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Tailoring Landscapes: Multivalent Terrain and the Politics of Black Geography in
Nineteenth-Century African American Literature

By

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In 1857, Dred Scott sued for his freedom after traveling to the free territory of Missouri with his owner. The famed case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* was decided in September of 1857 by a vote of 7-2, wherein members of the Supreme Court of the United States, lead by Chief Justice Roger Taney, ruled that “the legislation and histories of the times, and the language used in the declaration of independence, show, that neither the persons who had been imported as slaves, nor their descendants, whether they had become free or not” were acknowledged “as part of the people” of the United States (*Dred Scott v. Sandford*). Claiming that “citizen” and “people of the United States” were synonymous terms, Taney’s deliberation reveals one of the most startling paradoxes of national freedom: that “persons who had been imported as slaves” could be considered “free” at the same time they were denied personhood within the national body of the United States. Ironically, Taney invokes the discourse of freedom, “the language used in the declaration of independence,” to nullify freedom legally guaranteed to black people in Northern territories. What Taney’s judgment brings to the surface are the deeply entwined and often paradoxical discourses of race, citizenship, and freedom that subtend US nation building and sustain the fabrication of geographical borders in the mid-nineteenth-century. Like Dred Scott sought to exploit the porousness of legal borders within nationally organized geography by suing for his freedom, African American authors sought to exploit the loophole in national logic Taney inadvertently makes evident. In other words, Taney excludes “persons who had been imported as

slaves” and “their descendants” from the nation’s conceptual or political body at the same time his language locates black genealogical reproduction within the very landscape of the nation. Taney’s judgment reveals a crucial incongruity in national ideology of which African American authors took note: the disparity between physical geography, where the existence of black life is undeniable in the material landscape, and conceptual geography, in which laws of white racial logic are applied unevenly to deny black people legal personhood. By narratively constructing themselves within both the physical and conceptual geography of the nation, black authors challenge the fallacy of a uniform concept of United States’ geography in the nineteenth century, whether put forth by Taney, or prominent abolitionist sympathizers such as Abraham Lincoln. My thesis argues that African American authors address this conceptual paradox — the positioning of black people as both a presence and an absence within national space — in imaginative ways. Working at the intersection of language, race, and freedom, I contend that nineteenth-century African American authors interrogate national illusions, rewrite national space, and engender the landscape with meaning that exceeds national frameworks.

Building on Judith Madera’s claim that nineteenth-century African American literature is starkly geographic (8), this thesis foregrounds the import of national geography in Elizabeth Keckley’s *Behind the Scenes; Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* and Martin Delany’s *Blake; or, the Huts of America*. In *Behind the Scenes*, Keckley narrates her social, economic, and geographic mobility from slavehood in Virginia to successful dressmaker in Washington, D.C. Her elite clientele

includes First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, with whom she becomes a friend and close confidant. *Blake*, the fictional story of Henry Blake, an enslaved man who escapes and travels throughout the United States, Canada, Africa, and Cuba on a quest to spread black insurrectionism, also presents the story of black geographic mobility. Recent scholarship in the field foregrounds geography as a cornerstone of nineteenth-century African American literature. For instance, black diasporic, black Atlantic, and hemispheric studies have gone to great lengths to investigate the ways black authorship engages national landscapes and confronts imperial forms. Weaving Madera's work with other critical discussions on equality, racial capitalism, and nation building, such as David Kazanjian's discussion of the co-emergence of the racially hierarchical US nation-state and Enlightenment discourse in late eighteenth-century America, I uncover a critique of national geography in African American literature which highlights the paradoxes of a consolidated national geography. Though both Keckley and Delany have been condemned by some for reproducing national rhetoric — Keckley is treated by some critics as an all-too-loyal Lincoln White House employee and national sympathizer, while Delany is taken to task for envisioning black insurrectionism and the recolonization of Africa within the patriotic framework of the American Revolution — I insist that their writing does not simply reproduce national rhetoric, rather it assembles a collection of black perspectives that otherwise go untold within national culture. While balancing and destabilizing expectations from white publishers and readers, Keckley and Delany isolate and challenge abolitionist rhetoric that draws abstract lines of freedom across territories. Their writing is part of an African American authorial tradition

that reconsiders the terms of national geography by elevating the various cultural multitudes inscribed within particular spaces.

If Justice Taney's statement, and racist dominant discourse more broadly, admits black people's presence within national borders but excludes them from the conceptual framework of the nation, African American authors address the disparity between the physical and the conceptual through the creation of what I will call a multivalent terrain. White supremacy exploits the relationship between abstraction and materiality in order to imagine and enact physical authority, the effects of which have grave physical implications for black people. In this sense, the problem of national geography is an extension of the problem of empire itself, in that the construction of both national geography and empire hinges on the imaginary practice of mapping hegemonic spatial and temporal conditions onto physical territory to modulate black life and occlude black perspectives. National geographic mapping is a material practice that dictates the terms of space and organizes the temporal conditions of narratives that flow through that space. In this sense, national geography functions similarly to Fredric Jameson's conception of the historiographic form, in that it works to transform material into sheer chronological fact (101). Contradicting the chronological nature of national geography as linear, black authors' creation of multivalent terrain rearranges historical and geographical markers so that they do not immediately comply with national narratives, and thereby buckle the perceived distance between historical fact and narrative imaginary. For example, when Keckley narrates the White House's post-Civil War reunification tour, her account makes it clear that Lincoln's purpose with the trip is to

advance a national agenda of consolidating the previously embattled North and South. Such narratives of national progress organize histories of space chronologically and rupture national difference under the guise of egalitarianism while overwriting the ways Southern and Northern geographies have always been bound by a shared racist ordering system reliant on the subjugation of black people. Yet as this thesis will show, Keckley's representation of her experience of the reunification tour challenges Lincoln's egalitarian revisionism by providing a more holistic account of the dynamic relationship between territories as well as the various histories and experiences that constitute a single space.

African American authors take note of the interrelationship between the historiographic form and the construction of space by examining the ideological disconnect between the abstract and material, as well as the spatial and temporal; their development of multivalent terrain attends to the myriad historical conditions that exist within these polarities. As such, they prioritize a diachronic, speculative deterritorialization of geographic space. If the practice of hegemonic mapping constricts space and creates familiar histories by narrating historical events and national progress in a linear fashion, African American authors deterritorialize and interrupt traditional mapping through their representations of alternative, non-teleological histories of space. Madera, in her book *Black Atlas*, investigates black literary representations that are not simply about detailing the embodied reality of living in space constricted by white chronological order, but that are equally about constructing the variant features of territorial space. She notes that the "spatial imaginaries" of Gilles Deleuze and Félix

Guattari are helpful for addressing the way African American authors decipher territory. Delany, for instance, narrates a political geography that has the effect of unmasking the multiple narratives place holds and revealing how territory, like national empire, is something that “gets made” through rhetorical “projections onto physical space” (Madera 72). For instance, Delany appropriates racist formations central to white territorial mapping, such as white Christianity and racial capital, and reroutes them in order to imaginatively map black space. African American authors’ construction of multivalent terrain fashions a black conceptual space of its own, one that overrides dominant discourse and broadens our understanding of the historical intersections of language, race, and nation. Whereas hermeneutics focused on geographic hybridity explore multiple geographic nodes across a global landscape, multivalent terrain captures the multiplicity of geographic meanings and populations within a single landscape. It makes visible a dynamic and collective African American heteroglossia that flows within both the physical and conceptual national landscape.

In addition to considering how these authors challenge notions of a unified, cohesive national geography, this thesis posits that nineteenth-century African American writing proposes radical, constructive, and divergent notions of space and place that actively map the convergence of histories of race, nation, and geography. I argue that during extensive nineteenth-century nation building, black authors’ attention to political geography widens historical and territorial representations of space that counter imaginary imperial boundaries, creating a more capacious view of landscape. This analysis expands recent scholarship on geography in nineteenth-century African

American literature. Stephen Knadler, for example, asserts that nineteenth-century African Americans “often found themselves physically and imaginatively crossing borders to find work, to seek refuge, to serve as soldiers, to labor as missionaries, to accompany employers, or to form anticolonial ties” (2). Madera notes that Delany himself enjoyed a fruitful career as “an author, journalist, African explorer, doctor, inventor, politician, and ethnographer” (74), which speaks to Knadler’s claim that African American authors fashioned a “new black politics” that “shaped an alternative set of idioms, tropes, and images that challenged nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century ideas of the nation, citizenship and democracy” (2). Focusing on *Blake* in particular, Jerome McGann notes that Delany distills his political identity through his eponymous hero — “the man as author-agent” (xxvi) — and fictionalizes historical events using recognizable, non-fictional geographic markers “in order to rethink their significance for the future of black liberation”; in so doing, Delany constructs an “imaginary future” that escapes a “limited historical purview” (xvii).

Building on these critics’ assertions of place as socially and historically constructed, as an amalgamation of physical topography and imaginative projection and interpretation, I examine *Behind the Scenes* and *Blake* as texts that explore and infiltrate the geography of the nation. My distinctive entry point into the contemporary survey of geography in nineteenth-century African American literature demonstrates how black narrative forms conceptualize a unique political geography. The first section of my thesis analyzes geographic discourse in *Behind the Scenes* to argue that Keckley’s narrative reveals racist ordering systems that both structure and strike

through the fantasy of a unified national geography. Specifically, I read Keckley's account of her trip to Virginia as a member of the Lincoln White House reunification tour following the fall of the Confederacy as a sly critique of how white supremacy pervades Northern and Southern geography alike. The second section of my thesis examines *Blake*, pursuing a reading of the title character's geographic knowledge in conjunction with his interrogation of colonial discourse and quest for black economic success and futurity. I contextualize national geography through a consideration of Delany's personal philosophy on emigration and his desire to create a black nation-state, alongside his hero's belief that the only path to black geographic and economic freedom is achieved by passing through what he calls "white gaps" in the nation's ideological fabric. Specifically, I consider how Delany's personal commitment to black national freedom (represented fictionally as Blake's dogmatic stance on black economic equality) risks reproducing a colonial framework. However, I ultimately contend that *Blake's* recirculation of dominant national formulations — which posit a singular nation — questions their authenticity. Instead, Blake narrates a black political geography that allows for multiple spatial articulations and imagines future anti-colonial formations.

Keckley and Delany do not simply seek permission to inhabit geographic space as it is defined and regulated by white national institutions; rather, they insist on their right to determine, produce, and shape their own narrative terrain. Examining ideological gaps in national discourse, they narrate geographic oppositions and insist on the multivalence of place, which provides a more porous, less exclusive, notion of national geography. Lacing the criticism considered above with close readings of

geographic discourse in Keckley's *Behind the Scenes* and Delany's *Blake*, I demonstrate how these narratives discredit dominant articulations of national geography while insisting on geographical interpretations that exceed the territorial, as well as the conceptual boundaries of the nation. In other words, African American writing of the nineteenth century does not only destabilize the presumed homogeneity of national geography, but it also archives a multivalent terrain that reforms the properties of geographic space, and restructures black geographic belonging within the history of the United States.

Behind the Scenes, published in 1868, is a postbellum narrative written in the context of a certain Northern optimism regarding the prospect of post-War reunification. Yet Keckley registers a rhetorical tension between the recently conquered, virulently racist Confederate territory and her aesthetic experience of it as "beautiful," amplifying geographic tensions that undermine hope for reunification. In one key scene Keckley narrates her visit to Virginia with Abraham Lincoln's Presidential party as they tour the South following the fall of the Confederate Army at Richmond. As the party steams along the James River that "so long had been impassable," Keckley revels in the "balmy" air and the "beautiful" riverbanks flushed with the "first sweet blossoms of spring" (70). The James River is a historical site of geographic impassibility, as both a key location where Union and Confederate troops faced off in the war-stricken nation, and a site of geographic division dangerously impassable for enslaved blacks in the South, as well as free blacks in the North. Yet streaming along the river, Keckley

absorbs the scene from the boat's deck as she speculates on the future of Virginia; now restored to the "clustering stars of the Union," she wonders if the people of the North and South "would come together in the bonds of peace" (70). Outwardly, this echoes Lincoln's post-war mentality, and the foundation of his Reconstruction policy which emphasized reconciliation and avoidance of revenge and radical change ("Lincoln's Triumphant Visit," 2015). Lincoln's sympathy for the recently fallen South was notable, and the trip to Richmond allowed the president a chance to demonstrate his forgiving Reconstruction principles to the Southern states. However, Keckley's personal account of this watershed moment in United States history signals extant tension and future uncertainty between Northern and Southern territories, thereby complicating the notion of the universal, national culture Lincoln's idealistic Reconstruction policy sought to establish.

Keckley accepts Mary Lincoln's invitation to Virginia as a close companion of the first family, but she also agrees to the trip for personal reasons: it gives her the opportunity to go to Petersburg, Virginia, fulfilling her desire to return to the place she was born. Revealing this personal motivation showcases the multivalent meanings with which places are imbued: Petersburg is both significant as a site on a national reunification tour, and also personally meaningful to her own history, which remains unrecognized by narratives of national reunion. Upon receiving the invitation, Keckley remarks, "I would regard it as a privilege to go with her, as City Point was near Petersburg, my old home" (69). As she records the changes to the landscape since her eye "last wandered over the classic fields of dear old Virginia," now marked by

“deserted camps and frowning forts,” Keckley speculates on the value of Virginia not just as the geographic area being surveyed by the Lincoln party as a potential site of national reconciliation, but as her former birthplace (70). She notes, “A birthplace is always dear, no matter under what circumstances you were born, since it revives in memory the golden hours of childhood, free from philosophy, and the warm kiss of a mother” (70). Keckley’s account of Petersburg is at once bucolic and ironic; it is an account that denotes the multiple narratives a single place can hold. As the Lincoln reunification tour seeks to gauge the potential for transforming Petersburg from a site of racial violence into a symbolic site of national equality, Keckley’s writing insists on the multivalence meanings of place and remains especially attuned to destabilizing universalizing discourses that govern traditional narratives of place. David Kazanjian’s analysis of the origins of US nationalist discourse sheds light on dominant discourses of place; he writes that the “rise of universal egalitarianism was coincident with the rise of numerous, hierarchically codified, particularistic differences” that actually reinforced racial inequality in the project of national unification (2). By juxtaposing her history of enslavement in Petersburg with the President’s historical journey in the service of promoting universal egalitarianism and extending sympathy for Confederate loss, Keckley narrates Petersburg’s multivalence, and in so doing, resists chronologically ordered narratives of progress. Furthermore, by envisioning her childhood in a place she was once enslaved, a place marked by Confederate values that circumscribed her own value, Keckley gains representational control over such values. Keckley’s ironic vignettes of Virginia-past and Virginia-present mediate the historical conditions the city

holds for its different populations and signals the Sisyphean task of creating a unified national culture in the recently conquered Confederacy, a geographic area that remains marked by its surviving spatial and temporal intimacies with the institution of slavery.

The historical account of postbellum geography Keckley narrates also upsets the prioritization of masculine perspectives in nineteenth-century African American authorship. As Elizabeth Young states in her work on women's writing and the Civil War, black female authors who sought to write about their experiences during the war wrote against the masculine rhetoric of the body politic (110). Young argues that even anti-racist, influential male authors like Frederick Douglass, whose support for black women's writing was significant, "promotes two races but only one gender" (110). Douglass's *Narrative* is notable in the field of African American literary studies for its equation of racial freedom with masculinity. Keckley, by contrast, is part of a tradition of black female writing that Young argues resists the disembodiment black female writers experienced as they entered their narratives into national discourse (111). Keckley's representation of the dawn of the Reconstruction era functions in two ways: she writes her individual perspective as a formerly enslaved black woman into the historical record of a major moment in United States history, and she stitches the history of slavery into her return to the newly emancipated South; both rhetorical moves renegotiate the reproduction of exclusionary discourses of "freedom" advanced by white racial logic and insufficient abolitionist efforts. In other words, as she embarks on a journey with the Lincoln Presidential Party that seeks to write over the country's violent racial history with

the egalitarian rhetoric of emancipation and unification, Keckley's narrative underlines the racism central to the project of national unification.

Keckley's position within the Lincoln White House is notable for the status it confers to a black working-class woman within a white leisure-class society. Though she was born into slavery in Virginia in 1818, Xiomara Santamarina notes that Keckley worked steadfastly to buy her freedom, which she did at the age of thirty-one, ultimately becoming one of Washington D.C.'s most prominent dressmakers for a high society clientele that included Mary Todd Lincoln (139). Keckley's narrative focuses on her close working relationship and friendship with Mary Lincoln which began in 1861 and lasted through her husband's assassination and the former first family's relocation to Illinois. *Behind the Scenes* is in part an attempt to correct the public's censure of the former first Lady's financial transactions following what became known as "The Old Clothes" scandal. Keckley's narrative responds to the media outcry over Mary Lincoln's attempt to financially support her family through the sale of her celebrated wardrobe (Santamarina 141). In addition to the literary anomaly the narrative presents, in which a black working-class woman seeks to authorize a white woman's financial transactions, the radicality of Keckley's narrative rests in the representational power it provides a formerly enslaved black woman, and the vantage point it affords her on national discourse. Keckley's proximity to the center of national power allows her to frame the state of racial equality in the postbellum United States in her own terms.

In the preface to her narrative, Keckley frames her defense of Mary Lincoln alongside a critique of the institution of slavery. As she summarizes her desire to throw

the facts of Mary Lincoln's scandal — referred to in the text as a “secret history of her transactions” — to the surface, Keckley also comments on the historical trajectory of slavery in United States:

When the war of the Revolution established the independence of the American colonies, an evil was perpetuated, slavery was more firmly established; and since the evil had been planted, it must pass through certain stages before it could be eradicated. In fact, we give but little thought to the plant of evil until it grows to such monstrous proportions that it over-shadows important interests; then the efforts to destroy it become earnest. (2)

Here, Keckley addresses a white reading public reckoning with newly emancipated black citizens and forces them to confront the “evil” of “slavery... firmly established” in the geographic landscape of the United States as it is subtended by the American Revolution's objective of national freedom. As Janet Neary notes, Keckley's “intimate awareness of the precarious situation of emancipated slaves and her advocacy on their behalf provides a striking contrast to her discussion of Mary Lincoln's financial difficulties” (54). The point of tension Neary isolates makes it possible to understand the “secret history of her transactions” Keckley illustrates in two ways. On one hand, the transactions reference Mary Lincoln's scrutinized financial dealings Keckley defends as a loyal friend and employee. On the other, the transactions represent the violent history of racial capital, and the pernicious consequences that persist for newly emancipated African Americans in what Saidiya Hartman has deemed, the afterlife of slavery. If Keckley's explicit aim is to gain sympathy for Mary Lincoln by providing a larger context for her financial woes, her implicit goal is to present the cultural folly in the public's thirst for scrutinizing Lincoln's petty financial endeavors against the larger history of racial

inequality yet to be sufficiently scrutinized in post-war culture. While some critics argue that Keckley's narrative remains ambivalent about racism, Neary convincingly argues that "Keckley's authority" — which manifests as her authorial right to both question and create national and narrative truth — "underwrites the status and actions of the white figures in her text" (56-7). The representational authority Keckley asserts is crucial to countering white racial logic throughout her Southern tour with the Lincolns.

Working against the conditions of national reunification, Keckley's *Behind the Scenes* confirms the historical fact of the geographic dissolution of the Confederacy and it documents the end of a war that would promise freedom for the enslaved within a unified and consolidated national geography. Yet Keckley's narrative remains skeptical of the universal promise of freedom post-war reunification discourse suggests. Stephen Knadler notes that although the nation was founded on constitutional principles — the very anti-black principles Justice Taney forwards in his Dred Scott ruling — Keckley points out that the nation has "been driven and shaped more by the sentiments of the people than their commitment to reason and law" (77). The process of national unification is troublesome for Keckley for two reasons: it threatens to paper over the history of slavery, and secondly, she deems any unified narrative problematic because it occludes the multiple perspectives and experiences that constitute a place, whether that place is Petersburg or the United States at large. While narrating her own social and geographical mobility, Keckley opens a window onto the racially prohibitive legal discourse calcified in the history of US national expansion to probe cultural assumptions about geographic freedom in the antebellum and postbellum nation alike. If the

governing logic of Lincoln's postwar tour of the South is seamless national unification under the sign of emancipation, Keckley's story identifies forms of anti-blackness in both the North and South that preceded national emancipation.

Keckley's narrative fashions representations of national space from an unexpected perspective. In her study of *Behind the Scenes*, Young theorizes Keckley's representation of the White House not only as a literal setting, but as a "space of imaginative fantasy" through which she productively imagines alternative iterations of national organization (119). What Knadler finds important about Keckley's spaces of imaginative fantasy is that they "imagine a different kind of national community" by overturning "racial hierarchies" and narratives that insist upon a "reunion of North and South" (77). Kandler argues that the privileged perspective from which Keckley critiques unified nationality is afforded by her economic and cultural influence as a successful black laborer (77-8). Furthermore, Keckley's complicated affiliation with the White House amplifies her dynamic perspective as an insider intimately familiar with the nation's political epicenter, and alternatively, as a black working class woman whose cultural and social capital has been historically mediated by white racial logic. Yet Keckley capitalizes on her unique vantage point in order to augment nineteenth-century national narratives by cementing the trajectory of her own personal genealogy within the geographically evolving post-war United States.

Whereas nationalist rhetoric of space and place insists on a uniform point of view, Keckley insists on multivalent meanings of terrain throughout her trip to Virginia. At the same time, she identifies a link between racism and egalitarian rhetoric espoused

throughout Southern and Northern landscapes — be it the overtly racist rhetoric of the Confederacy, or nationally and racially prescriptive rhetoric of freedom espoused by northern abolitionists. For example, as Keckley enters the fallen Confederate Capitol previously inhabited by the Confederate Senate, she picks up, “by curious coincidence, the resolution prohibiting all free colored people from entering the State of Virginia” (70). Again, in a rhetorically ironic portrayal, Keckley signals to her reader that the discovery is anything but coincidence. Collecting what she calls “objects of interest,” Keckley actively pursues Southern relics of racial logic and racially prohibitive language as part of her scrutiny of that logic (Knadler 80). The archive of cultural objects of interest amassed in Keckley’s narrative, both in the Confederate Capitol and in the national landscape at large, occasions an investigation of the racism that transcends a North/South boundary and that is, as she demonstrates, fundamental to national culture. Keckley’s empirical excavation at the fallen Confederate Capitol attends to the material relics (the physical resolution itself) and the rhetorical relics (the resolution’s prohibitive language barring “free colored people”) of slavery that constitute the nation’s history of racial exclusion and violence. It is worth noting that while the Presidential Party enacts the fantasy of expanding Northern freedom across Southern lines, Keckley recalls, by holding in her hands, a document prohibiting “free colored people” from the Confederacy. With the project of national reunification on the horizon, Keckley remains conscious of the exclusionary language that organizes discourses of national citizenship. Her occupation with racist discourse extant in national framework alludes to a form of consciousness Christina Sharpe calls, engaging with a “past that is not past”

(13). In other words, Keckley refuses to let narratives of egalitarianism erase racist relics and racially prohibitive language inscribed in the historical geography of the nation.

Keckley's agitation of post-War consolidated national space unearths the reality of the nation's racially coded underpinnings. This is made clear as Keckley recalls Lincoln's request for the Presidential band to play "Dixie," (another cultural "object of interest") following his closing address to his companions upon the James River the evening before they return North:

You must excuse me, ladies and gentleman. I am too tired to speak to-night. On next Tuesday night I make a speech in Washington, at which time you will learn all I have to say. And now, by way of parting from the brave soldiers of our gallant army, I call up on the band to play Dixie. It has always been a favorite of mine, and since we have captured it, we have a perfect right to enjoy it. (73)

Keckley's literary engagement with geographically circumscribed cultural objects — in this case the famous Southern anthem "Dixie" — focuses on racial, cultural and national particularities that are unconsciously entwined within and reaffirmed by egalitarian national forms, such as Lincoln's reunification project. For example, if we consider "Dixie" as a toponym for the South, Lincoln's self-proclaimed right to celebrate freedoms won by "capturing" and "enjoying" "Dixie" paradoxically ventriloquizes Southern rhetoric of ownership and acquisition Lincoln's Union army fought to eradicate. Moreover, his desire to "enjoy" "Dixie" is striking when the song's racist background and muddled geographic origins are considered. According to Lincoln scholar Christian McWhirter, "Dixie" was introduced by a Northerner, Daniel Decatur Emmett, as a minstrel show song predominantly performed in the North by white actors in blackface. While

Keckley's anecdote indicates that the song's geographic associations were fastened to Southern culture, "Dixie" was more popular in the Northern states where there was enthusiasm for minstrel performance. Upon succession, the Confederacy spontaneously — and paradoxically — adopted "Dixie" in an attempt to create geographic and associative distance from the North in order to augment their newly claimed Southern nationality. In February of 1861, "Dixie" was played at Confederate President Jefferson Davis's inauguration after being recommended to the inaugural band. As a result of Davis's unofficial, yet assumed endorsement and the song's swift adoption throughout the South, "Dixie" ultimately became the de facto anthem of the Confederacy, as well as a toponym for the Southern states ("The Birth of Dixie," 2012).

Understanding the complex cultural and geographic trajectory that led to "Dixie's" Southern affiliations offers an entry point for deciphering the importance of the song's register in *Behind The Scenes*. "Dixie's" historical affiliation with both North and South operates as a fruitful metaphor for locating the racist discourses shared by two territories ostensibly at ideological odds over slavery. Keckley's account of Lincoln's speech is a sentimental nod to the closure of "one of the most delightful trips" (73) of her life, but her inclusion of the story also provides a wider aperture for inspecting Lincoln's right to own "Dixie" as a cultural reduction that does not sufficiently consider the song's multivalent geographic history. As McWhirter suggests, only "Dixie's" "first verse and chorus express anything approximating Southern nationalism... the rest is unmistakably the work of a songwriter utilizing various minstrel clichés" ("The Birth of Dixie," 2012). The song's enslaved speaker tells the story of a male "deceiver" who inherits a

Southern plantation after successfully seducing the plantation's mistress. "Dixie's" theme of deception was mimicked by Southerners who perennially altered the lyrics in order to mold the song into a fitting anthem. Yet in both Northern and Southern territories the shared cultural investment in "Dixie's" racially coded language outlives the song's discursive geographic affiliations.

Keckley's description of the final evening on the James River functions as yet another ironic vignette that amplifies racist culture within her story of Lincoln's Reconstruction tour. Keckley's multivalent account of Petersburg — depicted as a narrative backdrop for national unification and as the physical site of her enslavement — reveals Lincoln's wish to hear "Dixie" as a rather brazen command. Lincoln's request to celebrate the tour with "Dixie" makes light of the racism entwined in cultural objects and therefore reinforces the racial particularities that codify national geography in both the North and South. The final scene of the trip mirrors the earlier scene at the Confederate Capitol in which Keckley foregrounds relics of Confederate culture that populate the Party's reunification tour. Yet this time, Keckley's account draws an even starker relationship between racial logic and national geography as she replaces Lincoln's undelivered speech with a racially coded anthem. It is worth wondering if the anecdote Keckley shares on the final evening of her adventure suggests that Lincoln's peremptory allegiance to a unified national geography is in fact sustained by racial hierarchy.

In addition to interacting with geographically symbolic cultural objects, Keckley's narrative shows how language is also determinative of geographic meaning. Recalling

the Presidential party's arrival in Petersburg, Keckley writes about witnessing a scene between a "little ragged negro boy" and President Lincoln and Senator Sumner. The boy ventures "timidly into the car occupied by Mr. Lincoln and immediate friends," extending an offer to "tote" the party's bags (71). Lincoln is initially confused by the unfamiliar colloquialism, which prompts what aspires to be a clarifying conversation with Senator Sumner:

"Tote," remarked Mr. Lincoln; "what do you mean by tote?"

"Why, massa, to tote um on your back."

"Very definite, my son; I presume when you tote a thing, you carry it. By the way, Sumner," turning to the Senator, "what is the origin of tote?"

"It's origin is said to be African. The Latin word *totum*, from *totus*, means all — an entire body — the whole."

"But my young friend here did not mean an entire body, or anything of the kind, when he said he would tote my things for me," interrupted the President.

"Very true," continued the Senator. "He used the word tote in the African sense, to carry, to bear. Tote in this sense is defined in our standard dictionaries as a colloquial word of the Southern States, used especially by the negroes."

"Then you regard the word as a good one?"

"Not elegant, certainly. For myself, I should prefer a better word; but since it has been established by usage, I cannot refuse to recognize it." (71-72)

However, Sumner's clarification is an interruption that precludes the potential for a significant rhetorical exchange between the boy and Lincoln. It blatantly abrogates the cultural context in which the boy employs the word "tote" ("to tote 'um on your back"), and instead foregrounds Sumner's "better" definition. According to Sumner's explanation, "tote," while African by origin, is redefined in American dictionaries — "our dictionaries" — as a colloquialism local to the Southern United States. The national lens Sumner uses to mediate the boy's language simplifies "tote's" varied colloquial usages and omits the word's African origins. Moreover, Sumner consolidates the meaning of

the word within the Southern states at the same time he reinforces particularistic hierarchies for its use based on national authenticity and racial difference. Sumner discloses his belief that black colloquialisms are insufficient: “For myself, I should prefer a better word; but since it has been established by usage, I cannot refuse to recognize it.” While this scene intimates Petersburg as a frontier for forthcoming racial equality, one where Lincoln seeks to communicate with its racially diverse body, Keckley’s recollection of this debate over etymology reveals Petersburg as a site of inequality, where universal egalitarianism is pledged alongside black colloquialisms that are “recognized” insofar as they are not granted equivalence within a national framework that imagines “better” uses.

By Keckley’s account, Lincoln appears anxious to amend the racial tensions sewn into a divisive national framework. However, instead of seeking to understand his “young friend’s” colloquialism, Lincoln’s comprehension of the word “tote” appears to hinge on Senator Sumner’s racialized re-particularization of African origins as lesser, or “not elegant.” Lincoln, content to accept Sumner’s national rubric for the appropriate use of language, runs the risk of strengthening the particularities of race and nation abolition purports to flatten. Similarly, Kazanjian critiques hierarchies of language and national lexicon in *Three Years Adventure, of a Minor, in England, Africa, The West Indies, South-Carolina and Georgia* (1823). As Kazanjian notes, *Three Years Adventures* is an abolitionist narrative authored by a young Englishman who indicts the “wretched crews” of white sailors in late eighteenth-century St. Croix for their “degradation of Africans” (52). James Schroeder, writing under the pseudonym William Butterworth, makes a

salutary case for a cross-racial, social and political practice of mercantilism. Yet, Kazanjian notes that the imperialist language Butterworth uses to exclaim his relief upon being reunited with his English shipmates following his capture by Danish soldiers — shipmates whose “love of liberty” is “inherent in the breast of an Englishman” — is contingent upon the assumed superiority of the British Empire. Kazanjian demonstrates how Butterworth’s language leverages the security of citizenship inscribed by his national affiliation with England, at the cost of naturalizing the superiority of the British Empire to which he belongs (53). Likewise, Keckley’s account of Lincoln’s Southern tour represents the geographic dispersal of egalitarian values at the dawn of emancipation, yet it also sets those values alongside the geographic re-colonization of the US South. Such an articulation buries the history of African colonization deep within the political history of the United States. Moreover, Sumner’s etymological interpretation of the word “tote” is suggestive of promoting a nationally superior language, which as Kazanjian says, reinforces the practice of racially purifying a domestic space — in this case the former Confederacy — while exercising imperial power over a foreign or forgotten space (31).

Keckley’s “tote” scene registers the cultural currency of language as it is indexed by Sumner’s national assumptions about lexical origins and race in the nineteenth century. Where Justice Taney sought to preclude racial equality within the conceptual nation by regulating black personhood, Senator Sumner reaffirms racial hierarchies by regulating national language and cultural knowledge. Yet in the same way “Dixie’s” complexity resists the assumptions of a static, national landscape, an etymological

exploration of the word “tote” registers beyond Sumner’s nationalistic evaluation of the word. “Tote’s” earliest usage can be traced to the seventeenth-century. While it is likely derivative of English-based creole, it is akin to the words “tota” — to pick up — and “tuta” — to carry — used within the Niger-Congo languages spoken in central and southern Africa. This definition correlates with the young boy’s use of the word and applies more aptly to the scene Keckley describes. Keckley’s portrayal highlights etymological difference to create tension in the disparity between “tote” as the boy employs it as an African colloquialism to describe a physical form of labor, and Sumner’s less fitting interpretation of the word as “whole” or “total.” The nuances Keckley’s story holds discredits Sumner’s “proper usage,” and signals pluralistic uses and meanings of the word. The scene advances the word as a symbol of the African diaspora, the cultural implications of which are suppressed in the story of national unification.

Keckley’s documentation of her personal history, in which she narrates her enslavement in Virginia and the purchase of her own freedom, is useful for understanding her apprehension regarding discourse of universal cultural freedom in a larger historical context. In her investigation of nineteenth-century freedom suits, Edlie Wong notes an interesting connection; Keckley’s former master, Hugh A. Garland, was retained as Irene Sanford Emerson’s legal counsel against Dred Scott, a point she develops to read the “affective dimensions” of the infamous case as a broader context for understanding Keckley’s narrative (127). Keckley relocated from Virginia to the border city of St. Louis with the Garland family, where her work as a dressmaker

necessitated a considerable amount of travel between St. Louis and Illinois. As Wong notes, this cross river travel afforded Keckley “the right to sue for her freedom based on transit on free soil” (127). In short, when Keckley begins to press Garland for her manumission, he instead offers her money so she may take the ferry to the free side of the river. Yet Keckley declines, insisting on the self-purchase of her freedom. Wong points out that both Garland and Keckley approached the prospect of her manumission with strategic attention to the geographic conditions of the shifting nineteenth-century landscape. Garland, who knew “that the boundary between slavery and freedom in the newly settled western territories was... far more legal fiction than reality,” (Wong 128) understood that providing Keckley with money to travel to the mercurial border territory rather than allowing her to purchase her freedom and relocate elsewhere, would make her travel to a more stable Union territory difficult. Wong observes that Garland was known for his proslavery politics, as his antagonism of freedom suits and legal position in the Dred Scott case demonstrates. Garland remained aware that offering Keckley money to travel rather than letting her self-purchase freedom would increase her chances of being interrogated by other proslavery crusaders. Keckley, on the other hand, understood the deep “legal currents” that shaped the “geopolitics of slavery and freedom,” and remained unmoved by Garland’s offer, insisting instead on recommitting herself to self-purchase before relocating to less contentious territory (128). Keckley’s deep familiarity with the conditional and contradictory nature of legal freedom is a knowledge she would carry with her, even as she celebrated abolition in the South with the Lincolns.

Keckley interrogates national epistemologies like legal fiction, lexical reduction, and cultural hierarchies that code particular spaces as uniform, and she infuses her personal history into the national landscape to illuminate Petersburg's multivalent terrain. As Keckley's tour comes to an end, she offers a mystical and idyllic portrayal of the landscape along the James River that resonates with the "beautiful" and "balmy" riverbanks she first perceives at the beginning of the journey: "As the twilight shadows deepened the lamps were lighted, and the boat was brilliantly illuminated; as it lay in the river, decked with many-colored lights, it looked like an enchanted floating palace" (73). Here, the "enchanted floating palace" from which Keckley navigates the South functions similarly to Young's interpretation of Keckley's White House: as a site of imaginative redescription. The Lincoln tour is an extension of the White House, and just as Keckley asserts her own meaning to counter the dominant perspectives advanced at the national center, so too does she use the ship as the foundation for her alternative perspectives of the South. Keckley's "enchanted" experience of the South parallels "enchanted" ideas of Lincoln's "triumphal entry into Richmond" (71). Yet amidst exceptionalist rhetoric of "enchantment" and national "triumph," Keckley's view of the South, specifically her former home of Petersburg, insists on remembering the city's historical racial violence. Keckley writes:

I found a number of old friends, but the greater portion of the population were strange to me. The scenes suggested painful memories, and I was not sorry to turn my back again upon the city. A large, peculiarly shaped oak tree, I well remember, attracted the particular attention of the President. (72)

The "peculiarly shaped oak tree" figures the "peculiar" institution of slavery that has

shaped the physical and cultural landscape of the city. Although Keckley's legal, physical, and geographic relationship to slavery is temporally distant, she endures its "painful memories." These memories might invoke what Sharpe calls, a "sense of wakefulness as consciousness" (5). It is in this "wake; the state of wakefulness; consciousness" (4) that Keckley tells a story that engages the violent history of slavery, and counters the elision of that history by post-Civil War egalitarian expansion. Keckley returns to her site of enslavement to engage the incomplete project of emancipation at the same time she turns her "back again upon the city" she was once enslaved in to imagine a future beyond the institution of slavery. Keckley's representations defy teleological narratives that imagine the dissolution of slavery's racialized power structures and nationally stratified social systems alongside the dissolution of the Confederacy (Wong 17). As such, Keckley infuses her personal history into the landscape of Petersburg to re-signify national landscape as materially and culturally diverse, a multivalent terrain of converging spatial and temporal histories.

Delany's antebellum novel about black insurrectionism in the American South and Cuba, which was published serially by the *Anglo-African Magazine* between 1859-62, was written largely in response to his anger over the Dred Scott decision of 1857 (McGann xxii). Delany was born free in Charles Town, Virginia in 1812, and spent the majority of his accomplished life dedicated to the nineteenth-century black transnational movement. Before he began work on *Blake*, Delany spent an extended amount of time in the Southern United States studying the social and political condition

of blacks, eventually becoming a leading proponent of emigration, spending a year in West Africa where he sought to establish a community in the Niger Valley (McGann x-xi). *Blake* is Delany's masterpiece, written with the intent to enact social change, inspire black revolt, and as Robert Levine notes, conceive "of the problem of slavery in the larger context of U.S. expansionism" (178). Delany distills himself into an author-agent through Blake's eponymous protagonist, Henry Blake, who, like Delany, was born free. Yet unlike Delany, *Blake's* fictional hero was born the son of a wealthy black cigar manufacturer in Cuba prior to being decoyed away and sold to Colonel Franks of Natchez, Mississippi. As a result of Henry's subordination following the sale of his wife, he risks being sold by Colonel Franks. Attempting to prevent Henry's sale to a notoriously violent slave owner, Colonel Franks' wife clandestinely arranges to have him sold to a friend, while simultaneously, Colonel Franks devises a counter plan to thwart his wife's plan to spare Blake. Yet on the day of his sale, a rainstorm preempts both the Franks' calculations and enables Blake to carry out his own escape plan: "to begin working for a general black 'insurrection' and war against white oppression" within the North American territories and transatlantic (McGann xxii).

Blake brings together racial, economic, and historical complexities that constitute a shifting nineteenth-century United States and transatlantic geography. The novel is emblematic of nineteenth-century African American writing that documents political mobility and diasporic intimacy across vast geopolitical landscapes in order to create a political language that apprehends nineteenth-century white racist logic and nation building (Knadler 2). For Blake, geography is political, and he unrolls the political

rhetoric of slave insurrectionism throughout his itinerant journey across the South and beyond, traveling as far north as Canada and as far east as Henderson County, Texas. His peregrinations, which eventually take him into Cuba, complicate the geographic strictures of imperial territorialization and as Madera notes, his aim is to emerge from nationally structured territory by crossing through various states in order to ruin border integrity (80). If Blake's geographic mobility is the principal condition for his counter-mapping strategies to infiltrate imperial white cultural space, his apprehension and appropriation of dominant discourse and white racial logic sustains his movement through that space.

Like Keckley, Delany commences his appraisal of racist national geography in the Southern territories prior to drawing out anti-blackness deeply embedded in Southern and Northern US geography alike, yet Delany locates the Southern region's racism within a larger system of transatlantic racial capital. Detailing a conversation between Colonel Franks and some of the novel's other notable antagonists — Major James Armsted of America, and Captain Juan Garcia and Captain Jose Castello of Cuba — as they discuss a Cuban-American alliance for refitting an old ship, the *Merchantman*, in order to illegally repurpose the American vessel as a slave ship, Delany extends a fictional account of the legally prohibited, yet enduring nineteenth-century slave trade. Among the men, a debate ensues about “the place best suited for the completion of their arrangements” (1). The men from Cuba make a case for their homeland as the most fitting locale, yet the Americans succeed in securing Baltimore as the site for refitting the vessel. While Delany demonstrates how

Anglo-American exceptionalism and national superiority codes the South as “the place best suited” for expanding racial capital, the novel locates racial capital as a global issue. The Southern United States is simply the springboard from which *Blake* begins, which allows Delany to qualify local abolition efforts with the need for an urgent global black insurrection against racism and racial capital.

Delany’s exegesis of white racial logic is organized around a rhetorical investigation of religion. As Jerome McGann asserts in the introduction to his newly published edition of *Blake*, religion dominates the political action of the novel and maps the conflict between a false religion that promotes racist oppression and a religion of promise (xxiii). Within the text, Delany characterizes white Christianity as an organizing episteme slaveholders leverage to justify their oppression and as a trope his hero repurposes as a doctrine for black insurrection. Following an out of town assignment Blake returns to Natchez to discover Colonel Franks has sold his wife, Maggie. While Blake promises retaliation, Maggie’s mother advises him not to react unreasonably but rather to “put [his] trus’ in de Laud” and “stan’ still an’ see da salbation” (17, 22). Unmoved by falsehoods pledged by “the religion of” his “oppressors,” Blake responds, “Don’t tell me about religion! What’s religion to me? My wife is sold away from me by a man who is one of the leading members of the very church to which both she and I belong! Put my trust in the Lord! I have done so all my life nearly, and of what use is it to me?” (17). Blake’s indictment of Franks, whom he calls a “pretend christian,” enshrines his master’s white Christianity as the flimsy philosophy slaveowners adopt to justify their subjugation of black people and exploitation of black labor. Blake’s repudiation of

Franks' Christianity apprehends essentialist religious discourse and providential design, and ameliorates it as a productive framework for his revolutionary scheme. Blake says, "I'm tired looking the other side; I want a hope this side of the vale of tears. I want something on this earth as well as a promise of things in another world. I and my wife have been both robbed of our liberty, and you want me to be satisfied with a hope of heaven" (18). If Anglo-American biblical and cultural narratives seek to dictate through divine providence the conditions of black life, mobility, and labor, Blake's reproach of heaven marks his desire to outrun these white principles of containment.

In *Blake*, imperial formations like white Christianity that structure national geography are stripped to their imaginary core, which has the effect of characterizing ruling logic as malleable textual elements that may be narratively redeveloped. As Hartman notes, "the stories of those people from whom the technologies of self-representation were largely withheld" require "not only the interrogation of dominant narratives and the exposure of their contingent and partisan character but also the reclamation of archival material for contrary purposes" (10). Blake recalls the white religious principle ventriloquized by Mammy Judy — "stan' still an' see da salbation" — and reforms it as a directive for his companions, Andy and Charles, who are impatient to hear the details of his revolutionary plan. Blake proclaims, "Stop boys, till I explain. The plans are mine and you must allow me to know more about them than you. Just here, for once, the slave-holding preacher's advice to the black man is appropriate — 'Stand still and see the salvation'" (39). Later in the conversation Blake continues:

You must make your religion subserve your interests, as your oppressors do theirs!" advised Henry. "They use the Scriptures to make you submit, by preaching to you the texts of 'obedience to your masters' and 'standing

still to see the salvation,' and we must now begin to understand the Bible so as to make it of interest to us. (43).

Lacking faith in white Christianity's promise of divine salvation, Delany's hero reworks static biblical rhetoric to invent a political doctrine that calls for urgent black organization. Rather than sit still and anticipate the possibility of heavenly salvation as a material reality or achievable condition for black life, Blake's project is an urgent pursuit of earthly salvation, for people of color in the Americas to collectively design a secular project of geopolitical insurrection.

A notable feature of the political doctrine Blake abstracts from white Christianity is that it seeks to adjust the conditions of black labor from physical and embodied, to intellectual and mobile. After sharing the details of his plans for black insurrection with his companions, Blake moves to dissolve the meeting only after he is confident Charles and Andy are clear on the details of the scheme:

"Understand it? Why a child could understand, it's so easy!" replied Charles.
 "Yes," added Andy, "I not only undehtan' myse'f, but wid de knowledge I hav uv it, ah could make Whitehead's Jack a Moses!"
 "Stan still, then, and see!" said he.
 "Dat's good Bible talk!" responded Andy.
 "Well, what is we to do?" enquired Charles.
 "You must now go on and organize continually. It makes no difference when, nor where you are, so that the slaves are true and trustworthy, as the scheme is adapted to all times and places." (41-2)

In the same moment Blake calls for Charles and Andy to "stan still and see," he asks that they also "go on and organize continually" (41). This narrative tension — standing still on one hand and organizing on the other — mimics the criteria that constitutes exploitative slave labor, that laborers stand in obedience at the same time they continue

to organize their labor for slaveholder's capital gain. Because tenets of racial capitalism and providential design fasten and stabilize the conditions of citizenship within the conceptual geography of the nation, Blake's rhetorical reinterpretation of dominant codes identifies conceptual points of resistance and avenues for black political mobility within the national landscape.

Delany catalogs the symbiosis of white Christianity and racial capital throughout *Blake*, making the cultural impact of such dominant technologies legible across the novel's disparate geographic landscapes. It is therefore not surprising that Delany's hero challenges economic authority in the same way he does religious authority and in fact, Blake foregrounds the acquisition of black capital as a compulsory condition for competing with, and traveling through, the physical and conceptual landscape of the nation. Blake encourages fellow insurrectionaries to accumulate as much money as they can and by any means they can, even if it means stealing from slaveholders, as he believes wealth is the clearest path to mobilizing their political message across the United States and transatlantic landscapes. Sowing his plans through the continental US, Blake arrives in Texas where he tells a slave looking to join his insurrection, "I am glad to see you have money... you are thereby well qualified for your mission. With money you may effect your escape" (86). The acquisition of capital as the base for Blake's insurrectionary black politics prompts significant structural concerns and warrants attention to the areas where Delany's philosophy, as both an author and individual, gets lodged in dominant national discourse. As Knadler rightly contends, Delany's conception of African American recolonization, which sought to challenge

dominant ideas of nationality and citizenship, inevitably returns to economic principles as transcendental laws, and thereby reinforces the historical rise of the capitalist practice he critiques (33). However, at its core, Blake's meditation on the acquisition of black capital is also a polemic that makes a distinction between the physical and ideological roadblocks blacks face in the imperial nation. Speaking to a confidant, he says:

Your most difficult point is an elevated obstruction, a mighty hill, a mountain; but through that hill there is a gap; and money is your passport through that White Gap to freedom. Mark that. It is the great range of White Mountains and White River which are before you, and the White Gap that you must pass through to reach the haven of safety. (86)

Using a topographical metaphor, Delany distinguishes material obstacles extant in the landscape, namely "a mighty hill" or a "mountain," from the nation's conceptual barriers, symbolized by "White Mountains" or "White Rivers." Like many black actors of the nineteenth century, Blake conceives of breaks in white construction through his empirical observation of the physical world. In *Blake*, the topographical constraints of the landscape are not conterminous with the nation's conceptual geographic boundaries.

Madera's work reads Blake's representation of physical geography as a "trope of mapping" that "represents radical African American deterritorialization from the inside" (77). Blake advises his followers to rely on the natural features of the nation's landscape to guide them, noting that the path to liberation is as simple as keeping "fields of corn hemp or sugar cane" or "running streams... constantly before their eyes and in their memory, so that they cannot forget it if they would (40-1). By converting physical

properties of geography into topographical points of identification and the guiding markers for his scheme, Blake presents a path through the confines of the conceptual nation. The trope of mapping in Blake is therefore a way for Delany to extend a narrative field for envisioning the “spatial imaginaries” African American literature produces (Madera 72). The geographic knowledge Blake accumulates and shares, like teaching Andy and Charles how to use the North Star as a navigational tool, is fundamental to his scheme’s ambitious geographic scope. Delany’s utilization of celestial navigation resonates with Timothy Marr’s writing on George Tucker, a Bermuda-born congressman who was appointed the first black professor of moral philosophy at the University of Virginia. Marr contends that Tucker’s work of science fiction, *Voyage to the Moon*, which was written in 1827, grants the characters in his novel an “innovative perspectivism” that rises above geography to create a panoramic view of the earth’s convex crust as it circulates below, provoking conversations about the nature of differences between peoples and national character (13). What is important about the widened geographical perspectives African American authors like Delany and Tucker narrate, is that they materialize a textual capaciousness for reading landscape as multivalent. Delany’s ambitious dispersal of a new black politics throughout the US and transatlantic challenges the uniformity of national geography and protects against ethnic absolutisms.

Blake’s quest for widespread black insurrection reflects Delany’s real life quest for emigration, which both contextualizes and complicates his commitment to envisioning a thriving black nationalism within and outside of the United States. As

Levine notes, *Blake* is an allegorical account of Delany's desire to fashion his representative identity as a Mosaic black leader, comparable with Douglass's effort to do the same in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (177). Though Douglass and Delany both renewed calls "for violent black resistance to slavery," a point of tension germinated between the men, as Douglass was notable for his integrationist ideology and Delany for his mostly staunch, but sometimes waffling, insistence on emigration to and recolonization of Africa (Levine 178). "Delany," Levine writes, "presents in *Blake* a Pan-African vision of black nationalism that means to combat and expose the limits of the US nationalism espoused by blacks aligned with Douglass" (190). Delany's insistence on the creation of a black nation was driven by his suspicion that the Civil War would not provide sufficient black liberation. But as the prospect of war grew closer, Delany made a philosophical switch from emigration to becoming a supporter of the war in 1863, and even aligned with Douglass to recruit black troops for the Union (219). It is interesting to consider what Delany's philosophical oscillation between integration and emigration, and his eventual commitment to the war, means in the context of national geography.

Levine looks to parse the complexities of Delany's philosophical deviations by investigating the relationship between his support for the Civil War, his African regeneration project, and his vision of Pan-African insurrection, with his desire to fashion himself as a representative black leader (219). Before aligning with the Union abolitionist cause, Delany spent time in Africa studying the possibility of African regeneration. His 1861 *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, posited that

developing Africa as a commercial power would “convince whites throughout the world of blacks’ capabilities as producers and thus would pose a significant ideological challenge to the premises upholding US slavery” (Levine 183). Similarly, in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, Delany advocates for six hundred thousand free blacks from the North to emigrate to Africa, where they would assist in elevating their “degraded brethren” (ch. xxiii). Like his hero Blake, who is born of Cuban aristocracy, Delany traces his family genealogy to African nobility, “asserting that his father’s father was a “chieftain” and his mother’s father was “an African prince,” which Levine suggests Delany discloses not to suggest a return to Africa, but to assert that “he is a sort of John Adams natural aristocrat who rightly belongs in a leadership role in the United States” (220). What Levine’s historical analysis of Delany’s philosophy makes clear then, is that each of the avenues to black national power that the author theorized — the recolonization of Africa by “enlightened” African Americans on one end, and, the right to black masculine leadership in the US as an African aristocrat on the other — reinforce particularities of gender, race, and hierarchies of national authenticity, the very pillars of the exclusionary project of US nation building.

How then, do we reconcile Delany’s call for black nationalism, one that mirrors racialized rhetoric and capital production native to US imperialism, with the radicality of his revolutionary novel on black insurrectionism? Arguably, Delany’s dilemma is not so much about a philosophical oversight or reckless allegiance to a conceptual national framework as it is about facing off with ideological barriers and inconsistencies of the

white imagination. It bespeaks the difficulty of navigating dominant frameworks, of disqualifying hierarchies of race and nation, of escaping the abstractions and contradictions woven into cultural freedoms. In this sense, Delany's philosophical contradictions are simply a response to the contradictions inherent in national geography. Both Delany and his hero experience W.E.B Du Bois' double consciousness that Gilroy reworks as "striving to be both European and black" in spaces organized by "racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses" that "orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive" (1). If imperial practice strictly and uniformly codes geographic space, Madera suggests that Blake's national peregrinations alter the space through which he moves, which occasions a hermeneutic of deterritorialization that addresses both the physical and representational problems territory presents. In this way, midcentury African Americans approached territory as something physical, at the juncture of power/knowledge systems, *and* something textual" (109). *Blake* evinces both physical and textual representational power present in nineteenth-century African American literature; at once a blueprint for a black politics of insurrection and an archive of black genealogy and diaspora, Delany's winding biographical and fictional pursuits identify the inconsistencies of national geography and formulate a more comprehensive black geographic consciousness.

Ultimately, both *Behind the Scenes* and *Blake* map histories of failed or incomplete revolutions. Keckley qualifies the American Revolution as a war that firmly reestablishes slavery's evils in the colonies, and much of her narrative unfolds in the

aftermath of the failed Confederacy's revolt. Delany imagines the potential for black insurrection in the conspiratorial tradition of Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey's incomplete revolutions. In this sense, it is beneficial to look at *Behind the Scenes* and *Blake* as narratives that question the efficacy of national revolutions; especially when the pinnacle of revolution becomes the non-collective pursuit of egalitarianism alongside an exclusionary effort to draw abstract lines of freedom across geographic landscapes, thereby reaffirming particularistic differences and hierarchies of race and nation across the globe. It is worth recalling that Justice Taney, in his Dred Scott ruling, applies language from the Declaration of Independence (a document declaring revolt against Great Britain) to regulate freedom and reaffirm the US as a geographic space where "persons who had been imported as slaves" and "their descendants" are excluded from the conceptual framework of the nation. Yet the geographic representations in *Behind the Scenes* and *Blake* locate black modes of resistance that challenge the pernicious uniformity of the national imagination.

Interrogating contradictions in dominant discourse and unearthing the textures and nuances of landscape, Keckley, through her inspection of national "objects of interest" and Delany, through his geographical counter-mapping, upend narratives of national revolution. They censure conceptual discourse and narrate black geography to create something collective and tangible: a formal terrain of African American writing that recharts landscape as a rhetorical and material space where multiple histories talk and touch. This formal, multivalent terrain resonates with Lloyd Pratt's conception of "stranger humanism," a black political aesthetic project that peers reflexively at cultural

difference (7). The reconfiguration of national geography in nineteenth-century African American literature is a retroactive endeavor, one that diachronically narrates the multivalence of terrain. Archiving autobiographical, biographical, and fictional accounts of black life, Keckley and Delany, like many of their nineteenth-century contemporaries, weave black belonging into conceptual and material national geography to create a more comprehensive human geography that envisions the cultural multivalence of landscape.

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