom's Journal*, 51).
9. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 35.
10. Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 158.
11. Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 11, 21.
12. Stephen Knadler, *Remapping Citizenship and the Nation in African American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 9.
13. *OED Online*, s.v. "cosmology," www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/view/Entry/42251?redirectedFrom=Cosmology (accessed December 2014).
14. Ruser, "Delany's Comet," 802.
15. David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 18; *The United States Postal Service: An American History, 1775–2006* (Washington, DC: United States Postal Service, 2007), 10.
16. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.
17. Frances Smith Foster, "Genealogies of Our Concerns, Early (African) American Print Culture, and Transcending Tough Times," *American Literary History* 22, no. 2 (2010): 377, 378; and Frances Smith Foster, *Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in African America* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 110.
18. Charlton W. Yingling, "No One Who Reads the History of Hayti Can Doubt the Capacity of Colored Men," *Early American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2013): 314–48.
19. Timothy Helwig, "Black and White Print: Cross-Racial Strategies of Class Solidarity in *Mechanics' Free Press* and *Freedom's Journal*," *American Periodicals* 19, no. 2 (2009): 117–35. For other work on *Freedom's Journal*, see Patrick Carl Burrowes, "Caught in the Crosswinds of the Atlantic," *Journalism History* 37, no. 3 (2011): 130–41; and Philip Edmondson, "'To Plead Our Own Cause': The St. Domingue Legacy and the Rise of the Black Press," *Prospects* 29 (January 2005): 121–54.
20. Loughran, *Republic in Print*, 2–3, 316.
21. Martha Schoolman, *Abolitionist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
22. Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 201, 252.
23. Ousmane K. Power-Green, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 47–49.
24. The last issue I have been able to locate was printed October 9, 1829, only a short time after the publication of David Walker's *Appeal*. For the first publication of the *Appeal*, see Peter P. Hinks, introduction to *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, by David Walker (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), xxv.
25. The Editors [Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm], "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal*, March 16, 1827, 1. Historians have debated the newspaper's multiple other objectives. See Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 29, 38.
26. Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 23–24.

27. "Probable Collision of the Earth and Planet," *Freedom's Journal*, January 31, 1829, 342.
28. See Trevor Palmer, *Perilous Planet Earth: Catastrophes and Catastrophism through the Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55.
29. Laura Dassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 314.
30. "Every Man the Architect of His Own Fortune," *Freedom's Journal*, October 31, 1828, 249.
31. "People of Color," *Freedom's Journal*, April 27, 1827, 25.
32. John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794–1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 89.
33. See Robert Dodsley, *The Preceptor: Containing a General Course of Education. Wherein the First Principles of Polite Learning are Laid Down in a Way Most Suitable for Trying the Genius and Advancing the Instruction of Youth* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1758), 1:381.
34. Stephen Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 59–61.
35. Theodore Parker, "Justice and the Conscience," in vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of Theodore Parker*, ed. Frances Power Cobb (London: Trubner, 1879), 48.
36. Martin Luther King Jr., "Our God Is Marching On," King Papers Project, ed. Clayborne Carson, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/ (accessed June 12, 2014).
37. The Editors [Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm], "TO OUR PATRONS," *Freedom's Journal*, March 16, 1827, 1.
38. Samuel Cornish, "Reform Indeed," *The Rights of All*, August 7, 1829, 26.
39. See Nikki Taylor, "Reconsidering the 'Forced' Exodus of 1829: Free Black Emigration from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Wilberforce, Canada," *Journal of African American History* 87 (Summer 2002): 283–85.
40. Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 230.
41. Martin Bruckner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 6; and Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 5.
42. Hsuan L. Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.
43. Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 178.
44. V. "WALKER'S APPEAL, NO. 2.," *Liberator*, May 14, 1831, 1.
45. See V., "WALKER'S APPEAL NO. 1.," *Liberator*, April 30, 1831, 1. V. does not appear to reside in a slave state at the time of writing. V. identifies himself as "a free white man, without personal interest in the question of slavery," and indicates that he received his copy of Walker's *Appeal* from Garrison. V. later suggests that he might "walk arm in arm with [a black man of irreproachable character and intelligence] through Washington-street to-morrow, from Market-street to Roxbury line." I take this to mean that V. was, at the time of his writing, a Boston resident.
46. Baltimore and Washington City were sites of distribution from the first issue of *Freedom's Journal*. Fredericksburg, Virginia, was added with the August 3, 1827, issue. Alexandria, in the District of Columbia, was added with the August 24, 1827 issue. On January 11, 1828, *Freedom's Journal* added three locations in North Carolina to the distribution list: New Bern, Elizabethtown, and New Salem. Richmond, Virginia, was added with the February 29, 1828, issue. New Orleans was added on July 4, 1828.
47. J. G. Clinkscales, *On the Old Plantation: Reminiscences of His Childhood* (Spartanburg, SC: Band and White, 1916), 46. See also Peter Hinks, "To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren": *David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 155.
48. Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 51.
49. "The Ninth and Tenth Numbers of a Newspaper," *Recorder* [Wilmington, NC], September 2, 1831, 3. See also Hinks, "To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren," 143.
50. Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 266–67.
51. Hinks, "To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren," 170.
52. "ABOLITION OF NEGRO SLAVERY IN VIRGINIA," *The Rights of All*, October 9, 1829, 45.
53. See "Authorized Agents," *The Rights of All*, October 9, 1829, 48.

54. Hinks, "To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren," 170.
55. Samuel Cornish, "A Thought for the Patriot and Philanthropist," *The Rights of All*, May 29, 1829, 6. This resembles the program undertaken by John Berry Meachum, of St. Louis, in the 1840s. See Eric Gardner, *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 33–34.
56. "Authorized Agents," *Freedom's Journal*, January 11, 1828, 168.
57. "Authorized Agents," *The Rights of All*, May 29, 1829, 8.
58. Loren Schweninger, "John Carruthers Stanley and the Anomaly of Black Slaveholding," *North Carolina Historical Review* 67 (1990): 169.
59. U.S. Census Bureau, Population, Craven County, Virginia, prepared by *Social Explorer* (accessed June 12, 2014).
60. Schweninger, "John Carruthers Stanley," 171, 179, 177.
61. *Ibid.*, 187–89, 190–91.
62. Col. John D. Whitford, "Historical Reminiscences," *New Bern Weekly Journal*, January 3, 1905, newbern.cplib.org/.
63. "Domestic Slave Trade," *Freedom's Journal*, October 17, 1828, 284–85.
64. *Ibid.*
65. William S. Powell, "Sheridan, Louis," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 5:332–33.
66. Willard B. Gatewood Jr., "'To Be Truly Free': Louis Sheridan and the Colonization of Liberia," *Civil War History* 29.5 (1983): 335. He complained to a friend in 1834 that authorities could confiscate his property if he were to remain away from it for more than ninety days.
67. *Ibid.*, 332.
68. "Ninth and Tenth Numbers of a Newspaper," 3. See also Hinks, "To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren," 143.
69. Louis Sheridan, "For the Cape Fear Recorder," *Recorder* [Wilmington, NC], September 10, 1830, 3.
70. Hinks, "To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren," 143.
71. "The Conclusion of Our Article," *Recorder* [Wilmington, NC], September 10, 1830, 3.
72. See "The Freedom's Journal," *Freedom's Journal*, January 11, 1828, 168.
73. See "The Rights of All," *The Rights of All*, May 29, 1829, 2.
74. "Conclusion of Our Article."
75. Wendy Gamber, *The Boarding House in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 58.
76. The Baltimore agent Hezekiah Grice wrote in April 1830 to Richard Allen suggesting a national convention. Forty delegates met in Philadelphia that September, establishing the National Convention Movement, which Jalata describes as the "first civil rights movement in the United States." See Jalata, "Revisiting the Black Struggle," 92; and Marcia M. Matthews, *Richard Allen* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1963), 134–35. Eventually, Grice decamped for Port-au-Prince, where he became a bridge contractor. See George F. Bragg Jr., *Men of Maryland* (Baltimore, MD: Church Advocate Press, 1925), 71.
77. Seth Hinshaw was a Quaker postmaster for New Salem, North Carolina. On January 11, 1828, Hinshaw was listed as the agent to that town—a rural crossroad seventy-seven miles outside Raleigh. The table of postmasters for Randolph County in 1830 listed twelve postmasters, yet Hinshaw is the only one who appears on the *Freedom's Journal* distribution list. See *Table of Post Offices in the United States, Arranged by States and Counties; as They Were October 1, 1830* (Washington, DC: Duff Green, 1831), 158. He did not continue as agent for *The Rights of All*. By 1838 a Seth Hinshaw appears as the distribution agent in Greensborough, Indiana, for the Quaker periodical the *Friend*. Another Hinshaw—Jesse Hinshaw—appears as the distribution agent for the *Friend* in New Salem. See "The Friend. Tenth Month, 6, 1838," *Friend*, October 6, 1838, 8.
78. William Lloyd Garrison, "To the Public," *Liberator*, January 1, 1831, 1.
79. Quoted in Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 268.
80. William Lloyd Garrison to Joseph Gales and William W. Seaton, Boston, September 23, 1831, in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: I Will Be Heard, 1822–1835*, ed. Walter McIntosh Merrill and Louis Ruchames (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 131.
81. Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 268.

82. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 314.
83. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 17–18.
84. Maria W. Stewart, “Cause for Encouragement: Composed upon Hearing the Editor’s Account of the Late Convention in Philadelphia,” in *Maria W. Stewart, America’s First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 43.
85. Christina Henderson, “Sympathetic Violence: Maria Stewart’s Antebellum Vision of African American Resistance,” *MELUS* 38, no. 4 (2013): 52.
86. Hall, *Faithful Account of the Race*, 56–57.
87. “Probable Collision of the Earth and Planet,” *Freedom’s Journal*, January 31, 1829, 342; “Domestic Slave Trade,” *Freedom’s Journal*, October 17, 1828, 284–85.