

The Library's 19th-century locations.

From south to north:

Nassau Street (1795-1840)

Broadway (1840-1856)

University Place (1856-1937)

*Manhattan map courtesy of
The New York Public Library*



May
 To all to whom these Presents shall come,
 THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY
 Know ye that the said Trustees do hereby admit *Jeremiah Hamilton* to be a MEMBER of the said Society and that he is entitled to one eighth of the Property thereof by transfer from Joseph Stewart, executor of Andrew Gray deceased, the said right being paid with all necessary payments which the said Trustees have been by Law required to collect.
 In Testimony whereof, the said Trustees have caused these presents to be signed and affixed this *22nd* day of *May* in the Year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and *fifty six*.
 BY ORDER OF THE TRUSTEES.
Chas. King Treasurer.
H. Van Schaick Secretary.



Left: Library share of Jeremiah Hamilton, purchased from Andrew Gray on May 22, 1856

Right: The Library's building at the time, on University Place



The United States at the start of the 1800s: 17 states hugging the East Coast, including the new District of Columbia. The census for 1800—the nation’s second—showed 5,308,483 people living in the U.S., of whom 893,602 were enslaved Blacks and 143,937 were free Blacks. (Census figures for Georgia, Kentucky, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Virginia were lost.)

Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin



Academic class, Roger Williams University, Nashville, 1899

Library of Congress

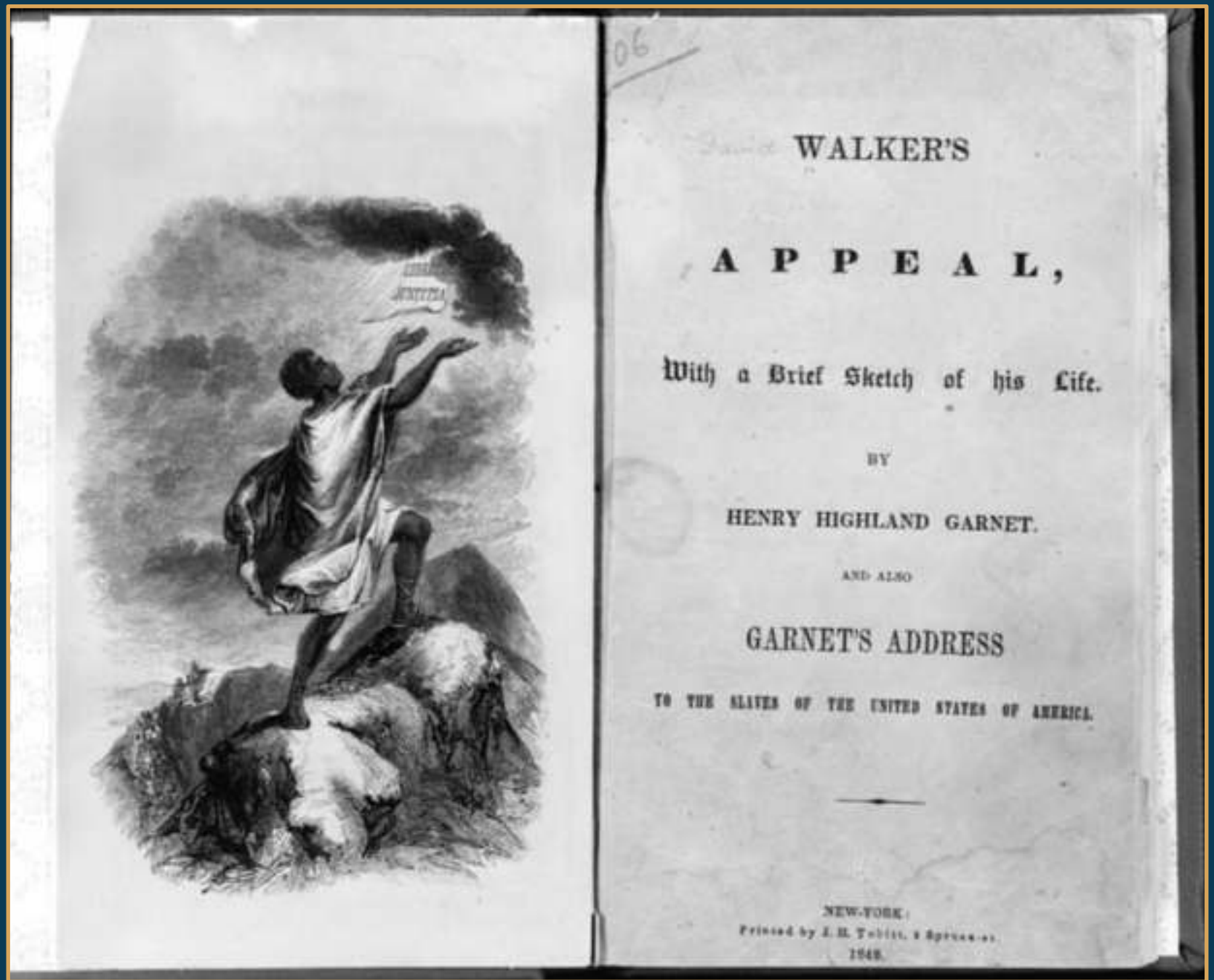
Enslaved Americans Revolt

- 1663 Major conspiracy by black and white indentured servants in Virginia is betrayed by servant
- 1712 New York City slave revolt is quelled by militia
- 1739 South Carolina slaves launch Stono Rebellion, killing 30 whites
- 1740 In response to Stono Rebellion, South Carolina outlaws teaching slaves to read and write
- 1800 Gabriel Prosser and Jack Bowler organize 1,000 fellow slaves to seize Richmond, but plan is quelled by militia and leaders are executed along with many others
- 1811 Slave revolt in Louisiana led by Charles Deslondes ends with over 100 slaves killed or executed by U.S. troops
- 1816-18 First Seminole War, involving runaway slaves and Native Americans fighting U.S. federal government in Florida
- 1822 Denmark Vesey organizes slave revolt to take over Charleston SC but is betrayed by a servant
- 1831 Nat Turner leads slave uprising in Southampton County VA; at least 57 whites are killed; 3,000 soldiers and Virginia militiamen react by killing blacks indiscriminately; Turner is captured and hanged
- 1839 Joseph Cinqué leads successful slave revolt on Spanish ship Amistad
- 1859 John Brown leads abolitionist raid in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Title page and frontispiece showing slave on top of mountain with his hands raised to paper labeled Libertas Justitia from Henry Highland Garnet, Walker's Appeal, With a Brief Sketch of His Life (1848; first published 1829)

The Library of Congress

David Walker (1785-1830) was a free Black man who grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. At 40, he moved to Boston and joined a Black Methodist congregation, supporting his family well as a secondhand clothes dealer. He became a leader in Boston's Black community, gaining local recognition for his antislavery speeches, a self-avowed "restless disturber of the peace." In 1829, he published the powerful anti-slavery *Appeal*.



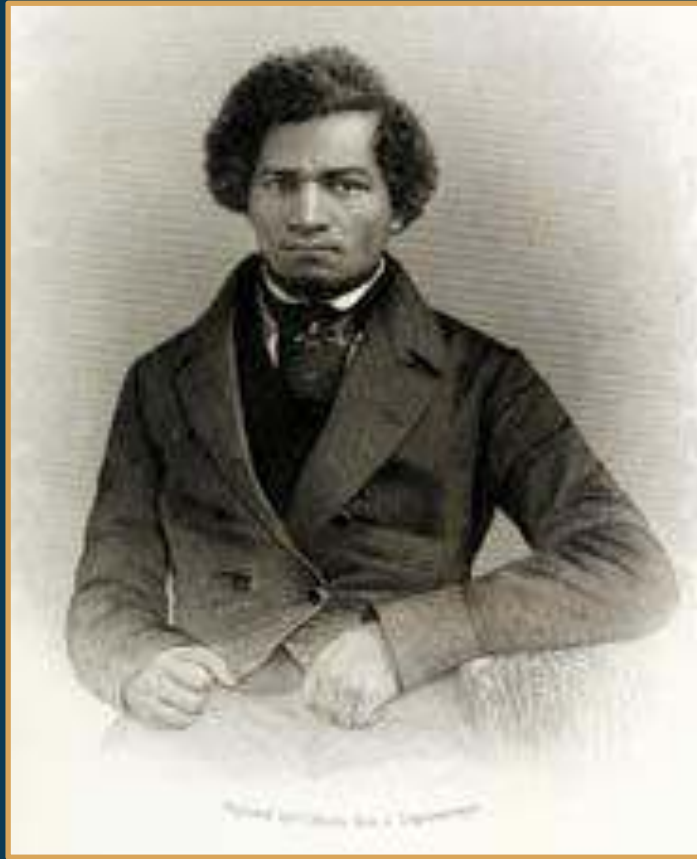


Boston in the 1830s, where Maria W. Stewart addressed the New England Anti-Slavery Society

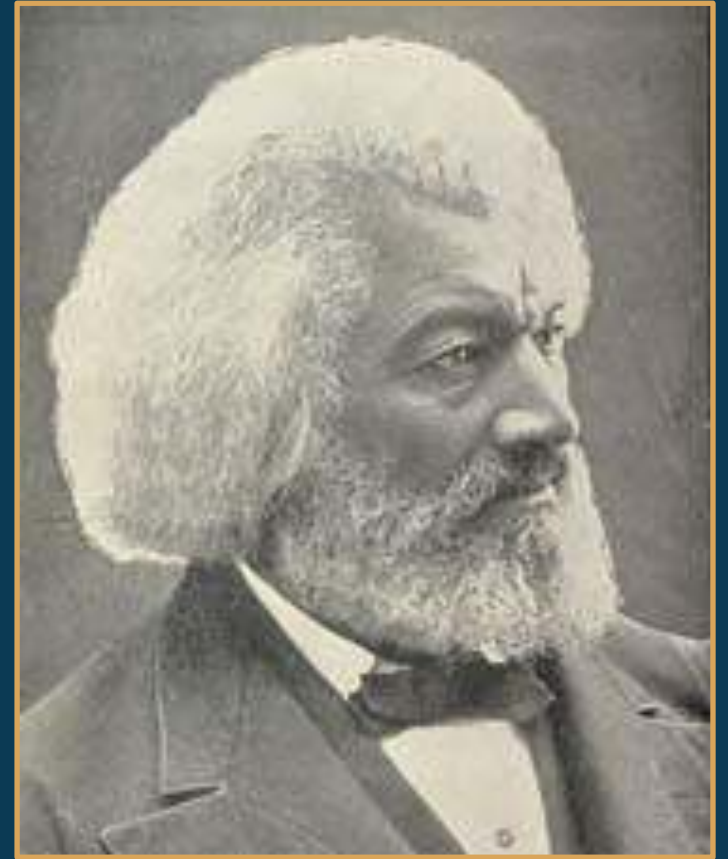
blackpast.org



Frontispiece, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself. Boston. 1845



Frontispiece, My Bondage and My Freedom. 1855



Frontispiece, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass. Written by Himself. First published 1881; revised 1892

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) was born in slavery but acquired literacy and eventually “seized” his freedom. In oratory, letters, newspaper articles, poetry, short story, and three autobiographies, Douglass addressed the greatest issues of his time—his peoples’ enslavement and emancipation.

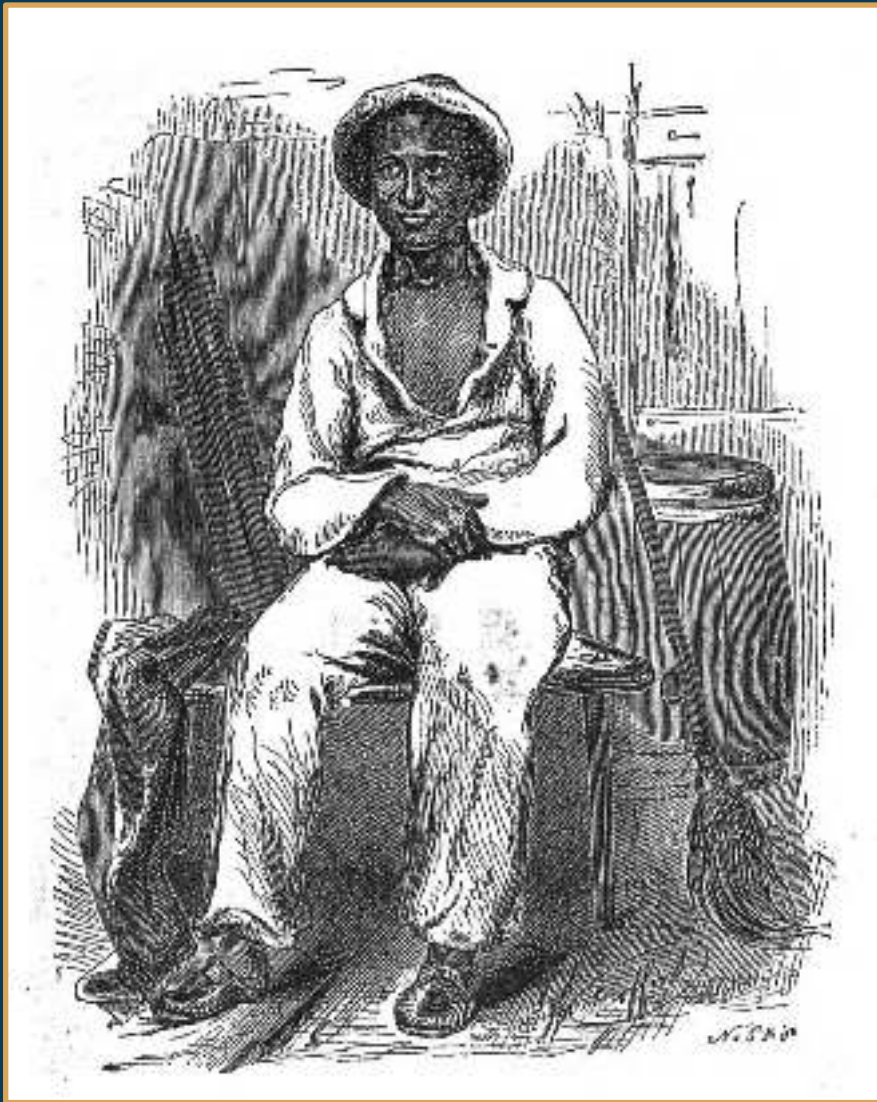
from Life and Times of Frederick Douglass

Written by Himself, 1892 edition

Documenting the American South, docsouth.unc.edu

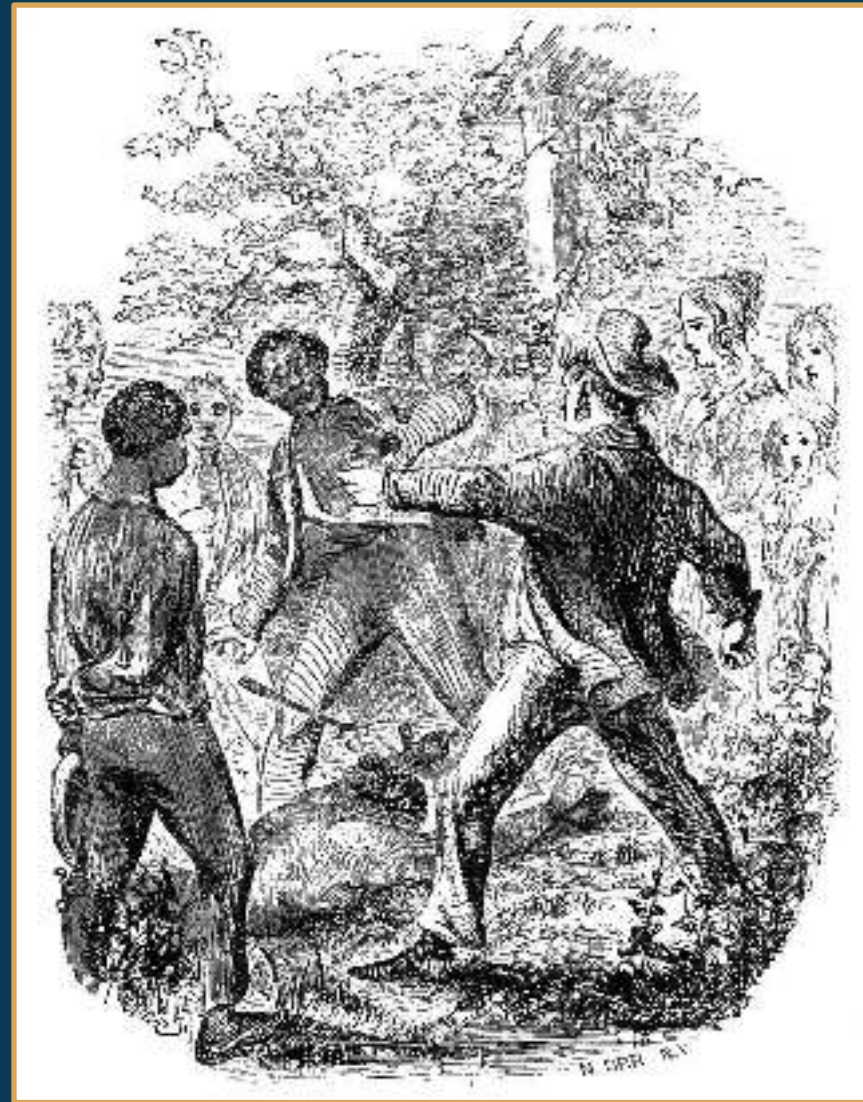
Young Frederick's white mistress, Sophia Auld, began teaching him his letters but was abruptly stopped by her husband. As Douglass later wrote: "The first, and never to be retraced, step had been taken. In teaching me the alphabet, in the days of her simplicity and kindness, my mistress had given me the "inch," and now, no ordinary precaution could prevent me from taking the "ell."





A Sketch of Solomon Northup (1807-?)

Frederick M. Coffin (engraved by Nathaniel Orr)
Solomon Northup, Twelve Years a Slave (1855)



Patsey's whipping from *Twelve Years a Slave*

Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, A Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853. Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1853.

Wikimedia Commons

*Only known formal photograph of Harriet Jacobs, 1894
by C.M. Gilbert, Gilbert Studios, Washington, D.C.,
restored by Adam Cuerden
The Journal of the Civil War Era*

Harriet Jacobs (1813-1879) published, in 1861, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*—a first narrative to be recorded by an enslaved African American woman. As a fugitive slave, her struggle for freedom, not only for herself but for her two children, was harrowing and sensational.



A translation of one of the texts
by Omar Ibn Said (1770?-1863)

The Life of Omar Ibn Said was written in
1831 and published in 1925 as an article,
"Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in
North Carolina," ed. John Franklin
Jameson, *The American Historical Review*,
30:4 July 1925.

*The Library of Congress, African and Middle East
Division, Omar Ibn Said Collection*

(11) Omar ben Saïed
Translating Manuscript, No. 1, 1831
In the name of God, the merciful, the
gracious. God grant his blessing upon our
lord (Saidna) Mohammed. Blessed be He in whose
hand is the kingdom & who is Almighty; who
created death & life that he might make you the
best of his works, for he is exalted, he is the forger
(of sins) who created seven heavens one above the
other. Do you discern anything trifling in creation.
Bring back your thoughts. Do you see anything
worthless. Recall your vision in earnest. Turn your
eye inward for it is diseased. God has adorned
the heavens & the world with lamps, & has made
us missiles for the devils & given us for them a grie-
vous punishment, & to those who have disbelieved
their Lord, the punishment of hell & pain of body.
Whoever associates with them shall hear a boiling
cacophon, & what is call therein may fully represent
those who suffer under the anger of God. Ask them
if a prophet (director) has not been sent unto them:
They say yes, a prophet has come to us, but we have
believed him. He said, God has not sent us down any thing, &

“Uncle Marian, (Omar Ibn Said),
a slave of great notoriety, of North
Carolina,” ambrotype daguerreotype,
by unknown photographer.

Half-length formal portrait.
Identification from manuscript note found
underneath the plate.

*Courtesy of the Randolph Linsly Simpson African-
American Collection, Beinecke Rare Book &
Manuscript Library, Yale University*



*from Portraits of American Abolitionists
Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society*

William Wells Brown (1816-1884) was born into slavery in Kentucky. In 1834, at 19, he escaped to Ohio and then settled in Boston, where he worked for abolitionist, temperance, and women's suffrage causes—at the same time becoming a prolific writer. His first book, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*, was published in 1847. Plain in style yet striking in its realism, the book explores the contradictions between a slave's survival ethic and the dominant morality of his time. His novel *Clotel* (1853), considered the first novel written by an African American, was originally published in London.



William Wells Brown



Frontispiece, Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States by William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Author of "Three Years in Europe," With a Sketch of the Author's Life. London: Partridge & Oakey, 1853.

Documenting the American South, docsouth.unc.edu

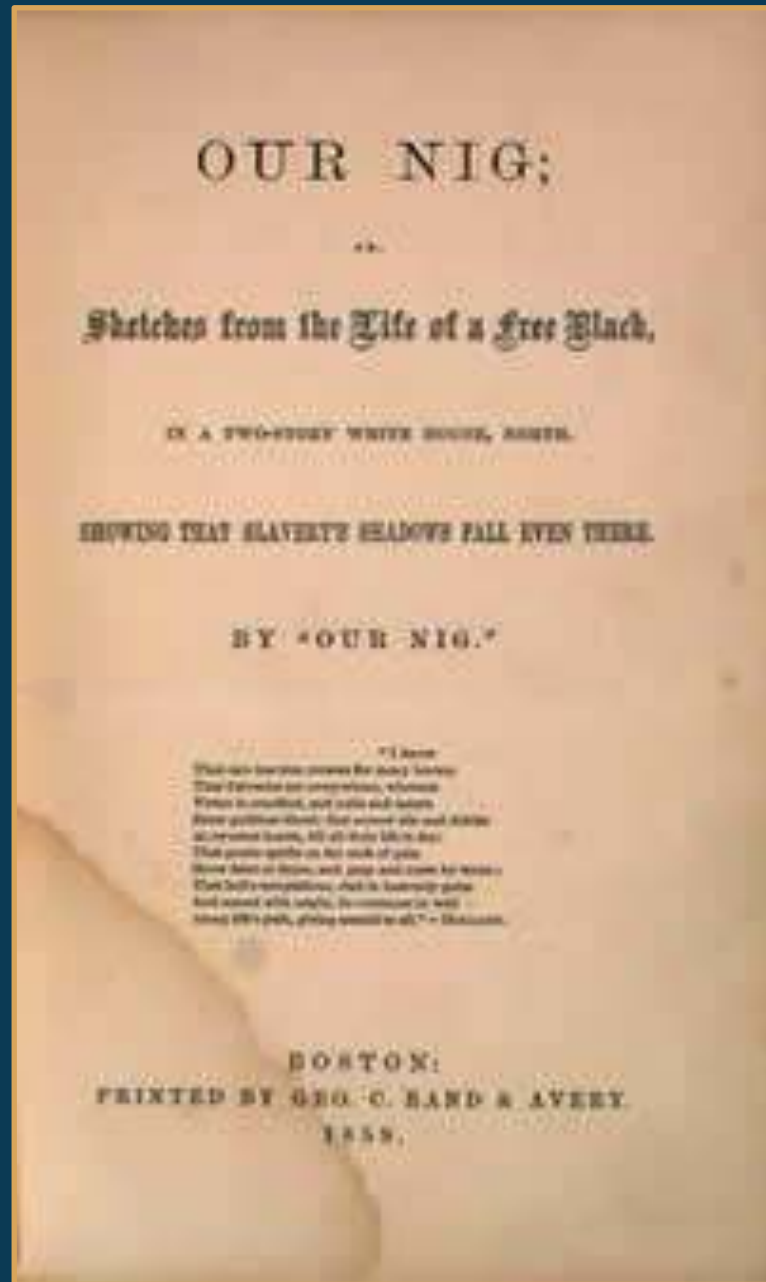
*In the 1980s, Henry Louis Gates Jr. discovered the 1859 novel **Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black** by **Harriet E. Wilson (1825-1900)**.*

Wikimedia Commons

Harriet E. Wilson (1825-1900) was born a free person of color in New Hampshire.

Orphaned when young, she was bound until the age of 18 as an indentured servant.

Wilson published her novel anonymously, recounting “slavery's shadow” in the North, where free Blacks suffered as indentured servants and from racism.



Harriet E. Wilson, author of *Our Nig*.
This statue by Fern Cunningham was
commissioned in 2006 and donated to the
Town of Milford. It honors Harriet E.
Wilson, a pre-Civil War African American
author from Milford, New Hampshire, who
is believed to be the first Black woman to
publish a novel in the English language.

*Courtesy of Grace Peirce,
Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire*



The
Bondswoman's Narrative
By Hannah Crafts
A Fugitive Slave
Recently Escaped from North Carolina

This page from the 1850s novel *The Bondswoman's Narrative* reads “By Hannah Crafts,
A Fugitive Slave Recently Escaped from North Carolina.”

Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Rev. William J. Simmons, 1849-1890
Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising.
Cleveland, Ohio: Geo. M. Rewell, 1887

Henry Highland Garnet (1815-1882)
escaped from bondage to New York,
where he was educated at the African Free
School and other institutions.

In his 1843 “An Address to the Slaves of
America,” he said: “However much you and
all of us may desire it, there is not much hope
of redemption without the shedding of blood.
If you must bleed, let it come at once—rather
die freemen than live to be the slaves.”



Samuel Ringgold Ward (1817-1864)
also escaped from bondage to New York and
graduated from the African Free School to become an
outspoken abolitionist.

In 1850, in a speech on the Fugitive Slave Bill,
Ward said, “This is the question, Whether a man has a
right to himself and his children, his hopes and his
happiness, for this world and the world to come....

Oh, this is a monstrous proposition....

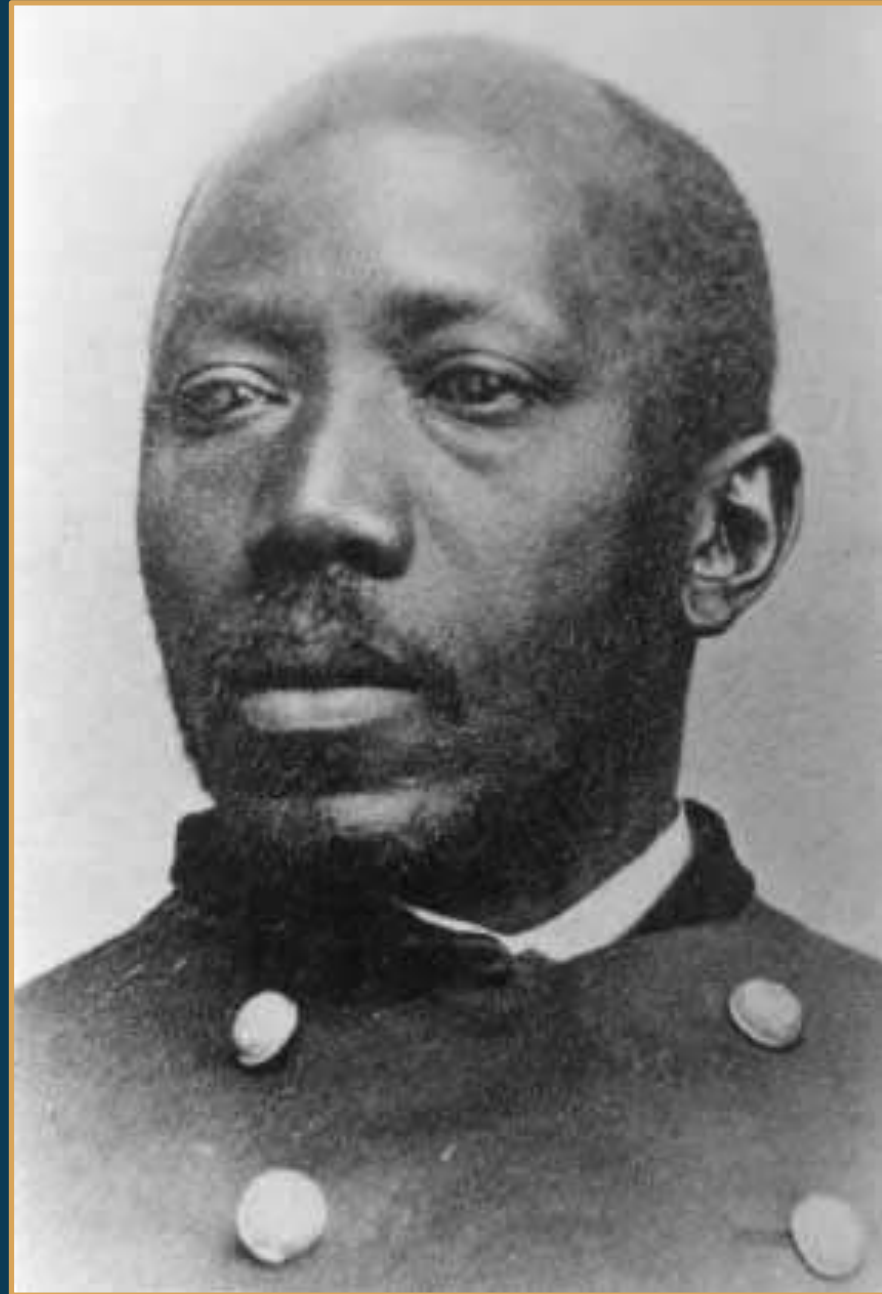
“Such crises as these leave us to the right of
Revolution, and if need be, that right we will, at
whatever cost, most sacredly maintain.”

*Image from his Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery
Labours in the United States, Canada & England
(London: John Snow, 1855)*



Martin Robinson Delany (1812-1885) is considered the first proponent of Black nationalism. In an 1854 speech, "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," he said: "No people can be free who themselves do not constitute an essential part of the ruling element of the country in which they live....The liberty of no man is secure, who controls not his own political destiny....A people, to be free, must necessarily be their own rulers...."

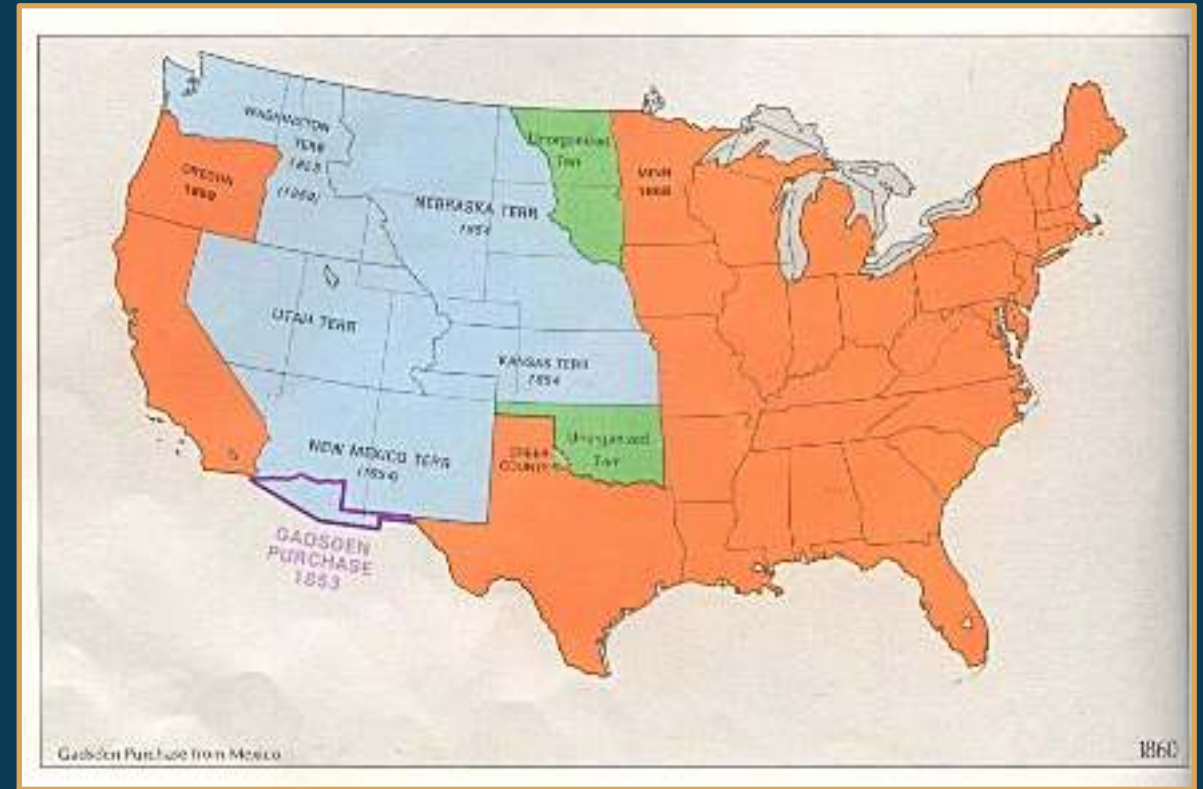
West Virginia University Libraries



James Monroe Whitfield (1822-1871) was known as the poet-barber in Buffalo. Like his friend Martin Delany, he was a writer and activist for African American emigration. He wrote impassioned antislavery poetry on a regular basis for *The North Star*, the weekly published by Frederick Douglass in Rochester, NY from 1847 to 1851. Whitfield published *America and Other Poems* in 1853; it is still in print today.

blackpast.org





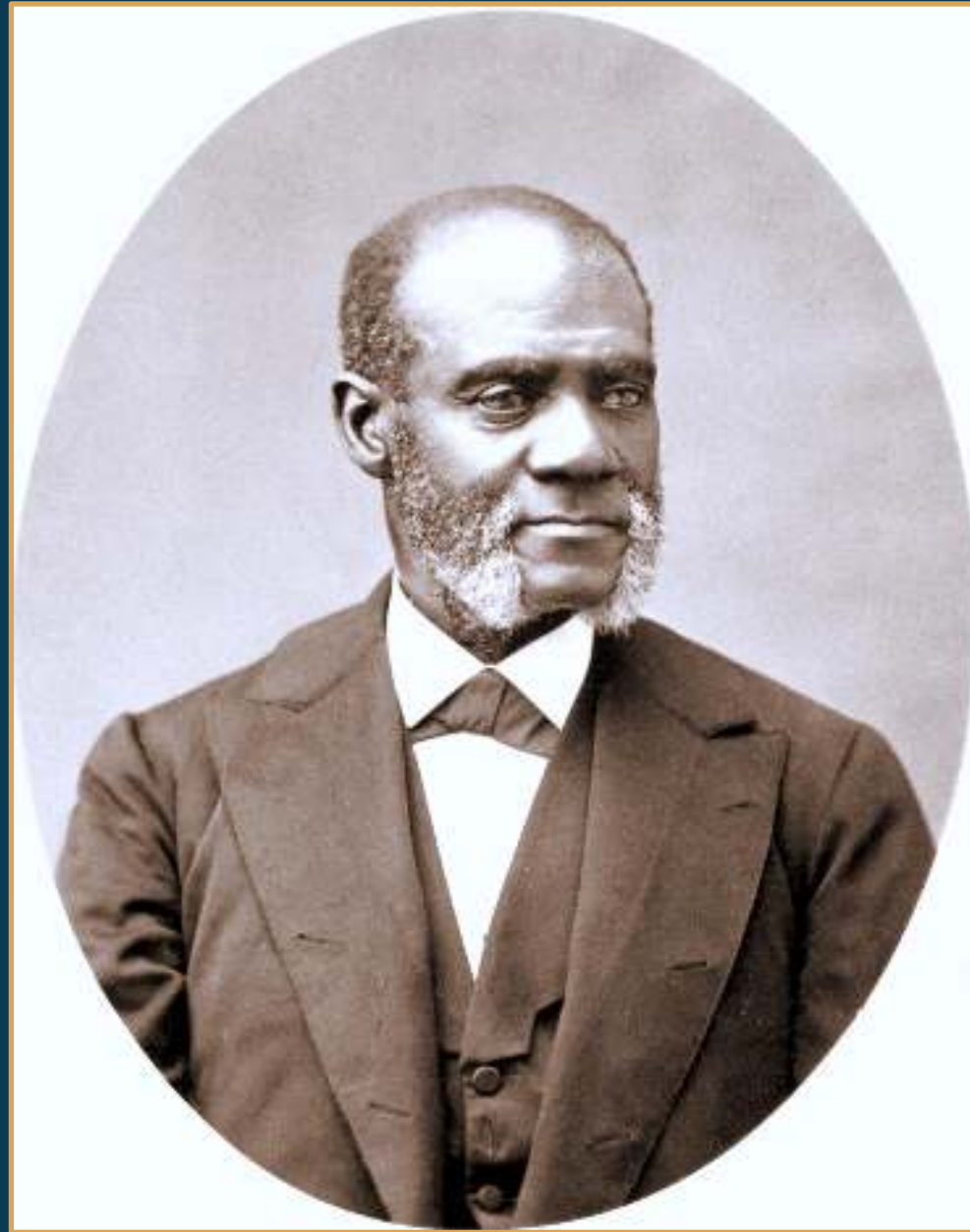
Compared to the 1810 map at left, by 1860 the U.S. included 33 states and 10 territories. Its census showed a population of 31,443,322, of whom 3,953,762 were enslaved and 448,070 were free Black people. Railroads extended from the East to Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Joseph, St. Louis, and Memphis. Some 4,000 miles of canals had been built, with the Erie Canal the most successful. The age of sail had been eclipsed by age of steam, with manufacturing keeping pace with expanding agriculture. Literacy and advances in printing made broadsides, newspapers, pamphlets, and books widely available.

Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin

Henry Highland Garnet (1815-1882),
Albumen silver print, c. 1881, by James U. Stead

*National Portrait Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution*

On February 12, 1865, the Rev. Garnet, now pastor of the 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., became the first African American to speak in the Capitol Building. His sermon, “Let the Monster Perish,” was delivered within days after Congress had adopted the 13th Amendment banning slavery. “Let freemen and patriots,” he said, “mete out complete and equal justice to all men and thus prove to mankind the superiority of our democratic, republican government...”



Charlotte Forten Grimké (1837-1914), at her death in 1914, left five volumes of diaries, written between 1854 and 1864 and between 1885 and 1892 and published posthumously. They would give a unique and intimate portrait of the life of a free Black female in the antebellum North, during the Civil War, and thereafter. On St. Helena Island, South Carolina, during the war, she recorded her experiences teaching freed slaves, often setting down their hymns and what she called their "shouts."

Presbyterian Historical Society

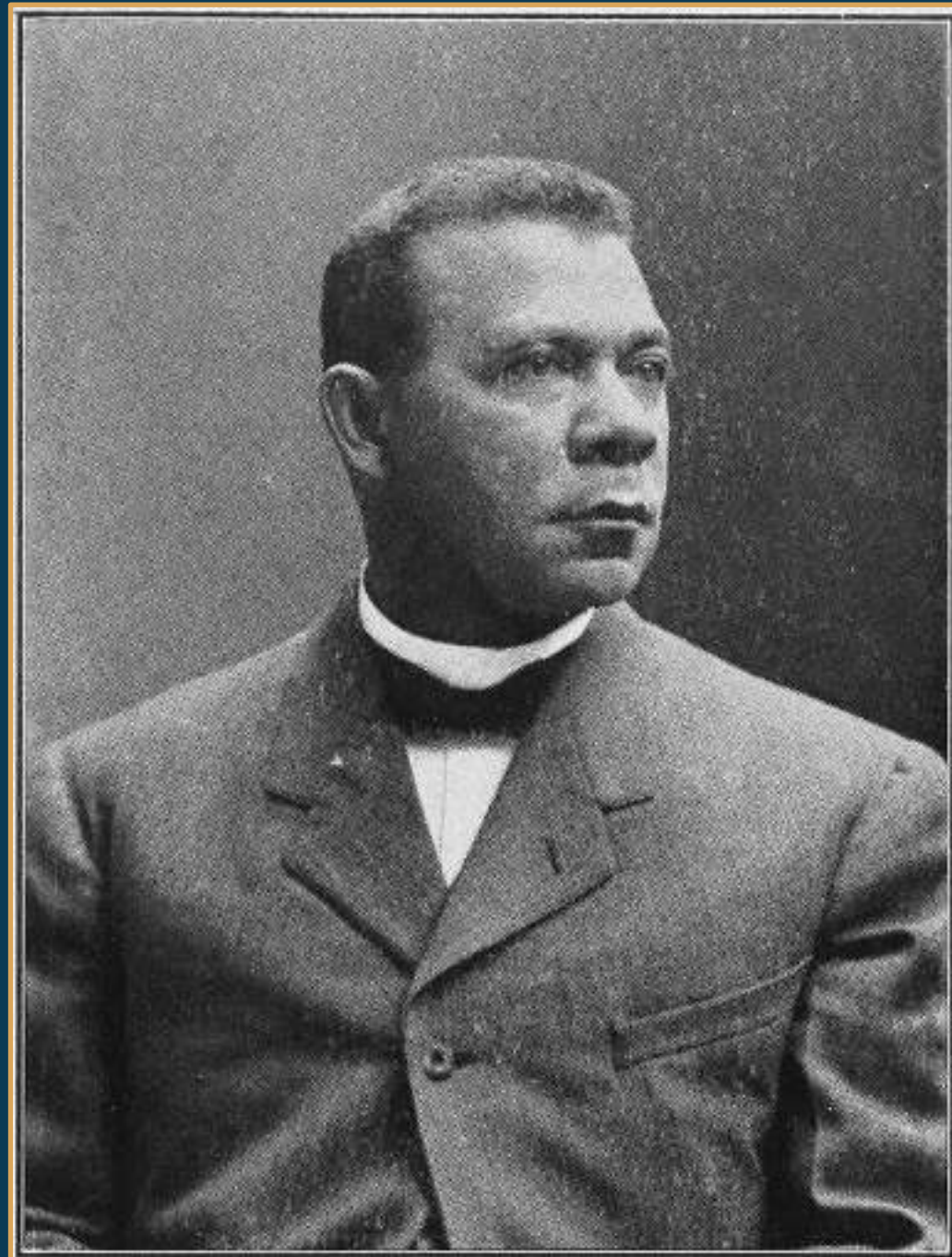


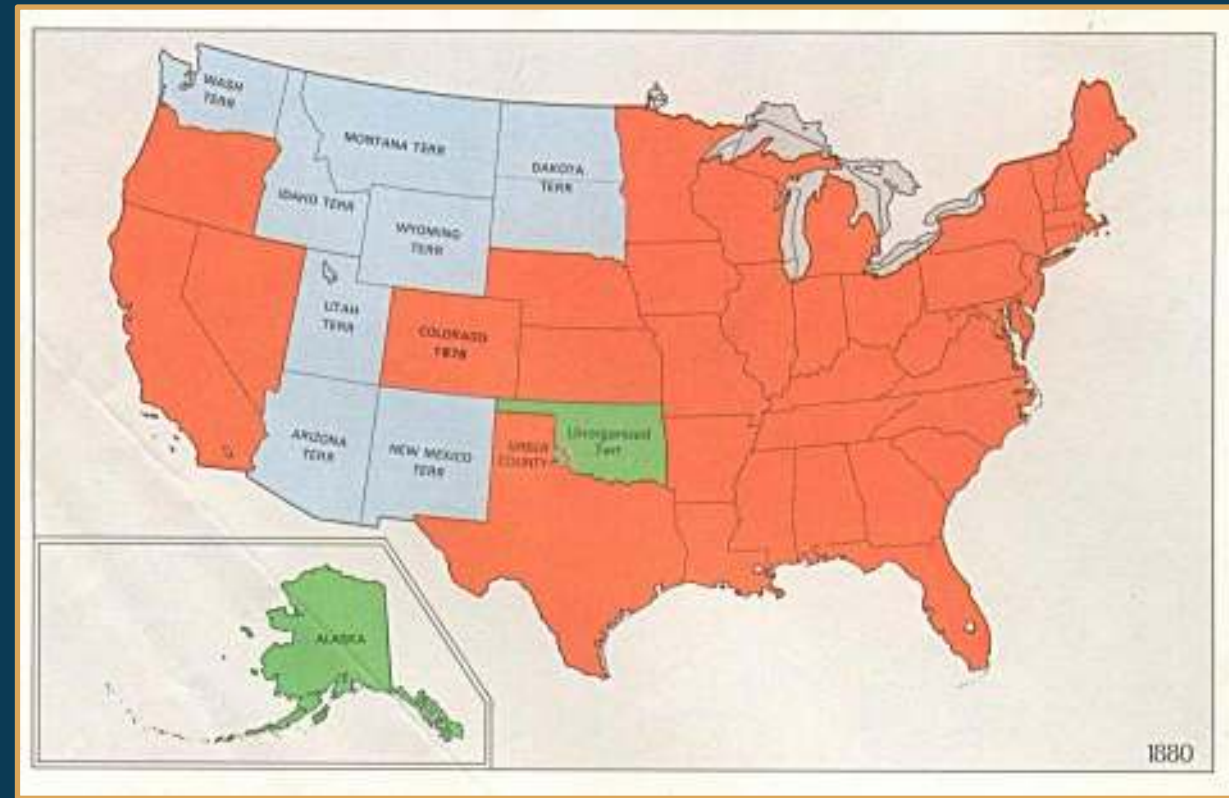
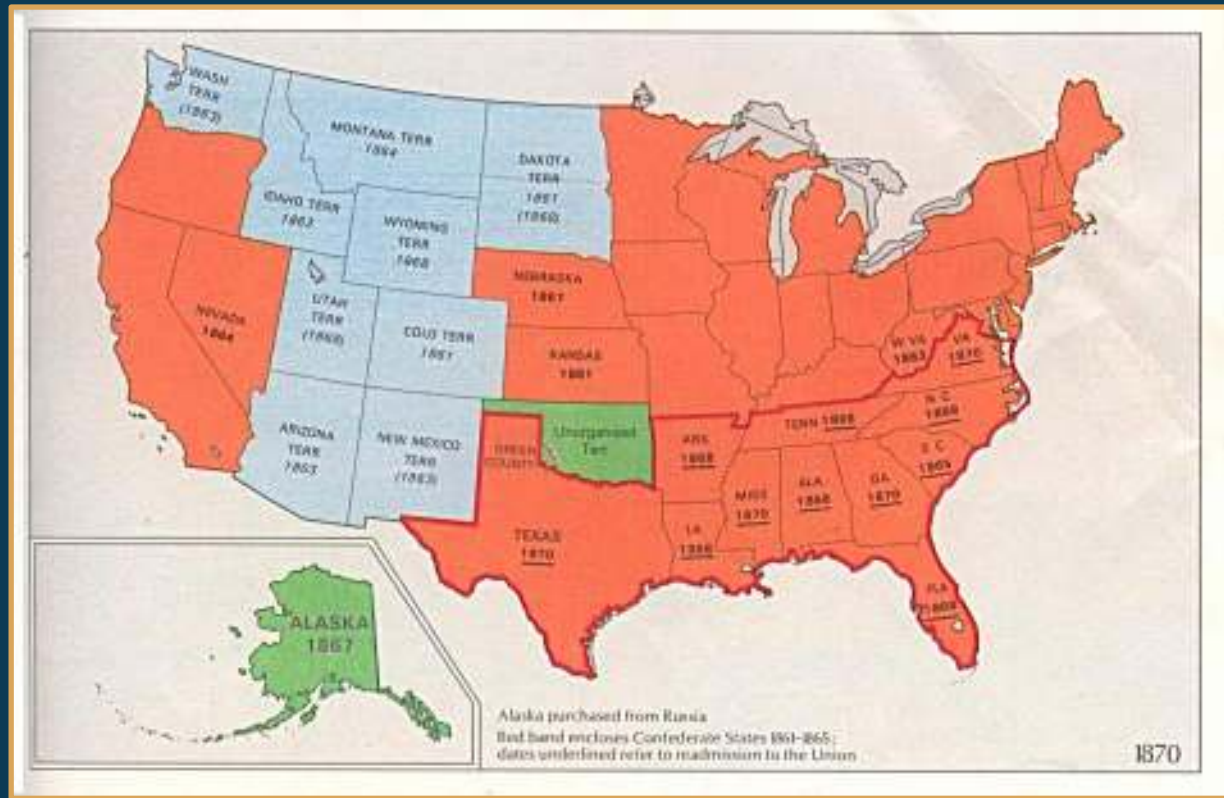
Booker T. Washington portrait from American Civilization and the Negro: the Afro-American in Relation to National Progress by C. V. Roman, A.M., M.D., LL.... (1916).

*New York Public Library Archives,
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) was raised in Virginia by his enslaved mother “in “the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings.”

Determined to get educated after Emancipation, Washington eventually gained admission to the Hampton Institute, an industrial school for Blacks and American Indians in Virginia. In 1881, at the recommendation of Hampton Institute’s president, Washington became president of Alabama’s Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, a position he held until his death in 1915. Tuskegee promoted industrial education, fostering in its student body racial pride, solidarity, and self-help.





By 1880, the United States included 37 states and 10 territories. The country’s population was 50,189,209, of which 6,580,793 were Black—all of whom were nominally free. After the election of 1876, federal troops were withdrawn from the former Confederate states, officially ending Reconstruction. In 1883, the Supreme Court overturned the Civil Rights Act of 1875, and widespread lynching, Ku Klux Klan activity, and racism marked the next twenty years throughout the country, especially in the South. With the Transcontinental Railroad’s completion, ever greater numbers of Americans headed west for new opportunities and a fresh start. Meanwhile, the devastating effects of the Panic of 1873 showed just how interconnected the country had become.

Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin



MRS. F. E. W. HARPER

literaryladiesguide.com



Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library



Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library

Frances E. W. Harper (1825-1911) was an abolitionist, suffragist, poet, teacher, public speaker, and writer. Born free in Baltimore, Harper had a long and prolific career, publishing her first book of poetry at the age of 20. At 67, she published her widely praised novel *Iola Leroy*, placing her among the first Black women to publish a novel.

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859-1930) was born in Maine, a fifth-generation African American New Englander. She became a prominent novelist, journalist, playwright, historian, and editor of Boston's *Colored American Magazine*. She was considered a pioneer in her use of the romantic novel to explore social and racial themes. "Fiction is of great value to any people," she wrote in her novel *Contending Forces* (1890), "as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation."

The Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins Society



*Author Charles Waddell Chesnutt at age 40.
Chesnutt Bros. (Cleveland, Ohio)*

Cleveland Public Library Image Collection

Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858-1932) was the son of free-Black émigrés from the South. He grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and eventually settled in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1884, passing the Ohio State bar and launching a business career as a legal stenographer. At the same time, he began writing stories documenting the corrosive effects of being stigmatized on the otherwise healthy mind and body of a Black man. His two collections of short stories and three novels explored the complex issues of racial and social identity in the post-Civil War South. They appeared serially in the *Atlantic Monthly* and other mainstream publications.



Alice Dunbar Nelson, c. 1902

Twentieth Century Negro Literature, gutenber.org

Alice Dunbar Nelson (1875-1935) was raised in New Orleans and among the first generation born free in the South after the Civil War. She achieved prominence as a poet, author of short stories and dramas, newspaper columnist, activist for women's rights, and editor of two anthologies. She was married to Paul Laurence

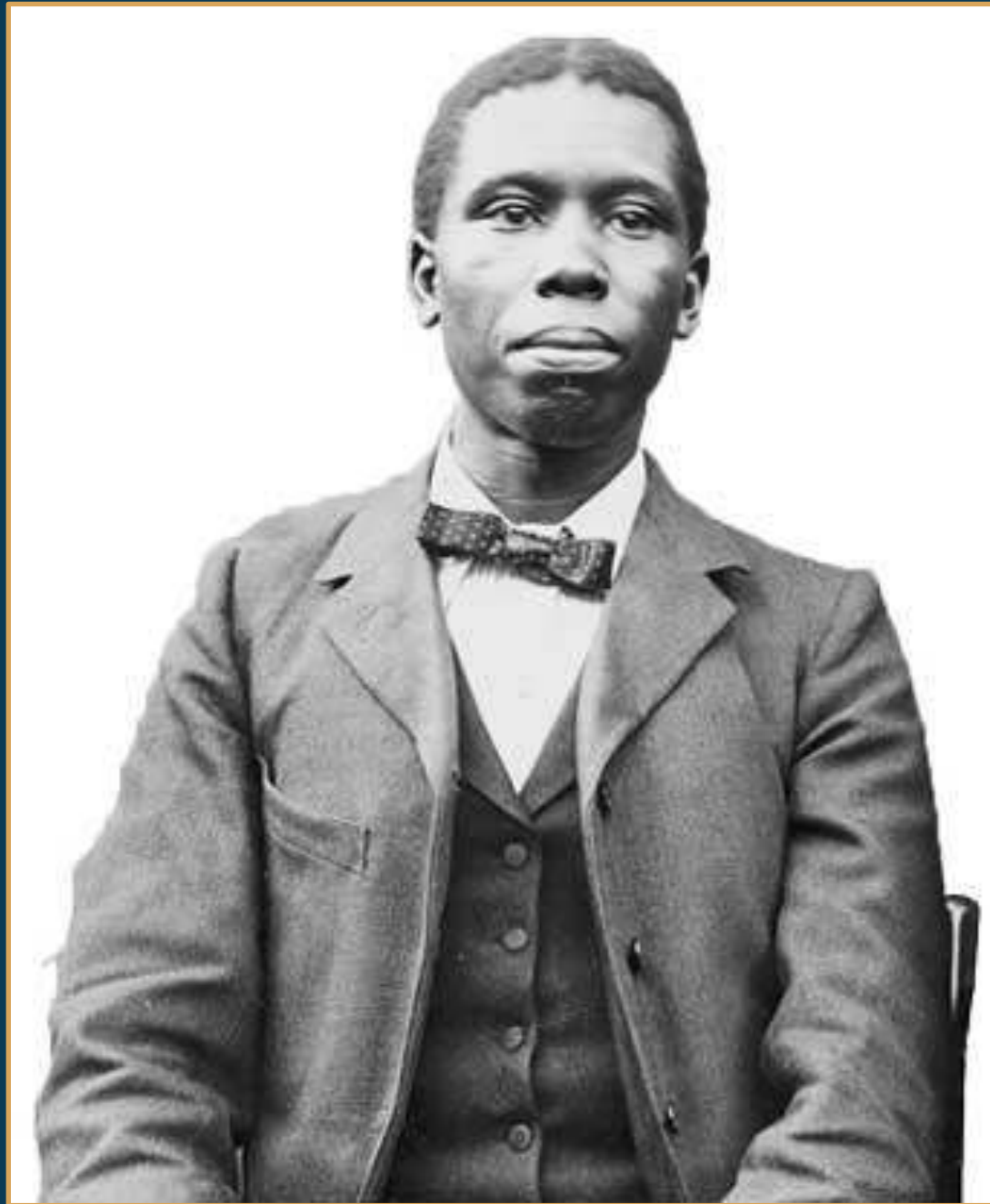
Dunbar until his untimely death from tuberculosis in 1906. Sometimes criticized because her work was so “nonracial,” she summarized her attitude in a letter to her husband in May 1895: “If one should be like me—absolutely devoid of the ability to manage dialect, I don’t see the necessity of cramming and forcing oneself into that plane because one is a Negro or a Southerner.”



Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was born in Dayton, Ohio, to parents who were enslaved in Kentucky before the Civil War.

Dunbar began writing stories and verse when he was a child and published his first poems at the age of 16 in a Dayton newspaper. Much of his more popular work was written in the “Negro dialect” associated with the antebellum South, praised and published by William Dean Howells in *Harper’s Weekly* and establishing his international reputation. During his short life—he died in 1906 at 33 of tuberculosis—Dunbar forged a close relationship with Frederick Douglass, who once declared him “the most promising young colored man in America.”

Courtesy of the National Park Service



Ida B. Wells-Barnett photographed by Mary Garrity, c. 1893

Wikimedia Commons

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), born to enslaved parents six months before Emancipation, became a tenacious and courageous investigative journalist of lynching—a practice as widespread in the South as in the North in the last two decades of the 19th century. But she also wrote stirring essays on education and equal rights, in 1884 becoming editor of *The Living Way*, a weekly black Baptist newspaper. “I had an instinctive feeling that the people who had little or no school training should have something coming into their homes weekly which dealt with their problems in a simple, helpful way.”

In 2020, Wells was posthumously honored with a Pulitzer Prize special citation for “her outstanding and courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against African Americans during the era of lynching.”



In 1892, when lynching reached [its] high-water mark,
there were 241 persons lynched.

The entire number is divided among the following States:

22	Alabama	3	Ohio	29	Louisiana
4	Montana	8	Idaho	5	West Virginia
25	Arkansas	5	South Carolina	1	Maryland
1	New York	1	Illinois	9	Wyoming
3	California	28	Tennessee	16	Mississippi
5	North Carolina	3	Kansas	3	Arizona Ter
11	Florida	15	Texas	6	Missouri
1	North Dakota	9	Kentucky	2	Oklahoma
17	Georgia	7	Virginia		

Of this number, 160 were of negro descent. Four of them were lynched in New York, Ohio, and Kansas; the remainder were murdered in the South. Five of this number were females. The charges for which they were lynched cover a wide range. They are as follows:

46 Rape	1 Self-defense	1 Assault and battery
11 Attempted rape	4 No cause given	2 Attempted murder
58 Murder	2 Insulting women	1 Assault and battery
4 Suspected robbery	6 Incendiarism	2 Attempted murder
3 Rioting	6 Desperadoes	2 No offense stated, boy and girl
1 Larceny	6 Robber	
6 Race Prejudice	1 Fraud	

In the case of the boy and girl above referred to, their father, named Hastings, was accused of the murder of a white man. His fourteen-year-old daughter and sixteen-year-old son were hanged and their bodies filled with bullets; then the father was also lynched. This occurred in November, 1892, at Jonesville, La.

*Graduation portrait of W.E.B. Du Bois,
a member of Harvard College Class of 1890.
Photos by Kris Snibbe/Harvard Staff Photographer
Courtesy Harvard University Archives*

W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) belongs to the twentieth century, but we meet him now, at the end of the 1800s, as he was emerging as a leading African American voice. Du Bois became a prolific and influential scholar-activist and has been called the founder of Black studies in American academic life. On his 25th birthday, while studying for his Ph.D. at the University of Berlin, Du Bois confided to his journal the following goals: “to make a name in science, to make a name in art and thus to raise my race.”



Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Frederick Douglass" (1897) laments the great man's passing
and the evils and treachery that surround African Americans.

A hush is over all the teeming lists,
And there is pause, a breath-space in the strife;
A spirit brave has passed beyond the mists
And vapors that obscure the sun of life,
And Ethiopia, with bosom torn,
Laments the passing of her noblest born.

She weeps for him a mother's burning tears—
She loved him with a mother's deepest love,
He was her champion thro' direful years,
And held her weal all other ends above.
When Bondage held her bleeding in the dust,
He raised her up and whispered, 'Hope and Trust.'

For her his voice, a fearless clarion, rung
That broke in warning on the ears of men;
For her the strong bow of his power he strung,
And sent his arrows to the very den
Where grim Oppression held his bloody place
And gloated o'er the mis'ries of a race.

And he was no soft-tongued apologist;
He spoke straightforward, fearlessly uncowed;
The sunlight of his truth dispelled the mist,
And set in bold relief each dark-hued cloud;
To sin and crime he gave their proper hue,
And hurled at evil what was evil's due.

Through good and ill report he cleaved his way,
Right onward, with his face set toward the heights,
Nor feared to face the foeman's dread array,—
The lash of scorn, the sting of petty spites,
He dared the lightning in the lightning's track,
And answered thunder with his thunder back.

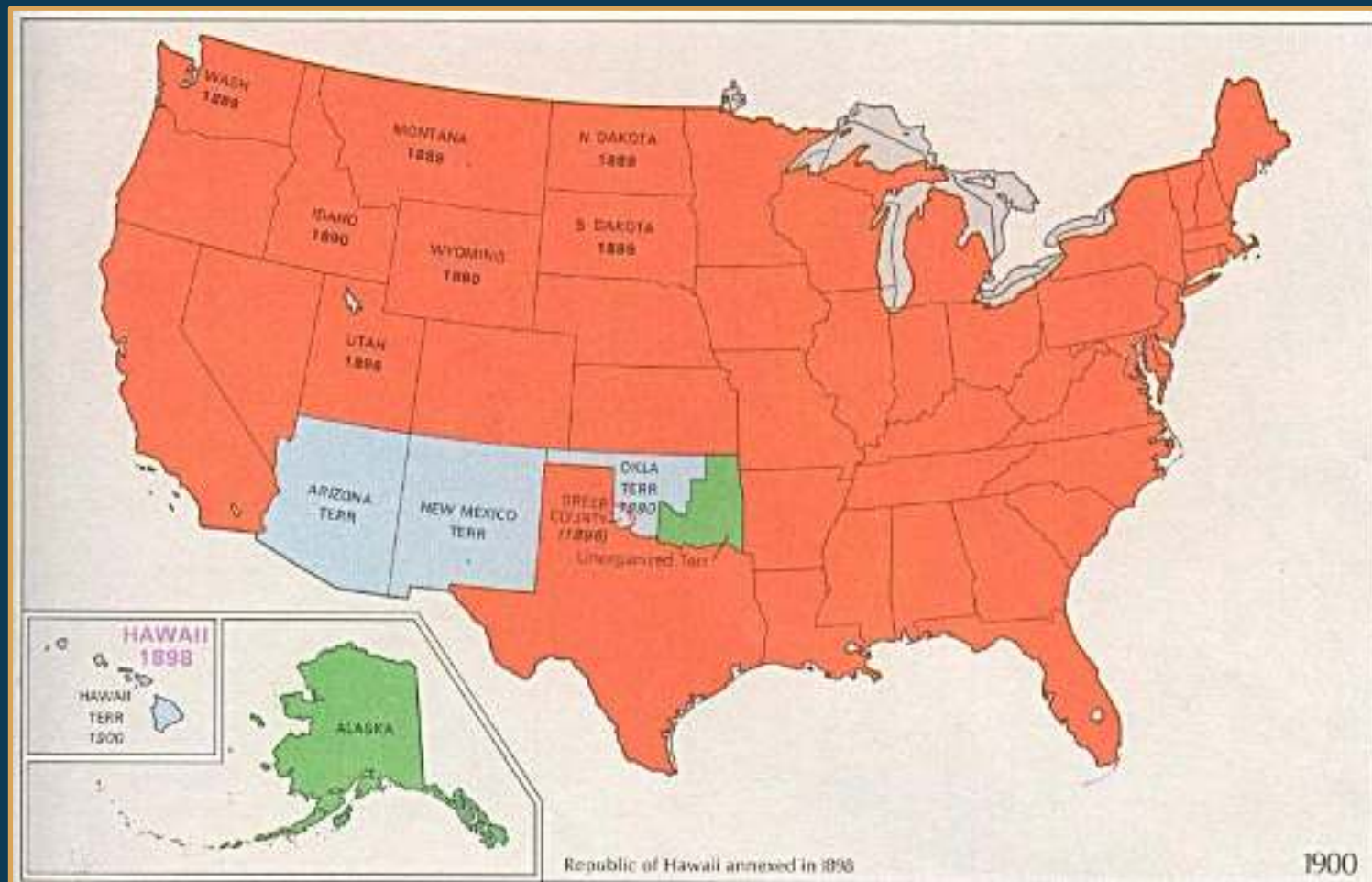
When men maligned him, and their torrent wrath
In furious imprecations o'er him broke,
He kept his counsel as he kept his path;
'Twas for his race, not for himself he spoke.
He knew the import of his Master's call,
And felt himself too mighty to be small.

No miser in the good he held was he,—
His kindness followed his horizon's rim,
His heart, his talents, and his hands were free
To all who truly needed aught of him.
Where poverty and ignorance were rife,
He gave his bounty as he gave his life.

The place and cause that first aroused his might
Still proved its power until his latest day.
In Freedom's lists and for the aid of Right
Still in the foremost rank he waged the fray;
Wrong lived; his occupation was not gone,
He died in action with his armor on!

We weep for him, but we have touched his hand,
And felt the magic of his presence nigh,
The current that he sent throughout the land,
The kindling spirit of his battle-cry.
O'er all that holds us we shall triumph yet,
And place our banner where his hopes were set!

Oh, Douglass, thou hast passed beyond the shore,
But still thy voice is ringing o'er the gale!
Thou'st taught thy race how high her hopes may soar,
And bade her seek the heights, nor faint, nor fail.
She will not fail, she heeds thy stirring cry,
She knows thy guardian spirit will be nigh,
And, rising from beneath the chast'ning rod,
She stretches out her bleeding hands to God!



In 1900, the population of the U.S. was 76,212,168, including 8.8 million Black people. Utah became the 45th US State in 1896, with Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Oklahoma enumerated as territories and still to join the union in statehood. Industrialization had transformed the economy. The telegraph and, eventually, the telephone brought far-flung states, territories, and diverse communities into contact despite deep sectional divisions. Literacy was increasingly widespread so that newspapers and books had the potential to reach huge audiences. Men and women availed themselves of new forms of community and communication.